PULLING ONESELF TOGETHER:
POWER AND CHARACTER IN BRITISH LITERATURE, 1914-1939

BY

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DISSEPTION

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ABSTRACT

A revealing legend from the First World War told of a tribe of deserters from all armies that had reverted to a pre-political “state of nature,” living beneath no-man’s-land in abandoned trenches and pillaging corpses in the night. This tale inspires the under-examined question that is central to my dissertation: how did the First World War alter English citizens’ relation to political power at its most basic level? Literary scholars have read interwar literature as an attempt to work through war trauma, and they have focused on the transformative cultural changes the war brought about. The field has not, however, given sustained attention to the threat that the war posed to established models of governmental and political legitimation, even though Westminster acknowledged the threat in unprecedented legislative interventions. Through readings of familiar and unfamiliar interwar literature, my dissertation analyzes how Britons constituted themselves as objects of state power during a culturally and psychologically fragmenting state of emergency. Drawing on such archival material as letters, diaries, parliamentary debates, medical treatises, and self-help books, my dissertation shows how state power administered British bodies and minds through the inter-related sites of law, medicine, and labor.

My first chapter, “Character, Power, and Britain’s Emergency Measures,” argues that the political philosophy concepts of the sovereign decision, biopower, and governmentality can help us better understand the cultural and literary production of the interwar years. During the 1914-18 war, the British government took exceptional and extralegal measures that citizens generally supported or took for granted. In retrospect, interwar writers engaged sometimes paradoxical
questions of citizens’ roles, rights, and obligations in a liberal state engaged in total war. This chapter demonstrates that writers and observers often worked through the fundamental political problem of the sources and limits of state power presented by the war, and the way the war changed the interface between the citizen and the state, by referring to changes in both personal and national “character,” which constituted a complex and often contradictory nexus of social and political codes.

Chapter 2, “Corporeal Law: Community, Memory, and the Missing Subject” focuses on the The Defence of the Realm Act (1914) and related legislation. These laws disrupted forms of communal, cultural and political identification across geographic and economic lines. In Scottish novelist Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *Sunset Song* (1932) and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), communal disruptions produce self-alienated subjects who struggle to stabilize a sense of self among contradictory cultural and political demands. Gibbon’s novel is an imaginative recreation of how wartime legislation compelled isolated rural communities to form permanent new relationships to the state through the violent appropriation of natural resources and rural labor. *The Waste Land* similarly presents the intervention of the war’s material conditions into the biological existences of English subjects, but also questions the legitimacy of any sovereign decision in so fragmented a society.

that I discovered in the British Library and Imperial War Museum. These texts demonstrate that acceptable forms of recovery often depended on the sufferer’s willingness to resituate himself within social hierarchies and gender norms by appropriating the power and assuming the role of the medical expert. The unique social and psychological structure of shell shock treatment underlies Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). West’s Chris Baldry and Woolf’s Septimus Smith both confront the threat of confinement and the loss of personal agency as a result of their trauma. Stripped of their identities through highly personalized psychological interventions, Chris and Septimus must choose between reinscription and complicity within rigid gender and power structures, or the permanent obliteration of their prewar identities.

Chapter 4, “Unmaking and Remaking: The Values of War Labor,” focuses on how the war altered English subjects’ relations to work. I argue that Hannah Arendt’s theories of labor, work, and action clarify the values attached to forms of war work, and how war work tied subjectivity to identification with or against state power. Vera Brittain chronicled her changing attitudes toward work before, during, and after the war in her memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933), which, I argue, cannot be understood without attending to her complex and intertwined work as a student at Oxford, her labor as a war nurse, and her action as an internationalist peace advocate. As the war poet most closely allied with high modernist style, David Jones resolves shell shock in his long poem *In Parenthesis* (1937) by translating his years of labor as a soldier into a highly formalized work of art, thereby transforming himself from *animal laborans* to *homo faber*.

In a brief postscript, I suggest the historical and political continuity between the interwar
and postwar periods, suggesting that the methodology of this approach could be usefully applied to the analysis of postcolonial, as well as British literature.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
POWER, CHARACTER, AND BRITAIN’S EMERGENCY MEASURES

And least satisfactory of all is something I cannot touch, somewhere—I cannot
determine where—in the seat of the emotions. Cravings, instincts, desires that
harm humanity, a strange hidden reservoir to burst forth suddenly and inundate
the whole being with anger, hate, or fear. These creatures of mine seemed strange
and uncanny to you so soon as you began to observe them; but to me, just after I
make them, they seem to be indisputably human beings. It’s afterwards, as I
observe them, that the persuasion fades. First one animal trait, then another,
creeps to the surface and stares out at me. But I will conquer yet! Each time I dip
a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say ‘This time I will burn out all
the animal; this time I will make a rational creature of my own!’ After all, what is
ten years? Men have been a hundred thousand years in the making.

—H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896)

Cats and monkeys. Monkeys and cats. All humanity is there.

—Ford Madox Ford, *Some Do Not...* (1924)

I. The Wild Men of No-Man’s-Land

One of the most shocking legends to emerge from the First World War told of a tribe of deserters
from all belligerent armies who had reverted to a pre-political “state of nature,” living beneath
no-man’s-land in abandoned trenches and pillaging corpses in the night. This fantastic tale,
which Paul Fussell identifies as “the finest legend of the war, the most brilliant in literary
invention and execution as well as the richest in symbolic suggestions,” inspires the central
question of my dissertation: how did the First World War alter British citizens’
relations to political power at its most basic level? And further, how did Britain’s emergency measures reconstitute what it meant personally to be a British citizen? How did those measures and their effects alter the criteria for inclusion in the legal and juridical orders of Great Britain? During and after the war, legal, psychological, and cultural discourses all contributed to constructing new forms and parameters of citizenship, and an anxious, exhausted population generally perpetuated these new terms. On the home front, many Britons accepted propaganda and official statements about the war, and resorted to a deeply ingrained value of taciturnity and resolve, the hallmarks of British national “character,” to get through the conflict with a minimum of visible emotional distress or uncomfortable conversation. The legend of the wild men of no-man’s-land, however, implies that, when Britain pushed its subjects to the limits of their humanity, those subjects saw their own images in the metaphorical rejection of not only state power, but also the foundational political philosophies underlying the enlightenment and the era of capitalist and imperialist expansion that lead up to the war.

Scholars have read wartime and interwar literature as an attempt to work through the trauma of trench warfare that the wild men legend distills, and they have focused on the transformative cultural changes the war brought about. The field has not, however, given sustained attention to the threat that the war posed to long established models of liberal British governance and political legitimation. My dissertation reads wartime and interwar literature through twentieth century political theories of the interface of the subject and the state, and draws upon such archival material as letters, diaries, parliamentary debates, medical treatises, and self-help books. In so doing, it argues that the sudden intervention of an administrative state power that conducted British bodies and minds through the inter-related sites of law, medicine, and labor, constitutes a major subtext of the literature produced during the First World War and
its aftermath. In high modernist texts by poets such as T.S. Eliot and David Jones, ambiguous
and open aesthetic form juxtaposes deep Western culture with dehumanizing modern technology
and the politics of total war, cultivating an aesthetic of “undecision”—a formal refusal to decide
rather than the inability to do so—and resistance to the politics that dehumanized the subject of
the First World War. Feminist authors such as Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West crafted
fictional narratives of shell shock sufferers to demonstrate that the ubiquitous psychological
breakdowns occasioned by the war revealed the political myth of masculinity on which
patriarchal power, embodied in sovereignty and its ideological demands, was founded. West and
Woolf wrote in response to the popular literature focusing on heroics, international intrigues, and
romance that flourished during the war. By the 1930s, more popular writers such as Vera
Brittain and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, whose accessible stories of war experience sold more
broadly than experimental novels, could base overt political demands on the demonstrable fact
that the war had advanced capitalist and political interests at the expense of a generation.
Gibbon’s and Brittain’s books also ask Britons to examine their parochial ignorance of the larger
geopolitical crises that had lead to the war, and to which Britain had contributed. The crisis the
war and state-expansion presented to British citizens saturates interwar literature across the
cultural spectrum.

The legend of the wild men is an early and intense manifestation of many of these
concerns. As much credit as Fussell gives the legend, he reads it entirely through the world of the
trenches that engendered it, and spends little more than a paragraph analyzing its significance. In
Fussell’s estimate, the legend offers “a virtual mirror image, and a highly sardonic one, of real
orderly trench life;” it “projects the universal feeling of shame about abandoning the wounded”
in no-man’s-land; it expresses the “universal fantasy […] of flagrant disobedience and
demonstrates that the enemy of British and German soldiers alike is actually the War.” Most importantly, it expresses that in the trenches “‘normal’ life […] was equal to outright bestiality and madness.” More than that, though, the legend of the wild men’s reversion to an animal state revitalizes the cliché of the beastliness of war by showing that bestiality is not only a reaction to inhuman conditions (after all, this is a legend), but also the condition soldiers saw underlying their humanizing political and social identities as subjects of state power. British character depended so completely on courage and firm resolve in the face of any difficulty, on all the masculine virtues learned “on the playing fields of Eton,” that under the extraordinary stress and violence that defined trench warfare, the ideal of British character itself seemed—or was proven—mythical.

Fussell is correct about the specific trench anxieties the legend reveals. However, I argue that the legend’s reminder of corporeality and wildness beneath the ideals of liberal Britain at war—the state of nature asserting itself, like in one of Moreau’s beast folk, from beneath an artificially constructed civilization—expresses a much larger political problem. The wild men legend transcends the conditions of trench life from which it emerged, and reveals that the conditions of the war had thrown into question not only the dependability of masculine British character, but also the most basic political relations among subjects, their society, and their sovereign. The subterranean scene of wildness, men existing among each other with neither shared culture, language, or national identity, evokes the pre-political nightmare of the Hobbesian war of all against all. But the fantasy of the wild men also presents a non-contractual way for subjects to be together without delivering their natural freedom over to state sovereignty, and not proffering their bodies in the service or protection of that power. The fantasized existence of the wild men is predicated on the rejection of the notion of contractual obligation. In
a sense, this rejection of war and civilization’s artificial animosities of language and culture constitutes a parody of the Rousseauvian Utopia, set rather in the Waste Land than in some prelapsarian garden. To be sure, the wild men present a terrifying scenario, one probably dreamt up to explain the horrible noises emanating from no-man’s-land in the night, and the myriad inexplicable events that soldiers experienced every day. But as with all good horror stories, the allegory runs deeper than the tale’s immediate origins may suggest, and as with all war trauma, the soldiers took this story home with them on leave or when they were demobilized. The story becomes more than an expression of combat fatigue or paranoia. It reveals perhaps the deepest change the citizens of Britain experienced because of the war, and it opens up a discursive and theoretical lens through which to examine the war’s impact on Britons’ varied conceptions of their ideal and actual relations and obligations to state power.

Published eighteen years before the outbreak of the Great War, H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* demonstrates that the wild men legend and the foundational political problem it presents were grounded in longstanding anxieties about the animality of the human that had been sparked by Victorian sciences and pseudo sciences of evolution, race and degeneration. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is concerned with political as well as scientific and evolutionary questions about what makes a being human. It is a story about the difference between the ancient Greek notions of *bios* and *zoe*, the qualified and political life of the participatory member of a political community, on the one hand, and the mere state of being alive, on the other.¹¹ The novel presents in miniature the evolution of humanity through ideology and discipline imposed by the commanding interventions of an organizing, political sovereignty. Dr. Moreau, an exaggerated and absolutist sovereign figure is an allegory of centralized power.¹² His image, in which he creates his beast folk, is godlike (he is repeatedly described as massive and white-haired) and he
exercises power of life and death over his subjects, imposing his absolute law on their psyches through corporeal and emotional pain. Moreau is convinced initially that the subjects he constitutes as objects of his own power are human beings, raised above the apolitical and animal equality that would later characterize the imagined wild men of no-man’s-land. When Moreau’s sovereignty is first vitiated by his confrontation with Prendick, the novel’s shipwrecked (and for all practical purposes stateless) narrator, and then annihilated by his death, the beast folk revert, in the absence of disciplinary pain, to their primal nature. The legend of the wild men suggests that the imposition of disciplinary pain on subjects, in the form of both ideological submission and, foremost, bodily punishment, seals the sovereign’s legitimacy.

Moreau’s creatures are human, practicing a parody of *bios*, as long as they respect Moreau’s law. In his absence they become simply living things. Both Prendick and the story insist, though, that humanity is as capable of reverting to bestiality as Moreau’s beasts are potentially human. The text presents beastly humans through the alcohol-induced brutality of the Ipecacuanha’s captain, symbolic of the “ship of state’s” sovereignty, and Montgomery’s reversion, also through alcohol, to bestiality. Prendick experiences horror when he is rescued and returned to humanity: “I would go into the streets [and] prowling women would mew after me; furtive craving men glance jealously at me, wearied pale workers go coughing by me with tired eyes and eager paces, like wounded deer dripping blood.” Worse than the bestiality of his fellows, Prendick feels that he, too, “was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain.” Without identifying that “strange disorder” as his own internalization of sovereign power’s humanizing voice, working against the animal instincts that arise from his bare body, Prendick ultimately turns to the study of astronomy, as if in the heavens alone there might be some sovereignty to redeem humanity from its stubborn animal aspect.
Twenty years after the novel’s publication, as the legend of the wild men’s reversion to animalism spread, real British subjects faced discipline in Moreauvian houses of pain such as the prison, the training yard, the clinic, the factory, even the trenches themselves. As subsequent chapters will show, state sovereignty was asserted on the bodies of conscientious objectors who were stripped, forced into army uniforms, force-fed, and pushed bodily through the motions of military training; conscripted soldiers who would not or could not perform the motions deemed necessary were shot; shell-shocked soldiers who lost the power of speech were burned on their tongues with cigarettes, and electric shocks were applied to force paralyzed soldiers to move; In factories, hospitals, and other sites of war labor, as well as on the frontlines, bodies were pushed for the war effort often beyond the point of physical and mental breakdown. The conditions of the war reified the most fundamental relation between the sovereign and the subject: corporeal control, through ideology at first, but through pain if necessary.

The idea that soldiers might revert to a similar beastliness as that of Moreau’s inventions, and so require disciplinary pain, indicates that the soldiers’ bios really was at question, but not only, as Fussell suggests, through the conditions of the trenches. The sovereign’s right to expose subjects to death, by prerogative or in the name of the public good, clearly underlies conscription. Under Britain’s wartime emergency measures, though, all subjects’ positions to state power ensured that they could be classified as having slid down the ladder of evolution to a state of zoe. Such, essentially, were the decisions pronounced on conscientious objectors: those unwilling to “do their bit,” became social outcasts, actually characterized as mad. Their lives were exposed against their will in prisons and in the trenches. Shell shock patients, similarly, when their malady could not be proven to derive from a physical wound or disorder, were considered to have been already mentally feeble and less than human. Doctors working within
the relatively recent light of Darwinian evolution often considered the reversion of shell shock patients into madness as a signifier of debased humanity and a confirmation of the pseudoscientific fear of degeneration. Even those who volunteered their services throughout the conflict faced the lives of beasts of burden.

The legend of the call of wildness, the notion of turning one’s back on political and national inclusion, raises many questions for the study of wartime and interwar British culture, politics, and aesthetics. What forms do the alternatives to submission to an over-demanding state and the reversion to an animalistic state of nature take? And what would be the consequences of such resistance on subjects’ self-governance and their cultivation of character and self? These questions animated the cultural, philosophical, political, and aesthetic debates surrounding interwar British literature. World War II introduced new problems—the total annihilation of death camps and nuclear weaponry—that once again transformed the stakes of political inclusion and the legitimacy of state power’s reach into individual biology and the organization of populations. The questions that animated literature about the First World War are addressed in every text under consideration in this study, including excerpts of private diaries and letters, artistic proclamations, parliamentary debates, legal declarations, self-help books, memoirs, canonical texts of high modernism, and works of popular literature. From the start of world war, and through the interwar period, citizens faced unprecedented questions and challenges regarding their political place. In Great Britain, received attitudes about the proper role of the state and about British identity and character (derived mostly from English hegemonic culture) shaped how subjects dealt with national and personal trauma.

II. Character and the State at the End of the Long Nineteenth Century
The war changed the exercise of power and the sovereign legitimacy of the state in Britain because it presented a new set of political problems. The immensity of the conflict, if not its gravity, was immediately grasped all over Europe, and governments of the combatant powers felt compelled to give legal form to the putative necessities the conflict would present. The legal changes that resulted, and the way they were enforced, foregrounded relationships between citizens and state power as the war progressed. State intervention shaped quotidian life more and more directly, but British society was certainly not without conflict over the forms and reach of state power before the war began. Massive legal and political transformations were underway in the Edwardian era. Labor and feminist groups, for example, could both feel the lack of state intervention in their lives and see its negative effects on the lives of those they represented. David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill’s 1909 People’s Budget, which had intended to ensure some degree of protection for the working class, was an unprecedented turn away from the non-interventionist policies that had characterized British politics and culture throughout the nineteenth century. The outbreak of war would extend its statist model much further into the lives of British citizens. If 1910 marked “the strange death of liberal England,” as George Dangerfield claimed in his 1934 book of that title, the war cemented the impossibility of reviving laissez-faire liberalism, at least throughout most of the twentieth century.¹⁴

The growth of the war out of the pan-European imperialistic practices of the nineteenth century is evident, but the actual forms that wartime legislation and intervention took were antithetical to the liberal values that characterized Britain throughout most of Victoria’s reign. Lauren Goodlad has demonstrated that “Victorian Britain was a liberal society: “liberal” first and foremost in the sense that, throughout the century, centralized institutions and statist interventions were curbed to preserve the ‘self-governing’ liberties of individuals and local
Goodlad argues that the later Foucauldian vocabulary of governmentality and self-care, and in particular the pastoral mode of power, are more illuminating lenses than panopticism through which to examine how Victorian citizens organized themselves socially and politically. In Liberal Britain citizens ideally cultivated character, which became the standard around which to organize social welfare through deterrent poor laws and private initiatives such as charitable societies. Goodlad also demonstrates that pre-war Britain placed a higher priority on self-governance than nations such as France, where a strong history of centralized government had been in place since the revolution.

In opposition to statism, Goodlad argues “Britons tenaciously imagined themselves through character, an antimaterialist concept of the individual. Yet character and the moral worldview on which it was predicated were threatened precisely by the materialist underpinnings of the modern state” such as bureaucracy, the social sciences, and increasing mass culture. Goodlad engages character not as a set of predetermined national traits, but as an individualist mode through which Britons encouraged one another to cultivate values they deemed to be moral. She does not interpret character as a simple or monologic prescription that Britons followed, but as a complex and always inadequate vision or ideal that revealed its own gaps and the gaps in Victorian governance. Although this pastoral way of conducting the character of others promotes a certain kind of individualism, it is not entirely divorced from a general norm of British national character, which was a frequent referent for proper conduct. This British national character, marked by its stoicism and resolve, had evolved gradually from Metropolitan English cultural values, and was promoted from within through ubiquitous and negative depictions of the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and Northumbrians, among others. While the British national character was often summed up comically by the figure of John Bull, for example, or the
melancholic Englishman, these were facets of a more widely accepted national character summed up in late Victorian poems such as Henry Newbolt’s *Vitai Lampada*, or Kipling’s *If—*.18 More marginalized cultures and ethnicities may have acted as a foil to demonstrate the superiority of English character, but English character as an ideal was also clearly encouraged: the British propaganda campaign, devised by leading English authors, clearly meant to invoke a homogenizing nationalist and imperialist character throughout the UK. Scientifically minded liberal moralists no doubt had higher aspirations for individual character instruction, but the more ubiquitous national image of sportsmanship and the “stiff upper lip” no doubt had wider cultural influence in the Edwardian years.

Goodlad writes that moral and anti-materialist “[l]iberal governance in this distinctive British form withstood many pressures, holding its ground until the unprecedented exigencies of World War I.”19 My dissertation is concerned with what became of British character under those exigencies, and how wartime and interwar writers, looking back, imagined new possibilities of character formation and self-care in the face of massively increased and centralized state power. The war brought a degree of materialism and emergency statism that transformed British notions of self-sufficiency and self-governance; but, I argue, the long legacy of anti-statism still shaped the way Britons confronted, perpetuated, and resisted new forms of governance and expectations of character formation. The demands of British character, internalized by British subjects as super-ego or the disciplinary voice of ideology, presented a major problem under these new exigencies. The result was not only mental breakdown, but also growing resistance to the demands of national character, which were so deeply ingrained as to serve as the internalized voice of sovereign state command. In cultivating character as an ideal of governance, anti-statist British liberalism had grown strong in the place of a central commanding state.
Given this opposition to state intervention or centralization, one might expect to see more resistance to the sudden and extreme state interventions that were ushered in as soon as the war broke out. Furthermore, the liberal faction in parliament had become increasingly radical and intellectual and less bourgeois. As Zara Steiner points out, “the business proportion of liberal M.P.s dropped steadily between 1892 and 1910. Increasingly, a new kind of candidate was making his way into the liberal ranks, men from the professional classes who had made their names as journalists, academics, and writers.”\(^{20}\) Many of these New Liberals supported state interventions into working class conditions, and reflected the cultural influence of the still more radical Fabian Society, which advocated a stronger centralized state.\(^{21}\) Furthermore, the business faction of the liberal party may not have been so opposed to the state intervention of the war, because the war’s perpetuation opened spaces for massive industrial and private sector profit.

Resistance to the war effort did build, as campaigns such as the invasion of the Dardanelles in 1915 failed catastrophically, and the situation in France looked endless, but they never gathered the kind of popular support of the anti-war movement in Russia, for instance, or Germany, both of which ceased warfare in the face of internal revolution. In Britain, three primary factors guarded against a widespread rejection of the war: an entrenched national ideal of stoicism and self-reliance, an elaborate propaganda campaign that built on and enforced that ideal, and less extreme civilian suffering than that of the continent. It was not until the later years of the war, and especially the long period of interwar reflection, that writers began seriously to express the disastrous results of this collision of ingrained liberal character and the absolute demands of a centralized and profoundly interventionist state.

Dangerfield saw the 1909 People’s Budget and the 1911 Parliament Act (which severely limited the power of the House of Lords to block legislation originating in the House of
Commons) as, perhaps more than the war, symbolic of the death of English liberalism. He collapses this moment of statist intervention with more obvious signs of advancing modernity, specifically new technologies, modernist arts, and the appearance of the Empire’s “subject races” and their cultures in Britain. In a hysterical aside, he declares that in 1911 Liberal England was

(Dying! In the streets of London, the last horse-bus clattered towards extinction. The aeroplane, that incongruous object, earth-bound and wavering, still called forth exclamations of rapture and alarm. Country roads, with blind corners and precipitous inclines, took a last revenge upon the loud invading automobile. There was talk of wild young people in London, more wild and less witty than you would ever guess from the novels of Saki; of night clubs, of negroid dances. People gazed in horror at the paintings of Gauguin, and listened with delighted alarm to the barbaric measures of Stravinsky. The old order, the old bland world, was dying fast: and the Parliament Act was its not too premature obituary….)

Most of the signifiers of modernity Dangerfield here chronicles are elsewhere associated directly with the war. The aeroplane in Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway (which certainly calls forth exclamations) is a direct reminder of the threat of war and air raids. The danger presented to horses (generally symbolic of aristocracy and deep English culture) by automobiles on country roads is a definitive symbol of the death of not only liberal, but also noble and masculine England, in Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End (1924-28) In both those novels, as in so many others produced in interwar Britain, sexual liberation and public and racialized displays of sexuality are also directly attributed to the war. Dangerfield’s identification of the Parliament Act with these phenomena underscores, as Eric Hobsbawm points out, that many modernist artistic forms were in place before the war, but also that the expansion of the state into the lives of its subjects was a process clearly underway before the war began. The state’s expansion through the emergency measures of the war was part of an ongoing process. Almost immediately, and in historical perspective ever since, the enormity of the war eclipsed these other signifiers of rapid change.
Dangerfield explicitly associates the world ushered in by the Parliament Act with savagery. The wild and unwitty young Londoners lack traditional British character and reserve. State intervention is a response or a side effect of the corporeal barbarism represented by their “negroid” dancing. The once cultured English, now enthralled by and emulating Gauguin’s native forms and Stravinsky’s heathen rites, have traded self-governance for a more continental style of control and administration, one more suited to races thought to be in need of firm leadership from above. Dangerfield sees the modern English as reverting to a kind of racial childhood, and so getting the disciplinary and controlling government they deserve.

Vincent Sherry has explicated the impact on modernist literary form of the disjunction between Britain’s espoused liberal values and the evident, if constantly denied, anti-liberalism of its war. Sherry deftly analyzes how the contorted, deceptive, and often illogical language employed by politicians and editorialists attempting to justify the war impacted the frequently paradoxical and logic-bending idioms of modernism. Sherry focuses primarily on Eliot, Pound, and Woolf, showing what each of them took, aesthetically, from the absurd language British politicians and editorialists used to justify the war. Sherry also pinpoints a moment at which one of the pioneers of prewar literary modernism, Ford Madox Ford, identifies the absurdity and illogical nature of the then-liberal government’s support for the coming war. Wyndham Lewis records a discussion in June of 1914 between himself, Ford, Violent Hunt, and Mary Borden. Borden tells Ford that she does not think England will go to war. Lewis recalls that

Ford thrust his mouth out, fish-fashion, as if about to gasp for breath. He goggled his eyes and waggled one eyelid about. He just moved his lips a little and we heard him say

“England will.”…
“England will! But Ford… England has a liberal government. A liberal government cannot declare war.”
“Of course it can’t,” I said, frowning at Ford. “Liberal governments can’t go to war. That would not be liberal. It would be conservative.”


Ford sneered very faintly and inoffensively: he was sneering at the British government rather than at us. He was being omniscient, bored, sleepy Ford, sunk in his tank of sloth. From his prolonged sleep he was staring at us with his fish-blue eyes—kind, wise, but bored.  

Sherry’s larger arguments about the contorted forms of British liberal logic demonstrate the degree to which the British people were dedicated to their national self-perception of liberal pacifism. Like Lewis in this passage, Sherry positions Ford as an outsider to both national culture and literary modernism, looking in omnisciently.

Ford’s recognition of the absurdity of what Sherry calls the “liberal war” is an aspect of his larger analysis, virtually a lifelong project, of the untenability of the demands of British national character. During the war, Ford, along with Wells and many other prominent authors, was brought into the propaganda campaign immediately organized by the British government, and he produced two volumes of anti-German propaganda.  

Mark Wollaeger argues that Ford, like Virginia Woolf, “considered the didacticism of Victorian literature a form of propaganda” and had specifically proscribed the writing of propaganda in the practice of literary impressionism, which Wollaeger reads as synonymous with modernism, at least to Ford. However, with the outbreak of the war and the publication of his propaganda monographs, in which he presented French civilization as worth saving from German militarism, “Ford’s impressionism and propaganda […] look like two sides of the same coin.” Because impressionism values the subjective reaction over the objective fact, it can be read, Wollaeger argues, as creating propaganda in the form of political or partisan “spin.” Ford’s earlier ethnographic writing, in which he diagnoses the ideal of Edwardian English character, engages in a similar kind of propaganda that is indirectly didactic by condemning, unlike the typical Victorian didacts, the processes and the results of British character formation.
The propaganda campaign was successful, I would argue, partly because of the deep-seated sense of British character to which it could appeal, even by imposing a more traditionally English character on other parts of Britain, and even extending that notion of character to the empire and commonwealth. Although the propaganda campaign intentionally pushed a brand of English character that could be expanded to the rest of Britain and beyond, the elements of such a character had developed in popular culture throughout the Victorian and Edwardian years. Ford had studied this cultural notion of English character deeply, and so was well acquainted with the rhetorical moves that might appeal to the English public. English character, and more specifically “conduct,” had been the main focus of Ford’s illuminating non-fiction ethnographic trilogy *England and the English* (1905-07), which moves through *The Soul of London* and *The Heart of the Country* to make some grandiose, frequently amusing, and often damning claims about *The Spirit of the People*.

These copious notes on English society and culture, despite Ford’s notorious unreliability (by many accounts he was a nearly pathological liar), are valuable for understanding the general British frame of mind that met and endured the indecencies of the age of total war. From Ford’s point of view, England seems to have been in a long state of decline or decadence during the first decade of the twentieth century. He does not express this by lamenting the possible loss of the empire, actually making the opposite argument that, as far as he is concerned, neither the Boers nor the English had any claim to African land in the Boer Wars. He is also not concerned, like so many other diagnosticians of English decline, with the threat pervasive neurasthenia (from which he suffered) presented to English masculinity. Rather, he reads individualism and liberalism in general as having attenuated what he felt were loftier forms of the dispersion and exercise of state power. In Ford’s analysis, the modern forms of power through administration
and appeals to individual character arise roughly during the period from the eighteenth century onward that Michel Foucault associates with the ascendancy of biopower. In the English context, however, Ford pinpoints the English Civil War as the source, claiming that the English revolution

Did away with the true Toryism which is Socialism, and rendered possible individualism, which today we call the upholding of the right to free competition; it gave us, in fact, liberty by gradually removing responsibility from the state—and it gave us two centuries of enmity to France and of growing subjection to German ideals (277).

Ford’s sentimental notion of “Toryism as Socialism” is characterized by a benevolent aristocratic rule that would distribute wealth more fairly from a consolidated, if socially superior (and so not socialist), organization. Ford’s cherished neo-feudal fantasy imagines a benevolent aristocracy treating peasants with princely magnanimity. This passage clarifies, however, that for Ford, liberal England’s antithesis to a centralized state empowers a bourgeoisie that takes over from the aristocracy any kind of governing function (in terms of the economy), and perpetuates essentialist class myths about the formation of individual character to justify the increasing wealth of the bourgeoisie. By shifting economic matters away from an aristocratic state and into the hands of individuals, modern politics asserts the benevolent character of the middle and upper classes as the population’s only necessary safeguard against economic deprivation. It therefore wrongly makes the state the enemy in all economic, and most political, matters.

*England and the English* is full of exaggerations, but as always with Ford, *impressions*, which include a disguised analysis and judgment, are more revealing than facts. The impression he gives of Edwardian England is of a rigid and repressed society, the liberalism of which rests on the surety that cultural conformity will keep the nation in agreement, with no need for centralized structures, and no need to talk about it. Ford stressed English conformity in
exaggerated racial terms: “the English people is very well aware that it is, along its own lines, as nearly perfect as a people can be; I mean that it breeds true to type” (259). Indeed, this conformity of thought has no need for disciplinary surveillance measures. It is deeply ingrained through more subtle techniques of discipline, and is overtly contrasted to, for example, “the French system of spying plus confession to a priest” (319). However, Ford does not celebrate this system of relative individual leniency and greater social conformity, ceding that the English system, because of its individualism, “is probably worse for the individual,” who may have to suffer in silence and secrecy. This system is, though, “almost certainly better for his neighbours,” who can enjoy the silence of their fellow citizens (319).

Such self-censorship is also damaging to various social arts. In his descriptions of London, Ford emphasizes the dullness of conversation, insinuating that the art of conversation (cherished and practiced by Ford) was badly damaged by a general desire not to say anything that would not meet universal agreement. Going beyond generalizations is a threat to decency, and Ford, perhaps summoning the specter of Oscar Wilde, laments “a conversational artist strikes us nowadays as ‘a bounder’” (81). Conversational incontinence presents a greater threat than the sexual license evoked by this term, which is not a problem so long as nobody talks about it.

In the final chapter of The Spirit of People, simply titled “Conduct,” Ford analyzes what he sees as the distinctly English, and certainly harmful, repression of emotions, which he attributes to the fact that “the Englishman feels very deeply and reasons very little” (311). Because of this surfeit of emotion over reason, any discussion of “things” is strictly forbidden among “good people.” Ford recounts an incident from his youth in which he had gone rowing with a young female acquaintance of his and “began to talk to the fair, large, somnolent girl of
some problem or other—I think of poor umbrella tassel menders or sweated industries that at that time interested me a great deal.” The girl is unresponsive, and the next day Ford is drawn aside by her mother to be told that he’s a “‘good boy,’” but he mustn’t discuss “‘things’” with her daughter. Ford claims to have been bewildered, although in the subsequent years he has learned what ‘things’ are; they include, in fact, religious topics, questions of the relations of the sexes, the conditions of poverty-stricken districts—every subject from which one can digress into anything moving. That, in fact, is the crux, the Rubicon that one must never cross. And that is what makes English conversation so profoundly, so portentously, troublesome to maintain. It is a question of a very fine game, the rules of which you must observe. It is as if one were set on making oneself interesting with the left hand tied behind one’s back (312).

From the broad sarcasm about umbrella tassel menders, Ford arrives at a counter-intuitive conclusion about English character. The taciturnity and propriety of English conversation constitutes an illusion maintained to mask the fact that, underneath their proper exteriors and carefully cultivated character, Britons of the public school mold (who became the example-setting officers of the First World War) are always on the cusp of sentimental extravagance.

Ford’s obviously overstated analysis helps to unravel a seeming paradox about British national character. Though known throughout the Nineteenth Century for the stern resolution and independence that was considered the backbone of both the Victorian state and its empire, Britain had also long garnered a reputation for madness and melancholy. Ford’s analysis of English character underscores that the exaggeration of taciturnity and commitment to “playing the game” of Englishness have been cultivated precisely because Britons are so sentimental. “Character,” in this sense, imposes control over the various primitive emotions that seem opposed to the enlightenment values celebrated by a man like Dr. Moreau, who makes reason, the quality Ford claims the English lack, the hallmark of civilization. If Ford is right that the English are over-endowed with sentiment, which accounts for their extraordinary taciturnity and
unwillingness to discuss “things,” any major trauma shared across the nation could deeply unsettle national identity, and also cause a disproportionate official backlash. When the war came, as Ford reflects in *Parade’s End*, and as archival materials from the period bear out, that is more or less what happened.

If the construction of British identity through the long nineteenth century did not depend on centralized state governance, as Goodlad’s analysis and Ford’s descriptions demonstrate, it did depend on a strong sense of the British subject to govern her or himself, to resolve silently to “do his bit” and “play the game,” according to its rules, to “keep a stiff upper lip” in the event of hardship so as to “see it through,” and in the event of catastrophic trauma to live up to the ubiquitous injunction to “pull yourself together.” This catchphrase of wartime Britain, though, has a dual meaning. In its mundane use to the hysterical soldier, it essentially means, “shut up and behave in accordance with social expectations.” One pulls oneself together by reconstructing a silent façade of stoicism, reverting to British “type,” and resolving to carry on, no matter what the external circumstances. Having pulled oneself together one stops asking questions and follows orders. One pulls oneself together, in this sense, by replacing any contingent, momentary, or unique emotional characteristic or desire with a ready-made national character that should, ideally, prepare one to face silently any pain or difficulty. The dying soldier in no-man’s-land who shoved his fist into his mouth to stifle the groans that prompted his comrades to expose themselves to danger by trying to rescue him, for example, had succeeded at pulling himself together *in extremis*.

The term “pulling oneself together,” can have another, more direct figurative meaning as well. The Victorians had conceived character as having both prescriptive and constraining elements that came from structures of authority, but also a perceived liberatory potential insofar
as character formation was a process of self-analysis and self-discovery. Rather than coming from without character was, as Samuel Smiles wrote, a “self-originating force.” The everyday practice of seeing the political and social constraints by which one is inevitably surrounded, and the need to “make a face to meet the faces that one meets,” as Eliot’s Prufrock puts it, constitute an always unfinished action of pulling a self together out of a realm of conflicting possibilities, a self one can govern and with which one can live. The action of self-creation is more than personal; it also constitutes any subject as a political member of her or his community. If the war blew apart the possibilities of maintaining the prescriptive English national character, marked by silent suffering, it also stretched the boundaries of the possibilities of subject formation, and opened political participation to a broader segment of the population. In interwar texts, characters and authors confront the limits of their own abilities to adhere to what they perceive to have been prewar character expectations, and the potentialities of pulling together less repressed, more expressive selves. In the process of facing disciplinary and biopolitical interventions, or the direct demands of sovereign power, Britons forged identities that were not bound strictly to national ideals of silent conformity and liberal government, but that also accommodated self-originating character formation.

III. War and the Administration of Forms of Life

In general, I take a historicist approach to the representations of character and power in the six formally diverse primary texts under consideration in this dissertation: T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land (1922), Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s Sunset Song (1933), Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier (1918), Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway (1925), Vera Brittain’s Testament of Youth (1933), and David Jones’s In Parenthesis (1937). I read texts both in light of various archival
material, but also through the political theories of four major twentieth century theorists of
power: Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Carl Schmitt. Interwar culture’s
engagement with political, social, and cultural problems demonstrates a period of intensification
and change in the political concepts of biopower and governmentality, largely defined by these
four thinkers.

As Michel Foucault delineates it, “biopower” describes a form of control based on the
reductive and totalizing discourses of statistics and demographics, and the development of
administration in such disciplinary institutions as the school, the hospital, the prison, and the
military. Through social sciences, biopower exercises control of populations in the name of the
public good. Deep changes that the war brought to biopower’s sites and institutions of
administration, and to new forms of technology, rapidly reorganized populations and re-
categorized individuals. As a modern paradigm for disseminating power across a population,
biopower emerged in conjunction with capitalism. Foucault explains that biopoliticization was a
process of unfettering the economic sphere from ties to state sovereignty. Allegedly for the
general good and prosperity of the population, the free market is thought to be guided by what
Adam Smith infamously called the invisible hand. Laissez-faire economic policy is of course a
hallmark of British liberalism, and Foucault identifies the rise of biopolitics and the separation of
economic matters from the state in Britain as beginning in the seventeenth century with “the
bourgeoisie against the absolute monarchy of the Stuarts.” Capitalism and state power
supposedly worked through mutual non-interference to guarantee each other’s interests, and the
decision to intervene in economics is always a potential executive prerogative. The First World
War yoked state power and the economy together, as the state’s war increased industrial
production enormously and benefitted many industries and profiteers.
Under Britain’s emergency measures, the King’s government was granted unprecedented power over the economy through its unhindered power to create any laws it saw fit. This statist intervention demonstrates that in a time of crisis there is a definite “normal” situation—here a general (if contested) anti-statism—that can be suspended. The aims of the sovereign and the bourgeoisie coincide. Both aim to protect the realm, or the territory, that is the necessary condition of their existence. Immediately following the outbreak of war, The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA, 1914) was passed. The act itself was a simple and short declaration of the crown’s extended power to do whatever necessary to insure that military operations would proceed without hindrance. However, The Defence of the Realm Manual it produced over the next several years is well over 700 pages. The laws contained in this manual unambiguously increase the state’s rights, particularly regarding acquisition of material, from natural resources and food to human bodies themselves under the Military Service Acts of 1916 and 1918, which introduced military conscription for the first time in modern British history. Although DORA consolidates sovereign power by essentially embodying the realm in the person of the king, it exercises control specifically at the level of populations.

In his initial explication of biopower in *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, Foucault traces a gradual transition in the form of the sovereign’s exercise of power. Over the course of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, sovereignty becomes less marked by the direct “power of life and death,” the absolute sovereign right “to *take* life and *let* live.” Sovereignty becomes rather an issue of protecting a population and assuring its right and ability to live and grow. Foucault is quick to point out, however, that the evolution of this new mode of power, which de-emphasizes the right of execution and even casts capital punishment as a public good, rather than as the sovereign’s prerogative, has not made a more peaceful world. On the contrary:
Wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and all things being equal, never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations. But this formidable power of death [...] now presents itself as a counterpart that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations. Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed.38

During the First World War the life of the population, its health and its ability to grow and prosper, was consistently defined as the object of the conflict. It was famously a war for civilization.39 More than a sovereign command to enlist, this sense that the war was, as Hobsbawm calls it, a “zero-sum game” on behalf of the population, rather than only the sovereign or the “realm,” compelled Britons to participate at every level.40 War was no longer uniquely the province of the military and the concern of those in whose lands it was occurring. War became an apparently necessary way of life, both in terms of quotidian existence and as the means through which life was guaranteed. The vast majority of British literature published during and after the war affirmed the necessity of the war as a means of protecting the population: this was certainly the function of Ford’s propaganda, and Rupert Brooke’s early sonnets, for example. Early anti-war poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, among others, tried to show that the opposite was true in their propagandistic anti-war poetry, but most Britons’ view of the necessity of the war remained unchanged. The biopolitical myth of the war as safeguarding the population, and occasionally the attempt to question such a thoroughly ingrained notion, are central to interwar literature.

For Britain in 1914-18, sovereign power mobilized the population through appeals to British character at first, but increasingly through direct command. With civilization at stake, the
demand of British character, that all citizens “do their bit,” became enormous. The failure to comply in wartime Britain could mean complete rejection from the social order and the de facto abdication of one’s civil rights. The means of convincing a population accustomed to non-intervention of this absolute necessity demanded an official wartime rhetoric that appealed directly to entrenched notions of British character.

The military administration of soldiers’ sexuality provides a good example of how appeals to individual character masked a larger biopolitical mobilization. Foucault developed the notion of biopower in his History of Sexuality because sexuality is located at the nexus of biopower’s two constitutive axes of body and population. In a practical sense, the sexuality of soldiers became an important issue early on in the conflict, and the sovereign’s direct relationship to the individual bodies of the soldiers and to the larger body of the army (and indirectly the entire population) is evident in the way soldiers’ sexuality was directed through a public appeal to private character, issued through propaganda and the military, and a mobilization of the medical apparatus to contain a mass outbreak of venereal disease. All soldiers received a message from the beloved and avuncular Field Marshall Kitchener on the first page of a booklet issued to them when they enlisted. The message begins by telling the soldier “You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy and your patience.” The message concludes by warning the soldiers “Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.” This advice on sexual conduct from Kitchener, who embodied British national
character at its most noble and austere, is meant directly to safeguard the health of the entire population, but it takes the form of the older, wiser man offering the kind of advice on sexual conduct that Foucault analyzes in the ancient texts he takes up in the later volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, in which authority figures guide others, conducting their conduct. Foucault shows that in those texts sexual excess is never explicitly forbidden in the way Kitchener seems to forbid it, but Kitchener’s command is not backed up by any official system to punish promiscuous soldiers. In the Greek texts, moderation in all things is encouraged, not for the sake of personal health or the social good, but as an inherent good in itself. Kitchener’s message expands the individual encounters or dialogues recorded in the Greek texts to the level of population, making care of the self a social priority.

One anonymous entertainer visiting the front recorded in his diary a gaffe that shows how the myth of taciturn English character masked the organized sexual excesses attendant on the war:

> In evening to hospital 39—a V.D. hospital. Made an appalling slip by telling the Tommies that it was an inspiring sight to see men from every corner of the British Empire all there “on the same job.” They roared and roared with laughter and I capped it by saying “and I know you all mean to see it through” at which they could not contain themselves. Of course I did not know till afterwards that it was a V.D. hospital. (380 officers also down with it, alas!—100,000 affected).

The behavior of the troops and the officers reflect the attitude they take to their predicament (which got them out of combat), as well as to Kitchener’s advice. The entertainer ironically, if unintentionally, reiterates the general appeal to character in his cliché about “seeing it through,” which the soldiers recognize as superficial public cant about the war, and about their own supposed character. The situation the entertainer describes underscores that sexuality under these circumstances is a social and a state issue.
The entertainer’s anecdote also reveals how soldiers, like the rest of the population, were classified by biological condition, reflecting the direct sovereign intervention into the categorization of forms of life that underlies much of Agamben’s biopolitical theory. The military division of soldiers into specified clinics by the hundreds of thousands reflects a military administration at the biological level. Earlier, in the Boer Wars, the British military had first introduced concentration camps to administer and classify the enemy. Unlike the biological divisions in a hospital, in the concentration camps divisions reflect sovereign attitudes not only to forms of human life, but to the value or legitimacy of human life, as well. Agamben seeks to make this kind of division absolute, positing the death camp as its ultimate manifestation. He arrives at his troubling conclusion that the death camp is the essential emblem of twentieth century politics, by invoking the ancient figure of homo sacer, a man who exists outside of sovereign protection and can be killed with impunity. As a stateless living creature and no sovereign’s subject, homo sacer embodies apolitical zoe, bereft of humanizing bios. Having located the First World War as the inauguration of homo sacer as the modern paradigm of all humans in their tenuous relation to a sovereign protection that can always and arbitrarily be withdrawn, Agamben problematically asserts that, in the modern geopolitical context, “we are all virtually homines sacri.” If this is so, it is because the protection of a sovereign state is all that constitutes humanity, and without it, any human can be killed with impunity. The First World War inaugurated a universal potential reduction to this state because it demonstrated that any state, too, could expose its entire population to death.

One of the best illustrations of this mass exposure to death in the First World War comes in the form of Pat Barker’s historical fiction. The final novel in her Regeneration trilogy, The Ghost Road (1995), focuses on the reflections of W.H.R. Rivers (whose work and influence I
examine further in chapter three) on his experiences as an anthropologist in Micronesia.

Throughout the novel, Rivers draws parallels between the cultures he had studied and his own culture, particularly through a practice from Micronesia that highlights the biopolitical basis of humanizing political inclusion within a population.

The structural similarities Rivers finds between his own culture and that of the head-hunting cultures of the Solomon Islands trouble him more and more as he continues to go about his work of curing shell shocked soldiers, who are psychologically and politically reduced to semi-animal states, to return them to combat. A troubling custom Rivers recalls about the treatment of illegitimate children immediately brings to his mind a primal civilizing scene of Western culture:

On Vao there was a custom that when a bastard was born some leading man on the island adopted the child and brought him up as his own. The boy called him father, and grew up surrounded by love and care and then, when he reached puberty, he was given the honor, as befitted the son of a great man, of leading in the sacrificial pig, one of the huge-tusked boars in which the wealth of the people was measured. He was given new bracelets, new necklaces, a new penis wrapper and then, in front of the entire community, all of whom knew what was about to happen, he led the pig to the sacrificial stone, where his father waited with upraised club. And, as the boy drew near, he brought the club down and crushed his son’s skull.

In one of his father’s churches, St Faith’s, at Maidstone, the window to the left of the altar shows Abraham with the knife raised to slay his son, and below the human figures, a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. The two events represented the difference between savagery and civilization, for in the second scenario the voice of God is about to forbid the sacrifice, and will be heeded. He had knelt at that altar rail for years, Sunday after Sunday, receiving the chalice from his father’s hands. That the sacrifice of the “illegitimate” child occurs on the cusp of maturity suggests, along with his replacement of the sacrificial boar, that he is being sacrificed as an animal. He is outside of the legitimate social and political order of the tribe because of his youth, but also eternally bereft of participation within their order by the unrecognizable and animalizing circumstances of his
birth. He cannot be permitted to become fully human, and so is sacrificed as an animal. In contrast, in the story of Abraham and Isaac, God intervenes, and Abraham kills an animal rather than his son. The ongoing sacrifice of soldiers, which is the obvious subtext of Rivers’s rumination on these two scenes, causes Rivers to reflect that Abraham’s story, which should signify a civilizing end to human sacrifice and a lasting sovereign benevolence, has been reversed in the structure of the war. An older generation now sacrifices its offspring in blind obedience to an earthly, rather than a heavenly, sovereignty, refusing to recognize the next generation’s full inclusion in the political order. This exclusion animalizes them, and the recognition of this animalism underlies the spread and appeal of the wild men legend.

Rivers’s reflections demonstrate the structural element that animates the wild men legend, and also illuminates the structure of the exposure of the entire population to death or disciplinary pain. The sacrifice continues because the populations’, and especially the soldiers’, humanity is forfeit. This potential reduction of an entire population from bios to zoe underlies Agamben’s bombastic assertion that “we are all homines sacri.” The era of total war from which Agamben culls his theory suggests that any population’s reduction to the level of the animal is always a potential when state power is consolidated in the name of a zero-sum conflict waged, supposedly, on behalf of the population.

IV. Exception and Decision: Legitimating Indivisible Sovereignty

Recent engagements of biopower have been polarized around arguments about the indivisible nature of sovereign state power and its absolute control over subjects, on one hand, and resistance to the idea that the state is naturally vested with this sinister and invasive aspect on the other. Bonnie Honig, for instance, has criticized Agamben, for arguing that the Nazi death camp
is the symbol and paradigm of state power.\textsuperscript{50} According to Agamben, the biopolitical paradigm was made invasive by the emergency mentality that the war introduced into British politics and law. In \textit{State of Exception}, Agamben claims “World War One (and the years following it) appears as a laboratory for testing and honing the functional mechanisms and apparatuses of the state of exception as a paradigm of government.”\textsuperscript{51} Agamben’s analogy underscores the experimental nature of wartime legislation, particularly its ambiguous language. Extra-legal wartime legislation, however, does not mean that any state signifies an \textit{a priori} reduction of population to disposable animal life.

Agamben asserts repeatedly that the war gave the state of exception its modern various legal forms in different nations, and furthermore that the war “coincided with a permanent state of exception in the majority of the warring countries.”\textsuperscript{52} Agamben’s formula for demonstrating this claim is to show that in most of those countries the same shifting of law-creating power from legislative bodies to the executive that was invoked to deal with the emergency of the war is later invoked to deal, during peacetime, with economic crises. The case of Britain is more or less typical in Agamben’s study. He points out DORA’s importance in shifting legislative powers from parliament to the executive and provides evidence for how, in peacetime, exceptional powers have been invoked in the face of economic crisis.\textsuperscript{53}

Agamben posits that the First World War inaugurated a modern form of a political concept or practice that appears in various forms in antiquity: the “state of exception.” His analysis of the development of exceptional politics bears out the importance of the war as a transformative moment in modern political and legal theory and practice. However, in Agamben’s oeuvre, as in much theoretical work on the state of exception and biopolitics, the First World War is a starting point that is quickly left behind. Its legislation is acknowledged as
the inauguration of a kind of politics that leads inexorably to the totalitarianisms that emerged in the 1930s and lead both to the horrors of the Second World War and to the modern neo-liberal state of, according to Agamben, “global civil war” in which we now live. Here, from historically contingent arguments about the impact of world war on juridical form, Agamben makes a problematic leap to an ahistorical totalizing discourse about the inevitable foundations of any human political system.

Agamben develops much of his theory of exception from Carl Schmitt’s notion that sovereignty depends on who “decides on the exception,” a theory Schmitt put forth shortly after World War I. For Schmitt, sovereignty is necessarily “a borderline concept” because the sovereign exists outside of law, but also decides on what is legal. In any argument about sovereignty, Schmitt claims,

> What is argued about is the concrete application, and that means who decides in a situation of conflict what constitutes the public interest or interest of the state, public safety and order, *le salut public*, and so on. The exception, which is not codified in the existing legal order, can at least be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like. But it cannot be circumscribed factually or made to conform to a preformed law.

The formation of this theory of sovereignty immediately after the war is not coincidental. Schmitt’s prewar juridical theories were influenced by his Catholic upbringing, and he espoused a “Neo-Kantian construction of the state compatible with his religious beliefs,” in which the state was governed by the right, or the ideal, rather than by the inevitability of conflict. After the First World War, in which Schmitt served as an officer and to which he attributed his maturity as a juridical theorist, Schmitt foregrounds the inevitability of conflict between states. Having experienced the bleak necessities of total war, Schmitt bases his idea of indivisible and underived sovereignty on the assertion that any state is defined by the possibility of external conflict, and
that, because conflict will inevitably and unpredictably arise, some sovereign must decide what
to do when it does.

DORA lines up precisely with Schmitt’s notion of how sovereignty works when conflict
arises. According to Schmitt, “the most guidance the constitution can provide is to indicate who
can act in a crisis.”

DORA does not technically dissolve parliament or suspend deliberative
legislative processes, but it states unequivocally that the sovereign decision rests with the
executive: “His Majesty in Council has power during the continuance of the present war to issue
regulations as to the powers and duties of the Admiralty and Army Council, and of the members
of His Majesty’s forces, and other persons acting in His behalf, for securing the public safety and
the defence of the realm.”

Under DORA, as Schmitt argues about the exception, “it is clear that
the state remains, whereas law recedes,” and the state remains because some entity is clearly
recognized as having an inherent right (or the uncontestable ability) to decide on the exception,
or to decide that some norm that has previously existed no longer exists, and to take power in
that event.

Schmitt advances his notion that the political exception is analogous to the theological
miracle by demonstrating that, as in the miracle, under the exception a definite decision is made,
one that comes from outside the unexceptional order (i.e., nature in theological terms—the
normal functioning of God’s design) and is absolute. The decision cannot be argued against. In
his analysis of conservative Catholic theorists, whom he admires for their devotion to
decisionism, Schmitt argues against deliberation as inevitably undecisive. In condemnation of
the “clasa discutadora,” Schmitt writes, “The essence of liberalism is negotiation, a cautious half
measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed
into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended in an everlasting
discussion.” For Schmitt, legislation such as DORA (which he does not address directly) goes against liberalism in its older Victorian form and in its New Edwardian manifestation, and thus brings a welcome end to the kind of proceduralism that seeks legally to codify, and thereby limit, state power.

As his lifelong emphasis on the absolute endpoint of decision demonstrates, Schmitt is a proponent and theorist of finality. His pragmatic realpolitik requires that deliberation cease as the only guarantor of security. To Schmitt, endless deliberation is a liberal pipe dream. His most evident contemporary theoretical opposite, then, may be Hannah Arendt, “preeminently the theorist of beginnings.” For Arendt, precisely the opposite of decision’s necessity is true. The potential for action that changes the political realm of possibility is not simply desirable. In fact, it can be terrifying. It is inevitable, however, in a world of contingency and plurality in which, as much as all humans share mortality, they are also endowed with the possibilities presented by their shared natality. Arendt would replace mortality, embodied in the sovereign decision to take life, as the “central category of political thought.” She argues for the radical equality of “human existence as it has been given,” which permits people to take action by presenting themselves to their human companions through speech that always has the potential to create change. To take action is to start something, to take an initiative of which the outcome is never possibly clear. The only means of initiation is speech, the artificial way in which “men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.” These new beginnings inevitably create change. The initiative nature of action assures the tenability of any final decision.

Arendt’s indirect challenge to Schmittian decisionism and Agamben’s absolute opposition between bios and zoe inform Bonnie Honig’s suggestion that the moment of
“decision” does not occur only in the state of exception, and that the state of exception does not actually suspend democracy. The actions undertaken even in a state of emergency still require the support of the majority. Honig usefully suggests that “discretion,” as employed constantly in making legal and political decisions, may be a more useful model than Schmitt and Agamben’s “decision,” which leads to the anti-democratic legitimation of an authoritarian power. Honig prefers the democratic possibilities presented by Foucault and Arendt who, among others, “prepare the way for thinking of democratic sovereignty as plural and contingent, a constellation […] of contending forces.” In this model of sovereignty administrative power is necessarily dispersed among administrators whose “discretion” fragments the absolutism of sovereignty. Such dispersal of power may not be the case in a totalitarian or authoritarian state, of course, but Honig is arguing against Agamben’s claim that the “state of exception” has become the paradigm of contemporary governments that paradoxically constitute humanity through their sovereign right to revoke it. Even under the emergency measures, exceptional politics, and extraordinary repressions of British law during the Great War, state power was not as absolute or concentrated as Agamben’s model of exception or Schmitt’s decisionism would imply it must have been. DORA still depended on consent, which derived more from social and civil custom than actual state compulsion.

Although Honig does not use the term “governmentality,” much of her analysis of contingent democratic politics suggests her sympathy with Foucault’s theory, not because she is interested in how states engineer “governable” populations, but because she is interested in how subjects come to govern themselves through self fashioning and self-care. Honig describes the two-way nature of governmentality in a democracy in a way that illuminates the opposed political conditions of absolute decisionism and action that Britons confronted during the war:
Enacting or exacting accountability is one of the essential responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Citizens, always already interpellated by government powers and perspectives, assert their own vision of governance over that of the institutions that frame their lives. Their counter-interpellation may mirror or support existing institutions with affirmation or may expose patterns of inequity and protest them.\textsuperscript{69}

This was true in Britain during and after the war to an extent because the powerful national liberal tradition of parliamentary deliberation, Schmitt’s despised \textit{clasa discutidora}, was so suddenly supplanted by emergency statism. DORA could concentrate executive sovereignty because the people generally supported such concentration, but it could not stop deliberation. DORA permitted brutal oppression and no end of censorship, but anti-statist and anti-war sentiment still found expression in the voices of opponents to conscription and other anti-individualist measures. In the war’s aftermath, many writers reviewed the problems of wartime politics and their impact on British character formation, and envisioned how self-conduct might be thought and practiced after the British population had been exposed to exceptional emergency measures’ dehumanizing, de-individualizing effects.

V. Governmentality: Constructing a Plain-Speaking Self

The totalizing and homogenous discourses of biopower and exception cannot account for the limitless ways through which subjects constitute themselves in relation to state apparatuses and techniques of control. The biopolitical picture that emerges from such accounts is necessarily one-sided. The personal aspect of governmentality, on the other hand, can fill in the other side of the picture. The subject of governmentality will always look slightly different than the subject that biopower and its techniques aim to constitute: it will always be \textit{a} subject, contingent and dependent on plurality, and never \textit{the} subject, the monochromatic, easily governable, and elusive dream of sovereign power.
Foucault distinguishes between sovereignty and governmentality, initially articulating governmentality as an art of government that was actually eclipsed by concerns over sovereign legitimacy from the renaissance to the eighteenth century. Foucault suggests that sovereignty’s one essential condition for existence is territory, because “sovereignty is exercised not on things but, above all, on a territory and subsequently on the subjects who inhabit it.”

Government, on the other hand, is a method of organizing resources, things, and people. Foucault defines it as “a right manner of disposing things so as to lead not to the form of the common good, as the jurists’ texts would have said, but to an end that is “convenient” for each of the things that are to be governed.” Government as a form of organization, or of disseminating power and giving structure, works not on a territory first, but rather on a population, so its techniques are biopolitical rather than political in the Machiavellian sense of safeguarding sovereign power. As the social sciences and statistics took root across the Western world, government emerged as an ordering force. The old forms of sovereign power had to find legitimizing grounds for sovereignty. Governmentality emerges as a set of tactics that permit power to be exercised over a population, to form “governmental apparatuses” and “a whole complex of knowledges,” and to transform the “state of justice” to an “administrative state.”

Tensions between these two modes of power are evident in the legislation and administration of both the British territory and population during the war. DORA underscores sovereignty, not governance, claiming in its title that the territory, and not the population, must be defended. This distinction is not semantic; it implies that the population is one of the tools by which the sovereign may defend its “realm,” and has real consequences in terms of what kinds of laws would be passed under the Act. Governance of the population, the capacious “disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end,” is explicitly subordinated to protecting the
one essential condition of a British sovereignty: a British realm. The Act is thus a reassertion of an attenuated juridical form. Whereas Foucault had defined government through its lack of dependence on the threat of violence—“the good governor does not have to have a sting”—sovereignty was always predicated on the power of the right to decide life or death in order to protect the territory, which the sovereign embodies. DORA clearly shows Britain asserting its sovereign decision and announcing a new model predicated on the threat of violence.

In his last work, Foucault turned to the examination of power and opened up ways to think about the individual subject in relation to both governmentality and sovereignty. While the old philosophical engagements of power had begun by asking what power is and where it comes from, Foucault suggests that a more fruitful approach would begin with the question of how power is exercised, and that, furthermore, the best place to look to understand this is at sites where power is resisted. Foucault’s method of analyzing power consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point [or] using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies.

Foucault, like Arendt, also asserts that power is not exercised through direct violence, but through influence. Rather than conclude, with Arendt, that violence marks the absence of power (though perhaps building on that notion) Foucault emphasizes that any power relation depends on the presence of a degree of freedom. Whereas violence is a physical action with the aim of destroying, Foucault argues that power’s aim is to influence the action of the other, not to interrupt the physical existence of the other. Power is also distinct from consent and so from the
most basic definitions of politics, because it does not depend on “a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights” as in the Hobbesian and Rousseauvian notions of originary politics. According to this definition, power acts on actions, while violence acts on things, and thus is effective when it influences actions and the way people constitute themselves as subjects. Within the state, various state apparatuses, and apparatuses only marginally related to the state, exert power over subjects to make them comply, to make them submit themselves (rather than submitting them) to the action of violence the state deems necessary. The state conducts the conduct of its subjects not for their protection or to lead them to self-care, but in defense of territory, its constitutive necessity.

Foucault begins his 1982-83 lectures on *The Government of Self and Others* by offering a way of thinking about resistance to interventionist state power that commands rather than conducts its subject. He begins with a reading of Kant’s *Was ist Aufklärung?* Kant had defined the Enlightenment as “‘Man’s way out from his self-incurred tutelage.’”⁷⁹ Freeing oneself from tutelage would be the epitome of self-governance. Under “tutelage” one accepts and bases personal conduct on the conclusions and beliefs of others. It is a relation of dependence. The way out from this tutelage is the cultivation of one’s own reason. In Foucault’s reading of Kant, enlightenment, the full use of reason, constitutes the opposite of the Moreauvian ideal of reason as submission to an ideologically internalized sovereignty. Moreau, as the pro-statist Wells no doubt realized, had a backward notion of reason and enlightenment. Submission to and protection by the decisive law of a sovereign does not make one human, as in the politics of *bios* and *zoe*. A manner of deliberation that does not suspend action may be a better measure of enlightenment, not only as a Kantian ideal, but also as a political practice.
In Foucault’s lectures, the voice that independent critical thinking takes is the ancient Greek notion of *parresia*, unencumbered free speech that is always political. Through a reading of Euripides’s *Ion* and other texts, Foucault establishes that *parresia* is the opposite of the “speech act” as defined by J.L. Austin, in which one affects some real and definite situation by making a proclamation. The speech act is a form of Schmittian decision in miniature, and like decision, it implies finality. It is the opposite of *parresia* because its outcome is always known and it can only be practiced from a position of authority. *Parresia*, on the other hand, is defined by its openness. It creates an uncertain or undecided situation. Furthermore, it is not directed from an authoritarian or sovereign figure, but rather at or against one. There is a strong element of risk in *parresia*. When it incurs disfavor, it can lead to an order of execution, the traditional response of a threatened sovereign. However, the speaker who possesses this quality is in control of him or herself, and demonstrates a degree of independent character that threatens the sovereign by not conforming to conventional tutelary wisdom.

In opening up new possibilities, *parresia* is akin to Arendt’s category of action, which also always entails risk and takes the form of open, rather than finalizing, speech. *Parresia* also ensures and is necessary for deliberation. Just as Arendt describes natality and pluralism as the conditions that make action possible, Foucault locates *parresia* in the condition of natality, showing that connection to the community through one’s mother is the necessary condition under which one could practice *parresia* and be heard in the ancient Greek city-state. Like action, *parresia*, always entails an uncertain outcome, and is only possible in a state wherein the speaker, or the actor, is recognized as having the full right to speak or act, a right that derives from membership within an established population.
Parresia becomes dangerous when subjects confront emergency measures: conscientious objectors and war protesters were jailed for speaking plainly to sovereign power. The shock of war and emergency legislation exposed how the ideal of British character development was predicated on conflating contingent individuals with a mythical national norm. The effect of this confusion was to expose Britons to animalizing reduction. As the war continued and in its aftermath, some writers imagined something like parresia as a new, postwar mode of self-governance and character formation. Interwar British literature is often concerned with the problems of asserting and cultivating self-originating character, or failing to do so, in the face of an invasive and ubiquitous decisionist power which has taken the place of the deliberative juridical forms of a previously more liberal and individualist society. In looking back at the war and its emergency measures, and trying to reconstruct some viable model of self-governance in the absence of the old restrictive norm of national character, which was automatically meant to occupy any “good” British subject, many interwar writers engaged the question of what it would mean to speak plainly and openly against invasive power and repressive ideologies.

By reasserting the diminished politics of mortality and decision in the face of crisis, state power pushed liberal governance past individual subscriptions to a silencing code of character and thus to its breaking point. Proper adherence to character had made Britain run smoothly by “rules of thumb,” in Ford’s estimate, but had left its subjects tongue-tied and stammering. In breaking the mold of English character, the war may also have loosed the tongues of a nation anxious to express and cultivate individual character more completely from within, rather than take on the burden of prewar English “goodness.” Character formation free from tutelage, and bound by no respect for sovereign decision may look, rather, to something more akin to a politics.
of natality, espousing the biological equality of humanity that the corporeal violence of the war had demonstrated.

In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how, in responding to emergency measures and their corporeal and psychic effects, interwar literature developed through engagements of sovereign legitimacy, the political place of the biological human, and new possibilities opened for personal governance and expression in the face of global democratic crisis. In Chapter Two, “Corporeal Law: Community, Memory, and the Missing Subject,” I argue that T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s novel *Sunset Song* (1933) present resistance to decisionist sovereignty in very different ways and in different artificially constructed voices. Both represent the implications and results of DORA and the legislation, particularly the Military Service Act, which it engendered. Gibbon, born in 1901, was too young to experience combat, and Eliot, despite his burgeoning Anglophilia, was American, and ready to fight for the US army if the need should arise. I argue that in *The Waste Land* Eliot develops a poetics of undecision, giving artistic form to the perceived lack of sovereign legitimation that permeated Europe after the war. For Schmitt, the war had been the symbol of the inevitability of unexpected conflict to arise, underscoring the necessity of a sovereign decision. Eliot’s aesthetic (regardless of his professed political convictions in 1922 or at any other time) inverts Schmitt’s relationship between sovereignty and the decision, implying that in the absence of legitimacy, no sovereign decision is binding or valid.

Gibbon, on the other hand, directly presents the impact of wartime legislation on rural Scotland, suggesting that the war had demonstrated that nineteenth century bourgeois capitalism and imperialism constituted a corrupt, violent, and moribund system that must be eradicated and replaced with communism. Through an omniscient and plural narrator delivering the story in a
synthetic Scots vernacular, Gibbon presents Scottish farmers who are drafted into the war effort, shot as deserters, and who watch as the needs of warfare strip their communities of natural resources. Aimed at the rural Scots population, propagandistic appeals to character actually supported imperialist aims. Under DORA, rural communities throughout Scotland and the rest of Great Britain were exploited and forced into a permanent relationship with militarism. By forcibly enlisting Scots, British decisionism exerted direct corporeal power over many subjects.

In chapter three, “Getting the Right Idea: Shell Shock, Contagion, and Control,” I examine two novels by English women who were greatly interested in the war and its cultural and psychological impact, particularly shell shock and what it might reveal about received gender assumptions: Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Legislation dealing with shell shock was not necessarily more tenuous than that dealing with conscientious objectors, but the army, parliament, and medical establishment were less certain about the nature of the problem they confronted. By analyzing self-help books written by recovering shell shock sufferers, I demonstrate that the tradition of liberal self-governance, symbolically inaugurated by Smiles’s 1859 text *Self-Help*, presented both an obstacle and a possible road forward for shell shock sufferers. In these self-help narratives, patients replicate their doctors’ commands to “pull themselves together” in order to relieve their family and friends of unnecessary worry. West and Woolf, in different ways and to different formal effect, recognize that these kinds of expectations, rooted in masculinist notions of appropriate behavior, cause mental breakdown more than they cure it.

In *The Return of the Soldier* the perceived rebellion of Chris Baldry’s shell shock rubs off on his home and family in the form of a libidary “corruption” of class and sexual ideologies. If the titular soldier is eventually contained in the ideological prison of his prewar imperialist
character, his fall into incontinence destroys the naïveté of his repressed cousin Jenny, who narrates his story. Jenny talks herself to an earth-shattering revelation about the constraints imposed, throughout her life, on her self-expression. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf presents a bleak and hopeless mutiny in the form of Septimus Smith, whose suicide is a disastrous rebellion against the medical establishment that attempts to reconstitute him through appeals to character and responsibility. Clarissa Dalloway’s collusion in Septimus’s death reveals her deep attachment to the trappings of power that similarly imprison her within the limitations of her role as the “perfect hostess,” but which she ultimately accepts and gladly perpetuates.

Chapter Four, “Unmaking and Remaking: The Values of War Labor,” focuses on how the war and propaganda’s appeals to the gendered demands of national character altered English subjects’ relations to work. I argue that Hannah Arendt’s theories of labor, work, and action clarify the values attached to forms of war work, helping us better understand how war work ties subjectivity to identification with or against state power. Vera Brittain chronicled her changing attitudes toward work before, during, and after the war in her popular memoir Testament of Youth (1933), which, I argue, cannot be understood without attending to her complex and intertwined work as a student at Oxford, her labor as a war nurse, and her action as an internationalist peace worker, in which she finally finds a voice by publicly speaking on behalf of the League of Nations. As the war poet most closely allied with high modernist style, David Jones resolves shell shock in his long poem *In Parenthesis* (1937) by translating his years of labor as a soldier into a highly formalized work of art, thereby transforming himself through language from *animal laborans* to *homo faber*.

Throughout the three sections of her memoir, Brittain attempts to come to terms with the sacrifices and physical debasement she experienced during the war. In recalling the experience,
she analyses what aspects of entrenched British culture and individual character had contributed to her generation’s willingness to sacrifice their labor and their lives for so many years. Although she condemns the war and attempts to reconcile her postwar melancholy and shell shock by changing international politics through her commitment to the League of Nations, Brittain also frequently exhibits a refusal to believe that her generation’s sacrifice was unnecessary.

While Brittain’s chronicle of her war experience culminates in her outward-directed action, David Jones, who had served on the Western Front, turns inward to resolve his trauma, purging his memories in the creation of a modernist epic. *In Parenthesis* demonstrates that Jones experienced the war as his reduction to a mere laboring body, treated and valued as a thing that daily remakes the minimal conditions of life. Like Brittain, he conceives his experience as a sacrifice that has reduced him to bare life, and also like hers, his text is marked by ambiguity as it simultaneously asserts the pointlessness of the war’s brutality and attempts to redeem the experience by assigning it some value. For Brittain that value is didactic, and she expresses it in public action. For Jones, the value is aesthetic, and, though he would prefer his poem to be about peace, he crafts elaborate, human art out of the bestial conditions of the Western Front.

These texts represent the political crises the war occasioned, and over which Britons ruminated and debated in the interwar years, while a second, more destructive conflict grew increasingly likely. Each text is concerned primarily with the way institutions such as law, medicine, the military and the factory were employed to coerce Britons into a war of imperialist and capitalist gain. I have selected them from a wide-range of war related texts that show the war exposed and troubled the relations between politics and the constitution of human subjectivity.
CHAPTER 2
CORPOREAL LAW:
COMMUNITY, MEMORY, AND THE MISSING SUBJECT

Over the men of that generation hung a doom which was admirably if somewhat ruthlessly expressed by a British Staff Officer in an address to subalterns in France: “You are the War generation. You were born to fight this War, and it’s got to be won—we’re determined you shall win it. So far as you are concerned as individuals, it doesn’t matter a tinker’s damn whether you will be killed or not. Most probably you will be killed, most of you. So make up your minds to it.

—Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (1929)83

It’s a bit like medieval trial-by-combat, you know. In the end moral and political truths have to be proved *on the body*, because this mass of nerve and muscle and blood is what we are.

—Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door* (1993)84

I. Redefining the Subject’s Relationship to State Power

Immediately following the outbreak of the First World War, British Parliament passed the “Defence of the Realm Act,” (DORA) a vague and open piece of legislation that essentially allowed executive power to make and pass any future laws the state might deem necessary to protect the British homeland. The text of the act is short and the offenses it lists imprecise. Parliament expanded it continuously throughout the war. This initial articulation of the Act blurs the line between the subject of state power and the subject of military power:

Be it enacted by the King’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows

1—(1) His Majesty in Council has power during the continuance of the present war to issue regulations as to the powers and duties of the Admiralty and Army Council, and of the members of His Majesty’s
forces, and other persons acting in His behalf, for securing the public safety and the defence of the realm; and may, by such regulations, authorize the trial by courts martial and punishment of persons contravening any of the provisions of such regulations designed—
(a) To prevent persons communicating with the enemy or Obtaining information for that purpose or any purpose calculated to jeopardize the success of the operations of any of His Majesty’s forces or to assist the enemy; or
(b) To secure the safety of any means of communication, or of railways, docks or harbours; in like manners as if such persons were subject to military law and had on active service committed an offence under section 5 of the Army Act.
2—(2) This Act may be cited as the Defence of the Realm Act, 1914. 85

In a sense, the act enlists the entire nation into the war effort. The terms of provision (a) specifically leave the act open to apply to anything that could be construed as jeopardizing the army’s success. The threat to civil liberty is clear. Some of the laws passed under DORA were innocuous enough, and protected the people as well as the realm. At one point during the war, for example, civilians were compelled to put out all lights during certain hours to protect them from air raids, and flying kites became temporarily illegal on the grounds that it could be a means of communicating with the enemy. 86 But DORA had longer lasting and specifically corporeal effects on British law. Although it may seem only a slight infringement on rights, the hours in which alcohol could be consumed changed. 87 This law directly dictated to British citizens how they were to treat their bodies, and thereby claimed some degree of state ownership over those bodies. More directly, DORA led to the unprecedented “Military Service Acts” of 1916-18, which implemented conscription for the first time in modern British history. As I will demonstrate, opposition to conscription led to the imprisonment and abuse of thousands of conscientious objectors, who found themselves in the paradoxical position of having the legal civil right to object to service, but being punished for objecting because, under DORA, they were subject to military rather than civil law. Often they were denied even the legal recourses still
technically open to them as soldiers. Conscientious objectors occupied a liminal legal space between civil law and martial law, subject to punishment from both, and protected by neither.

Due to conscription and other legal interventions, British communities were not only broken up by the absence, death or mutilation of young men and women, but also by rapid modernization compelled by the war and new ways of mourning to accommodate the scale of death. The individual corporeal interventions into British law had a direct impact on the forms of British community, both rural and urban. In this chapter I will examine how subject formation through communal inclusion changed during and after the war as a result of wartime legislation, and how two very different authors present the war’s impact on the relation of the physical body to sovereign power, and on corporeal legislation that ultimately distances subjects from the bodies they inhabit, from their communities, and from their imagined selves. I will look specifically at the urban alienation of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), arguing that the fragmentation of the poem represents (among other things) the fragmented subject as it perceives itself in relation to the body, to community, to its former and permanently lost self, and to any form of state or communal sovereignty. I will then move on to Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s novel of Scottish rural life during the war, *Sunset Song* (1932), which contrasts the intervention of the imperialist and capitalist British State into the lives of rural Scots to their previous communal organization around the land, and to a future socialist order that Gibbon imagines. Though formally and tonally distinct, these texts demonstrate that the corporeal legislation war brought to individuals, families, and communities was frequently played out at the deepest level of personal subjectivity. Both texts present the legislative interventions of the war as permanently interrupting the deep agricultural cycles and collective rituals around which European communities had formed. Folk tradition and mythology are opposed, in both, to modern
biopolitical legislation and its effects. Neither Eliot nor Gibbon necessarily advocates these
“natural” or “primitive” forms of community and ritual. Nevertheless, invoking them shows,
partially, the untenability of any claim to a just sovereign authority in the interwar years, and the
artificiality of modern state sovereignty’s claim to exceptional or decisional power.

*Sunset Song* deals directly with the effect of legislation, particularly the laws that allowed
the state to appropriate communal natural resources and the Military Service Act of 1916. *The
Waste Land*, on the other hand, never specifically addresses wartime legislation, only referring
directly to the war on a few occasions. Through a close examination of the public debates
surrounding this legislation and the physical forms through which the state enforced it,
particularly conscription, I hope to illuminate the influence of corporeal legislation on Eliot’s
myriad symbols of sovereignty, control, and corporeality. I argue that Eliot gives poetic form to
the crisis of sovereign legitimacy that exceptional wartime measures revealed. By crafting an
aesthetic of undecision and absence, in which power exists arbitrarily and rests on no clear
foundation, Eliot creates a negative vision of the Schmittian theorization (discussed in the first
chapter) of the decisionist politics that emerged as a direct result of the war. Before turning to
*The Waste Land* I will also briefly examine Basil Bunting’s “Villon,” (1925) a poem that owes
*The Waste Land* a direct stylistic and thematic debt, and that recounts the poet’s experience in a
prison for conscientious objectors. “Villon” demonstrates Bunting’s perception of a modern and
distinctly biopolitical relation between the body and the state.

The 1916 Military Service Act, probably the most important piece of legislation passed
under DORA, is more than a simple announcement that conscription has been instated. The
wording of announcements of the act reveals ambiguity about the state’s motives and how the
state wants citizens to understand conscription. Earlier posters that had promoted voluntary
enlistment had contained the passive voice in asserting Kitchener’s confidence that the appeal would “be at once responded to” by patriotic men over 5 feet 3 inches tall and with chests larger than 34 inches. Posters announcing the Military Service Act would have appeared around Great Britain very early in 1916. The passive voice in the announcement of conscription implies an attempt by the state to conceal its injunctive role. The wording also conceals the action of the act. The state does nothing, even if a man does not enlist. By not enlisting, he voluntarily chooses to meet “a third course.” The act encourages men to enlist, but if they don’t, all that will have changed, legally speaking, is an attitude toward those men’s military status. They will be deemed, in a general sense, to have enlisted, and can await their orders. No option is given other

Figure 1. Recruitment poster, 1915. (IWM Q.79826)  
Figure 2. Military Service Act poster, 1916 (IWM Q.79827)
than enlisting individually, as part of a community, or being deemed to have done so. The state exercises an authority that it attempts to conceal. The announcement does not present conscription as an absolutist decree, but rather as an attitude that citizens are vaguely compelled to adopt toward their relationship to the state, an attitude with direct (if concealed) physical consequences.

The repercussions of this tentatively worded compulsion to enlist were far-reaching. As in many wars in many nations, legislators present conscription as a necessity: the conflict cannot be won with the forces available and the belligerent powers are unwilling to resolve the conflict through diplomacy. The necessity of such intervention may be and often is questioned, but the precise legal form of conscription is less subject to public or academic debate. In the case of Great Britain in the First World War, the rhetorical and legal forms conscription took reflect an unwillingness either to exercise absolutist sovereign state power over life and death or to guarantee that war would not effect the individual liberties promised by the state in what Schmitt or Agamben would consider “non-exceptional” circumstances. The assumption that conscription was necessary, the vague and non-committal form it took, and the form of punishments meted out to conscientious objectors all demonstrate that the war presented a crisis about the limits of state sovereignty over subjects’ bodies and over their capacity of self-determination at the deepest levels of their identities.

Britain did not rush wholeheartedly into authoritarian rule when the war broke out, as propagandists and legislators claimed Germany had done. As Vincent Sherry has shown, the absurd and contradictory language of the conscription announcements and debates were not lost on a young generation of satirists, who publicly, though anonymously, mocked conscription in university literary journals. In general, the British felt themselves to be at war with the concept
of excessive militarism that Germany represented, so adopting militarist measures was uncomfortable to many. While DORA is certainly restrictive of liberties and prepares the legality of more forceful and restrictive measures, the parliamentary debates over the Military Services Act demonstrate a hesitation on the parts of many to become too militaristic, too Prussian.\footnote{A small but vocal group in parliament objected to passage of the Military Service Bill. Some believed that conscription could be more trouble than it would be worth; others objected to the fact that the bill legally enforced an attitude that men must take toward their own identities regarding military service. In his short book \textit{For Conscience Sake} (1917) Alfred Bishop, the brother of an incarcerated conscientious objector, argues against conscription’s juridical legitimacy. In the introduction to the book, John Clifford states that “Over 4,500 ‘Conscientious Objectors’ have been \textit{made into soldiers against their will}, arrested, handed over to Military Authorities and subjected to Military law and whatever that involves. Of these, nearly 3,700 have been court-martialed; over nine hundred who have completed their first sentence have been court-martialed again, and returned to prison.”\footnote{Clifford shows that the tribunal system designed to determine which objectors’ grounds were truly “conscientious” created an inescapable cycle of increasingly severe sentences that would logically end in execution (although parliament had taken measures to prevent execution in such cases, it did sometimes occur).\footnote{He points out that “the spirit and the letter of the Military Service Act provide exemption for the citizen who refuses to be made a soldier from a deep sense of religious duty” and so concludes that the actual treatment of conscientious objectors is “illegal.”}}92 Clifford shows that the tribunal system designed to determine which objectors’ grounds were truly “conscientious” created an inescapable cycle of increasingly severe sentences that would logically end in execution (although parliament had taken measures to prevent execution in such cases, it did sometimes occur).93 He points out that “the spirit and the letter of the Military Service Act provide exemption for the citizen who refuses to be made a soldier from a deep sense of religious duty” and so concludes that the actual treatment of conscientious objectors is “illegal.”94

As the rest of Bishop’s book demonstrates, however, the legality of the treatment of conscientious objectors is always problematic because, through vague language, an extra-legal space seems to have been cleared in which to treat such cases. The legality of this treatment
depends on how one reads the “exceptionality” of Britain’s situation and what becomes of legality in the paradox of law’s legal suspension during an emergency. Is the tenuous legislation of DORA, or the almost non-committal wording of the Military Service Act, adequate to clear the kind of extralegal space that Agamben theorizes as law’s essence? Furthermore, the cases present a legal problem because the act sets up a law and provides a possibility of exemption from its provisions, but remains deliberately vague about verifying or defining who may be exempt. As some opponents in parliament argued, if conscription is a law, it would need to be absolute. If it provided a secure means of being released from service, it would be more a suggestion than a law, and the point of the act was that suggestion had not been enough. As it came out, the Act ambiguously creates a law about how the subject sees himself and his position in regards to the state, and what the state “deems” his position to be.

Bishop reviews and provides quotations from the parliamentary debates surrounding the Military Service Act. He shows that many MPs expressed concern that the bill provided, in the words of liberal MP Robert Trevelyan, no “absolute right of escape from service for a conscientious objector.”95 Under the bill, the cycle of repeated sentencing would come about after tribunals established at three levels had tried the conscientious objector. The first would be local, the second regional, and the third national.96 If a case were denied in the first tribunal, it could be appealed in the second and third. Initially, some members of parliament suggested that only members of “religious bodies opposed to all wars” should be offered exemption. In response, Trevelyan “stated that there were very large numbers of perfectly courageous, conscientious young men who, not for religious reasons largely, but for reasons wrapped up in their most convinced beliefs, would have nothing to do with fighting, [conscription would cause] a feeling that intolerable injustice was going on” and that “the simplest way out of the difficulty
was to say that if a man had a conscientious objection he ought to be able to claim complete exemption.” The failure to respond to such objections demonstrates that the majority of the House of Commons believed that Britons who objected to the war could not only be coerced into fighting against their wills, but could change their attitudes about their own identities as pacifists or as objectors on other grounds. The failure to come up with a way out for any objector also indicates a fear that the enormous social and familial pressures, as well as propaganda, would not be adequate even for a strong majority of British men who did not really object to the war to resist the temptation of pretending they did.

One objection raised in the House of Lords was more romantic than pragmatic, but clearly reflects some of the popular attitudes about conscription: the second time the bill was read in the House of Lords Earl Russell declared “that he had an instinctive abhorrence of making a man fight when he did not want to. He thought that in passing the Bill they were diminishing the glory of the country.” Russell’s understanding is more rudimentary than Trevelyan’s. He finds it abhorrent to make a man fight, but does not see this as a debate about changing a person’s identity. His argument is about harm to the nation, and could be read as an argument about international propaganda, not civil liberties or protection. The law in the end did not so much compel the men to fight, as compel them to agree to see themselves as soldiers.

Echoing the objections of Trevelyan and Simon, Lord Courtney of Penwith said he was afraid that experience would show that the difficulties involved in the Conscientious Objector had been painfully under-rated, and that the very character of the objector had been misunderstood. […] There were some very serious men, men not easily moved, who hold the feeling, whether derived from inner conviction or from a plain reading of the injunction of the Sermon on the Mount we need not speculate, that war is a sin against humanity, and a thing from which they must stand apart. With a man who has this conviction that the thing is forbidden, it is not “I will not,” but “I cannot.” […] ‘And you would have greater difficulties in trying to resist their opposition than you could possibly have in exempting them freely and altogether.’
Courtney’s objection combines those voiced in the House of Commons and that of Russell, and provides an important new element, as well: self-originating, rather than national, character. Courtney doesn’t object to making a man fight against his will, but rather sees that it will not be possible to force one to be a soldier who has shaped his self-perception in opposition to such an identity. Constructing the will to be soldiers is necessary, and he sees that may be impossible for some.

Conscription was not only jarring to conscientious objectors and their few Parliamentary advocates. Some citizens also thought it un-British, and it destabilized some civilian relations to the war propaganda. Many in Britain had taken pride in the spirit an entirely voluntary military demonstrated. That conscription had become necessary seemed to give the lie to the notion that all Englishmen could be depended on to “do their bit,” as the stoically litotic wartime phrase put it. A young Miss Viola Bawtree records in her diary on January 30th, 1916:

The Compulsion bill has been carried and dear old England is behaving very creditably about it. Of course we’re all hoping that by the time it becomes law there won’t be any more men to “Compulse.” Then who can say our army is not entirely voluntary, in spite of the wretched Bill! It’s interesting to meet all the khaki armlets, showing the men are either exempt from service, or ready to be called up when wanted.100

Bawtree is evidently conflicted about the bill, seeing it as a potentially necessary evil that may prove unnecessary after all. She positions herself as one among a plural “we,” strengthening a youthful tone of camaraderie with a larger national community that she sees as essentially unified, despite some potential ideological outsiders who may need to be brought forcibly into the war. Her rhetoric is tellingly confused about the implications of the bill. She uses strong adjectives and adverbs, but when it comes to describing the novel sight of men who must literally wear on their sleeve their legal relationship to the military, she only remarks that it is
“interesting,” a non-committal adjective revealing mixed feelings, or at least a reservation that delays analysis.

Bawtree’s diary provides a rich account of how one young woman’s character was significantly shaped by the war. She frequently struggles with conflicting opinions, some of which seem to come from her community, and some of which she arrives at on her own. The moral paradox of conscientious objectors particularly intrigues her. In an entry of March 16, 1916, less than two months after expressing hopes that no men will need to be “compulsed,” she writes

The Conscientious objectors have had a special corps formed for them—the Non-Combatant Corps. They’re being sneered at a great deal. I don’t know what to make of them. Many have genuine consciences I believe, but seem unable to reason sanely. If there wasn’t a war going on they’d be quite right, in my opinion, to take up the stand against anything military; but considering we are at war and fighting for what we believe to be the right, then every true Briton ought to help his country, instead of considering his own feelings.

Bawtree’s fallacious reasoning (understandable, considering her age) reveals the mainstream attitude toward conscientious objection. Clearly, if there were not a war, conscientious objectors could only object in theory. The condition of the war, however, is the necessary condition of their objection. The failure of conscientious objectors to put the desires of their national community before their own deepest convictions appears as a form of insanity. Like shell-shocked soldiers, to whom I will turn in the next chapter, they are excluded from the social contract with their sovereign, and so also excluded from their community. Formulating conscientious objection as insanity provides a structure through which to deny their erstwhile political rights, and conscientious objectors were disenfranchised early on. Unlike shell-shocked soldiers, however, they have no possible excuse for their insanity, which can only be a manifestation of an essential anti-social perversion. The pattern of pronouns in this passage
betrays Bawtree’s confusion about national identity, and replicates, in an apparently spontaneous consideration of the issue, the exclusion of the conscientious objector from the social and political sphere. She begins by opposing “them” and “they” to “I” and “my.” She at first concedes that without the war “they’d be quite right.” In “my [her] opinion,” she would then agree with them. But when she considers the war, an ambiguous “we” pops into her discourse. Her assertion that “we” are at war includes herself, the objectors, and “every true Briton.” Moved to patriotic scorn for selfishness within this sentence, she concludes that no true Briton would consider “his own feelings,” semantically breaking the solidarity of the conscientious objectors and rendering in its place one sole, selfish man, putting his personal and trivial “feelings” above the magisterial “what we believe to be the right.”

Bawtree’s measured consideration of conscription is unusual, and perhaps derives from her youth. Ethel Bilborough, “a middle aged civilian of Chiselhurst, Kent,” kept what she, from the start, referred to as a “war diary.” Her diary entry of March 5th, 1916, expresses a more popular attitude towards conscription and the legal form it took:

Conscription has come to England! One can hardly realize it, things have come about so gradually. Voluntary recruiting did well, but not well enough, and the slackers had to be got somehow […] But the government have felt their way to this great step very cautiously, very guardedly, and have made absurd concessions relating to men bearing arms who may have ‘conscientious’ objections to war! and endless exemptions are being made […] Naturally every coward and slacker thinks fighting is ‘wrong’! and the most ludicrous reasons are being put forward by men who want to get exemption owing to their ‘conscientious’ (?) scruples! The other day a man who said he was an artist, claimed exemption on the grounds that he ‘could not mutilate anything so beautiful as the human form’!!

Bilborough’s sole objection to conscription is the way the government has handled it. She recognizes, in a sense, the same problem that opponents such as Trevelyan and Courtney saw with the Act. If it does not absolutely compel men to fight, rather than “deeming” them to have
enlisted and remaining open to hearing their objections, it does not have the force of law necessary to overcome slackers’ absurd excuses for not fighting.

The Military Service Act could be excused and was no doubt understood by civilians such as Bilborough as a necessary step in containing the “madness” of pacifism, although it initially felt like an indication of the decline of firm British resolve. An observer like Bawtree, however, was capable of reconsidering her sympathies. By the end of the war her diary expresses distaste for jingoism, and eventually for the vindictiveness of the Treaty of Versailles. For Bawtree, as for many, the war became the occasion through which she discovered the stakes of cultivating political attitudes reconciled with the kind of conviction shown by conscientious objectors. Her bitter rejection of the war indicates the displacement of her national camaraderie and loyalty with a mature care of the self. As much as the war presented an ongoing experiment in the politics of exception and decision, as Agamben argues, it was also, in personal ethical struggles such as Bawtree’s and those of conscientious objectors, a laboratory in which to test the limits of self-governance and the strength of one’s convictions in the face of sovereign state intervention.

II. Involuntary Military Training: Breaking Conscientious Objectors
Soldiers and those who had more immediately at stake were not nearly as patient in considering the ethical rights of conscientious objectors as Robert Trevelyan or Viola Bawtree. Stories of attacks on conscientious objectors abound. Objectors were mistreated in civilian sectors, in prisons, and even when they were performing non-combatant work in special corps. A letter from N.A. Thomas apparently to his girlfriend and dated April 25, 1917, describes a typical violent encounter between soldiers and objectors:
There are a great number of “Conscientious Objectors” near Seaford that have been employed for the past 4 months constructing one of the roads leading to Newhaven the road is just the same as it was before the operations of the “C.O.’s.” They all were allowed leave at Easter and X-mas and get real good food. Don’t you think it rather unfair to us fellows? We often march past them and pass a good deal of comments etc; sometimes there is a “rough-house” ending in a few C.O.’s being badly mauled and a few of us chaps being escorted back to the guard-room and then punished “C.B. etc.” This is an every-day occurrence. I can see some fun shortly if they continue to keep them here.104

Thomas reveals a fundamental doubt about the objectors’ reasons for not enlisting. They are essentially lazy and want to escape any work, so the road they have been working on, in his estimate, has seen no progress. That fact is not necessary to justify the violence against them, in which he revels, but their laziness, coupled with their preferential treatment, adds to his enjoyment of that violence. Their lazy, well-fed complacency serves to highlight the active bravery and camaraderie of “us fellows” and “us chaps” who face punishment for the sake of mauling these slackers when the state itself has deemed them a threat and excluded them from the rights of citizenship by suspending them in a lawless space between military and civil law.

The violence perpetrated against conscientious objectors in the civil sector mirrored their treatment by the military, and despite the punishment mentioned by Thomas, these soldiers took their examples on how to treat objectors from higher military authorities. The form that punishment of objectors took reveals that corporeal control was at the heart of the problem they presented. The language of the Military Service Act indicates that men are not being compelled to fight; rather, they are being compelled to enlist or to consider themselves enlisted. The act denies their civil liberty by deeming them to be soldiers. Legally, would-be objectors denied exemption did not even necessarily have recourse to a court martial. Rather than going before either a civil or military court to be sentenced, they were brought to a barracks to commence their military training, though against their will. Throughout the war, a regular newsletter called
The C.O.’s Hansard, an anti-conscription publication that chronicled the ritual corporeal torture that these men underwent when handed over to the military, compiled hundreds of descriptions of the treatment of objectors.

William Cohen’s recent argument about Victorian conceptions of embodiment is useful in understanding the treatment conscientious objectors faced in training camps. Cohen demonstrates that during the nineteenth century English literature reflects a growing awareness of the totality of the body as the person. He demonstrates that modernization and technology lead to this unification, and that Victorian writers increasingly put pressure on assumptions that the soul and the body were divisible:

Mass industrialism and urbanization provided new locations, such as factories, metropolises, and imperial colonies, in which conflicts over the relation between the body and its interior arose; mechanized labor produced one new kind of body, while conceptions of race and ethnicity as embodied states, indexed by science, generated others. Cohen’s argument shows that in general, Victorian writers were intrigued by the possibilities of representing the body as integral with the soul, or even that an incorporeal soul was mythical. I argue that the war significantly altered or arrested the progression or acceptance of corporeal primacy precisely because it exaggerated the processes Cohen identifies as the conditions that enabled it for the Victorians. The war was an industrialized venue of destruction that foregrounded the body’s complete vulnerability, and, to many, the absurdity of its relation to such abstract notions as patriotism, honor, and religion. The interiority of subjectivity, and its relation to bodily obligation, was particularly significant in debates about conscription and the treatment of conscientious objectors whose arguments frequently, but not always, represented corporeality as subordinate to an essential, non-tangible and not necessarily religious attitude toward combat. The military’s solution was to foreground corporeality to the point of eradicating
complex interiority. The military attempted to reduce the unexcused conscientious objector to the “docile body” of a soldier by physically putting it through a soldier’s motions.\textsuperscript{106}

The story of G. Beardsworth, which was reported in September 1916, exemplifies the form of torture used on conscientious objectors. The exaggerated physicality of the treatment, and its public nature, faintly mirror the anecdote of the executed regicide with which Foucault opens \textit{Discipline and Punish}.\textsuperscript{107} The report first describes how, after being brought from the tribunal to the barracks, Beardsworth refused to submit to the medical exam or to cooperate in any manner. When soldiers forcibly attempted to dress him in a khaki uniform, he eventually submitted to put the uniform on himself, but refused to put on the puttees, and was handcuffed so soldiers could put them on him. When the handcuffs were removed, however, he took them off.\textsuperscript{108} This extreme infantilization of the conscientious objector exaggeratedly presents him as a wayward child who must physically be shown how to occupy the role of the soldier and the soldier’s movements. Although he could easily be court-martialed for his refusal to comply, the army intends, as he is told repeatedly, to break him. His treatment arises from his being “deemed” to have enlisted. However, in some paradoxical way, he is deemed unentitled to the due process available to voluntarily enlisted soldiers because of the involuntary nature of his enlistment.

Beardsworth’s torment continues the next morning when the army employs the same absurdly literal attempt to make his body act as they deem necessary. During drill, soldiers walk behind him kicking his ankles in the right direction until his ankles are “swollen and a source of torture.” When Beardsworth reiterates his objection to a major he is “handed over to the gym squad for a further course of ‘discipline.’” The report continues

The exhibition of the next hour beggars description, and it took place in a public park before a large number of men and women and children. At 11 a.m. the wife
and sister of B…… arrived in the Park and were eye-witnesses. He was first taken to the water jump. The men take a run, vault over a rail, and then leap over the pool of water. B…… resisted. He was dragged to the rail, roughly bundled over, and as he refused to leap, he was pushed time after time into the water. No time was allowed him to recover his breath. As he scrambled out of the water he was seized and harried round the field by fresh men as fast as they could force him, only to be brought back with the object of making him leap. After he had been doused about a dozen times, the attempt was abandoned, and he was taken to the next stage of torture. This was a palisade 7 feet high. Men clamber up one side and drop down the other. Five men seized B…… and threw him bodily towards the top, but being a fairly big man instead of landing him clear they caught him on the top, and as he fell over on the other side they caught him. This was not “efficient” enough for the officer. He was dragged back, hurled bodily over the top and as the men ran to catch him, this officer shouted “stand clear,” and he was allowed to smash to the ground like a log. This was repeated a third time, and he was hurried to a frame platform reached by an inclined plank. In a state of physical exhaustion B…… was seized on every side and forced at full length up the sloping plank. No brutality was spared, and no restraint of any kind was shown. At the top he was turned head over heels time after time, and finally dumped on the ground, helpless and bleeding. The interlude to this exhibition of British Militarism was physical exercise. B…… was placed on his back on the ground, with men moving his arms and legs, and one man with his foot in the pit of his stomach.109

Beardsworth’s treatment is not as extreme as that undergone by Foucault’s regicide, of course, but its form is symbolic, ritualistic, and meant to demonstrate publically the inescapable and absolute nature of sovereignty over the subject’s body. The reaction of the crowd, however, is one of “indignation.” When “the wife and sister frantically abused the officer responsible,” they implicated themselves in Beardsworth’s refusal to submit. Although they could not be treated in a similar fashion, the officer devises a disciplinary punishment for them, as well. Even though Beardsworth was not executed, “on Saturday the wife was informed by a non commissioned officer that her husband had been shot at dawn.”110 The only conceivable point of this cruelty is to promulgate the legally inaccurate (or at most undecided) notion that the military now exercises absolute control over any citizen’s body as an immediate result of the emergency measures of the war.
The C.O.’s Hansard contains many reports of similar treatment. What they all have in common is the exaggerated physicality of punishment. In Beardsworth’s case and others, the privates and officers who inflict these punishments frequently tell the objectors that the army has already “broken” many of them. \(^{111}\) Because their crime is not to think of themselves as soldiers, the punishment trains the bodies of these men by forcing them through the actions of soldiers, with the proud assurance that just about any body that is forced to wear a uniform and forced to do drill and training will eventually impress this reality on the mind. As in Althusser’s reading of Pascal, which enables him to “invert the order of the notional schema of ideology,” corporeal action comes first, and inscribes absolute law on the subject’s psyche. \(^{112}\) The generally progressive and secular logic underlying the Victorian shift toward an understanding of the body as the extent of the human is behind this treatment. Imprisoning objectors as citizens who had broken a law would validate their objection by handling it within the prescribed, non-exceptional juridical order. Without the language of absolutism, the state decrees how citizens must construct their essential identities, and physically carries out this decree.

Men such as Beardsworth who were not excused but would not relent in their objections were sent to prison. A counter-discourse to the war and its propaganda grew up in their communications, and conscientious objectors formed several leagues, exchanging ideas through The C.O.’s Hansard, through personal correspondence and organizations such as the “No Conscription Fellowship.”\(^{113}\) A unique cultural artifact is the C.O.’s “autograph book,” a book of blank pages exchanged among and filled in by objectors and their supporters. These books provided a creative outlet for the incarcerated. Many contain mini-essays and poems that express the grounds for objection, which are occasionally religious, but just as often about the corrupt political and financial motivations that the objectors believe constitute the real reasons for the
conflict. The books frequently show a sense of humor about their authors’ imprisonment, which in itself is a form of resistance.

The absurdity of this type of treatment grows out of the conditions of an essentially liberal state caught in the paradox of its emergency measures. The sovereign decision is not made as a Schmittian injunction to fight and die for the sovereign, and state sovereignty here occupies a different kind of liminal space that renders its disciplinary attempts less than authoritarian, and so less than fully effective. In the first epigraph to this chapter, Richard Aldington describes the officer’s blunt language about the likely deaths of the subalterns as admirable because it dismisses the cant of inherent British individualism, which the emergency measures of the war had proven hollow. Britain’s liberal past, suffering, as Sherry shows, under the language of an illogical war, also suffers under the form of an illogical law to which it will not fully commit. The objector thus retains some space in which to shape his ethical identity and
articulate his objection, a process Basil Bunting looked backed on in the years following his imprisonment as an objector.

III. Basil Bunting’s “Villon”: Absurdity, Aesthetics, and Anthropometrics

The paradoxes of the Military Service Act and its enforcement are powerful subtexts in Basil Bunting’s poem “Villon” (1925). Bunting was imprisoned at the age of 18 for his refusal to enlist. The second section of the poem (which I present in its entirety) deals directly with Bunting’s experience and is probably the only high modernist first hand account of being imprisoned as a conscientious objector. Furthermore, it clearly owes a stylistic and thematic debt to The Waste Land, to which I will soon turn, and it explicitly addresses the uniquely biopolitical aspect of not only the conscientious objector’s experience, but that of any civilian in a modern state at war:

Let his days be few and let
his bishoprick pass to another,
for he fed me on carrion and on a dry crust,
mouldy bread that his dogs had vomited,
I lying on my back in the dark place, in the grave,
fettered to a post in the damp cellamage.
    Wherein all we differ not. But they have swept the floor,
there are no dancers, no somersaulters now,
only bricks and bleak black cement and bricks,
only the military tread and the snap of the locks.
    Mine was a threeplank bed whereon
I lay and cursed the weary sun.
They took away the prison clothes
and on the frosty nights I froze.
I had a bible where I read
that Jesus came to raise the dead—
I kept myself from going mad
by singing an old bawdy ballad
and birds sang on my windowsill
and tortured me till I was ill,
but Archipiada came to me
and comforted my cold body
and Circe excellent utterer of her mind
lay with me in that dungeon for a year
making a silk purse from an old sow’s ear
till Ronsard put a thimble on her tongue.

Wherein all we differ not. But they have named all the stars,
trodden down the scrub of the desert, run white moon to a schedule,
Joshua’s serf whose beauty drove men mad.
They have melted the snows from Erebus, weighed the clouds,
hunted down the white bear, hunted the whale and the seal and the kangaroo,
they have set private enquiry agents onto Archipiada:
What is your name? Your maiden name?
Go in there to be searched. I suspect it is not your true name.
Distinguishing marks if any? (O anthropometrics!)
Now the thumbprints for filing.
How many golden prints on the smudgy page?
Adsunt omnes, omnes et
Villon.
Villon?
Blacked by the sun, washed by the rain,
hither and thither scurrying as the wind varies (ll. 77-120).\textsuperscript{115}

This excerpt includes many of the images and tropes associated with conscientious objectors by
those who were sympathetic to their cause.\textsuperscript{116} Though the poem does not explicitly address the
context of imprisonment, the lines about the “prison clothes” being taken away seem to refer to
the practice of leaving conscientious objectors naked with an army uniform, and not giving them
any alternative clothing.\textsuperscript{117} The body is reduced to its animal nature, taken out of the social
contract by its refusal to bear the contractual uniform of the sovereign.\textsuperscript{118} But in conflating the
army uniform with “prison clothes,” Bunting indicates that military service is also a form of
imprisonment. The uniform would trap its wearer in a false identity. Furthermore, the association
of the conscientious objector to Jesus is established when the speaker recalls his time in the
grave. The lines about Jesus raising the dead, with their slip into a simple rhyming iambic
tetrameter, can be read either as ironic commentary on the lack of “Christian” virtue in his
treatment, or as a more positive statement on the conscientious objector’s fulfillment of Christ’s commitment to nonviolence.\textsuperscript{119}

The speaker comforts himself during his imprisonment by calling to mind symbolic characters from Western canonical literature. Archipiada appears in the fifteenth century French poet François Villon’s \textit{Ballade des dames du temps jadis}. The origin of the name is unclear. The general consensus is that it is Villon’s misremembering of the name Alcibiades.\textsuperscript{120} Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translation of the poem, “The Ballad of Dead Ladies,” replaces Archipiada with Hipparchia, a substitution that adds another to the poem’s litany of extraordinary dead ladies.\textsuperscript{121} But Bunting seems to treasure precisely Archipiada’s indeterminacy, and the impossibility of translating the human anomaly she represents (was she Villon’s mistake? Was she his invention?) into a codified and recognizable symbol. Archipiada may at first comfort the speaker as a symbol of his own inscrutable and private human experience; she is a human indeterminate of the kind the army wants to deny, a representative of a liminal place of undecision between the absolutist options of adhering to one sole identity or another. Her undecidability appeals to the speaker.

Likewise, Circe calls to mind the classical understanding of the animal element in the human, and her presence reflects the speaker’s feeling that he has been reduced to an animal by being cast out of the political order. Bunting, however, reverses the work Circe does in \textit{The Odyssey}. Here, she transforms the animal sow’s ear into a work of human artistry, the silk purse. The speaker resists precisely the ideological assumptions that the punishments of conscientious objectors demonstrate. His imprisonment should force him to identify as a soldier by making such identification his only bodily option. His clothes are taken away and his corporeality is abjectly exposed. Rather than allowing his physical condition to turn him into something he is
not, however, he conjures Circe as an “utterer of her mind” who protects rather than debases his body and mind. Circe and Archipiada function as symbols of the primacy of a constructed and cultivated identity over corporeal contingency. Though the poem is not polemically pacifist, its assertion of the primacy of spirit over the body, and over laws written on the body, as well as the allusions to Christ’s death evoke the crucifixion, and the satirical inscription INRI (Iesus Nazarenum Rex Iudaeorum). As in the crucifixion, the body’s vulnerability is explicitly contrasted to sovereign power over life and death.

In the later part of this section of the poem, however, Archipiada falls victim to the modern scrutiny of anthropometrics, a bureaucratic science engineered by the French detective Alphonse Bertillon, who died in 1914. Bertillon represents a rhyming opposite of the poem’s main subject, Villon. The humorous and bawdy Villon reminds us, in the poem, “that DEATH is written over all” (l. 45). By contrast, Bertillon’s anthropometric interventions represent police work gone awry and invading the private lives of citizens. Bertillon reduces the human to a set of physical characteristics, assuming a corporeal mastery over the subject and her life and death.

The humanist figures from antiquity who comfort the speaker, and the poetry they represent, are also contrasted to anthropometrics in the question “How many golden prints on the smudgy page?” which contrasts the pages of literature, on which are inscribed the valuable mysteries of complex interiority, with the pages of thumbprints, which reduce human individuality to an index of arbitrary lines. After this line Homer and Dante are called to come forth (Adest), as the figures of poetry and art had been called forth to comfort the speaker, presumably now to be fingerprinted and catalogued. All are called forth, including Villon. Villon, however, seems to resist the call, and when the caller asks after him, the speaker responds with a description of Villon as ancient, worn by natural processes, and as contingent “as the wind
varies.” The attempt of sovereignty to render legible bodies is always frustrated by the undecidability of bodies, which are constructs of ideology, culture, and ungovernable interiority.

The poem is thus expressly concerned with the biopolitical interventions of the war, positing that the incarcerated speaker has been a victim of a corporeal policing that reduces him to a body that the state can recognize and control. The parenthetical assertion “O anthropometrics!” disparages emerging surveillance techniques. The ugly neologism with its Greek roots sticks out in Bunting’s poetry, which is characterized by Anglo-Saxon words, allusions to pre-modern poetry and art, and, in his later poetry, Northumbrian dialect. The clumsy invasion of this word into the poem reflects the intrusiveness of the processes described. Bunting’s situation as an imprisoned conscientious objector is part of a larger trend of suspicion and a bureaucratic reduction of people to sets of corporeal statistics and “distinguishing marks.”

Bunting is obviously much more direct than Eliot in his engagement with the physical consequences of wartime legislation, and we have the biographical record of his imprisonment to help interpret this enigmatic poem. Thematically, both “Villon” and The Waste Land confront the specific problems of “reading” bodies, and the issues of what characterizes or legitimizes sovereign decision. Eliot’s engagement with wartime legislation, and its impact on sovereign legitimacy runs deep in The Waste Land both thematically and stylistically, but not as manifest subject matter. Rather, Eliot’s aesthetic, which clearly appealed to Bunting, poetically engages the aporias of sovereign legitimacy in the state of exception that Agamben has identified.

IV. “Who is the Third?”: Sovereignty and Absence in T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land

“Villon” was published only three years after The Waste Land, and its debt to both Eliot and Pound is clear. Indeed, Bunting’s poem provides a set of guiding points for reading how The
Waste Land deals indirectly with the problems that wartime legislation and the liminal space of conscientious objectors raised for state sovereignty. There are no overt references to wartime legislation or conscientious objection in The Waste Land, but Eliot’s pained survey of postwar Europe continually comes back to the questions raised both in “Villon” and in various accounts of the ways in which bodies came under a new form of state control during the war.

I argue that The Waste Land gives poetic form to the aporias and ambiguities opened up by Liberal Britain’s tryst with something akin to the decisionism of Schmitt and the state of exception expounded by Agamben. The problem of the state of exception is that it is both inside and outside law, constituting what Agamben repeatedly calls a liminal space. According to Agamben “the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude but rather blur with each other.” As I will show, The Waste Land’s aesthetic develops from exploring the irresolvable contradictions entailed by “exception”—a condition in which sovereignty constitutes the law by being outside the law. Throughout The Waste Land liminal spaces and existential paradoxes characterize the violence and the menace of a world in which sovereignty has no discernible validity nor basis, nor any feasible representatives to restore order and fertility. In a poetics of exception that negatively reflects the Schmittian metaphysical politics of exception, Eliot’s poem reverses Schmitt’s gambit: in exemption from the law, The Waste Land seems to suggest, the sovereign does not become the final authority; rather, sovereignty is impotent and illegitimate. The Waste Land presents an aesthetic of undecision for the era in which decision purportedly became the paradigm of modern governance.125
As Andrew John Miller has demonstrated, Eliot was intensely interested in what Miller terms the “crisis of sovereignty” that categorized the interwar years. Miller focuses mostly on Eliot’s later work and its reflections on aesthetic and personal sovereignty. He also analyzes Eliot’s engagement with the crises of state sovereignty that were occasioned by the First World War. One of Miller’s useful distinctions about the war’s relation to the crises of sovereignty is that the war provided “a violent confirmation of an already emerging sense that existing forms of state sovereignty cannot cope with the tendencies that, by eroding the boundary between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ have simultaneously eroded the boundary between ‘world’ and ‘nation.’

I argue that alongside concerns about these social and international boundaries, *The Waste Land* expresses anxieties about the eroded boundary between the private and public aspects of the body and the interiority or exteriority of sovereignty over the bodies of its subjects. Internally, social and political injunctions are introjected as superego, which becomes the sovereign state’s representative within the psyche. Externally, bodies in *The Waste Land* tend to be unruly sites of abjection, liminality, and alienation. Bodies resist all sovereign attempts to define or control them. The corpse as remainder, signifying presence and absence, highlights the paradox of exception.

One of the primary ways in which *The Waste Land* expresses these paradoxes is its cultivation of an aesthetic of absence and undecision—i.e., not the inability to decide, but the refusal to do so—to express a sense of fragmented or delegitimized sovereignty. Throughout its five sections, the poem invokes forms of absence through seemingly unrelated speakers. The mournful quality this pervasive absence produces, and its relationship to the cultural and personal experience of war, stem partially from the British subject’s transformed relation to sovereignty. *The Waste Land* is a uniquely modernist elegy, with no clearly discernible lost
object of mourning (e.g., no Lycidas or A.H.H.), and with no unified speaker to mourn that lost individual, and, in recalling their relationship, to come to terms with the inevitability of separation and death. This experimentation with elegy distills a modernist melancholia, which, I will show, is closely related to wartime legislation’s impact on culture and to the immediate crisis of sovereignty, to borrow Miller’s term, occasioned by the war. One of the most aesthetically rich and over-determined symbols of undecision and absence in the poem, and the one in which its myriad tropes of absent sovereignty coalesce, is the mysterious “third who walks always beside you” (l. 359) who appears in the poem’s final section and whose spiritual presence, paradoxically, signifies his or her corporeal absence. Ultimately I suggest three complementary ways of reading this present absence: it signifies the body lost to its community through wartime legislation, the absence of the subject from its pre-traumatized self, and finally the spectral presence of a past and now impotent sovereign.

To establish this reading, it will be helpful to anatomize briefly how absence shapes the poem in three distinct ways that are directly related to the war and its corporeal legal interventions. First, biographical criticism of Eliot controversially indicates that the poem may have been an elegy for Jean Verdenal, a Frenchman with whom Eliot had a close relationship, and who died in the catastrophically wasteful invasion of the Dardanelles in 1915. Second, Eliot populates the poem with spiritual and mythical figures of governance or sovereignty in various states of absence or degradation, suggesting a world with no present and clear mythology or metaphysics to connect its inhabitants in a meaningful community with a meaningful set of governing laws. The appearance of these characters could be read as the sublimation of one object of mourning into an array of objective correlatives. At the very least, it signifies that something has sparked a profound doubt about the possibility of human connection through old
forms of uniting community under one sovereign. Third, the repression involved in crafting an
elegy for a potentially unacknowledged passion forces the poet into an ambiguous relationship
with his own subjectivity. As the extensive gestation tale of the poem and Ronald Schuchard’s
analysis of Eliot’s “dark angel” indicate, Eliot himself, excised from the poem after various
attempts to become its locus of unity, or at least to create a locus of unity, constitutes one of the
poem’s most essential absences.\textsuperscript{130} He is both in and out of the poem. The way Eliot wrote the
poem suggests that the pre-traumatized self is cut off from the postwar self by a set of
interventions that have altered the way in which individuals constitute themselves as subjects of
power.\textsuperscript{131} These absences culminate in the final section of the poem. “What the Thunder Said”
expresses a separation of the subject both from social contexts that would lend it meaning and
ultimately from any foundational knowledge of itself—not merely at the level of personality, but
at the level of cognition, and so, in a Cartesian sense, of existence. Eliot doubles the symbol of
the absent “third” to stand for both the absent body, and the alienated subject. As in Woolf’s
\textit{Jacob’s Room}, published the same year, the “empty rooms” (l. 409) once inhabited by the dead
become symbols of interrupted community and interpersonal alienation.\textsuperscript{132}

Abject figures abound in \textit{The Waste Land}, most notably corpses, whose physical presence
always underscores a deeper absence. There is the corpse “planted” by Stetson at the end of “The
Burial of the Dead,” as well as the many corpses who populate London. There is also Phlebas,
the Phoenecian sailor, who is the subject of “Death by Water,” the “Hanged Man” from the Tarot
pack (who is conspicuously absent in Madame Sosostris’s reading), and, more ambiguously, the
voices of the dead that speak throughout the poem. Whether the recurring missing corpse of \textit{The
Waste Land} was actually Jean Verdenal’s is still debated in biographical criticism. James
Miller’s 1977 study *T.S. Eliot’s Personal Waste Land* proposes that the poem is entirely about the death of Verdenal, and about the psychic trauma that loss occasioned in Eliot.\(^{133}\)

Aside from what it reveals about Eliot’s own life, the connection to Verdenal, which was, in 1977, too scandalous for the majority of Eliot critics to consider seriously, underscores the hardly arguable centrality of the war as the cause of the sterility, trauma, and separation between subjects in the poem.\(^{134}\) The Verdenal connection suggests that the war’s effects may have been deeply personal for Eliot. Miller shows that Verdenal haunts the text: as the corpse planted by Stetson (l. 71), as Phlebas, as the subject of Ariel’s song, and even, potentially, as the famous Hyacinth Girl (l. 36).\(^{135}\) Verdenal, or a textual “semblable,” continually resurfaces, and the poem continually reburies him. The trauma of this unrequited love is much less its transient, repressed, or “unspeakable” nature, however, than the radical absence created by death in the war. In a less alienating time and a less alienated mind, such a traditional poetic topic as the death of a loved one in war may have generated an elegiac coming-to-terms with loss. But the re-appearance and reburial of corpses parody the vegetative cycle, suggesting a pervasive anxiety about the presence of the dead body and the physical possibility of putting a corpse to rest.

In the end, the figure of Verdenal is important because, whatever Eliot’s relationship with him may have been, he suggests a human counterpart for the divine sacrifices of such deistic figures as the Fisher King, the ancient Arthurian emblem of death and regeneration, and Jesus Christ. Verdenal is also a corporeal locus on which the legislative interventions of war, such as conscription and the absence of bodies, coalesce. However “personal” *The Waste Land* may be, Verdenal is important because his individual death at Gallipoli stands in for the collective wasteful expenditure of the war. The scale of death and absence occasioned by the First World War suggests an interruption in the cycle of death and regeneration that a desiccated and faithless
Europe cannot overcome. More importantly, although bodies were certainly lost irretrievably in previous conflicts, the legislative decision not to return the dead to their communities—enacted in 1916 when the number of dead bodies became unmanageable—makes the absent body a biopolitical paradigm of the war around which state sovereignty was eventually reasserted through such highly contentious symbols as the tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey.\(^\text{136}\) Such monuments and cenotaphs, in their physical presence, serve as constant reminders of the corporeal absence of the soldiers represented by one unknown corpse.

Aside from Jean Verdenal, the poem mourns the absence of Eliot himself, whose life story, and in effect whose “self,” had been excised from the initial draft. This absence of the unifying self from the final poem is indicative of Freudian melancholia, as the subject’s lost object of love casts a “shadow” on the ego, obscuring it and subjecting it to the tyranny of the superego, which voices the internalized commands of the community.\(^\text{137}\) \textit{The Waste Land} is almost meta-melancholic, always removing the melancholia one step further from any character or speaker that could serve as its locus, until it floats incorporeally around the poem. Formally, \textit{The Waste Land} modernizes melancholic poetry by engaging the innovative forms of psychological representation modernist novelists were developing. \textit{The Waste Land} is informed by the fragmentation of the subject presented in the stream of consciousness fiction produced in the period by Eliot’s contemporaries such as Proust, Joyce, Woolf, and Ford. It even succeeds in wresting the complexity of interiority back from fiction by presenting a poem wherein mental processes are more alienating and fragmented than narrative can formally allow. While the melancholic stream of consciousness protagonist laments his or her fragmentation and alienation, he or she is generally still present as a consciousness struggling to make the fragments of memory cohere. In \textit{The Waste Land}, even this subject is radically absent from itself.
The first section of the poem evokes elegy and absence in its title, “The Burial of the Dead,” but it also evokes a resurrection different from the spiritual hope for renewal that brings closure to elegies such as Tennyson’s In Memoriam. Michael Levenson has pointed out that the first speaker comes from beneath the ground—buried, but evidently not dead. This subterranean voice is the first of many indications that the poem is concerned with a liminal space between life and death, and that the resurrections the poem presents are physical and corporeal, rather than spiritual or metaphoric. This death refuses death’s silence, and speaks in the absence of life. Throughout the poem, the dead and the living change places through various forms of resurrection and premature burial.

Allyson Booth insightfully connects Levenson’s reading of the liminality of death in The Waste Land with the unique conditions of death and dying in the trenches of the First World War. Booth points out that one of the most common causes of death, injury, and disappearance was that soldiers were buried alive in mud thrown up by exploding shells, and their bodies could subsequently not be found. The high number of soldiers reported “missing” due to the ubiquitous mud, and the logistical problem of transporting so many bodies, caused a major disruption in traditional rituals of mourning the dead at both the state and personal level:

For civilians during World War I, one jarring decision was the British government’s adoption, in 1916, of a policy dictating that soldiers killed in battle would be buried where they fell rather than shipped back to England for interment at home. Rituals surrounding death that depended on placing a corpse at their center were suddenly frustrated and forced to revolve around an absence instead. For a nation filled with civilian bereaved, death thus became indistinguishable from absence.

Booth is right to point out the difference between death and absence, and her corporeal reading of the trauma is insightful in regards to rituals of mourning and The Waste Land’s engagement with corporeal loss, assimilation, decay and resurrection. The decision not to return corpses to
families is directly biopolitical and transforms one of the oldest sites of ritual and community. In Eliot’s case, Verdenal is not merely absent, nor merely dead—like thousands of other young men, he was as Eliot put it, “(so far as I could find out) [...] mixed with the mud of Gallipoli.”

Not only does Verdenal’s fate confuse absence and death, Eliot pictures him, like the soldiers buried in the mud, occupying the space of the dead while still alive. Furthermore, the imagery of the body being “mixed with the mud” suggests a kind of fertilization, and the figurative regeneration of vegetative cycles the poem suggests have been interrupted. Without the body re-centered in its community through a physical burial, regeneration cannot occur, the corpse cannot sprout. The sovereign decision to withhold the physical body that could signify renewal is mirrored in the ineffectual Fisher King, a figure of paradoxically impotent sovereignty.

Images of liminality between life and death recur in the first section, as throughout the poem. Aside from the opening speaker, the second stanza begins with the underground “roots that clutch” (l. 19) and goes on to describe “something different from either/ your shadow at morning striding behind you/ or your shadow at evening rising to meet you” (ll. 28-9). The shadow is symbolic of death but it is also an incorporeal absence that yet signifies a corporeal presence—and here the ominous speaker threatens the auditor by putting her or him between two shadows that signify non-existence. The speaker’s offer or threat to show the auditor something different from these deathly shades implies a new form of death, or absence from life. As Booth points out, a few lines later, the speaker, apparently addressing the Hyacinth Girl, says “I was neither/ living nor dead, and I knew nothing,/ looking into the heart of the light, the silence” (ll. 39-41). The speaker’s statement that he is neither alive nor dead is here given more detail, and the speaker attempts to render in terms of sense the threshold between the two biological states. He situates himself definitely outside of “the light” and “the silence” by saying that he is
“looking into” them. This speaker thus occupies a place of undecision between life and death, the site of decision that marks sovereignty as such, and so signifies that he is not subject to the foundational sovereign decision; at the very least, he troubles the legitimacy the sovereign derives through that power of decision.

This trope is echoed in the third and fourth stanzas, as well. Madame Sosostris does not find the Hanged Man, indicating an absence in the place of death that evokes both the Fisher King and Christ. Eliot glosses the reference to the Hanged Man with a note that “he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and […] with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V.”145 Eliot’s notes, of course, are misleading, and this frank admission of arbitrary association masks a more legitimate possible significance of the Hanged Man. The association with the hooded figure, the resurrected Christ, makes sense because the Hanged Man in the Tarot deck signifies, among other things, an executed traitor.146 That the absence of the Hanged Man provokes Madame Sosostris immediately to issue a warning about “death by water” indicates an opposition to execution as a present and direct form of death that reiterates a sovereign power and that power’s relationship to the body, and a fluid, accidental form of death that swallows up the body and causes a physical absence (as in the disappearance of Verdenal’s body and the swallowing up in the ice that Ernest Shackleton and his men feared, a point to which I will return).

The illegitimacy and decay of the poem’s various spiritual and sovereign figures demonstrate that a shared culture or realm does not connect the socially disparate Londoners Eliot presents. If anything connects them it is the sense of negation the war has cast over them and their shared cityscape. The lack of spiritual mediation appears in three primary examples of damaged subjects who cannot communicate emotionally, but whose communications are
mediated through their bodies: the couple whose dialogue appears in the center of “A Game of Chess,” Albert and Lil, who directly follow this dialogue, and the young man carbuncular and the typist, whose brief, mechanical assignation occupies the center of “The Fire Sermon,” and thus the center of the poem. In all these pairs, the interiority and exteriority of the bodies in question are illegible. The reading of desire and intention is either impossible or strikes the characters as unimportant. This corporeal illegibility is encapsulated in Tiresias’s intersex body, but far from making sense of the poem as a mediating figure, as Eliot suggested, Tiresias is merely an impotent observer at the threshold of the poem’s interiority.

The dialogue at the center of “A Game of Chess” could represent an evening at home with T.S. Eliot and his wife Vivien.147 It certainly seems influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and the popularity among London’s avant-garde of “talking cures” and treatments. Eliot and his wife both underwent such treatments.148 Whether or not Eliot was keeping up to date on Freud when he wrote this particular passage, he certainly moved in circles that read and discussed Freud.149 Furthermore, this passage was written during a period of emotional and psychological instability for both Eliots150. The autobiographical aspect of this conversation, though, matters less than the sense of alienation and disconnection it conveys.

The scene suggests that both the speaker and the listener are sunk in deep melancholia, and melancholia is a revealing lens through which to view the larger fragmentation of The Waste Land. The poem is concerned with melancholia both as content, as in this scene, and as a literary form to express absence and alienation. According to Freud’s 1917 analysis, melancholia is like mourning, but rather than lamenting a lost love object, the melancholic turns feelings of absence and insufficiency inward.151 What is missing for the melancholic is her or his past sense of unity
and presence. Both characters in this scene suffer their own melancholia, and bristle with irritation at that of their partner. The speaker interrogates the listener, unable to comprehend him:

“"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me."
“"Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak."
“"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?"
“"I never know what you are thinking. Think"

I think we are in rats’ alley
Where the dead men lost their bones (ll. 112-6).

Although she begins with the complaint about her own nerves, her inability to understand him and her imperatives that he speak and think, cast her in the role of the analyst. His unspoken response reflects the diminution in self-regard that Freud noted, but he takes revenge on the cruelty of her command to “speak” and “think” by silently striving for negation. His later response to her further questioning, “Nothing again nothing” (l. 120), highlights both his sense of self-negation and her inability to connect with him through any kind of meaningful mediation. These characters’ physical proximity underscores their psychic absence from one another. Unable to communicate emotionally, their conversation becomes an index of bodily complaints (bad nerves, lidless eyes, the allusion to lost bones) and bodily protections (the hot water, the closed car). These two speakers communicate mental and spiritual trauma through its bodily signifiers. Negating interiority, they communicate through exteriority.

Freud also described melancholics’ tendency to “[take] revenge on the original object and [torment] their loved one through their illness, having resorted to it in order to avoid the need to express their hostility […] openly.” The speaker tortures her partner with her illness and her lack of self-regard in the lines quoted above, and also when she threatens to rush out and “walk the street” (l. 132). But the thinker’s self-negation signifies more than his own essential absence from himself and is equally aggressive. He occupies the liminal space between life and death,
physically present, but seemingly unable to count himself among the living in his evocation of “rats’ alley” (a possible allusion to the trenches) and his self-negation. Reducing himself to an animal body in an animal space, this speaker reveals anxiety about his place in the social and political order. His absence causes the speaker to ask if he is “alive, or not?” (l.126). The self-negation is almost suicidal, and thus reflects the thinker pathologically turning his aggressive impulse inward upon himself.

The central misunderstanding of the scene between Lil and her friend about Lil’s husband, Albert, is also marked by bodily abjection, undecision, and alienation. Albert has given Lil money to get a set of false teeth, but, in his absence, she has used the money to get pills for an abortion. Although the abortion may have saved Lil’s life, the aborted child becomes the most significant missing person in this section, and one of the most significant in the poem. The abortion is a human embodiment of the general interruption of the regenerative cycle that makes postwar Europe a wasteland. In the absence of a regenerative deity (or the belief in one) to connect humans meaningfully, or a sovereign power that is responsible for the bodies of the people, there is no birth, or, as in the opening lines, birth and regeneration have taken on cruel and ironic connotations. Lil’s rotten teeth signify this decay, and are echoed later in the line “Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit” (l. 339) at the beginning of “What the Thunder Said.” This line reflects the moment after Christ’s death and before his resurrection—between Golgotha and the road to Emmaus. It is the most sterile moment in the poem, with the most excruciating imagery of thirst and heat, and, as I will show, one that alludes to a foundational scene of fraudulent or illegitimate sovereignty.

The voice of the barman ominously announcing “HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME” evokes the authoritative imposition regulating revelry (sordid or not) by controlling drinking
hours. The Barman also becomes a metonym of a mechanical and disciplinary understanding of
time that contrasts natural cyclical rhythms. As in the scene with the typist, this scene parodies
the diminution of human sexuality and reproduction into a mechanical affair. Lil’s body is
subject to the medical intervention of replacing her teeth with prosthetics and having her baby
chemically aborted. The scene also implies that Albert’s experience in the war has hardened him,
and the mechanical and derogatory nature of military prostitution is a subtext of the speaker’s
insinuations about Albert’s infidelity. Their bodies are both taken over and degraded by outside
forces. The possibility that the baby may have been aborted because it was not Albert’s also
underscores how the conditions of war were thought to have interrupted reproduction and
patrilineal assurance. 

These confrontations, including that between the typist and the Young Man Carbuncular,
demonstrate that the inhabitants of the wasteland are absent to themselves, as well as to those
around them. The tenuous presence of the characters or speakers of the poem is a major stylistic
achievement. The elaborate tale of the poem’s composition and the manuscripts published in
1971 (with Eliot’s, Pound’s, and Vivien Eliot’s marks and comments) reveal that Pound drew out
the poem’s unique aesthetic of undecision by constantly deflecting Eliot away from some central,
unifying, and aesthetically sovereign subjectivity. The largest cuts that he made were of the most
unified and narrative sections: the potentially autobiographical opening and the story of the
sailors in part four. The records of Pound’s intervention into the poem demonstrate that Eliot
wanted to impose a central unified speaker on the poem, to make the fragments cohere in a single
subjectivity. Revealingly, the final part of the poem, “What the Thunder Said,” which Pound left
virtually untouched and which contains the poem’s most profound reflections on undecision and
sovereignty, was written in an almost automatic and un-self-conscious way, with Eliot in some sense absent from the poetic “self” he had cultivated.\textsuperscript{155}

Eliot and Pound both argued that the poem was unified, although they understood that unity in different ways. Eliot’s claim that Tiresias was the central subject seems capricious, especially considering that he mainly wrote the notes in which it appears to pad the poem for publication, and later said that when he wrote \textit{The Waste Land},” he “wasn’t even bothering whether [he] understood what [he] was saying.”\textsuperscript{156} However, Tiresias is an important figure not only because he so obviously represents an illegible, undecidable body, but also for his role in Sophocles’s \textit{Antigone}. In that play, the blind seer warns Kreion that his actions (culminating in Antigone’s ambiguous death sentence) constitute an illegitimate sovereignty that has forfeited the support of the people, on which it should depend. Tiresias’s blindness also suggests that Eliot may have been attempting to cast Tiresias in the role of the blind seer-poet. Pound believed that “Death by the Water,” which revolves around the drowned Phoenecian Sailor and is the most enigmatic section of the poem, held the whole thing together. More potentially unifying characters and voices can be found in the excised fragments, which now constitute another kind of absence to complement the official text.

What Pound cut, why, and to what effect, has been a subject of much debate. Hugh Kenner argues that Pound’s excisions were necessary for the poem to achieve the power that it does.\textsuperscript{157} Vincent Sherry, on the other hand, argues that Pound imposed a unifying vision on the poem that prevented it from achieving a truly fragmented poetics with no central perspective.\textsuperscript{158} Similarly, Robert Bernard Hass argues that “Pound’s editorial intervention [...] disrupt[ed] the evolution of some of Eliot’s most important ideas.”\textsuperscript{159} However, in wrestling the center away from Eliot’s personality and private agonies (although, to his credit, never towards his own),
Pound helped Eliot achieve a poetic innovation that perhaps neither had intended or immediately recognized. Whereas Virginia Woolf on hearing Eliot “chant” an earlier version of the poem could record in her diary that *The Waste Land* was “Tom’s autobiography—a melancholy one,” Pound succeeded at excising much of Eliot himself from the poem.\(^{160}\)

Pound’s excisions continually steered the poem away from the poetic technique Eliot had established and with which he felt most comfortable: the deep psychological depiction of one character, either the speaker, as in a dramatic monologue (e.g., “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “Gerontion”), or the object of the speaker’s contemplation (e.g., “Portrait of a Lady,” and the Sweeney poems). Ronald Schuchard writes that in crafting these earlier poems “the young poet and student of philosophy [tried] to represent and control in his art the intensity of his internal conflicts,” which were largely sexual.\(^{161}\) In “The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” for instance, Eliot’s reflections on sexual stasis and anxiety produce an arguably coherent poem with an at least somewhat unified speaker. But if “Prufrock” depicts the concerns of a generally unified mind contemplating mental fragmentation and absence, *The Waste Land* presents fragmentation and absence disembodied and permeating a host of characters who are no more Eliot than they are anybody else. The poem moves through an indecisive array of characters who do not take organizational responsibility. They may have names and voices, but the poem distances them from its readers and from one another. Are they evocations of ideas, cultural signifiers, icons substituting or standing for complexes of universal human emotion and thought? They are certainly not unified characters directing the mental action of the poem in the sense that Prufrock is one.

It is clear from the manuscript that Eliot had intended the poem to be more coherent, and so more in line with his earlier work. Even the working title taken from Dickens’ *Our Mutual*
Friend, “He Do the Police in Different Voices,” suggests one “he” doing the voices. The first 54 lines of the draft, all cancelled by Pound, further suggest that Eliot wanted to begin the poem with autobiography. These lines are set in Boston, where Eliot had attended Harvard, and recount a night of drunken debauchery. The opening lines read “First we had a couple of feelers down at Tom’s place/ There was old Tom, boiled to the eyes, blind” (ll. 1-2). This may be a speaker describing a character named Tom, but it nevertheless establishes the name by which Eliot was known as the first in the poem, emphasizing the direct connection between the poet and the content. It even casts him in the Homeric role of the “blind” poet, a role which Eliot later shifts to Tiresias.

These 54 lines also play more than the rest of the poem with popular cultural referents, most of them American, fitting them into a definite time and place of the poet’s direct experience. This opening is novelistic and expansive, and sustains a narrative of movement, rather than description, more than any section of the published poem. The many voices in this section seem to be under the control of an indirect free-style narration that mediates among them, and signifies who is talking and when. This style is Joycean or Woolfian. The speakers do not seem to exist in the vacuum of misunderstanding and absent mediation that characterizes the interaction among the speakers in the published poem. This section and the first three fourths of a much longer narrative version of “Death by Water” that tells the story of some sailors, are the biggest cuts Pound advised. Both seem most to have showcased Eliot in his earlier mode of carefully constructing a unified subjectivity through which to express and engage his personal anxieties and unfulfilled desires.

Despite these huge cuts, Pound left the fifth section nearly untouched, writing “OK from here on I think” at the top of the first page. “What the Thunder Said” was written more or less
at once, and more or less automatically, when Eliot was in Lausanne, Switzerland, for treatment following a nervous breakdown. He frequently and obliquely referred to this unsettling experience of inspiration. James Miller writes that Eliot “revealed that he had his own work in mind in writing […] ‘it is a commonplace that some forms of illness are extremely favourable […] to artistic and literary composition.’” \(^{163}\) But this experience went directly against what Eliot had counseled as the ideal way of writing poetry, which was impersonal and almost Poe-esque in its formalist dicta. As Kenner suggests, it may have been unsettling for him to see his carefully constructed and deliberated passages cut out while work was deemed superior that came to him in unpremeditated inspiration, without the techniques that reflected his conscious thoughts and elaborate meanings.\(^{164}\)

Unlike the cut portions with their depictions of tightly constructed characters and reflections on sovereignty, control, and absence, “What the Thunder Said” presents a showering of free associations. Tellingly, the first three sections of *The Waste Land* are named after programmatic and highly structured discourses—Anglican ritual, chess, and Buddhism’s central sermon. Sections four and five, “Death By Water” and “What the Thunder Said,” suggest nature coming in and overwhelming the human subject and human order. Further, “Death by Water” retains the sound of a structured discourse, as if it will explain a process, while “What the Thunder Said” resigns completely from the active or didactic tone of the other titles. This progression reflects the movement of the poem from burial to the possibility of regeneration (the thunder does bring rain), but it also marks the poem’s movement away from tightly structured and purposed discourses.

The beginning of the final section ties the resurrection trope explicitly to Christ and, as I will demonstrate, evokes both the conscientious objectors and the dead soldiers who are
symbolized by absence. The first stanza of this section begins by recalling the Garden of Gethsemane and ends at Golgotha:

   After the torchlight red on sweaty faces  
   After the frosty silence in the gardens  
   After the agony in stony places  
   The shouting and the crying  
   Prison and palace and reverberation  
   Of thunder of spring over distant mountains  
   He who was living is now dead  
   We who were living are now dying  
   With a little patience (ll. 322-330).

Coming immediately after the fourth section, which evokes baptism in telling about the “death by water” of Phlebas the Phoenecian sailor, it is hard not to see some conflation of Christ, in his silent Gethsemane and sterile Golgotha, with the drowned Phlebas, the character who most clearly evokes Verdenal in James Miller’s reading. The Passion is a common trope for presenting dead soldiers, but it is also, as the work of Bunting, Eva Gore-Booth, and Sassoon demonstrates, a common trope for presenting the conscientious objector. The proximity of these sacrificial figures suggests that the lost object of love (and it does not matter whether we read Phlebas as Jean Verdenal or not, or whether Eliot’s feelings for Verdenal were erotic) that could connect the subject to its community is absent. Furthermore, the description of Christ is oddly tautological and unnecessarily exact: “He who was living is now dead.” This line mirrors the grammar of the next line, which is contrarily unclear, and situates the plural first person subject as neither present in life nor yet absent in death. In the deep Western past, the god of fertility was destroyed every autumn to regain life in the spring. While the liturgical year of Christianity is mapped onto this ancient cycle, the understanding is that it is purely symbolic, a placeholder of regeneration to fill the teleological time between Christ’s death and resurrection and eventual return. The moment of the poem seems stuck between Christ’s burial and resurrection. Christ, occupying the
liminal and paradoxical space of neither life nor death, is corporeally absent. Just as the Fisher
King cannot recover and regenerate the land, the Easter Resurrection is blocked.

A long meditation on thirst and heat follows this passage, wherein the sovereign figure of
Christ is removed from the poem. The speaker describes stagnation in a desert:

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses

If there were water

And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over rock
Where the hermit thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water (l.331-358).

This passage refers to the miracle in the Old Testament in which Moses brings water from a rock
so the Israelites may drink and give water to their animals when they are in Meribah. But here
there is no water because there is no sovereign, or lawgiver, such as Moses, to mediate between
the suffering people and God. As Bonnie Honig points out in an intricate reading of Moses’s
conduct at Meribah, which builds on Franz Rosenzweig’s reading, Moses reveals himself in this
episode to be a fraudulent leader. When he and Aaron had gone up the mountain to ask God what they should do, God told them to tell the rock to bring forth water. But Moses, in anger at what he sees to be the Israelites’ rebellion (they had called the place “evil” and asked why Moses had brought them there) instead strikes the rock twice with his staff. He does not only disobey God’s order by presenting himself as the agent who can bring the water, but he also shows doubt by impatiently hitting the rock twice. Moses is punished for this transgression by dying before he reaches the Promised Land.¹⁶⁶

In his original notes to the poem, Eliot does not connect this sequence directly to the scene of Moses’s transgression at Meribah, citing only “the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous […] and the current decay of eastern Europe” as the “themes” of “What the Thunder Said.”¹⁶⁷ But the Meribah scene is an important referent here, and one that is more centrally concerned than those Eliot lists with the question of sovereign legitimacy that pervades the poem. This passage appears between the disappearance of Christ in the first stanza and his reappearance (in one sense) as the “third” who appears in the fourth stanza. The reference to Moses leading Israel at Meribah shifts the poem’s focus from the metaphysical sovereignty of Christ and his present-absence after the crucifixion to the directly political problem of a leader’s responsibility to his people. Moses is punished because in this story he takes on an illegitimate sovereignty (which Rosenzweig and Honig describe as magical rather than prophetic). In Honig’s reading, Moses gives the people what he thinks they want—a show of his own force. But he has underestimated their longing for a more legitimate and less authoritarian leader, who will join them in seeking a legitimate communal experience at Meribah. Moses presumes to a power greater than they want to give him, and it is for underestimating Israel that God punishes him. This scene from antiquity offers an allegory for the years during and immediately after the
war. The relief from an illegitimate sovereignty will not come from a show of force, or from a charlatanic performance. This allusion to a scene in which a people desire a more moderate and less forceful display of sovereignty—a pastor, perhaps, rather than a dictator—suggests a possible unconscious or veiled sympathy to more democratic forms of government than those that emerge in the wake of the war.\footnote{168}

The passage immediately following stands out as the poem’s most direct and self-conscious evocation of the aesthetic of absence and its psychological and metaphysical implications. In the fifth stanza the themes of resurrection and corporeality and the liminal space between life and death coalesce in one symbol that is simultaneously present in its absence and absent in its presence. This figure calls the most fundamental question of presence to mind, implicitly defying the Cartesian \emph{cogito}:

\begin{verbatim}
Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or woman
—But who is that on the other side of you? (ll. 359-65).
\end{verbatim}

Eliot writes that the lines quoted above were “stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton’s): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted.”\footnote{169}

Ernest Shackleton and his men later concluded that this present/absent member of their party was the Holy Spirit protecting them. But cognitive psychology offers another explanation: this presence is a psychic casting into external space of what the subject cannot immediately (i.e., in the unmediated moment) recognize as itself. As cognitive theorist Michael Gazzaniga puts it,
“everything in life is memory, save for the thin edge of the present.” That missing person is the earlier self, who, forgotten in the present but present in memory, one counts as a separate entity. The phenomenon this scene describes provides the most helpful way to unify thematically the various absences of the poem because it suggests the most profoundly metaphysical absence possible, one which Freud’s theory of melancholia and later engagements with cognitive neuroscience elucidate: in the melancholic state, the subject’s ego is obscured by the tyranny of internalized law. In terms of sovereignty, the state's power over bodies has displaced the internalized presence of spirit—God—which would make the self no longer merely a body but a body subject only to its own internal sovereign power. The question *The Waste Land* here poses, on a Cartesian and ontological level, is whether the thinking mind can assure the subject of its own presence when it can’t ever perceive itself in the present, but only constructs itself through memory.

Allyson Booth has argued that this apparition and the note about Shackleton, taken together, refer also to the liminal state of undecision between life and death that is so frequently in *The Waste Land* occasioned by the war. Drawing on the rest of Shackleton’s accounts, Booth shows that the explorers who went with Shackleton on his 1914 expedition had all agreed to give up the voyage and join the army, even offering the ship for service, as soon as the war broke out. Winston Churchill formally declined the offer. She further demonstrates that, counter intuitively, the ice had functioned for the explorers in much the same way the mud had for the soldiers: both were untrustworthy elements, always threatening to overwhelm the fragile human body and assimilate it, on the one hand through the live burial shell explosions frequently caused, and on the other by opening beneath the explorers and swallowing them up. The ice and
mud signify ways in which the human body could suddenly occupy the “neither living nor dead” position that is essentially Christ’s when he meets his disciples on the road to Emmaus.

However, Booth’s connection of Shackleton’s extra explorer and the resurrected Christ presents a problem. Christ is, as Booth explains, a resurrected body, between life and death, neither living nor dead. Likewise, the living soldier buried in mud or the explorer sucked into the ice confounds the place of the dead and the place of the living. However, the present absence that appeared to Shackleton and his men, and to which Eliot draws our attention in the note, functions differently. This is not a corpse that appears problematically between life and death, as Booth states. Rather, it is an entirely psychic presence devoid of physicality. The disturbance it represents is not one of corporeal confusion relating to the physical world, but of psychic confusion projected out from the subject and onto the world as the subject interprets it. The figure represents the absence of a body to be mourned, a psychic presence where there is no body. Beyond that, it represents the tyranny of the state (in the form of introjected conscience) over the ego that Freud theorized as melancholia. The mysterious third is not an “other,” it is an unrecognized manifestation of the ego as self-sovereign subject.¹⁷²

Toward the end of The Waste Land the dryness and sterility are finally broken by the thunder and its three admonitions to give (Datta), to show compassion (Dayadhwam), and to control (Damyata). In the final section of “What the Thunder Said” the coming of the rain could symbolize regeneration. Because the rain does finally come to the parched land, some have read this as an uplifting ending, symbolizing restoration of the natural order, or the rain as symbolic of Jesus, present even in his absence, as the water that springs from the rock, and brings life back to the sterile land, or, more simply, as the return of a legitimate sovereign. A metaphysical spirit comes promising connection.¹⁷³ However, each exhortation is followed by a reflection that
negates its possibility. The three commands of the thunder cause the speaker to reflect for a final
time on the three central absences of the entire poem: the absence of the dead in war and of the
corpse that was never returned, the absence of the subject from himself and so from his
community, and finally the absence of the sovereign who has power to heal these wounds
through regeneration.

The speaker responds to *Datta* with a fear that what has been given “is the awful daring
of a moment’s surrender/ which an age of prudence can never retract” (ll. 403-4). This speaker,
like the one who opened the poem, is also then revealed to be dead, and clearly depicted as
missing from the physical world represented by the solicitor:

> By this and this only we have existed
> Which is not to be found in our obituaries
> Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
> Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
> In our empty rooms (ll. 405-9).

The physical absence of the body from the room recalls the missing bodies of the war, and the
bedrooms they left behind. All that remains are memorials that cannot capture their essence, and
the lean representative of the law into whose hands their memories and their spirits have been
commended. Furthermore, it is not tombs that are draped in spider webs, but rather incorporeal,
intangible memories. The speakers of these lines are missing, presumed dead, but where are their
bodies?

The next injunction is to show compassion, but the reflections the command

“*Dayadhvam*” occasions seem to indicate the impossibility of connecting meaningfully with
others:

> I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison (ll. 411-4).
Here, rather than the bodies being absent, each person is mentally absent from each other, as in the earlier depictions of London couples unable to connect. That the key turns “only once” signifies that profound alienation is inevitable (and Bunting echoed this line in “Villon”: “Only the military tread and the snap of the locks”). These lines also most closely reflect the influence of F.H. Bradley’s philosophy, on which Eliot had written his dissertation. Bradley’s work is largely about the insurmountable distances between people and the solitude of subjectivity. Also, these lines reveal that it is thinking of the key that locks each subject in absence and solitude from others that confirms this condition. The confirmation of alienation comes from the cognitive recognition of its possibility. Once imagined, the key that confirms the otherwise nonexistent prison of alienation cannot be unthought. This prison also recalls Christ’s prison, mentioned in the first stanza of this section (l. 326), thematically connecting fundamental human absence with the moment after Christ has been removed from his community but before his crucifixion redeems humanity.

It is in the last command, “Damyata,” or control, that the absence is most keenly felt. Here, the speaker who started as a first person plural lamenting corporeal absence and moved into third person singular now shifts to second person, addressing an absent auditor:

The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands (ll. 418-22).

The “expert hand” signifies formal mastery, and it is tempting to read this as a comment on how the poet has navigated the poem, which has borne along an absent passenger/auditor. As in the above quotations, other images from the poem recur here—the sea that wrecked Phlebas in a storm is now calm. A hand, which had been “automatic,” and so lifeless, on the typist is here
presented as expert and controlling. The possibility of empathy is here present, but as a past conditional, a realization unfulfilled. The injunction to exercise control cannot be met. The speaker has recognized and can reflect on the sovereign’s absence, but cannot resurrect or think of any way to restore sovereign legitimacy. The speaker can only move from this realization of absence, and of the inability of aesthetic form to heal the wounds of absence, to the closing, in which he resorts to building from the fragments of his culture the fragmented consciousness of missing persons who populate *The Waste Land*.

V. Community, Language, and National Identity in *Sunset Song*

The communal crisis in *The Waste Land* is famously urban, while that in Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *Sunset Song* (1933) is superlatively rural. *Sunset Song*, the first in a trilogy called *A Scots Quair*, deals directly with the problems of wartime legislation. The novel tells the story of Chris Guthrie, a farmer’s daughter in Kinraddie, a farming village on a tough bit of Aberdeenshire land. Chris lives through the catastrophic changes the Great War brings to Kinraddie and its inhabitants. Gibbon writes in a synthetic Scots vernacular, with the narrator and several of the characters frequently meditating on the limits of English in comparison to what they see as their more nuanced Scots.\(^{175}\) The survival of their language is explicitly linked to the survival of their culture, and both appear endangered even before the war by modern technology, capitalist exploitation, and a homogenizing British nationalism that advances cultural values perceived by the Scots as English. Technological modernization and Scotland’s engagement with the UK’s imperialism threaten to eradicate a certain type of Scottish rural character that is performed largely through connection to the land, traditional communal events such as weddings, funerals, and the celebration of births, and Scots dialect.
For all his regional and linguistic specificity, Gibbon’s style is indebted to Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence. Like Hardy, Gibbon creates a fictional countryside, presenting a map of the village of Kinraddie and its landmarks before the text. Like Tess of the D’Urbervilles, it is the bildungsroman of a girl growing up in an often coarse and brutal rural community. As with Jude in Jude the Obscure, much of Chris’s conflict revolves around a desire to escape her humble origins through education. Even with a scene of double infanticide and suicide, however, and the death of the village’s most admirable men in the war, Gibbon never comes close to the sublime bleakness that Hardy cultivates out of the “ache of modernism.” Whereas sexuality seems to lead inevitably to misery and death in Hardy’s Wessex, Gibbon presents a Lawrencian and nostalgic reflection on the sexual rhythms of the Earth, while, in Eliot’s vein, mourning the impossibility of a return to natural balance: between the prelude and the epilude, both titled “The Unfurrowed Field”, the “song” of the novel consists of four chapters titled “Ploughing,” “Drilling,” “Seed-Time,” and “Harvest.” The war puts an end to this ostensibly natural cycle that ties people and reproduction directly to nature. As in The Waste Land, the war interrupts vegetative cycles, signifying the end of natural time, in a sense, and the commencement of life in a mechanical world divorced from the natural rhythms and cycles out of which deep Scottish culture had grown. The war’s legislation is more directly invoked as the source of this interruption in Sunset Song, which literalizes much of what Eliot’s text implies through form and allusions to myth and fertility rites. Rather than sit among the fragments of lost culture, however, Sunset Song—and more explicitly its sequels Cloud Howe and Grey Granite—advocate socialist revolution to instill a mode of state power respectful of local culture and adequate to the problems of modernity.
Sunset Song shows how, in the war years, a rural community is forced into a permanent and materialistic relationship to a multinational, but Anglocentric, British state power. However, few critics have pointed out that Gibbon presents the older communal form of Scottish farming culture as already moribund. The novel is not a simple celebration of bygone culture; rather, it posits the ancient connection of the people to the land as an outdated model of humanizing inclusion in a community. Sunset Song is only partially a primitivist homage to the ancient communal forms symbolized by the druidic “Standing Stones,” that grew directly out of the Earth. Sunset Song does not naively advocate a return to such communal structures that venerate human analogies to the vegetation cycle. Rather, Gibbon teleologically depicts this form of social organization as obviated by modern technology and the promise of socialism. Communal organization around the land is preferable, however, to the new form of nationalist imperialist inclusion through cultural homogenization that the capitalist war accelerates. Socialism is a positive third alternative to these forms of social organization, and it becomes the motivating force of the characters as A Scots Quair continues. Sunset Song is concerned with showing how local culture, rooted in the yearly cycle of growth and harvest, is displaced by the rampant capitalist opportunism presented by the war.

Much of the conflict caused by this rapid transformation has a strong ethnic element. The culture of capitalism and war that takes over in the novel is distinctly English. The assertion of British unity that drives war propaganda also erases Scottish local culture, which derives not from a sense of its inclusion in the political concept of a British realm, but from the physical cultivation of the land. Working and living off the land together creates a humanizing, local community, and the tenancy of a piece of land gives the characters an integrated, fully human social identity. As monarchs are called by the names of their nations, the farmers of Kinraddie
often take on the names of their farms, e.g., first John Guthrie, and later Ewan Tavendale who takes over Blawearie Farm are both called “Blawearie” or “Blawearie man” by other characters. After the war, the erstwhile workers depend not on the land and on one another for a sense of community, but on their inclusion in the imagined community of an entire British realm.

Gibbon’s novel is explicitly concerned with the destruction that war brings to Scotland’s national, local, and ethnic identity. Unlike the formalist Eliot, Gibbon was a dedicated Marxist who worked closely with Hugh MacDiarmid, the socialist poet who developed synthetic Scots vernacular. In response to a statement by the social group Writer’s International, Gibbon wrote “I hate capitalism; all my books are explicit or implicit propaganda.” Sunset Song and its sequels are fairly explicit. Gibbon’s primary criticism of the war is part of his larger criticism of capitalism, and he conveys these arguments directly through the voices of characters who are killed by the war. The text also presents the culture of the war as insidious and ultimately irresistible even to the characters who initially oppose it. In the second novel, Cloud Howe, he links the war directly to the Great Depression, depicting the violent suppression of miners’ strikes in Scotland and the homelessness and poverty that result when owners and landlords sell or abandon their devalued property. In Grey Granite, the expectation of another global conflict motivates socialist workers to strike.

The legislation ushered in under DORA is at the heart of the conflicts in Sunset Song. The novel deals with conscription, the forcible arrest and detainment of a conscientious objector, the inescapable invasion of war propaganda into an otherwise isolated community, the execution of soldiers, and the stripping of the land for natural resources to be used in the war effort. Although Chris Guthrie’s story does not revolve entirely around the war, Gibbon’s communist motivations compel him to take a political view of the conflict and examine the effects of its
exploitative legislation on the class of Scottish peasants that essentially disappeared as a result of the war and modernization. *Sunset Song*’s consideration of wartime legislation is further complicated by Scotland’s ambiguous relationship to English rule.

Kinraddie’s cultural unity before the war was neither unchanging nor idyllic, however, and the threat of violence is early established as a defining characteristic of the community. Kinraddie was supposedly founded by a Beowulf figure who came to slay a gryphon that had been killing children.\(^1\) Furthermore, the community clings to the memories of various violent battles, mostly with the English. As David Johnson points out, though, the inhabitants of Kinraddie do not define themselves simply in opposition to the English. They are not even sure which side their ancestors fought for in a battle between the English and William Wallace.\(^2\) Chris Guthrie, like the community she represents, is divided along ethnic lines:

> [T]wo Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you’d waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you’d cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies” (32).

The division Gibbon here makes between a largely abstract and written mode of transmitting English culture, and an immediate, sensual connection to the Scottish land, is not simply paralyzing, as Berthold Schoene has argued.\(^3\) Rather, the division allows Chris to interpret and analyze the opposing cultural messages transmitted locally through the unconstrained and open-ended speech of sympathetic characters such as Chae Strachan and “Long Rob of the Mill,” and nationally through the propaganda that infiltrates Kinraddie with the coming of the war.

Chris Guthrie and all of the other characters in the novel voice conflicting opinions about the war and the extent of their obligations. Many inhabitants are Unionists who unquestioningly believe in the war, whereas others either think the war is none of their business or actively
oppose it. What is unique about the novel in terms of war literature is that the central problem regarding the war that the characters face is wrapped up in a question of national identity and allegiance that most English soldiers and citizens did not share. As Schoene points out, disapprovingly, Gibbon presents Chris as internally divided between a Scottish and an English identity. To some extent, this division is true of most characters, and even of the village itself. The critical distance to national identity this division opens works both ways, and the sympathetic characters, especially Chris, Chae, and Rob, are critical of both Scotland and England.

Like Chris, Kinraddie may be ethnically divided, but it is also culturally united around its perpetuation through cyclical time. Far from unambiguously advocating deep rural culture, Gibbon presents this material connection to the land as limiting, violent, and outdated. The character most intimately connected to the land is Chris’s father, John Guthrie, a violent and sexually insatiable patriarchal tyrant whose strength and violence are connected directly to the land: “for every harvest there came something queer and terrible on father, you couldn’t handle the thing with a name, it was as if he grew stronger and crueller then, ripe and strong with the strength of the corn, he’d be fleeter than ever and his face filled out” (67). John has a lust for life in the most literal sense, but the violence with which he breeds life out of the land, and out of his wife, Jean, is too extreme, and ends in destruction. Jean, poisons herself and her twin babies, and his oldest son, Will, runs away from his father’s violence to Argentina, leaving John with no male heir. After he is paralyzed by a stroke Chris becomes his sole caretaker, and he attempts to commit incest with her by invoking precedents from the Old Testament, showing that his devotion to the Scottish “Auld Kirk” Protestantism masks a more primal patriarchal power connected to the necessity of constantly breeding new life. The death of John Guthrie and the
animal force he embodies liberates “Chris Caledonia,” as her second husband calls her, who unambiguously represents Scotland.

As the violence and subsequent paralysis of John indicate, along with the poverty in which much of Kinraddie lives, the notion that political and communal agency springs directly from the land is mythical. One of the primary advocates of the connection to the land is the novel’s peculiar narrator. Tom Crawford, introducing the 1988 Canongate Classics edition, calls the narrator “the voice of the folk,” and describes it as collective and plural rather than singular. Understanding that the “voice of the folk” is distinct from Gibbon himself, or from any one character, is crucial to understanding the novel’s politics, and the function of Gibbon’s synthetic Scots. In constructing this collective voice, which is often unreliable, ignorant, biased, and contradictory, Gibbon ironically portrays the problems inherent in essentializing ethnic or national character. The narrator is by turns pro and anti-English, pro and anti-war, and is, like Chris, characterized by division. Though treated with some irony, the difficulties of dual ethnic and national character or allegiance are not particularly serious until the war breaks out and Kinraddie becomes truly divided between adherents to Scots’ individual rights to be left to their land, and pro-English warmongers such as the minister and the capitalist profiteers Alec Mutch and Munro of Coudiestoun. The minister’s popularity grows the more bloodthirsty and patriotic his sermons become, and Mutch and Munro make fortunes by exploiting the national food shortage.

In his reading of Hugh MacDiarmid’s poetry and politics, Matthew Hart demonstrates a helpful way of thinking about the kind of division and contradiction that characterize Sunset Song. Like Gibbon, MacDiarmid was committed to international socialism while he also wanted to present the unique local Scottish history, culture, and language, as constitutive of Scottish
identity. Rather than reading this as a trial by self-division, Hart shows that MacDiarmid comfortably occupied, and even sought, this contrariety, which constituted much of his aesthetic. Hart argues that MacDiarmid develops “Synthetic Scots poetry as a creative solution to the problem of reconciling Scottish nationalism with socialist internationalism.”

Hart also points out that the contrariety of nationalism and inter-nationalism is more complicated in Scotland than in other nations fighting for independence. Some native Scots language and culture were lost after the Act of Union (1707), but Scotland was also implicated in extending and profiting from the English Empire. These internal divisions and dueling allegiances, given aesthetic form in MacDiarmid’s and Gibbon’s Synthetic Scots, constitute the internal communal divisions that pit the inhabitants of Kinraddie against one another, and in some cases against themselves, during the First World War.

The war initially exacerbates Chris and Kinraddie’s division between English and Scots national identity. Unlike the voice of the folk, which encourages Chris to embrace her Scots side, the narration does not unambiguously champion the native wit and kind-heartedness of the Scots. Granted, the more sympathetic characters, particularly Chae and Rob, owe more allegiance to Scottish ethnicity, but the narrator and other Scots-identifying characters often side against them. These characters are far from parochial Scottish nationalists, though: Chae is a socialist and Rob is an atheist, and both are devoted to their local community and more specifically their own land. Chris, too, and the text in general (but certainly not the narrator), display a constant aversion to Christianity, which becomes the most effective medium of British nationalism in the village. These unconventional views cause Chae and Rob to become exiles in their own communities, and make Chris a subject of constant gossip and rumor. Class is certainly a major factor in the distinction, but the aversion to the discussion of “things” that Ford Madox Ford noted in England
is quite reversed in Kinraddie. These most Scottish of characters talk constantly about politics, religion, sex, and eventually the war. As Ford developed the garrulous American characters John and Florence Dowell in *The Good Soldier* and Mrs. de Bray Pape in *Parade’s End* to juxtapose babbling American national character with English taciturnity, Gibbon employs the “voice of the folk” to contrast Scottish organic conversation to the repressive propriety of the Anglophilic Kinraddie gentry.

Of the four characters in *Sunset Song* to die in the war, at least two are unambiguously Scottish in their cultural identification, but internationalist in their political views. Among the dead are the very minor character James Leslie; the Ingersoll-reading, anti-imperialist atheist Rob, whose profession connects him directly to a way of life that is disappearing; the socialist farmer Chae; and Chris’s husband Ewan Tavendale. Chae, Rob, and Ewan are all robbed of signifiers of their identity and background that are rooted in Scotland, but certainly not exclusively Scottish. In each case it is through a specific, physical legal intervention that is made possible by the Defence of the Realm Act and its legislation. War legislation and military practices defile and fragment the characters’ subjective unity by forcing them into a relationship with state power and violence. The inclusion of James Leslie, who is given Gibbon’s real name (James Leslie Mitchell), offers a meta-narrative reflection on Gibbon’s own sense of fragmentation and absence caused by the war. Gibbon’s depiction of their deaths is not a reactionary lament for the death of Scotland’s traditional identity, but in some ways a critique of the insularity of rural Scotland, which will not listen to Rob and Chae’s explicitly progressive religious and political ideas.

Rob is an iconoclastic defender of deep Scots tradition against Anglicization and Christianity. Despite the massive propaganda program mobilized to recruit Scottish men, and the
wave of nationalist fervor that swept through, England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland alike, Rob objects to the war from the start:

For, and it grew a fair scandal all through the Howe, you could hardly believe it, it was funny enough, Long Rob of the Mill didn’t hold with the war. He said it was a lot of damned nonsense, those that wanted to fight, the M.P.s and bankers and editors and muckers, should all be locked in a pleiter of a park and made to gut each other with graips: there’d be no great loss to the world and a fine bit sight it would make for decent folk to look on at. But for folk with sense to take part in the soss and yammer about King and country was just plain hysteria; and as for Belgium invaded, it got what it needed, what about the Congo and your Belgians there? Not that the Germans weren’t as bad, they were all tarred with the same black brush (194-5).

Rather than see the war as an opportunity for a specifically internationalist effort that will clear the international scene of this bourgeois imperialism, as Chae naively does, Rob sees it as a conflict grown out of international imperial competition, in which all belligerent parties are culpable. The native Scotland for which Rob stands is not directly implicated in this imperial competition because it is subjugated by one of the main belligerent forces. Rob here implicitly identifies Scotland not as a small and ostensibly innocent nation, as newspapers and politicians depicted Belgium, but as analogous with the position of the Congo, if not so murderously exploited. For a rural miller, Rob’s understanding of international politics is well informed, sympathetic, and far from parochial. The younger and naïve Ewan Tavendale has no more reason to be involved in the war than Rob or Chae, as a non-Unionist Scot, but he much more parochially succumbs to the popular opinion that will soon make Rob an outcast in the village.

Immediately after Rob’s speech against the war, the narrator intervenes to offer the village’s collective opinion that even if he is not as foolishly patriotic as the other villagers, including Chae, he “couldn’t lie like that, the long, rangy childe, without being called pro-German, as the papers called it” (195). From this point on, because the community uncritically accepts the propaganda espoused in the papers, Rob is essentially at war with Kinraddie. First, a
group of patriots arrive at the mill to duck Rob for being “the Kaiser’s crony” (195). After Rob defends himself and his mill with his shotgun, they flee, but from that moment forward the majority of Kinraddie boycotts his mill and ostracizes him in the town. Gibbon employs martial rhetoric in describing “the attack on the Mill,” demonstrating that the militarism of propaganda has a direct impact on local attitudes toward tradition and individual agency (197). As “Rob of the Mill,” Rob’s identity is constituted around his physical place in the community, which also defines his social function. In a supposed defense of the British realm, an ad-hoc militia attacks his land, which symbolizes his right to humanizing political inclusion, because his assertion of self-governance is a threat to the state.

The narrator continues to present Rob as deranged for waging his long battle for self-sovereignty with the British Military and particularly the 1916 Military Service Act. Although he is, in Chris’s view, a paragon of masculinity, his refusal to comply with the Military Service Act soon breaks Rob physically. When he is ordered to report for service “all Kinraddie watched from its steadings the goings and comings of Rob at the Mill,” but Rob does nothing:

The next day came, the policeman came with it, he rode up to the mill on his bicycle and bided at the mill a good two hours and syne rode out again. And folk told later that he’d spent all that time arguing and prigging at Rob to set out. But Rob said If you want me, carry me! and faith! the policeman couldn’t very well do that, angered though he was, it would look fair daft wheeling Rob along the roads on his bicycle tail. So the policeman went off to Stonehaven and out from it late in the evening there drove a gig, the policeman again, and two home-time soldiers, it needed all three to take Rob of the Mill away to the war. He wouldn’t move even then, though he made no struggle, he just sat still and smoked at his pipe, and they’d to carry him out and put him in the gig (209).

The manner in which Rob is taken into custody underscores the public nature of dealing with obstinate objectors. As in the incident of Beardsworth’s public forced “training,” all of Kinraddie watches because they want to see Rob disciplined, and so be confirmed by sovereign state power
in their own support of the war. The use value to the military of the efforts expended to apprehend and hold objectors like Rob is clearly performative.

After he is taken away the town speculates that he must have joined up after all, or that he is in jail. When he is returned to his home at the mill Kinraddie finds that he never gave in, despite physical abuse, and had eventually resorted to a hunger strike. The text does not dwell on specifically how Rob was “ill-used,” but Rob’s recourse to a hunger strike, although it weakens him physically and mentally, is the corporeal way in which he regains his small degree of freedom. Like the Conscientious Objector Mac in Pat Barker’s *The Eye in the Door*, from which this chapter’s second epigraph is taken, Rob is forced to prove the truth of his conscientious objection on his body because the state does not recognize any non-material assertion. Rob wins his freedom by showing the British state that he is willing to give his body and die as a result of their injunction, not in war, but in prison. He is sent home after a doctor “said it was useless to keep him, he’d never be of use to his King and country” (219). As the repetition of the word “use” indicates, Rob has been reduced to a piece of potential war material, has been used as a public reminder of the force of conscription, and once used up he is sent back to live in poverty and obscurity at the mill, his health and his business ruined.

Rob’s fate is similar to that of the woods surrounding the farmland of Kinraddie. On his return to Scotland on leave, Chae is the only character who recognizes the irreparable damage done to the land by its deforestation. As part of the legislation ushered in by DORA, the state was permitted to make use of natural resources. Chae finds that Kinraddie’s trustees have sold the forests to the War Office as material and is shocked that none of the other residents saw the damage that deforestation would do to their livelihoods and to the future of their community. As a socialist who believes that the war will usher in a pan-European revolution against capitalism,
Chae is appalled that the trustees exploit the war to make money by selling the trees at the expense of Kinraddie’s future. After first finding out about the deforestation, the usually affable Chae becomes introverted and unhappy. Because the land and its farmers have been so close, the finality of this harvest strikes Chae as a kind of death:

But the last night of his leave he climbed to Blawearie and he said there was nothing but the woods and their fate that could draw his eyes. For over by the Mains he’d come on the woodmen, teams and teams of them hard at work on the long bit forest that ran up the high brae, sparing nothing they were but the woods of the Manse. And up above Upperhill they had cut down the larch, and the wood was down that lay back of old Pooty’s. Folk had told him the trustees had sold it well, they got awful high prices, the trustees did, it was wanted for aeroplanes and such-like things. And over at the office he had found the factor and the creature had peaked at Chae through his horn-rimmed glasses and said that the government would replant all the trees when the war was won. And Chae had said that would console him a bloody lot, sure, if he’d the chance of living two hundred years and seeing the woods grow up as some shelter for beast and man: but he doubted he’d not last that long. The factor said they must all do their bit at a sacrifice, and Chae asked And what sacrifices have you made, tell me, you scrawny wee mucker? (203).

Significantly, the only trees not likely to be of any practical value to the people or the land, the “woods of the Manse,” are the only ones left untouched. The Manse and its woods provide a more important function to the British Government: the most rabid anti-German and pro-war propaganda comes from the Minister. Both the image and the fact of the trees being cut down adds a unique element to the otherwise commonplace analogy of soldiers being “harvested.” The vegetative cycle is not merely interrupted by this intervention; it is permanently destroyed. The old form of political inclusion or recognition from connection to and control over a piece of land is lost for all of Kinraddie’s residents except the propagandizing minister. Though presenting the war merely as a destroyer of deep-rooted Scottish culture is in some ways an easy response, significant portions of Scotland, represented in this novel directly by Rob and indirectly by Chae, had legitimate reasons to protest Scotland’s involvement in the war, as did the English
conscientious objectors. Arguably, conscription was possible in Scotland, but not in Ireland, because of the more thorough erasure of Scottish native culture and language that made it necessary for Gibbon to construct a synthetic vernacular for his novel in the first place.

Like Chae, Chris’s husband, Ewan Tavendale, eventually goes off to the war willingly. His death is soon reported to Chris. At the end of the novel, however, when the war dead are commemorated, as for Rob and Chae, Ewan is not missing simply because he is dead, but because the war culture has first drastically altered his disposition and his character. The circumstances of the war had killed something within. He was absent from Chris, and, it is later revealed, from himself, before he even leaves for France. The scale of Ewan’s transformation from an essentially innocent young farm laborer to the brutal soldier who returns to Chris after completing his training in a British Army camp is shocking. Ewan, like Chris and Rob, had initially expressed little interest in the war. As an independent farmer with a family, he is not subject, as is the unmarried Rob, to the Military Service Act. As the topic of the war becomes inescapable, though, Ewan becomes increasingly distant from Chris until one morning he leaves to enlist without telling her his plan. The scene of his departure inverts the domestic scenes in the famous propaganda poster of women encouraging their male relations to enlist.¹⁹¹

Ewan leaves one morning after revealing his increasing irritability by yelling in a “shameful” manner at John Brigson, the old man they have hired to help with the harvest:

Chris heard him rummage in their room, and then he came down, he was fully dressed, his dark face heavy and stranger than ever, Chris stared at him Where are you going? and he snapped To Aberdeen, if you’d like to know, and off he went. He had never spoken to her like that—he was EWAN, hers! … She stood at the window, dazed, looking after him, so strange she must then have looked that little Ewan ran to her, Mother, mother! and she picked him up and soothed him and the two of them stood and watched Ewan Tavendale out of sight on the bright Spring road.

It seemed to Chris he had hated her in that minute when he looked at her in the kitchen, she went through the day with a twist of sickness
about her heart (211).

In the propaganda posters, the young father’s love of his wife and children, and their earnest entreaty that he must go, compels him to enlist, and he leaves with his community. Ewan’s departure inverts every aspect of this scene. Chris and her son do not know the reason for Ewan’s departure, and do not want him to leave. He is not motivated by a desire to protect his family, or anybody else, and he leaves alone. The decision to enlist is presented as selfish, a sign of Ewan’s insecurity and lack of mastery over his self-image. When the pressure of propaganda and the

Figure 4. One of the most famous English recruiting posters from the First World War.

gossip of townsfolk become strong enough, Ewan puts an artificially constructed self-image before his own desires and the needs of his family. Ewan explains in a letter that “he’d grown sick of it all, folk laughing and sneering at him for a coward, Mutch and Munro aye girding at him” (213). Ewan’s reasons for enlisting have nothing to do with the facts of the war, which are divorced from the reality of Kinraddie and unknown to Ewan. He has essentially been like Rob,
an objector to the war, with the difference that he objects because he doesn’t see that the war has anything to do with him and his life, whereas Rob has political—not religious—objections.

Ewan eventually sees himself as a soldier by constructing a fantasy self out of propaganda and social pressure, and so he enlists. His initial objection was not founded in convictions.

Though there had been a subtle but perceptible change in Ewan as the war propaganda worked its way into his unconscious, he is so changed when he returns after a few months as to be unrecognizable. Ewan’s return and the heartbreak it causes Chris constitute the emotional climax of the novel. Gibbon presents the English culture that takes root in Scotland as a result of the war as homogenizing and vulgar; it is not even English culture, really, but English army culture. 192 Military culture alone is what destroys Ewan’s once placid demeanor, not the experience of war, as he has not yet been abroad. When he returns to Blawearie he shows nothing but contempt and disrespect for Chris, their son Ewan, and the town of Kinraddie. He brags to Chris about the prostitutes he’s slept with and he is continuously drunk. It is not the physical destruction or trauma of combat that have brought about this fantastic change, but military training.

After facing combat Ewan realizes that his relation to the war is arbitrary and externally constructed, and he is recalled to himself. Gibbon presents Ewan’s entire tryst with the military as a fugue state from which he awakens suddenly in a trench in France. When Chae comes home again on leave, he explains to Chris that Ewan had been shot as a deserter. Gibbon presents this sudden desertion as a return to the sanity of his position towards the war before he was influenced by propaganda and the insinuations of nationalists like Mutch and Munro. Chae recounts to Chris that he asked Ewan why he deserted when there was no possibility he could get away:
And Ewan looked at him and shook his head, *It was the wind that came with the sun, I minded Blawearie, I seemed to waken up smelling that smell. And I couldn’t believe it was me that stood in the trench, it was just daft to be there. So I turned and got out of it.*

In a flash it had come on him, he had wakened up, he was daft and a fool to be there; and, like somebody minding things done in a coarse wild dream there had flashed on him memory of Chris at Blawearie and his last days there, mad and mad he had been, he had treated her as a devil might, he had tried to hurt her and maul her, trying in the nightmare to waken, to make her waken him up; and now in the blink of sun he saw her face as last he’d seen it while she quivered away from his taunts. He knew he had lost her, she’d never be his again, he’d known it in the moment he clambered back from the trenches; but he knew he’d be a coward if he didn’t try though all hope was past (237-8).

Ewan’s response to the war, from his indifference to his suddenly signing up, his subsequent abuse of Chris, and his eventual re-awakening to himself, reflect the dual nature of governmentality. Because Chris is such an overt symbol of Scotland, Ewan’s realization that he has lost her can be read as a not-too-subtle suggestion that, in following English propaganda into what has become an expeditionary war for profit, Ewan, and thousands like him, have lost their cultural identification. Gibbon never presents Ewan as a particularly complicated or deep person. Chris is initially skeptical about whether they would make a good match because he lacks any intellectual curiosity. But Ewan is dedicated to the land, and dedicated to Chris, at least before the war breaks out, and he evinces no confusion about his identity. In the personal terms of governmentality—the cultivation of the self—Ewan has all that he wants or needs and is perfectly reconciled to his life at Blawearie. When the war breaks in, however, Ewan demonstrates what an easily governable subject he actually is, how weak the self he had constructed was in the face of a nationalist injunction. His perception of himself, going through the motions of mocking and abusing Chris as if in a dream from which he hopes to awaken, demonstrates governmentality’s dual nature and how it can divide subjects. Ewan here, more than Chris ever was, is a split subject, recognizing in his depths (though they may not be deep)
that he has put on an identity in discord with the self he has spent a lifetime unintentionally, or at least, unconsciously constructing. What wakes Ewan up is the memory of his land, which had once constituted his political and communal inclusion in Kinraddie. The sensory recollection of Blawearie’s smell as a signifier of social identity overpowers the merely abstract notions of character and state obligation presented by propaganda and social pressure. He remembers his more concrete familial and communal obligations as “Blawearie man,” responsibilities that spring from the land. His animalistic behavior toward Chris derived from his abdication of those responsibilities in favor of a political relation to a sovereign that, for imperialist and capitalist gain, exposes him to death. When he realizes this, he is already metaphorically buried in the trench in France, and buried in France is where he will remain.

Ewan is thus the opposite of Long Rob, who is so sure of the identity he has self-consciously built that he is able to resist the most direct physical and violent injunctions of governmentality from above. As Rob tells Chae, joining the army would be the easy way out of his predicament, and the cowardly way. Likewise, when Ewan “awakens” he feels it would be cowardly not to desert. Rob’s dedication to his personal code of conduct is too strong for him to break. One of the text’s tragedies is that Rob’s powers of resistance, although built on the strongest possible psychic foundations, cannot protect him from the invasive nature of the state’s superficially ambiguous injunction to enlist. When he decides to enlist after all, he first spends a day with Chris helping her with the farming, thereby communing with and taking his leave of the land. When he tells her he is going to enlist he makes it clear that he considers it a personal defeat. He tells Chris that “he couldn’t stay out of it longer, all the world had gone daft, and well he might go with the rest, there was neither trade nor trust for him here, or rest ever again till this War was over, if it ever ended at all” (232). Unlike Ewan, who goes off in a fugue state, Rob
remains conscious of the hypocrisy that, in a sense, he has stooped to. He is driven to it from real necessity, after seeing his village and his land “gone daft” in compliance with a sovereign command unrelated to their lives, their well-being, and the essential functioning of their rural existence. Rob has lost his humanizing inclusion in the community and enlists out of resignation to the animal state of corporeality to which he has been reduced.

The bleak ending of *Sunset Song* is tempered in two important and inter-related communal events. First, the community experiences two weddings in the aftermath of the war, and both contain the promise of a better future for Kinraddie’s poor. First, the most Anglophilic and capitalist resident of the village, Gordon of Upperhill, who takes pride in having “broke up the Ploughman’s Union” suffers the indignity of his daughter Maggie Jean marrying a socialist doctor and embarking on a mission to organize Kinraddie’s farm servants. Chris also marries a newcomer to the village, the minister Robert Colquhoun, who preaches a moderate kind of socialism and pacifism.

The uncertain future thus has advocates who will fight for a form of political inclusion not predicated on obedience to propagandistic myths of character. The past is also secured in the form of the war monument that Chris and her new husband create to commemorate Chae, Rob, Ewan, and James Leslie. Rather than constructing a typically celebratory monument and placing it in the middle of the town, to reaffirm the community’s commitment to the nobility and necessity of violent sacrifice, they etch a simple inscription in one of Blawearie’s Standing Stones. Most of the villagers object to this austere memorial, and they are made uncomfortable by the new minister’s speech, which emphasizes that the lives and the culture these men represented, including its forms of political inclusion and its primal connection to the land, are as irrevocably a part of Scotland’s past as the Druids.
CHAPTER 3:

“GETTING THE RIGHT IDEA”:
SHELL SHOCK, CONTAGION, AND CONTROL

If everyday and all day long you chatter at high pitch and with the logic and lucidity of the Frenchman; if you shout in self-assertion, with your hat on your stomach, bowing from a stiff spine and by implication threaten all day long to shoot your interlocutor, like the Prussian; if you are lachrymally emotional as the Italian, or as drily and epigrammatically imbecile over unessentials as the American, you will have a noisy, troublesome, and thoughtless society without any of the surface calm that should distinguish the atmosphere of men when they are together. You will never have deep arm-chairs in which to sit for hours in clubs thinking of nothing at all—or of the off-theory in bowling. On the other hand, in the face of death—except at sea, by fire, railway accident or accidental drowning in rivers; in the face of madness, passion, dishonour, or—and particularly—prolonged mental strain, you will have all the disadvantage of the beginner at any game and may come off very badly indeed. Fortunately death, love, public dishonour and the like are rare occurrences in the life of the average man, so that the great advantage would seem to have lain with English society; at any rate before the later months of the year 1914.

—Ford Madox Ford, Some Do Not...,1924. 193

I. Recovery Narratives of Control and Redemption

“I remember when I was very ill, I used to say to myself, ‘While there’s life, there’s hope; and when there’s no hope, there’s rope.’ But that was only jocularly. I was only trying to recapture my lost sense of humour.” 194 So writes recovered shell shock sufferer Wilfrid Northfield in the preface to his giddily confident self-help book Conquest of Nerves (1933), directed at England’s burgeoning population of neurasthenics. This grim jocularity alone may not console his suffering readers, however, and Northfield is quick to assure them that he has suffered like them “and triumphed, and having triumphed is out to help [them] to do likewise.” 195 These prefatory assertions emphasize three generic aspects of interwar fictional and non-fictional shell shock
narratives: First, there is a constant oscillation between attraction to death, the inherent privacy of which offers relief from the explicitly social field of suffering, and the need to face up to one’s social duty. Like Northfield and others who documented their recovery processes, literary representations of shell shocked sufferers, such as Rebecca West’s Chris Baldry, Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Smith, Ford Madox Ford’s Christopher Tietjens, Richard Aldington’s George Winterbourne, William Faulkner’s Darl Bundren, and David Jones’ and Vera Brittain’s recollections of their shell-shocked selves, among others, share this characteristic. Sufferers alternate between exhausted attraction to death, sometimes suicidal, and a sense of duty to carry on. Second, the sufferers’ recoveries depend on their recognition and distancing of themselves from their symptoms and, in the case of self-help books such as Northfield’s, the re-creation of their precise conditions in the suffering reader, over whom the author thereby gains a feeling of control. Northfield writes his own erstwhile symptoms onto his imagined readers with almost flippant insouciance to demonstrate how fully he is cured, and to reiterate to the reader that he or she, too, can be cured by simply “getting the right idea.” What determines recovery is the ability to re-constitute oneself as a social subject and object of power. Third, the sufferer only recovers through submission to a larger, social, and ultimately paternalistic external force. In the end, he recovers or not depending on his submission to foundational social rules and his ability to overlook precisely what feminist writers like West and Woolf saw as the most important aspect of shell shock: the aporias within patriarchal power that war trauma revealed. In this chapter, I will examine archival material written by shell-shock sufferers and professed experts before moving on to shell shock’s disruption of gender and class in Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier (1918), and Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway (1925), two formally and politically
innovative novels by modernist feminists who saw in shell shock a hermeneutic through which to analyze restrictive and conventional power relations.

The widespread trauma occasioned by service in World War I irrevocably transformed the British state’s relationship to its subjects through psychological state interventions. Although “shell shock” as a medical category had its roots in prewar anxieties about neurasthenia, it also exposed the tenuousness and exhaustion of national paradigms of character and control; the return of traumatized soldiers impacted social and political discourses of gender, sexuality, empire, and class. Since Elaine Showalter’s seminal assertion that shell shock opened a discursive space in which English feminists could critique patriarchal psychiatry, which had previously been used almost exclusively on or against women, critical re-examinations of shell shock have flourished, especially in the context of gender studies. In this chapter, I argue that biopower and governmentality illuminate the structures of shell shock treatment and what shell shock meant for character and received notions of gender in Britain. Furthermore, little has been done to put modernist accounts of shell shock, often written at second-hand or through the aestheticizing eyes of an artist, into dialogue with the non-fiction accounts of sufferers, doctors and legislators that informed interwar writers. I therefore show how reading literary texts alongside such documents reveals the changing psychiatric and political epistemologies that influenced interwar literature and modernist literary form. All of these texts contain implicit assumptions or arguments about shell shock’s signification of a crisis in gender.

Shell shock profoundly unsettled essentialist and nationalist gender ideologies that were central to war mobilization and propaganda. Because it affected previously hardy and resourceful Englishmen, pervasive shell shock implied two things: English manhood was not as unbreakable in its taciturn reserve and self-control as myths of national character had promoted, and
hysterical breakdown was not the exclusive province of women and the emotionally or culturally
delicate. Rather, the prevalence of mental breakdown suggested to many doctors that the pre-
social and animalistic desires of the individual, even at the height of Edwardian socialization,
lingered beneath the cultivated surfaces of seemingly ideal English youth in uniform. Though
this emotional breakdown was widespread in the armies of all heavily involved nations, it posed
a particular crisis to English state power and national identity. England had long defined itself in
opposition to the continent in general, opposing its Protestant reserve and famous “stiff upper
lip” to dissolve and emotional continental (and Irish) Catholicism.

In a generically similar monograph to Northfield’s (quoted above), Joseph Snowball
Milne’s Shell-shock, Neurasthenia, and a New Life (1918), is fraught with anxiety about what his
condition may suggest about his masculinity and his status as a political subject. Like Northfield,
Milne explicitly affirms the mastery of the cured writer over the suffering reader, though the
certainty of his words is undermined by the anxiety of his italics: “I don’t ask you what you feel
like; but I tell you,” Milne writes, “and I can do so because I have been like you, and although I
have been just as ill as you, I have got better. I tell and teach you how to get better. Oh, try, and
keep on trying, what I tell you, and you will be sure to get better yourself.” Despite the
differences in tone and the fifteen years separating their publications, Milne and Northfield’s
narratives reveal how sufferers of shell shock confronted the seemingly omnipotent structure of
psychiatric power. Far from undermining the authority of official treatment, these books
hysterically recreate it, showing how shell shock sufferers internalize medical rhetoric and
enforce its precepts. By writing and publishing their experiences, Milne and Northfield resituate
themselves subjectively through emulation and subordination, thereby sharing, to some degree,
in the power to which they succumb, and exercising their share of power over their readers.
The authority they perpetuate is fundamentally paternalist, but also in tension with their ongoing repressions, anxieties, and indignities. Milne, writing while his wounds are fresh, does not claim to have fully recovered. The rhetoric and the structure of his book testify to an ongoing crisis not so much of shock or neurasthenia, but of identity and guilt. Milne reveals less about the physical and psychological trauma caused by combat than about the emotional trauma caused by its treatment. His book’s unusual form attests to a confused and fluid identification with the imagined patients and attendants who will be his readers. The first page consists of a headline to the “Introductory Remarks,” followed by a note explaining that these remarks are at the end, so the sufferer may have unimpeded access to the means of relief the book provides. This device locks the sufferer out of a secret shared among “normal” readers, establishing a conspiratorial tone between Milne and the attendants of the ill. If any sufferers do read these remarks, they are urged to “strain every nerve which they possess” to heal themselves and “cease to be a burden to their friends.” Milne also insists on the decisive authority of the doctor or attendant and the sufferer’s exclusion from deliberative processes: “[i]t is the patient who cannot make suggestions and come to conclusions.” The patient’s invalidity marks his discourse as a priori invalid; while he suffers, he is not a socialized subject, but the object of an absolute and external decision.

Although Northfield is as jolly and avuncular as Milne is stern and paternal, his advice, too, is predicated on an assumption that he understands the sufferer. His conviction that any neurasthenic can recover if he simply succeeds in “getting the right idea” is an only slightly kinder version of the constant injunction he himself faced to “pull [him]self together” when his problem was that he could not. Like Milne, he fails to see that the sufferer to whom he addresses himself may suffer in a qualitatively different way, that the sufferer’s experience may
provide valuable keys to his recovery. Northfield and Milne both share in a universalizing belief that erases contingency, and they cure themselves by asserting unification with decisive sovereignty against individual subjectivity and its contingencies. Rather than examine the particular aspects of their own cases, and determine what has caused their breakdown, they pull themselves together by adhering to an indivisible authority. Northfield replicates the authority that finally succeeded in getting him to get the right idea, and, like Milne, eagerly assumes the doctor’s role, even urging readers to write to him for further advice. He shares Milne’s conviction that what has worked for him will work for anyone, and he puts more curative faith in golf—symbolic of patriarchal power, as golf courses were an exclusively male realm and often the site of suffragists’ civil disobedience—than in any of his other suggestions. These include having one’s teeth attended to (replacing them all with dentures is ideal) and, sensibly enough, eating plenty of fruits and vegetables. He mentions only as an aside that his neurasthenia developed while he was fighting in France, an omission that demonstrates the extent to which he considers manifestations of his neurasthenia as unaffected by their cause, or even unrelated to his war service.

Milne and Northfield’s convictions (contrary to their professed experiences) that anyone can get better through mental effort demonstrate the medical and military debate over whether shell shock was a physiological injury or a psychological disorder. Milne’s righteous insistence that he was misdiagnosed with neurasthenia, and actually suffered from shell shock, is predicated on his refusal to consider his problem as psychological. He uses the term shell shock to validate his condition, over which he insists he has no control, whereas the sufferer of neurasthenia, he believes, has worn out what was not a strong mental constitution to begin with. Milne writes:

I have been led to read of Neurasthenia, for that is the diagnosis or verdict concerning my case, by specialists who have examined me. While that is the
verdict, yet, on consideration of what I now struggle to read and write, I believe that where my condition may be Neurasthenia, of Shellshock nature, it might well have been called something more like itself,—and especially after reading Dr. Hartenberg’s conclusions on symptoms of Neurasthenia without the Special Manias. Neurasthenical patients are credited with certain manias of the imagination etc., but when one of the sufferers “struggles to get better” for at least eighteen months under this condition of Shell-shock trouble, it must indicate that he has no such mania. He has a severe injury which needs at least to be repaired, or rather, as I have already stated, something needs to be “re-created.”

What is at stake is Milne’s human worth, and his insistence on his understanding of the suffering of others, who cannot understand it for themselves, implies he reads mental neurasthenia and physical shell shock as temporarily suspending political and social rights. Milne’s assertion of the total physicality of shell shock portends the general consensus in the later Parliament requisitioned Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock” (1922) that a sufferer of emotional, rather than commotional, war neurosis must have been previously mentally or emotionally weak. For Milne, shell shock is as physical as a bullet wound, and must be overcome, like any other invalided soldier’s injury, through physical therapy. The distinction between medical cases and mental cases can be made based on the strength of the patient’s willpower.

Although the therapies imposed on Milne did not work, he develops his own strategies, ingeniously reinscribing himself into the social space of power he has been forced to abdicate as a patient. He masters his guilt and demonstrates to his doctors that, through an Olympian act of will, he can succeed where they have failed. He rejects the disciplinary devices, masquerading as therapies, which have been used against him: electricity and cold baths, although physical, would locate his cure outside himself and on someone else’s authority. Rather, he reaches his own physical remedy by stooping forward and “pressing the blood to [his] head,” so he can feel the brain “lifting” in his head. This physical cure demonstrates the extent to which he refuses a
psychological one: “Now I can imagine that my brain must have been low down in my head [...] My brain must have been torn down from behind almost to the forehead.” By finding or fabricating this physical source for his disorder, Milne asserts the honorable nature of his injury, demonstrating the masculinity and self-control that allows him to dictate and prescribe treatments to his readers.

As these scientifically dubious solutions demonstrate, recovering from shell shock through a physical intervention into the body was a way to displace its damaging effect from the socialized human and onto the corporeal animal. Historically speaking, mental trauma suffered through warfare has lost some of its social stigma in the ceaselessly violent years since World War I (although sufferers have constantly had to fight for government aid and recognition). When this phenomenon was new and recognizable for the first time on a large scale, however, it posed a fundamental question to British civil society and the state about what constituted the humanity—the cultural, political, and social identity—of its subjects.

II. Shell Shock, Biopower, and the Social Pact

Milne’s and Northfield’s narratives indicate that the crisis of shell shock is one of resituating the living soldier into the social realm, that is, re-socializing him as a subject of power. This biopolitical problem involves the distinction between bios, the qualified or political life, and zoe, the biological fact of being alive. The shell-shocked soldier fundamentally loses his distinction as a political subject, and becomes rather an object of politics, until he can re-assert himself into the power structure as both agent and subject of power. This is what Milne and Northfield—but not, say, Septimus Smith or Darl Bundren—succeed, very publicly, in doing.
Many wartime medical and military authorities explicitly understood shell shock as the subject’s regression to animal instinct, the triumph of the latent, pre-contractual animal over the socialized human. Shell shock and its treatment, I argue, present a juridical problem of sovereignty that concerns the two modes of power that characterize much of Michel Foucault’s work: power directed at the subject through state institutions, such as the madhouse or the prison (shell shock sufferers frequently ended in both), and the more subtle structures of ideological and epistemological power that address themselves to the self, as distinct from the subject of the state. As Agamben points out, however, “the point at which these two faces of power converge remains strangely unclear in Foucault’s work, so much so that it has been claimed that Foucault would have consistently refused to elaborate a unitary theory of power.” If these are separate forms of power their point of separation is similarly ambiguous. As England’s reaction to shell shock demonstrates, these are not necessarily two unidirectional but separate manifestations of power. Rather, they are different manifestations of the same necessity to subordinate individual zoe to social bios, a necessity revealed through the common characteristic of paternalism and paternal authority in state power apparatuses as well as power structures directed towards the self and its cultivation, such as family, religion, self-help books, or private counseling.

As Foucault, Arendt, Agamben and others have pointed out, the family is a point of convergence between two authoritarian figures of the father: the first a wholly personal and psychological patriarch, the second a model for and unit of state power in the Western political tradition. Although Arendt points out that in ancient Greece, “the human capacity for political organization [was] not only different from, but [stood] in direct opposition to that natural association whose center is the home (oikia) and the family,” she shows that this conceit ignores the inevitability of inequality within the family. Foucault summarizes the political aspects of
ancient paternal power: “The formula [from Roman Law] vitae necisque potestas […] designates not sovereign power but rather the unconditional authority [potesta] of the pater over his sons.”211 The presence of the shell-shocked soldier at the English home front radically undermined this juridical and social foundation of power by juxtaposing the bare physicality of life to the social, represented by the father and cultural masculine ideals. A paradox of shell shock is that the war depended on the analogy of the sons of the state fighting to protect their homeland (fatherland, motherland), but at the individual level, these men were also likely to be husbands and fathers whose subsequent incapacitation threatened such political/domestic analogies.

During and immediately after the war, Tracy Loughran has shown, the biopolitical implications of shell shock were evident in the two distinct ways. Science understood what was clearly a breaking of the shell-shocked soldier’s military and official pact with his sovereign, and his unofficial social pact in the contractarian sense: he had either regressed willfully to an animalistic state of nature through cowardice, or he had lost his ability to adhere to his social contract, as he willed.212 The effects of this epidemic constituted, as Loughran points out, a “national emergency” by 1917, when the outcome of the war was unpredictable, and the immediate necessity of containing and preventing the problem was obvious.213 Its solution, therefore, was more than a merely academic question, but a matter of immediate legal and political concern. No doubt many genuinely impaired soldiers were shot as deserters. This immediate legal solution went against the state’s ostensible role, according to Foucault’s delineation of biopower, as the preserver of the species and its way of life.214 Exposure of life to death is a sovereign prerogative, but with the rise of governmentality rather than the Machiavellian justification of sovereignty, execution became a means of protecting and
administering the population. The execution of legitimately injured soldiers, who constitute both a part of the population and the means of sovereign protection, would go against the interest of either mode of power. However, because shell-shocked soldiers were executed and exposed to violence while injured, shell shock quickly became a useful symbol of the barbarity of war to pacifists and the anti-war movement. The problem shell shock posed was about the limits of state power, and where state power had to resign and let other cultural forces—in this case psychology—take over.

This bafflement of state power and its limits was a matter of public knowledge and debate, but the juridical conundrum it presented was not formally investigated by parliament until April 1920. At this point the threat of war was contained and the emergency was considered over, despite the abundance of shell-shocked veterans suffering in private and public. The commission gathered and interpreted expert medical accounts of shell shock from both army and private doctors for the purpose of finding “some scientific method of guarding against its occurrence.” The commission suggested two sources for the medical and legal difficulties of categorizing shell shock: first, the state’s dual goal to send every able-bodied man, but to protect the incapacitated; second, the obvious opportunity shell shock presented for shirking duty and exploiting the state—for “such was the appeal of the term ‘shell-shock’ […] that it became a most desirable complaint from which to suffer.” The term’s potential to mask or conceal was clearly a threat to state sovereignty, and although it genuinely was misleading for many of the reasons the commission lists, the commission’s interest in debunking it at the level of language indicates an interest in debunking it as any coherent circumstance, or set of circumstances, that permitted the release from duty to the state. The inquiry’s origin as an army report, requested by
parliament, may have forced it to the findings most beneficial to state power. Widely reported in the papers, and appearing beside innumerable ads presenting infallible cures for any and all nervous disorders, these biased findings provided the basis on which most interwar private citizens and artists formed their ideas of shell shock.\textsuperscript{219} As the commission’s report and the narratives of sufferers turned specialists reveal, shell shock changed mass culture’s relation to psychiatry, even as it coincided with changes in official psychiatric discourse. The received story is of a gradual change from the physiological explanations of neuroses on which Milne insists to psychological explanations, as the problem’s scale and the lack of progress with physiological cures impelled an acceptance of the talking cures and psychoanalysis that had been popular only among a small, continentally-inflected avant-garde before the war.\textsuperscript{220} Ben Shephard, accepting this old narrative, has defined physiologists as shell shock’s realists, in contrast to psychologists, its dramatists. Shephard seeks to purify discourses of shell shock from “modern baggage derived from the women’s movement” and cordon it off from culture, gender or sexual studies.\textsuperscript{221} Generally, Shephard’s account is a reactionary attempt to restore representations of the lower class British Tommy as prone to malingering. Conversely, Loughran convincingly demonstrates that this separation of physiological and psychological wartime explanations of shell shock is misguided and historically inaccurate. Shephard argues against Elaine Showalter’s influential study \textit{The Female Malady}, which offers a hagiographic reading of W.H.R. Rivers, the ostensibly Freudian doctor of Craiglockhart War Hospital. Showalter misrepresents him as thoroughly psychoanalytic, however, whereas Loughran demonstrates that he remained at least partially committed to physiological explanations even after the war.\textsuperscript{222}

Loughran is correct that the extent of Rivers’s commitment to psychoanalysis is not as great as Showalter’s historiography or Pat Barker’s fictional account make it appear. Archival
records, however, demonstrate that analytic questions that now seem commonplace in diagnosing sufferers of mental breakdown struck soldiers during the war as unusual. James Butlin, who stayed at Craiglockhart Was Hospital, wrote to a close friend about his first encounter with his doctor, who may well have been Rivers:

he is a clever man, a bit of a philosopher, an eminent nerve specialist and somewhat of a crank. He extracts from you your life history with such questions as:—is there any nervous trouble in your family? Have you been ill as a boy? Where were you at school? Do you smoke much? Etc. etc. His great idea, as I had been previously warned, is to get you to take up a hobby. He asked me what hobbies I had. I said that I played tennis and bridge. He said the 1st was all right but that the latter tended to keep you too much in the house.223

Although the doctor is motivated by psychoanalytic inquiry, he seems just as concerned with attending to his patient’s trauma through physical exercise of the sort recommended by Northfield. The treatment proposed by this eminent nerve specialist is neither wholly psychological nor wholly physical, but a combination of both.

Loughran further argues that the physiological understanding allowed English psychiatry to subsume shell shock into a larger Darwinian narrative, reducing it to the defeat of human will by instinct, and so marking its victims as degenerates who had regressed to an animal state. The fault of breakdown therefore lay with the sufferer, not the state, and this convenient way of coping with the problem lasted throughout the war. The psychologization of shell shock, which would imply more than acceptance of Freudian thought by the English medical establishment, but, in fact, its radical progression, did not come until later.224 Loughran’s thesis that “[t]here was no straightforward transition to a psychological understanding of the war neuroses” is useful and correct. For the psychiatrists who defined it, shell shock may have been, as Loughran says, “a horrifying revelation of the survival of animal origins within civilization.”225
Though the scale of psychiatric intervention into state power was new, the phenomenon was not. Foucault has demonstrated that, beginning in the eighteenth century, in France and elsewhere, the state had increasingly relied on medical experts to provide the grounds on which to decide punishment for crime. Psychologists and experts were called into courts more frequently, not so much to explain a suspect’s actions as to explain her or his psychological identity. But the way in which expert testimony on the mental conditions of defendants was (and is) used is generally individual. Shell shock required expert medical testimony to guide the state in dealing with a mass problem occurring in the heart of state operations. Psychiatrists were called on to develop universalizing frames or explanations for a phenomenon that presented itself in uniquely contingent ways. Psychiatric power needed to recognize and define the type of life of the individual, the *bios* rather than *zoe*, so that the state could make the decision of life or death, which marks it as sovereign. The parliamentary investigation into shell shock is the medico-legal case *par excellence*, in which the state must bring in a massive medical and psychological apparatus to justify the fundamental aspect of its claims to sovereignty: its right to take life.

In *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and his later Collège de France lectures, Foucault traced these connections between madness and the foundations of juridical state power. He argues that Western thought conceives of the criminal as the natural, pre-Hobbesian “man of the forest,” one who puts individual interests ahead of the social pact. The shell shock victim, unlike the wounded soldier, is by definition outside the social contract. The constantly deferred or receding *objective* demarcation between reason and unreason parallels the exceptional space between the sovereign and bare life that Agamben reads as constitutive of power. Thus, the state, not the subject, determines the quality of any given human life. In general, damaged subjectivity matters little, if at all. Individual cases of crime may compel expert testimony, but an
indeterminable psycho-criminal epidemic during the largest conflict in England’s history, and at a point at which state security was threatened more than it had been in at least a century, constituted a genuine threat to sovereignty.

Foucault employs a rhetoric of foundations similar to Agamben’s when he says that “the Reason-Madness nexus constitutes for Western culture one of the dimensions of its originality.” This originality can be both the origin and the uniqueness of Western culture, as if, as Freud speculates in Civilization and its Discontents, Western culture evolved governance through distinguishing the mad and the sane and subordinating individual desire to collective need. Individual sanity works as a metaphor for the nation state’s unification under one sovereign power, and vice versa. The state recreates its sovereignty in each subject’s self-control as, in a Hobbesian sense, the Leviathan can only be made up of subjects who have renounced their individual instincts.

The history of madness being subsumed into discourses of power therefore presents a psychiatric manifestation of the state of exception. Foucault describes the asylum as “A quasi-absolute sovereignty, jurisdiction without appeal, a writ of execution against which nothing can prevail—the hôpital général is a strange power that the King establishes through the police and the courts, at the limits of the law: a third order of repression.” The asylum is at the limits of the law because, unlike a prison, wherein the state and subject recognize their putative obligations and breaches thereof, the asylum is where the state must constitute its sovereignty at the level of the subject, rather than simply prove or execute its sovereignty. Again, Foucault’s genealogy of unreason precedes Agamben’s formulation of the sovereign basing its power on the ability to designate bare life: “The formula of the “rational mind” has utterly changed its meaning: the unreason it suggested as the origin of all possible reason has entirely disappeared.
Henceforth madness must obey the determinism of man perceived as a natural being in his very animality.”

The unreasonable can easily be subsumed into the role of the banished, bereft of sovereign protection, and at the literal margins of human society. This liminal position of placeless and ambiguous humanity is both outside the physical boundaries of the state and internally free from the state’s constitutive, constraining injunctions. The animal terminology that Loughran identifies in the official discourse on shell shock is more than incidental or histrionic. It reveals the political roots of the threat posed by shell shock’s unprecedented scale of (voluntary and involuntary) psychological rebellion.

III. Surrogate Fathers: Psychological and Physical Treatments

Such a threat to the unstable basis of power was bound to create a discourse and practice of paternalist containment and control. The wide-ranging treatments of shell shock are frequently represented by the seemingly oppositional pair of Rivers and Dr. Lewis Yealland, whom Showalter puts at the “most punitive end of the treatment spectrum.” The differing methods used by Yealland and Rivers to achieve similar ends reveal the power structure and class prejudices underlying Milne and Northfield’s representative and repressive-curative recommendations.

Medical treatises by Yealland and Rivers show that doctors’ interpretations of shell shock depended largely on the sufferers’ class status. Rivers, in particular, with his more psychological and less physical interpretation of neurosis, was inclined to use the sufferer’s social background and upbringing to gauge the quality of his shell shock. He found that private soldiers and officers manifested different sets of symptoms due to their different experiences prior to the war. Rivers’ primary supposition is that “the neuroses of war depend upon a conflict between the instinct of
self-preservation and certain social standards of thought and conduct, according to which fear
and its expression are reprehensible.” He explains that ordinarily there is no conflict between
duty and self-preservation. He also writes that his work has revealed “how great an extent the
symptoms of neurosis are determined by mental factors, even when the main agent in the
production of the neurosis is concussion or fatigue,” thus reading class onto even cases where
physical injury is a factor.

Because educated upper class men were immediately drafted as officers, and the working
classes generally became private soldiers, the differences in their education and attitudes toward
duty determined the symptoms of their breakdown. Rivers writes “the average private enters
upon his military training with less aversion from the expression of fear than the average officer”
because a public school education revolved largely around learning to suppress fear and to serve
the greater good. In this reading of war neurosis, privates suffer simplistic and physical
symptoms of paralysis, mutism or blindness because they unconsciously want a simple way out
of the conflict between duty and self-preservation. The British national character of fearless
stoicism does not extend to the working class, who are interpellated in opposite ways. They can
thus cling stubbornly to these symptoms, refusing to believe their disorders are psychological
rather than physical. Better-educated officers, however, will only retain these symptoms briefly
before their more analytical faculties become dissatisfied with the false solution. According to
Rivers, officers’ manifestations of shell shock, like officers themselves, are thus more
complicated, intellectual, and interesting.

If class and education are crucial factors in Rivers’ treatment, Yealland reduces all cases
to a problem that must be overcome physically, regardless of the subject’s background. In
Hysterical Disorders of Warfare (1918) he proudly narrates a torturous session in which he
applied electricity to a mute soldier’s throat to get him to talk. Although he doesn’t specify the rank, the soldier is almost certainly an officer. His descriptions are, as Showalter writes, “so brutally direct in their power tactics as to seem painfully embarrassing to contemporary readers.” What Showalter reads as embarrassing is Yealland’s direct sovereignty over his animalized and infantilized subject. While Showalter, writing in the Foucauldean light of the 1980s, thinks of power in the subtle terms of ambiguity, as a kind of ether through which subjects find and position themselves socially, Yealland is a military doctor, and so a direct representative of state power. In intervals between shocking a patient’s neck with electrodes (after “hot plates” and lit cigarettes had been applied to his throat and tongue) he tells the patient threateningly “you do not understand your condition as I do, and the time you have already spent with me is not long in comparison with the time I am prepared to stay with you.”

The contrast to the academic and peaceful Rivers is obvious, but Yealland and Rivers both produce their cures through forms of paternalism. Rivers was famously beloved by patients and portrayed as the sympathetic “father-confessor” in Siegfried Sassoon’s Sherston’s Progress. Sassoon writes of Rivers benevolently observing patients with the “half-shy look of a middle-aged person intruding on the segregative amusements of the young,” and asserts that his own “definite approach to mental maturity began with [his] contact with the mind of Rivers.”

Yealland’s relationship with his patients is equally fatherly, if more frighteningly so, and it actively discourages psychological development in any fashion but that prescribed by Yealland and the state, for which Yealland stands as a surrogate. Yealland relies on an external symbol of paternal power, the effects of which are psychological, not physical. His narration of his treatment continues:

I said to him “are you glad you have made such progress?” […] he began to cry and whispered in a stammer, “I want a drink of water,” and I replied
“Yes, you will have a drink of water in a few seconds, in fact just as soon as you can utter a sound.” He again made an attempt to leave the room, and I said firmly to him, “You will leave the room when you are speaking—speaking normally. I know you do not want the treatment suspended now you have made such progress. You are a noble fellow, and these ideas which come into your mind and make you want to leave me before you are cured do not represent your true self. I know you are anxious to be cured and are happy you have recovered to such an extent; now you are tired and cannot think properly, but you must make every effort to think in the manner characteristic of your true self—a hero of Mons. You are already doing splendidly, and I am satisfied that you are now determined to talk and I am very pleased with you; more than that, I am proud of you.” His attitude then changed considerably, and from that time he made every attempt to recover.  

Yealland’s treatment of the problem is less Freudian than Rivers’s in its professed methods, but it still works by invoking the paternal threat of castration, again and again, to draw the subject into the social, symbolic realm. Although Yealland believes in the efficacy of electric shocks as much as the patient, the electricity acts as a negative re-enforcement, lacking any positive physiological effects of its own. It is a direct threat of paternal punishment, whereas Rivers’s method is more humane and, as Showalter indicates, probably more effective at containing the rebellion against the military of which the subject’s symptoms are, in her reading, a manifestation.  

But Yealland’s definition of the problem of shell-shock, and his approach to its cure, underscore the blurry line between politically qualified life that contains animal desire (bios) and unqualified, bare life, which cannot subordinate immediate desire to social/political exigencies. Yealland’s withholding of the water is thus more than a simple motivational technique: Yealland becomes a physical manifestation of the soldier’s psychic check against physical (libidinal) satisfaction over communal obligation. The soldier must subordinate himself to the social before he will be permitted to satisfy, in a controlled way, his personal, physical desire, and the social injunction is that he return to his “true character,” a disciplined hero of Mons. Like Dr. Moreau, Yealland derives pleasure from inflicting pain and in the attempt to
humanize this degraded and tormented creature, re-enforcing physical pain with appeals to social
duty in the name of reason. His discursive representation in the narrative extends the pleasures of
power.

These treatments of shell shock, with their emphasis on subordinating the physical to a
social order represented by a father-figure inform many wartime and interwar representations of
shell shock that contributed to the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis in Britain. In her
Lacanian analysis of paternity in *The Return of the Soldier*, Susan Varney claims the novel
diagnoses how shell shock’s threat to established gender and familial roles emptied interpersonal
relations of their illusory basis in paternal power, which had always been the foundation and
image of state power. “The psychic truth upon which one acts is that there *is* a father,” writes
Varney, “a guarantor of the possibility of social relations (as well as a powerful prohibitor and
protector).”242 The state always recognized the unique rights of the father over his family;
Varney cites Edmund Burke’s evocation of the father as a model of state power that commands
the subject to respect the state in a natural, pre-social way, and ensures the state’s natural right
over its subjects’ lives.243 As Yealland and Rivers’ treatments demonstrate, when this “psychic
truth” is jeopardized, and the subject refuses to engage in the social order, the state must
intervene and re-assert its paternal power to socialize the subject through discipline. In the
collusion of state power and psychiatric power, the psychiatrist becomes the figure of paternal
power, the representative charged with bringing wayward sons and daughters back into the fold.
Yealland’s particularly sinister paternalism, which punishes and praises, requiring the subject to
desire and request further pain, crystallizes the relations among psychiatry, the damaged subject,
and the fundamentally paternal model of the state. West’s Chris Baldry and Woolf’s Septimus
Smith both recognize and respond to this power structure and the surrogate fathers deployed to re-socialize them, although in strikingly different ways.

IV. “This Shattering of Our World”: Paternalist Impressions in The Return of the Soldier

*The Return of the Soldier* was the first extended narrative depiction of shell shock, written during the peak of the war and published well before its end.\(^\text{244}\) The novel tells the story of Chris Baldry, an upper class Englishman who returns from the front with amnesia. He thinks it is fifteen years earlier, and he rejects his wife and social obligations for the love of Margaret Gray, the now middle-aged innkeeper’s daughter he had loved in his youth. His dalliance with this “shabby” woman symbolically threatens all that is supposedly virtuous in the English patriarchal and imperial system the war was fought to protect, and this sexual rebellion’s forceful repression (through a psychoanalytic intervention) is necessary to return the family to what can only be the semblance of their pre-war “normality.” West employs shell shock not only to question the biopolitical assumptions on which state and psychiatric power are founded, showing their reliance on an untenable homology to paternal family power; she also uses it to develop the techniques of modernist narrative, employing an impressionism derived through James via Conrad and Ford to express the ideological ramifications of this modern problem. *The Return of the Soldier* both reflects and builds on the public, primarily masculinist, narratives of shell shock’s analysis, containment, and treatment.

It is not surprising that West and other feminists used shell shock as the impetus for experimental narratives that interrogate the complacently patriarchal culture that limits women’s social and political involvement.\(^\text{245}\) Shell shock metaphorically exposes how power disperses itself not through official state apparatuses against civic society—as according to Foucault,
Western thought had long held—but through civic society, down to the level of the family. West uses shell shock to demonstrate the inherent contradictions in this pervasive power, always gendered as male and patriarchal, which results in metaphorical and actual violence against and oppression of women, and neuroses in both sexes. *The Return of the Soldier* questions the foundations of imperial patriarchal culture, and explores the ramifications of an attenuated or delegitimized patriarchal order. West’s narrative does with shell shock precisely the opposite of what the male discourses of Northfield, Milne, Rivers, Yealland and the War Office Report desire, arresting recovery to focus on the possible meanings of shell shock’s multiple significations for gender and class, and imagining what resistance to the state, civil, and psychiatric interventions to confine and repress it could mean.

The plot of *The Return of the Soldier*, stripped of its defining psychological nuances, is simple. In the spring of 1916, lower middle-class Margaret Gray arrives at the magisterial Baldry Court to inform its inhabitants—Kitty, the wife of Captain Chris Baldry, who is serving in France, and his cousin, Jenny Baldry—that Chris has been “shell-shocked” and suffers amnesia. He thinks it is 1901, when he courted Margaret, and that they are still intimate. Jenny narrates Chris’s homecoming, his agony in trying to accept beautiful and shallow Kitty, and his inability to remember, unaided, his dead son, Oliver. In the end, Chris is cured by the unconventional therapies of Dr. Gilbert Anderson, who returns him to his repressed and oppressive role as a disciplined and patriarchal soldier. The actual war never enters into the story; Chris’s injury is only depicted in a revelatory, despairing vision that Jenny instantly represses, and that provides a crucial key to the text’s encoding of the male and female sexual trauma embedded in ideological expectations, which Chris’s shell shock ultimately exposes.
Through exposing the work of repression, *The Return of the Soldier* critiques the dominant response to shell shock as enacting outmoded gender prescriptions; the cultural, medical and state reactions to war trauma naively affirm English myths of essential masculine character while simultaneously revealing their constructedness. Chris Baldry represents the failure of “proper male conduct” the Great War partly engendered and partly revealed, and thus, embarrassingly, the war’s failure to fulfill the state’s biopolitical mandate to preserve the way of life of the race. Chris, once a hard-working English imperialist profiteer and paragon of masculine virtue, brings back to England psychological, social, and sexual disruptions in which, the novel indirectly posits, lie the seeds of a potential change to England’s power structure and the only possibilities of redeeming the war’s destruction. West’s representation of shell shock neither condemns the war’s inhumanity, nor accurately describes its effects on soldiers; rather, it functions as a hermeneutic through which she explores England’s sexual power structures.

The novel’s tension derives from the narrator’s fraught relations to what she sees as the “plot”—that is, the story of Chris’s shell shock and recovery, which she constructs from memory in an impressionist style. Jenny’s narrative fluctuates between repressed knowledge and artificial innocence. Her inquisitive mind fights her desire to contain or suppress what Chris’s experience suggests about the life they had shared together. Like Milne and Northfield, Jenny and her community do not try to understand the malady or its sources. Rather, they consciously avoid inquiry and only analyze Chris’s problem unwillingly or unconsciously through their attempts to reverse it. Jenny and Kitty’s anxiety to see Chris cured shows the force of external pressure on the soldier, who is explicitly compared to a symbol of state sovereignty: to Jenny and Kitty, when Chris was healthy he was “as a flag flying from our tower.” Significantly, though,
Jenny’s trauma doubles Chris’s, and as her narration continues her desire to cure Chris vacillates depending on her willingness or ability to examine her own emotional and sexual desires.

The sophistication of West’s accomplishment in crafting Jenny’s narration, I argue, makes this novel more effective than even some sympathetic critics have realized. West created so psychologically complex a narrator that the central trauma of the story is only implied by her descriptions of the action and other characters. Indeed, the form of Chris’s shell shock reveals West’s real interests, the everyday traumas of sexual subjugation and psychical violence that paternalist ideology imposes on both women and men. Jenny’s closest formal relative is Ford Madox Ford’s revolutionary narratological accomplishment, John Dowell, who thinks he is only bearing witness to the story he narrates in The Good Soldier (1915), but whose narration reveals indirectly what he is unwilling or unable to realize about his own sexual and social frustration. Jenny, too, is more than a merely unreliable narrator, but rather a central figure whose trauma partially shapes, creates and doubles Chris’s trauma, both in France and England. Jenny’s sexual repression and her admitted jealousy of Kitty and Margaret reveal the limits of sexuality as an ordering kinship and social bond. Jenny thinks she is happy in her role as Baldry Court’s loyal spinster. Margaret, having lost Chris, marries a man of her class who brings her no satisfaction. Chris and Kitty’s marriage, publicly admired, is a performative social obligation, with no real bonds of affection. The recognitions of conventional sexual and kinship structures’ potential emptiness and merely social significance constitute the lasting and potentially liberatory damage the war has inflicted on the Edwardian idyll. The return home of the shell-shocked soldier brings a realization, as Varney points out, of the infondé of culture and power—thereby allowing the emergence of Jenny’s own repressed sexuality, which now finds, to Jenny’s dismay, room for expression.  

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Jenny’s narration, even from the beginning, fluctuates between Edwardian complacency and a realization that Edwardian culture forces subjects into restrictive social and gender roles through pervasive paternal violence. Baldry Court is so masculinist in its ideology, yet so sterile in its reality that it crushes male subjectivity in the cradle. The novel opens with Kitty and Jenny in Oliver’s nursery. The baby himself, dead five years, could not thrive in a world that confronted him almost immediately with demands that he develop a fierce masculinity; an overly paternalist power structure prevents the organic growth of a new generation. Chris, replicating the gender and class demands that literally stood in the way of his own potential happiness, had bought Oliver an enormous rocking horse, imposing on him too early the paternal injunction to master the animal instinct and tame it to a social will outside himself (4). His mother surrounded him with a fierce menagerie of toy animals, the tiger, in particular, always ready to pounce and serving as a reminder of the imperialism through which the Baldrys and their class make their money. Oliver’s error in referring to Jesus Christ as “Tender Leopard” instead of “Tender Shepherd” demonstrates how the pastoral function of religion is here replaced by paternal authority’s insistence on tough masculinity. The menagerie represents how animals are transformed in discourse not into symbols of pre-social drives, but into symbols of cultural intelligibility the child must master. The flesh, signified by the beast, submits to the logos of the father. Furthermore, Oliver’s ball and jersey, with which Margaret will later recall Chris to his past life, serve as reminders to Chris of the masculinist command which he, having suffered under himself, imposed on his child to “play up! play up! And play the game.”

Jenny, too, is indoctrinated in the patriarchal values that she narrates without recognizing as causes of the war and the infertility that is the war’s symbol and legacy. She laments her selfishness in wanting Chris back in this English idyll, unwilling to admit what her narration
shows—that Baldry Court is a hollow performance space (7). Jenny is unwilling or unable to work out the significance of her feelings about Chris and Kitty’s marriage, as well. When she imagines a price attached to Kitty, as if Kitty were on the cover of a magazine, she does not pursue the obvious implication that she sees Kitty as a commodity or ornament, or that this implies that Chris has acquired Kitty for Baldry Court under the injunction to perpetuate its tightly structured beauty and its name (4). Jenny lingers at the edge of a realization that the English ideals she outwardly celebrates constitute a confinement of desire by patriarchal order, but she frequently and self-consciously shies away from the brink of such realizations.

Steve Pinkerton, like many critics, reads Jenny’s narration fairly straightforwardly, and contends that the novel demonstrates, through Chris’s coming to terms with his loss at the end, and recognition of his forgotten life in the artifacts of his dead son, that trauma must speak before it can be overcome. In this formulation, the novel constantly defers dealing with mental and emotional war trauma, which is only ever imagined. Trauma speaks loudly, if unknowingly, however, through Jenny’s narration. While recovery is deferred from Chris until the very end, when he masters his incontinent discourse and reverts to British type, the whole narration is Jenny’s talking herself into a realization of her trauma, both at the limitations of her position and at what Chris’s condition actually signifies about the myths on which her comfort and self-assurance are founded. Wyatt Bonikowski makes slightly more of Jenny’s unreliability in his argument that the novel is a Freudian representation of how Chris discovers his death drive in France and brings it home, to infect Baldry Court. Bonikowski argues that this death drive is “connected to” Jenny’s passion for Chris, but he doesn’t specify how—primarily because he, too, reads Jenny as a rather one-dimensional character. Although he recognizes Jenny as traumatized, the exact connection is obscured by Jenny’s inability to render objectively the causes of Chris’s
trauma. Their connected death drive is mediated by sexual trauma: Jenny’s trauma doubles Chris’s by replicating, albeit vicariously, the sexual initiation that constitutes the moment he can’t move past. Sexual initiation creates, or awakens, the death drive: it is at the moment just before consummation with Margaret—the moment to which the shell-shocked Chris returns—that Chris’s development is arrested (37).

While Bonikowski attributes Jenny’s war dreams to her desire to suffer alongside Chris, she actually suffers a sympathetic terror that is more about the corruption or violence of her own denied and repressed sexuality than about Chris’s danger. Her terror is that her ideal of masculinity—everybody’s ideal of masculinity, in this novel—has always masked a fundamental sublimation of personal desires to a rigid mode of social, state and economic being, dictated from above. Jenny is consistently on the verge of realizing, when presented with the rupture of Chris’s shell shock, that the English, at the level of their bodies, their desires, their frustrated jouissance, are in thrall to their own global domination, which commands them, through pervasive social structures as much as through conscription and propaganda, to serve.

Jenny tries not to realize that Chris has always had hidden desires that sometimes went against social and paternal expectations, i.e., his desire for the lower middle-class Margaret and his desire not to take on the administration of the family mining venture. Her repression becomes more difficult as Chris’s behavior reveals that the conditions of the war have chipped away at the biopolitical distinction that made him a political subject, rather than an agent free to pursue his desire outside a rigid chain of command. Though Chris has been visibly content in his marriage, as Varney points out, he has suffered under his father’s disapproval and the necessity to step in and become the patriarch, the symbol of order and the locus of the symbolic power that orders society. His amnesia therefore takes him to the moment just before he was forced into the
patriarchal role.\textsuperscript{256} Through amnesia, Chris rebels against the social order he personifies, rejecting identification both as a filial subject of power and as a paternal agent. Unlike Milne and Northfield, who claim to have made every effort to regain their positions within the power hierarchy, Chris only reluctantly accepts the circumstances Margaret, Jenny and Kitty explain to him, while refusing to realize them. Jenny is at first revolted by Chris’s rejection of his role and his love for Margaret, and later enthralled by what she painfully recognizes to be its purity—that is, its lack of reference to any external social or power structure.

Ann Norton’s analysis of West’s “paradoxical feminism” indicates that it no more constitutes an essentialist condemnation of masculinity than an essentialist celebration of femininity. However, Norton demonstrates that West did have essentialist views of what masculinity and femininity should be. These views are often hard to reconcile with her feminism and her biography, particularly her insistence that women should nurture men, the creators of culture.\textsuperscript{257} Although Jenny presents Chris as unique, the novel shows how he is always interpellated into a representation of man as a generality—he is “the soldier,” and in most details West presents him as conforming to that representative position, even when his psychological condition betrays his hatred of it. In this respect, Chris represents the limitations his class imposes on him, and how those limitations will be transformed by the revelation that his idealized subject position is founded on self-denial and an illusory paternal power. This overt historicization and sexualization of Chris’s trauma demonstrates that West was attuned to the larger implications that shell shock, and the war, would have for England. Chris is not merely a casualty of war—ideology, class and gender comprise his neurosis, which is a “pre-existing condition.” West brings the social implications of this revelation of pre-existing neuroses to light, revealing how the patriarchal structure of prewar England bred sexual neuroses in men and
women, rendering their lives metaphorically sterile. Shell shock is not an anomaly or a physical injury in West’s interpretation. Rather, it reproduces at the physical level the metaphorical paralysis, the mutism, the semi-willed amnesia of the baselessness of prewar patriarchal ideology and repressive character, and by extension the baselessness of the war. The novel suggests that Chris’s amnesia makes him “saner than the rest of us” (58). His self-erasure through breakdown points to a larger truth about his individual identity: in a fundamental way, before his shell shock, it had not been permitted to exist.

Jenny comes close to revealing this in her own excursus on how extraordinary Chris was, how he was always hoping things would transform into something that would adequately satisfy his desire. His desires create in him a double-bind of upward mobility and imperialist and patriarchal expectations taking him away from what he truly wants, i.e., arrest in the stage where he first finds an outlet for an emotion unmediated by social expectation. His amnesia suspends him in the moment just before consummation, cherishing his unsanctioned desire’s imminent satisfaction. His core trauma is linked to this sexual initiation, before he must step into the role of the father and renounce his personal jouissance to meet the demands of the nation. What he desires, what his amnesia gives him, is arrest in the moment of initiation, which precludes growth of kinship structures and the perpetuation of empire.

It is immediately after this initiation that Chris is pressed into service, directly in the name of his overbearing father, to serve the empire. Chris is suddenly forced to go to Mexico, to take care of the family mining business, leaving his young lover behind. In the inscrutable way of bad fathers, Mr. Baldry does not tell the family about his decision to send Chris until the last moment, relying on his sovereignty as the pater familis to obviate any possible objection.
Furthermore, the mode in which he finally does let the family know seems, as Jenny presents it, calculated to force Chris into a public display of his use value as an upper-class son:

At last there came a morning when he said to Mrs. Baldry across the breakfast-table: “I’ve sent for Chris. If the boy’s worth his salt—” It was an appalling admission, like the groan of an old ship as her timbers shiver, from a man who doubted the capacity of his son, as fathers always doubt the capacity of the children born of their old age (47).

Jenny’s comparison of Mr. Baldry to a ship almost explicitly invokes the metaphor of the ship of state, and the doubt that he feels for Chris’s capacity may reflect the broader cultural doubts that the older British generation had about the younger, which suffered such unprecedented breakdown during a war whose conditions were largely ignored at home. The widespread fears of decline and degeneration signaled by ubiquitous neurasthenia had caused many to speculate that the comfort that Empire had brought to middle and upper class Englishman may have robbed the younger generation of the “salt” that had built that empire. As the war would be, some thirteen years later and for a younger group, this call to serve is Chris’s first opportunity to “prove himself” in the masculine public sphere.

As if taking too seriously the command to leave aside childish things, Chris leaves without telling Margaret where he is going and what he must do. After a fight with her, ostensibly caused by his jealousy at catching her in a boat and laughing uproariously at another man’s lack of ability with the phallic oars, Chris leaves in a fit of rage more likely directed at his father than at Margaret. Through a tragic mishap of incompetent mail forwarding, Margaret never gets Chris’s apologies, and moves to her suburban stain of a community, eventually marrying the feeble Mr. Gray, whom Jenny describes on first seeing him working in the tiny garden as “not so much digging as exhibiting his incapacity to deal with a spade” (40).
In being faithful to his youthful desire on his return from France, and offering Margaret at least the fantasy of what life might have been like with a man who is not an incompetent duffer (he is certainly a master of oars, and no doubt of spades as well), Chris is unfaithful not only to his wife, but to the performance Kitty and Jenny have so carefully constructed. He reveals that, beneath his own impeccably maintained façade, he has always nursed desires that Jenny has been unable, in her social conformity, to acknowledge. Likewise, the naïve letter from Chris’s clergyman cousin Frank, which reports Chris’s condition (after pausing effetically, and, in such a letter, quite tactlessly, to extol the virtues of French omelets and scorn the indecency of the “new army,” among other things), demonstrates his unwillingness to acknowledge that his much more masculine cousin was not as devoted to respectability as he had always assumed. Frank states “I had no suspicion that Chris had this side to his nature, and it was almost a relief when he fainted again” (20). The letter reveals that the younger Chris was keeping secrets in a sense, too, and that the taint of nonconformism Frank detects is not wholly false, nor merely a function of brain damage. Having had no idea about this side of Chris’s nature, Frank does not come to admit that Chris may have been repressing a more natural, less social desire to transgress class and patriarchal demands. Welcoming his unconsciousness, Frank demonstrates that to the morality he represents, no Chris is better than this Chris.

Jenny’s suppression also reveals an as yet unexplored facet of the novel’s reflection upon its historical moment. In conceiving returning soldiers as potential carriers of sexually disruptive pathogens, she indirectly engages the known but unmentionable fact that soldiers were bringing home venereal diseases on a large scale.260 While the rampant prostitution always attendant on war is not directly mentioned in The Return of the Soldier, it is a powerful subtext, allegorizing the fear of disruption to healthy and socially sanctioned modes of kinship. Jenny struggles with
her realization of a deeper truth behind Chris’s seemingly deranged desire and with her own prophetic visions of the degeneration the war is bringing to British masculinity. Depending on Jenny’s frame of mind, Margaret—the object of Chris’s desire, for whom he throws over all social decency and state allegiance—comes to represent either hyper-individualized, transcendental and extra-physical love, or anonymous and hyper-physical prostitution.

Jenny, like Kitty, is appalled by Margaret at first, meeting her rather as the dreary Margaret Gray than as the absolute object of desire, Margaret Allington. In her infatuation with Chris, though, she comes to love Margaret because Chris loves her (although Jenny and Margaret’s kiss before they set out to cure Chris implies an attraction not directly mediated by male sexuality). Yet Jenny usually describes Margaret in terms of animalism and corruption. Her existence, and the modernity she represents to Jenny, is a contamination to the ideologically hollow, but grandiose, Baldry Court. Jenny describes her as coming from “the red suburban stain which fouls the fields three miles nearer London than Harroweald,” and laments that “[o]ne cannot now protect one’s environment as one once could” (9). This focus on the need for prophylaxis against foul red stains, of protecting the physical and social integrity the repetition of “one” implies, suggests the encroaching of disease, which, more than mere poverty, Margaret initially represents to Kitty and Jenny. She is described variously as an insect and a disease. Jenny and Kitty are appalled by the proximity of her shabby pigskin purse, and feel the need to protect Chris from its metaphorical representation of both sexual and monetary desire. As Jenny constantly approaches and backs away from the edge of realization, so too do Jenny’s descriptions of Margaret toy with outright comparisons to prostitution that never fully crystallize. Jenny sees Margaret as a glove that has grown dusty and shabby after falling behind the bed at a hotel (10-15). She fixes her hat with “something out of a little bottle bought at the chemist’s” (9).
Furthermore, Jenny and Kitty interpret her, at first, as mercenarily after Chris’s money. That these are the interpretations available to them shows the degree to which they have internalized a disdain for the lower middle-class and for all things outside the fastidiously maintained grounds of Baldry Court. Such attitudes establish how profoundly Chris’s rejection of his role as the patriarchal sovereign of Baldry Court in favor of Margaret will confound Kitty and Jenny.

Despite these deprecations, in the fourth chapter Jenny’s tormenting jealousy of Margaret and her sexual desire for her cousin become clear, even to herself. When Chris goes out to the pond to row and Jenny fetches Margaret, her tone has transformed. The intense class snobbery she still feels is now conflicted with the natural charm she suddenly sees in Margaret; at this point, Jenny has almost broken through the cordon sanitaire of Baldry Court, represented by the beds of fastidiously maintained flowers that keep out wild or uncultivated plants (49). In falling in love with Margaret, Jenny replicates Chris’s own liberating fall from sexual and class circumspection; she symbolically pitches herself off a knoll onto a pile of dead leaves, replicating both Chris’s sexual “fall” from his social position, and his “sanity,” and the literal fall she imagines for him into the mud of no-man’s-land (57). Jenny is more willing to acknowledge her feelings for Chris, uncharacteristically admitting, when Margaret is eager to see Chris “I suppose the truth is that I was physically so jealous of Margaret that it was making me ill” (51). The “physically” is ambiguously placed, and Jenny’s trauma here doubles the ambiguity of shell shock’s dual valence as either a physical or psychological phenomenon—she is both having physical manifestations of her jealousy in the form of illness, and she is jealous of the physical past, and always impending present, shared by Chris and Margaret.

Kitty’s jealousy, too, focuses on Margaret’s maternal and sexual control of Chris, demonstrating how thoroughly war propaganda saturates the lives of these women. By insisting
to Jenny that they recall Chris to his former senses, Margaret fulfills the role of the empowered
mother in the campaign posters depicting women pressuring their sons into military service.261
As the mother who recalls Chris to his duty, Margaret functions like the Freudian fetish for Chris
in her fulfillment of his desire for two simultaneous and conflicting Freudian archetypes—
deferecence to the phallic mother (superego), and non-socially constrained sexual freedom (id).

The crisis of Jenny’s traumatic sexual jealousy reaches its culmination in an elaborate
vision that is the key to the sexual trauma of the novel: Jenny sees Chris behind the frontline in
his moment of shell shock, physically lying in the mud while his soul communes with some
strange God, the “soul of the universe.” This vision contains crucial elements that critics rarely
discuss and which reveal the sexual nature of the trauma war has caused not only for Jenny, but
also for the superficially satisfied and rigid English patriarchy of the prewar years. Shell shock,
in this vision, is figured as wiping clean the slate of socialization, a radical confrontation with the
presocial desires that have been plastered over Chris’s subjectivity through indoctrination into
correct attitudes regarding class, sexuality, empire, and industry. The problem that this vision
reveals is that, more than simply death, or madness, what the returned soldier brings home is a
transformed attitude to the physical core of his humanity, to sexuality, and to the repressive
social order for which he fought:

There, past a church that lacks its tower, stand a score of houses, each hideous
With patches of bare bricks that show like sores through the ripped-off plaster
and uncovered rafters that stick out like broken bones. There are people still
living here. A slouchy woman sits at the door of a filthy cottage, counting some
dirty linen and waving her bare arm at some passing soldiers. And at another house
there is a general store […] It is in there that Chris is standing, facing across the
counter an old man […] with a magnificent smile at once lewd and benevolent,
repulsive with dirt and yet magnificent by reason of the Olympian structure of his
body. I think he is the soul of the universe, equally cognizant and disregardful of
every living thing, to whom I am not more dear than the bare-armed slouchy
woman at the neighboring door. And Chris is leaning on the counter, his eyes
glazed. (This is his spirit; his body lies out there in the drizzle, at the other end of
the road.) He is looking down in the two crystal balls that the old man’s foul, strong hands have rolled across to him. In one he sees Margaret […] as she is transfigured in the light of eternity. Long he looks there; then drops a glance to the other, just long enough to see that in its depths Kitty and I walk in bright dresses through our glowing gardens. We had suffered no transfiguration, for we are as we are, and there is nothing more to us. The whole truth of us lies in our material seeming. He sighs a deep sigh of delight and puts out a hand to the ball where Margaret shines. His sleeve catches the other one and sends it down to crash in a thousand pieces on the floor. The old man’s smile continues to be lewd and benevolent; he is still not more interested in me than in the bare-armed woman. Chris is wholly inclosed in his intentness on his chosen crystal. No one weeps for this shattering of our world (59-60).

Jenny’s description of the front, gleaned from films and newspaper photos and supplemented by her imagination, is couched in the same rhetoric as her earlier description of Margaret and her home. Jenny’s vision adds sexual disease to the violence of the emblematic ruined church. The destroyed church, more than merely symbolic of destroyed moral order, vulnerably lacks its outer (phallic) symbol of force and power. The sores on the houses invoke the “stain” of the ugly and modern little town in which Margaret lives, depressingly anonymous and now universal; the taint of diseased sexuality attaches to the home as well as the church. The slouchy woman, with her dirty linen and bare arms, suggests a prostitute. For Jenny, the violence of the war brings a disease that overcomes domesticity and the ordering spaces of kinship. The master of the universe with whom Chris negotiates resembles a satyriatical “natural man,” or “man of the forest,” who exists outside the circumscriptions of contractual and moral human culture; untied to any law in this lawless landscape, he symbolizes the unfettered self-sovereign wild man—a man of pre-social desire lacking any hierarchic sense of civil society, for whom all men and women are the same. He presents Chris with two irreconcilable options: Chris can fulfill presocial desire by breaking the omnipresent borders of ideology, or he can choose restraint within an artificial and symbolic domestic sphere (representative of contractual civilization) not of his choosing. The wish fulfillment of his amnesia suggests he has been living the superficial
latter life for the past fifteen years. In his moment of shell shock, Chris is divided into a merely physical and insignificant body, and a wholly psychical manifestation. Margaret is indescribable in her transcendent and incorporeal ethereal form because she is no longer Margaret, but an abstract, non-individuated symbol of pre-social desire. Although Jenny can’t see Margaret’s transformation, this vision is, for Jenny, the “light of eternity.” Margaret is not here an individual subject, but a symbol of the real, the unreachable that transcends social and linguistic referential and representative structures; this ethereal Margaret is Jenny’s vision of total unmediated desire.

Surprisingly, Jenny notes that, to the lewd and benevolent master, she herself is no more dear (expensive?) than the prostitute, revealing her own traumatizing realization of essential physiological human equality—the inability of culture actually to make of one person a more essentially or valuable human body. The ending line of this passage, “No one weeps for this shattering of our world” is almost a cliché given the “end of the belle-époque” narrative, but it is actually prescient: nobody will weep for the world that is gone, in which outmoded moral piety forced people to live out ideological illusions, when they will have to weep instead at the world that there now is, a world forced out of its illusions at a moment in which it has already demoralized and slaughtered the generation which stood to benefit from such liberation. There is a double-valence in the shattering of this world: Jenny cannot re-establish the previous naïveté in which she accepted the patriarchal social order, nor can she imagine a social order that would allow development of more equal relationships between sexes and classes, permitting people more fully to recognize shared humanity.

Chris’s return to soldierly bearing is doubly traumatic. It demonstrates the injunction to go on living in forms that no longer fit a bitterly experienced world, without acknowledging the experiences that lie just beyond the pale of conventional morality. The shattering of the world
that comes with Jenny’s realization creates a space in which old myths might be questioned, and new ways of coexisting might come into being. But in West’s novel, psychoanalysis, the tool which was thought to expose the falsity of old morality, comes to patch that morality together and force those who have looked beyond the circumscriptions of its ideology back into prescribed subject positions: Jenny is the helpless and jealous onlooker, Margaret is both the mother and the lover, ideologically bound to force the man she loves back to pointless war and probable death, Chris is once again the (unironically) Good Soldier. Materialistic Kitty is the only one to get what she wants: a return to the semblance of order at Baldry Court. The potential shell shock exposes is wasted by a refusal to confront the deep, persistent ideological problems it reveals. Rather, a specialist compels the soldier back to his duty of protecting by embodying the imperial patriarchal civilization England is fighting for. Chris is compelled to recognize the one relation powerful enough to force him back into the social realm—that with his dead son.

The appearance of the man who will cure Chris, both temporally and physically, underscores a crucial transformation of power that shell shock engendered. Throughout the novel, no superior officer ever comes to reprimand Chris or threaten punishment. No medical officer comes to offer an experienced specialist’s advice. The entire burden of official power for rehabilitating this soldier falls into the hands of a private doctor whose innocent and amiable appearance belies the surety of his power. Jenny describes her first encounter with Dr. Gilbert Anderson as one wrought with foreboding, as if she knows she is witnessing a social transformation of the way in which power circulates and draws the wayward into line:

I was startled to begin with by his unmedical appearance. He was a little man with winking blue eyes, a flushed and crumpled forehead, a little gray mustache that gave him the profile of an amiable cat, and a lively taste in spotted ties, and he lacked the appetiteless look which is affected by distinguished practitioners. He was at once more comical and more suggestive of power than any other doctor I had ever seen, and this difference was emphasized by his unexpected
occupation. A tennis-ball which he had discovered somewhere had roused his sporting instincts, and he was trying at what range it was possible to kick it between two large stones which he had placed close together in front of the steps up to the house (65).

Though certainly not a threatening presence in appearance, Dr. Anderson’s “unexpected occupation” reveals exactly that his official occupation is to rouse in any invalid the sporting instinct and recall him to England’s ongoing cultural and imperial “game.” He has arranged the goal at the steps of the house, signifying that when he gets his hands on the real object of his visit, his goal will be to kick him back through the doors of Baldry Court, restoring him as the paternal figure within the properly circumscribed kinship sphere.

Dr. Anderson’s sport at the steps of the house shows that he is a temporary patriarch, a kind of surrogate father, and he takes easy control of Chris and the three women who accompany him. Furthermore, his attitudes to the women oddly mirror Chris’s. He quickly realizes that Jenny “[does] not matter,” forms a sympathetic attachment to Margaret, and treats Kitty with the politeness her position demands, stoically swallowing his annoyance. In his role as the surrogate father, Dr. Anderson is the opposite of the “lewd and benevolent” master of the universe who had offered Chris his unimpeded course of enjoyment. Dr. Anderson appears to remind Chris (and Kitty and Jenny) that none of them have such a choice.

Dr. Anderson is not, however, an imposing Yeallandian father figure, physically threatening his patient. He appears benevolent, is fully committed to a psychological explanation of Chris’s malady, and gently rebukes Kitty for calling Chris’s condition madness. He says that he will cure Chris “by talking to him. Getting him to tell his dreams” and he never suggests that there is anything physically wrong with Chris (71). He does, however, assert that Chris’s condition arises from his unhappiness before the war. Jenny and Margaret’s claims that “nothing and everything” was wrong with him and that “he was always dependent” suggest not, as the
War Commission’s report on shell-shock posits, that every sufferer of shell-shock was particularly weak-minded before going to war (72). Rather, Chris is representatively complex; everyone is a potential sufferer of shell shock, even those who had been, “as a flag flying from our tower,” hyper-representative of British ideals of masculinity (80).

In the end, it is not Dr. Anderson who recalls Chris to the present, nor, really, is it Margaret, who delivers the bad news. It is not really even Oliver. Rather, it is what Chris’s paternal relationship to Oliver represents, and the reversed doubling of that paternalism in Chris’s relation to the state. Jenny and Margaret decide on just the thing to bring Chris back to an awareness of the social and political role he is compelled to inhabit: “one of the blue jerseys [Oliver] used to wear” and “the red ball he and his father used to play with on the lawn” (76). Although Jenny has previously described the nursery as full of stuffed animals, these beloved objects, suggestive of pre-social drives, would fail to remind Chris of his double-duty as familial patriarch and son of the fatherland. Rather, the Union Jack colors of the jersey and ball, and the injunction they represent to “play the game,” recall him immediately to the hated reality that his life, his desires, and his body are not his own.263

*The Return of the Soldier* is ultimately the story of the return of the father, the re-affirmation and re-enforcement of the state’s sovereignty to reproduce patriarchy even in the face of its possible dissolution. Rebecca West’s economy and control of language create a structure through which to examine how the biopolitical crises impelled by the war both changed English culture’s fundamental attitudes about sex and domesticity, and masked those changes with a rigid masculinist discourse of regaining control. Jenny’s narration is characterized by the Fordian irony of her inability either to grasp or articulate the signification of what is going on around her. Jenny herself suffers the multiple repressions of constantly facing the terrible consequences the
war will have, and already has had, for a way of life she cherished even as it kept her a domestic prisoner of a social order founded on her subjection to a diffusive paternalist power. In showing British readers the psychological effects of such a system, however, West undermined the omnipresent power of its ideology, suggesting the personal fulfillment possible in the shattering of a moribund world.

V. Mrs. Dalloway and Human Nature: Shell Shock, Class, and the Man of the Forest

Virginia Woolf’s more widely read Mrs. Dalloway has often, as in Showalter’s reading, been paired with The Return of the Soldier as another example of a feminist writer taking advantage of shell shock to explore and expose the problems of Edwardian class and gender roles. Despite their similar focus on the tribulations of a returned and shell-shocked soldier, the two novels work quite differently, and expose, through distinct narrative techniques, different aspects of how shell shock changed the structure of power in Britain. Both novels are close examinations of the ways in which state power impacts domestic and private lives, and also the inner workings of citizens’ minds, constituting the false consciousness on which power relies. Woolf’s novel is not as politically radical as West’s, nor does it use form to recreate, and thereby demonstrate, the inescapable quality of top-down patriarchal power. Rather, Woolf’s form demonstrates the pervasiveness of power among all classes and levels of society. Mrs. Dalloway catches state power in the moment of its retraction from the open and obvious primary factor in subjects’ lives, actually legislated and dictated from above in the parliamentary acts examined in Chapters One and Two. The novel shows the forms in which the war came home permanently: legislative interventions give way to ideological forces passing between people, often directly, and usually unconsciously. West’s Dr. Anderson had hinted at the diffusion of power through civil society,
and power’s seemingly benign disguises. Woolf’s text insists that power is embedded in nearly all civil and social relations, and Clarissa’s day in the life of interwar London is a constant unconscious negotiation and analysis of power.

In the novel, state power asserts its control most directly on Septimus Warren Smith, another shell-shocked veteran. Upon his return to England, like Chris, Septimus faces similar, albeit more invasively normative psychological apparatuses. As with Chris, his shell shock manifests itself partly in what appears to be libidinal desire—in Septimus’s case for his dead comrade Evans. Whereas Chris eventually succeeds at grimly returning to his duties, Septimus is rebellious to the end. He overtly rejects the filial obligations he allegedly bears to his employer, Mr. Brewer, and his two doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, the various surrogate fathers who attempt to claim him. Similarly, he refuses to constitute himself as an agent of power within a standard familial relation with his wife Lucrezia: the Smiths remain childless. Septimus’ suicidal talk with Rezia is explicitly called into question as a matter of legality, and his eventual suicide, his radical act of the one against the all, is a desperate claim to self-sovereignty that puts him outside the social realm of bios, and, ironically, in the moment of his death, into the asocial realm of zoe. Clarissa, on the other hand, contrasts Septimus by establishing her social and physical health by overtly constructing herself in the social and political realm of bios.

Much criticism of Mrs. Dalloway focuses on how the metaphysical connection between Clarissa and Septimus exposes the faults of the social system Woolf set out to criticize. I argue that the “caves” Woolf hollowed out behind Clarissa and Septimus meet at the subterranean and unconscious point of wildness. Woolf wrote in her diary “I should say a good deal about The Hours [Mrs. Dalloway’s working title] and my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The ideas is that
the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment."\textsuperscript{264} These caves, which meet in some subterranean center where the narrator controls their currents and directions like a telephone operator, convey power among the various characters of the novel. The caves also contain the characters’ back-stories and connect them to one another through shared human experience that comes to light when they meet. But if the caves can connect at the surface in mundane interaction, they also can connect at a much deeper, barely recognizable level. The most profound connection in the novel is that between Clarissa and Septimus, two characters who never exchange a word.

The \textit{zoe/bios} distinction is helpful for thinking about Woolf’s treatment of shell shock and why Woolf would double Septimus and Clarissa. As I have demonstrated, many of shell shock’s analysts thought it indicated a reversion to an animal state and was merely a symptom of inadequate self-control. \textit{Mrs. Dalloway} deconstructs the British ideologies of masculinity and class that shell shock’s scandalous appearance threatened, and that constitute structures of state and social power. One of Woolf’s primary areas of exploration is how power’s diffusion through official and social apparatuses contains pre-social impulses within prescribed sexual and social roles. As my readings of archival sources and \textit{The Return of the Soldier} show, shell shock victims recovered or not depending on their submission to social rules, and their ability to overlook what feminist writers such as West and Woolf saw as the most important aspect of shell shock: the aporias of patriarchal power it revealed. Septimus’s refusal to re-socialize and re-situate himself in the web of power-relations demonstrates the impermeable nature of patriarchal ideologies. Woolf’s representatives of these ideologies are Dr. Holmes, who conservatively reads Septimus’s problems as either physical or entirely fictional, and the psychoanalytically astute Dr. Bradshaw, who, like Gilbert Anderson, proves much more effective in his invasiveness and
control. The discourse of these doctors is explicitly disciplinary and legalistic. They are charged with containing Septimus, and the threat he presents, on behalf of the state. They are not interested in helping him find whatever cure might afford him relief. The only way out of their discourse for Septimus seems to be death. Beyond Septimus’s case, *Mrs. Dalloway* demonstrates that the same kind of biopolitical pressure that exerts its control over Septimus shapes the identities of every interwar British subject, if in less obvious ways.

Woolf’s cave technique of excavating the psychology behind each character’s appearance, thoughts, and actions on the page, allows the omniscient narrator to slip in and out of the characters’ minds, revealing their shifting positions as subjects and objects of power, trauma, illness, and madness. To various degrees, each character attempts to understand her or his level of power in various relationships. At a relatively insignificant level, for instance, are Richard Dalloway’s internal complaints about Hugh Whitbread’s officiousness or Clarissa’s pangs of jealousy at not being invited to Lady Bruton’s luncheon.²⁶⁵ In a more damaging submission to power Clarissa marries the “safe” Richard Dalloway, despite her greater affection for Peter Walsh and her attraction to Sally Seton. Likewise, Septimus marries Rezia in an attempt to fulfill his masculine, military role, and potentially as a hysterical response to his attraction to Evans.²⁶⁶

This ubiquitous insecurity about positions does not, however, translate into a revelation about the *infondé* of state and social power, as in *The Return of the Soldier*. Rather, the supposed omniscience of *Mrs. Dalloway*’s narrator provides the assuring safety net of some potentially realizable truth outside the narrative. Like West, Woolf critiques paternalism’s unjustified role as the guarantor of the social, but she also suggests another guarantor who might displace paternalist sovereignty—the aesthetically cultivated narrator, who both connects and reveals.
West’s impressionism functions as a closed circuit in which readers must interpret among voices that cannot be trusted. Woolf clears an internal space for authority in her text through the voice of the detached narrator. Jenny, like John Dowell, Charlie Marlow, and myriad bewildered Jamesian narrators, is caught in the lime of her own tale. Woolf’s narrator is beyond and above it, capable of soaring within the space of a sentence from one character’s crystal-clear mind, unmuddied by the mediation of his or her own attempts at language, to any point in the world.\textsuperscript{267}

The narrator is a kind of benevolent sovereign, variously revealing or re-enforcing class roles and functions. As such, the narrator constitutes a safe spot outside the characters’ reflections on arbitrary power, a coherent power that holds London together as a web of class relations that retains stability. To some extent, Woolf’s narrator thus reproduces the problem that she critiques in Clarissa by suggesting that there is a final and legitimate authority—not the state, necessarily, but perhaps a more liberal form of social governance by class and culture.

West’s Impressionism, I argue, is a more directly political narrative mode than Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness because it locks the reader into the limitations of one necessarily politicized subject position. That is certainly not to suggest Woolf’s method is apolitical, but it is more ambiguous. It has been nearly four decades since scholars and critics began to dismiss the now risible notion, spread by her immediate biographers and her own coterie, that Virginia Woolf was, in Leonard Woolf’s words “the least political animal… since Aristotle invented the definition,” and nearly two decades since Mark Hussey, in his introduction to the first collection of essays to focus exclusively on Virginia Woolf’s relation to war, asserted that

\textit{all} Woolf’s work is deeply concerned with war; that it helps redefine our understanding of the nature of war; and that from her earliest to her final work she sought to explore and make clear the connections between private and public violence, between the domestic and the civic effects of patriarchal society, between male supremacy and the absence of peace, and between ethics and aesthetics.\textsuperscript{268}
Power is an implicit aspect of every relation Hussey lists, and I would add to this list the relation between war and language—how war affects mediation of experience into something that can be shared, or as Elaine Scarry might put it, how war trauma affects a subject’s “making” capacity.\textsuperscript{269}

Indeed, after her first two novels, from \textit{Jacob's Room} (1922) onward, war is a major aspect of all her novels (with the arguable exception of \textit{Orlando} (1928)). \textit{Jacob's Room} was similarly interested in the link between patriarchal violence and war, but it was more diagnostic of how the war came to be and why the British submitted to its proponents’ illogical, illiberal insistences. In \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, Woolf wanted to show not the causes, but war’s effects, not how language leads to war, but what war did to language, specifically the way language mediates biological existence and power relations. Throughout Clarissa’s day in London, and by extension, the five years since the end of the war, those effects are omnipresent, settling over London and its inhabitants so uniformly and gradually as to be scarcely noticeable.

Work on Woolf in recent years has certainly borne out Hussey’s assertion, occasionally to the extent of exaggerating Woolf’s political acumen or inventing for her too radical credentials. Woolf’s engagement with the political is frequently, and I think intentionally, ambiguous. Unlike the more radical, iconoclastic and youthful West, Woolf’s critique of her culture is cautious—she cannot get rid of everything she doesn’t like about modern England without altering a few things she does like. As a result, her experimental shell shock narrative remains ambiguous in its class-consciousness, whereas West’s was searing.\textsuperscript{270} For example, Woolf puts English imperialism in the likeable and incompetent hands of Peter Walsh, who hypocritically claims to be anti-imperialist and whose continuous idle manipulation of his phallic knife suggests a general impotence. Peter exercises a pastoral, muddling and benevolent governance in India, but this casual attitude conceals the political realities of British Imperial
rule. West, on the other hand, famously wrote in one of her first published editorials that “there are two kinds of imperialists: imperialists and bloody imperialists.”

Still, *Mrs. Dalloway* clearly indicts postwar British ideology’s casualness in the face of its own destruction, and its unwillingness to transform the constrictive and outmoded forms Clarissa Dalloway openly celebrates and embodies. The opening of the novel is a *tour de force* representation of the way state power diffuses society and binds subjects, and Woolf is careful to situate the reader specifically in the postwar moment. On her walk to the florist, Clarissa has sudden realizations about what the experience of war has meant for her and her culture. Even before Clarissa explicitly thinks of the war, her reflection that “millions of things had utterly vanished,” suggest both cultural transformation and the obliteration of millions of objectified bodies. When she connects this thought a few paragraphs later to the war, her thinking demonstrates the ineradicable nature of the conflict: “The War was over, except for someone like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favorite, killed” (4-5). These oppositional reactions to the sons’ deaths represent two ways of reacting to the external horror of the war. Her thought that Mrs. Foxcroft was “eating her heart out” revitalizes a cliché by attaching personal grief to the larger culture. The lost Manor House represents, like Baldry Court, a traditional site of cultural power rendered impotent by the loss of the young men born to inhabit it, and the consumption by the war of the heart of English custom. But the emotion bothers Clarissa, who is much more impressed by Lady Bexborough’s display of stoic English character. The dichotomy suggests that while the material realities of Britain’s over-extension will surely eat away at the country, there is yet a refuge for traditional, taciturn, proper Englishness in the
ability to maintain, at all physical and emotional costs, the “stiff upper-lip” and to “get the right idea” that allows subjects to cope with trauma. If the war ultimately cost Britain much of its empire, its values, and its culture, redemption still lies in the possibility of all stoically going under together.

Clarissa’s first fancy that the day is “fresh as if issued to children on a beach” signals an understanding of life as given (3). The word “issued” is unmistakably militaristic; for Clarissa, there is some paternalist authority, trustworthy at least in the fact of its realness, from which the conditions of reality derive. This establishes the false consciousness Clarissa maintains, with some difficulty but usually with conviction, throughout the novel. If life is issued from above, Clarissa’s subjectivity and social position are painstakingly maintained at ground level. Her first encounter of the day is with Hugh Whitbread, who has come up to London “to see doctors” (5). Clarissa and Hugh come immediately face to face with the unmentionable facts of biology, a common human characteristic that nevertheless holds humans apart. Hugh’s desire not to specify Evelyn’s “internal ailment” underscores the fundamental secrecy of the human body, its incommunicability, and also suggests that Hugh, who is a pale shadow of the more abominable Dr. Bradshaw, may be concealing Evelyn’s mental breakdown. His vague statement that Evelyn is “a good deal out of sorts” suggests more than a physical ailment, and adds psychological significance to the internality of Evelyn’s illness. The suggestion of Evelyn’s illness, coming from the “well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body” of Hugh throws Clarissa into grave self-doubt about her own appearance, suggesting the daily presence of Hugh’s masculine (even sexual, as his illicit kiss of Sally Seton suggests) imposition may account for Evelyn’s being so “out of sorts” (6). His appearance of imperturbable solidity, like a piece of furniture, makes Clarissa feel relatively powerless in his presence.
Clarissa’s expansive mood determines her cheerful reaction to Hugh, despite the discomfort he causes her. Her sense of community with everybody, even “the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) [who] do the same; can’t be dealt with, she felt positive by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life” (4). In affirming Liberal England’s anti-statism, Clarissa seeks to erase the years of state intervention, creating an illusion that liberal governance and character have not “gone under” in the war years. From Clarissa’s perspective, Londoners of all classes share a distaste for organized management of life. Despite the sense that life is “issued,” she reads her community as opposed to the official biopolitical legislation that characterized life during the war. Her suspicion of biopolitical action reveals a potentially neo-liberal attitude. Clarissa essentially wants to deny the efficacy of legislative actions that could help these drunken frumps. Though she senses all aspects of her life come from a superior social ordering force, Clarissa wants to disentangle zoe from the political, to appreciate the fact of living without imposing the order of organization upon life. Loving life in all its serendipity and across class and social borders—which Clarissa only thinks she can do—seemingly opposes Clarissa to the official organization of life, represented by her MP husband, to whom her feelings are always ambiguous. However, her connections to these people, these frumps with whom she would never willingly associate signifies a power more invasive and inescapable than acts of parliament.274 It is not parliamentary acts that hold these subjects in relation to one another, but rather the tolling of Big Ben, which signifies the fact of their moving through culturally significant time and space together in deeply entrenched class positions. Similarly, while the citizens are united in occasionally violent nationalist sentiment by the passing of the limousine, their attention on the sky-writer, whose message addresses their
physical condition and the indirect power the market exerts over them, eclipses state power, allowing the limousine to pass through the gate with “nobody look[ing] at it” (20).

In such presentations of how consumer culture, for instance, takes on the mysterious power of the sovereign, the novel (but never Clarissa) succeeds in Woolf’s stated aim of “criticiz[ing] the social system” of interwar England, its technique occasionally revealing the material realities of class-division and the effacement of labor.275 However, class condescension pervades the novel, and cannot be tidily subsumed into one character’s false consciousness. The primary object of this snobbery is Septimus, and the limitations of the novel’s critique come mostly from the condescending attitude Woolf’s omniscient narrator shows for Septimus, as well as the collusion with authoritative narratives that the creation of the character shows on Woolf’s part.

Beyond the ambiguous presentation of Septimus, to which I will return, Mrs. Dalloway’s narrative technique exposes the narrator’s collusion with the social system she erstwhile criticizes. Natania Rosenfeld is only partially correct in her argument that the various “affinities” Clarissa thinks she has to people and things are more accurately manifestations of Clarissa’s delusions, and that the narrative technique of the interconnecting caves, or web, “belies an iron grid, the skeleton of class division beneath the novel’s fabric.”276 This division is evident enough in Clarissa’s virulent antagonism for Miss Kilman, but it also creeps into the voice of the narrator in more subtle and revealing ways. The narrator vacillates between exposing class frictions and perpetuating them. For instance, the narrator’s description of the effacement of labor in the lunch scene at Lady Bruton’s reads as a Fabian critique:

“And so there began a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of aproned white-capped maids, handmaidens not of necessity, but adepts in a mystery or grand deception […] this profound illusion in the first place about the food—how it is not paid for; and then that the table
spreads itself voluntarily with glass and silver [...] and with the wine and coffee (not paid for) rise jocund visions before musing eyes; gently speculative eyes; eyes to whom life appears musical, mysterious [...]” (102).

This parody of an upper class luncheon shared by the wielders and shapers of state power (Aristocratic Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread with his job at court, and MP Richard Dalloway), emphatically describes those in power as unseeing, contentedly turned inward and ignorant of the conditions on which their comfort is founded. Moreover, the diners’ perception turns the servants into objects whose sole being is in what they make things do. Calling attention to the effacement of their labor, the narrator seems here highly critical of upper class blindness to servants’ subjectivities. These three characters are also distinctly antithetical, in different ways, to Clarissa’s understanding of herself. Lady Bruton is too hard-hearted and given to causes, Hugh is universally regarded as a pompous ass, and Peter Walsh’s disapprobation of him has permanently ruined him, to some degree, for Clarissa. As for her husband, Clarissa chose him over Peter precisely because she knew Richard’s unreflective, uncritical nature (which is underscored in the lunch scene) would leave her free to forge, uncritically, the “odd affinities” Peter would have always questioned.

But the narrator’s presentation of Clarissa among her own servants undermines any characterization of her as more sympathetic than her peers. The narrator frequently dips into the minds of servants and the working class, but only briefly, and generally only to show how they conceive their relationships to their social superiors. The narrator reveals Clarissa’s servant’s thoughts in a parenthetical paragraph that separates her from the rest of the narrative, rendering her more a foreign object in the narrative’s web than one of its constitutive threads:

(And Lucy, coming into the drawing-room with her tray held out, put the giant candlesticks on the mantelpiece, the silver casket in the middle, turned the crystal dolphin towards the clock. They would come; they would stand; they would talk in the mincing tones which she could imitate, ladies
and gentlemen. Of all her mistress was the loveliest—mistress of silver, of linen, of china, for the sun, the silver, doors off their hinges, Rumplemayer’s men, gave her a sense, as she laid the paper-knife on the inlaid table, of something achieved. Behold! Behold! she said, speaking to her old friends in the baker’s shop, where she had first seen service at Caterham, prying into the glass. She was Lady Angela, attending Princess Mary, when in came Mrs. Dalloway) (37).

Initially, Lucy seems to think at least irreverently of the class she serves, with its “mincing tones which she could imitate.” The next line, however, reveals that this is neither simple mockery nor Bhabha-esque mimicry to empowerment, but rather genuine admiration. Lucy’s somewhat fawning admiration of her mistress would be ironic if it were Clarissa’s interpretation of Lucy. What would in that case seem to be Clarissa’s narcissistic delusion here seems to be the narrator’s affirmation of the servant’s fawning attitude toward her mistress. Woolf’s political attitude is ambiguous, as the narrator’s voice should not be mistaken for Woolf’s, but Lucy’s admiration of Clarissa does affirm what Woolf’s writings reveal elsewhere—for all her political and feminist insight, she rarely questions the justice or value of Britain’s rigid class divisions.

Clarissa’s political position is not official, like those of the diners at Lady Bruton’s. Rather, Clarissa is an outlet of the power they create. Lucy’s devotion to Clarissa is presented straightforwardly, not through Clarissa’s egotistical reading of her. She mediates power between the official locus of its creation and those over whom it is most forcefully exerted, the lower and middle classes. Clarissa does not represent Woolf at all. Indeed, Woolf’s diaries show vacillation between sympathy and ridicule for Clarissa. Like Clarissa, though, Woolf’s novel at times replicates the collusion with power that allows Clarissa to “feel the beauty” and “the fun” at the death of Septimus (182).

To make sense of Mrs. Dalloway’s ambivalence toward power, Christopher Herbert revisits the anti-Hegelian, anti-teleological mid-to-late Victorian philosophical movement of
Relativity, convincingly arguing that *Mrs. Dalloway* is both formally and thematically a relativist text that refuses to engage in absolutes. Thematically, the novel presents the inevitable totalitarianism of absolute truth, most thoroughly embodied by Sir William Bradshaw, whom Herbert reads as a textual descendant of “Mr. Murdstone, Mr. Casaubon, Angel Clare [and] Dracula” in the violence with which he imposes his absolutism on others.\(^{279}\) In resisting the violence of absolutism, *Mrs. Dalloway* is “pledged to the potentially severe perturbation of the status quo and keyed to a mission of resistance to the ideology of purificatory violence.”\(^{280}\) Herbert consolidates his claims through more explicit passages from *Three Guineas* that reject the notion of absolute moral truths. His argument about the moral relativism of the novel is convincing, but he tries too hard, in the end, to ally Clarissa herself to this relativist ideology. Woolf may very well, as Herbert’s reading indicates, have recognized that the extreme form of nationalism the war had evoked, and which was being resurrected through the process of commemorating the war (as the passing limousine scene indicates) could be a totalitarianism that would leave no room for relativist thinking or dissent, but such realizations do not extend to Clarissa. She readily accepts the feeling of “extreme dignity” the proximity to power brings her, and works in her domestic way to ensure the smooth functioning of that power (16).

If it is true that she claims never to have imposed her particular “truth” on anybody else, it is also evident, as Herbert suggests, that Clarissa shows little resistance to the patriarchal power of the absolute. Indeed, she has openly colluded with it in her rejection of the sexual relativism offered by Sally Seton. Romantically, Clarissa is stuck between two men who impose their absolutist vision upon her. Richard Dalloway and Peter Walsh are both committed to differing ideological positions. While Richard is allied directly with state power, Peter, with his narcissistic insistence that he sees through state ideology to some kind of socialist or politically
avant-garde truth, is even more dictatorially absolutist than Richard. Like Clarissa, Richard conforms to the subject position to which he has been born, although he is not passionate about it.

Furthermore, Woolf’s novel explores the boundaries and overlaps of violence and power evident in Yealland’s and Rivers’s forms of treatment, as well as in her own medical treatment. Violence is certainly present both in the characters’ back-stories and in Septimus’s suicide, but it is important to distinguish between the novel’s representations of power and violence, especially as these are external or internal to official state structures. Hannah Arendt demonstrates that, despite a tendency to conflate the two, violence and power are actually opposed in their essence. “Violence,” Arendt writes, “appears where power is in jeopardy,” but power itself, when stable, has no need to exercise violence. Power, unlike violence, derives from humans acting together, and a person or a regime can only be said to be “in power” to the extent that it is “empowered by a certain number of people to act in their names.” Mrs. Dalloway is an exploration of how this collective power is lived and thought by the people who embody and perpetrate it. Septimus, as the outsider who refuses to take up his place as object and agent of power, embodies the violence that rebels against power, whereas Clarissa represents all those who empower the state’s regime by tacitly accepting and enforcing its precepts. As Arendt writes, “[t]he extreme form of power is All against One, and the extreme form of violence is One against All.” An eventually obedient shell shock victim like Chris Baldry never rebels violently against the power structure that constitutes his nightmare, and resigns himself to his expected place, partaking of and thereby guaranteeing his share of power. Septimus Smith does rebel against power, and his solitary act of self-violence underscores, like Chris’s submission to patriarchy, that soundness of body and mind means submission to power, and that power extends
in differing degrees from the state, from those few empowered by the many, through the lives of individual subjects.

Woolf’s presentation of Septimus Smith is more ambiguous than most scholars have recognized. Karen Levenback, for instance, misses Woolf’s ambiguous semi-complicity with official state power, and the psychiatric power through whom it acts, and that she openly criticizes. Although the narrator and Woolf should not be conflated, Septimus cannot be read as anything but a stereotypically emotional type who would naturally succumb to shell shock. Levenback’s reading of Mrs. Dalloway as Woolf’s coming to terms with her survivor’s guilt of the war strives to see Woolf as fully conscious of the shell-shocked veteran’s plight. Certainly, given her own suffering at the hands of incompetent doctors, and her enclosure in nursing homes, Woolf sympathizes with Septimus and all those he represents, but sympathy does not translate into a realistic or probing understanding of the broader medical condition of shell shock. Levenback reads the death of Septimus, as most scholars have, as embodying the sacrifice of innocents that permits the English state to carry on the construction of its hollow ideologies of gender and class, and, I would add, heteronormativity. However, as Levenback and others have pointed out, Woolf would have been familiar with the official discourses on shell shock emerging after the war, and the extent to which these discourses constitute Septimus’s character undermine the resistance to such discourses that Levenback and others read in Mrs. Dalloway.

Levenback contrasts Woolf to journalists like Arnold Bennett and Philip Gibbs, who “look at the returning veterans with a lack of sympathy reminiscent of the government’s Report of the War Office Committee of Inquiry into ‘Shell-Shock.’” Though the motives of the inquiry, and its dissatisfaction with the “grievous misnomer” of shell shock, are more complex than Levenback indicates, the general tone of the “experts” consulted by the committee is
unsympathetic and, as I argued above, the report works with the state to contain the threat shell
shock represents. Dr A. F. Hurst’s testimony, for example, demonstrates why a patient like Milne
would have been unsatisfied with a psychological diagnosis. Hurst opines “the type of man most
inclined to breakdown is the man who is probably called “neurotic”; a man who has the artistic
temperament; a man who is more emotional than the average type of man.” This could
certainly describe Septimus, whose madness, although no doubt aggravated by his war
experience, is not solely rooted therein. The narrator describes Septimus as characterized by
“vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds, which all
muddled up (in a room off the Euston Road), made him shy, and stammering, made him anxious
to improve himself, made him fall in love with Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road
upon Shakespeare” (83). Septimus is already endowed with one of the primary signifiers of shell
shock (stammering) and described as precisely the sort of unmanly man who would develop the
disorder as soon as he got to the front. Furthermore, his ability instantly to develop “manliness”
in the conflict signifies instability. Sassoon, whose state of shell shock was ambiguous, was one
of many cases in which conspicuous and rash bravery signaled breakdown.

Unlike West, who implicates the upper class directly in the perpetuation of the paternalist
ideologies underlying the war, and so shows an upper class paragon of English masculinity
brought down by the war experience, Woolf more complacently presents us with a shell shock
victim who is just the type to develop war neuroses—incapable of taciturn masculinity before the
war, and so incapable of it afterwards, as well, rebelling against masculinist injunctions of self-
control in “the most extreme form of violence.” Directly in contrast to West, Woolf also makes
her shell shock victim a middle-class clerk, whose general shabbiness is noted on several
occasions (14, 22, 24, 95). Septimus is in Margaret’s class, marked by a similar shabbiness,
whereas Clarissa is in Chris’s, marked by the outward dignity of power. In his desire to improve himself literarily, Septimus has also long been read as a re-writing of Forster’s poignant Leonard Bast in *Howards End*.

Despite the parallel condescension and sympathy for Septimus that run throughout the novel, the connection between Septimus and Clarissa is more than another of Clarissa’s self-serving delusions. What Clarissa and Septimus share is a proximity to death that makes them especially cognizant of the false consciousness with which the healthy sustain themselves at individual and national levels. In her essay *On Being Ill* (1930), Woolf explicitly theorizes the incommunicability of illness and pain, and what it reveals about how subjects form and resist community:

> Directly the bed is called for, or, sunk deep among pillows in one chair, we raise our feet even an inch above the ground on another, *we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters*. They march to battle. We float with the sticks on the stream; helter skelter *with the dead leaves on the lawn*, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round, to look up—to look, for example, at the sky.²⁹⁰

In the role of illness, when sympathy for others is revealed to be highly contingent on our own health, there is a potential for limitless self-discovery because the subject is removed from the social sphere.²⁹¹ The patient is de-subjectivized, taken out of the symbolic realm of language and communication, even with the self, and left with a bare corporeality that cannot easily be subjected to social duty or constructed personal identity. The military language significantly links physical health with adherence to social and political duties. The link between Clarissa and Septimus is partly founded on their joint proximity to illness and the possibility of desertion it presents. Septimus boldly fought out the war with no thought of desertion, as Clarissa has upheld the values of her class, even when tempted away from such values by the unruly companions of
her youth. But Septimus, in the end, is lead by breakdown to look into the part of himself that illness uncovers. Clarissa, although her life is increasingly defined by her illness and her approach to the grave—“narrower and narrower would her bed be”—shores her social existence against the dissolution of her own body and mind (30). Her party is a way to connect the disparate associations of her life, but more than that, it extends her life, in spatial terms. Scarry points out that the degeneration of the body with age is a process of the world shrinking around one until eventually concerns focus only on the body.292 As her illness makes her world smaller, Clarissa’s party makes her world bigger.

The bond Septimus shares with Clarissa, the point where their caves connect, is a point of wildness buried beneath millions of years of evolution. This is what illness reveals. As much as Chris Baldry’s shell shock exposed pre-social, wild desires, so too does Septimus’s, both in himself and indirectly in Clarissa. Although Septimus has been cultivated, and has been a decorated soldier who made it through the war, his deferred shell shock has brought him even further to the level of the animal than Chris’s. His great failure, for which he consistently berates himself, is his inability to feel. Of course, if he truly couldn’t feel, he wouldn’t be able to express guilt, or panic, or any of the myriad emotions he expresses. His problem is actually that he thinks he can’t feel for others, that the war has de-socialized him, taking him out of the realm of qualified bios into the realm of zoe. In Agambenian terms, Septimus sees himself as homo sacer, a man consecrated to the underworld, who, stripped of his social identity, can be killed with impunity: the narrator describes him as “lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society” (25). He thinks of himself as a sacrificial scapegoat who by virtue of his nonhuman status can talk to the dead and so mediate between London and the underworld. His primitivist animalism is further represented in his obsessive and pagan notions that trees are
sentient, that his own mind is directly connected to the world, that birds talk to him. When he sees a dog become a man, he essentially sees the arbitrary and tenuous nature of any human’s connection to the social world, and the underlying bestiality of humanity.  

What is at stake in the doubling of Septimus and Clarissa is a division of one subjectivity not just into sane and insane, but also into qualified and bare life. Clarissa is equally cognizant of her own qualification as a socialized human, whose hyper-civilized personality masks the bare facts of her embodiment and its attendant decline, as well as her own base, animal instincts and feelings. The narrator defines her “odd affinities” in specifically bestial terms, writing that she reacts like a cat to people: either her back goes up, or she purrs (8). When reflecting on her arch-nemesis, Miss Kilman, Clarissa momentarily acknowledges the pre-social desire that animates her animosity in language strikingly similar to that Woolf will later use to describe the effects of illness:

| It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf encumbered forest, the soul; never to be quite content, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self-love! this hatred! Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the swing doors of Mulberry’s the florists (12, emphasis added). |

Clarissa instantly dismisses the animal within her. Her entry to the florists, where nature is subordinated to human will and to a host of cultural signification, shows her ability to find security within the ordered city-space of London. Her declaration that she will buy the flowers herself, and the thrill she gets in experiencing London community on her way to the shop, demonstrate the security she feels in the human constructed world that banishes the insidious
thoughts her illness has suggested to her about her corporeality and the pre-social element within herself. As with Jenny, the manipulation of nature to a social order forms a *cordon sanitaire* between Clarissa’s socialized subjectivity and the animalism that always threatens to encroach.

This description is echoed in one of the first passages that establish the doubling of Clarissa and Septimus. This connection is first made at the locus of the spine, signifying willpower, courage, and uprightness. The description of Septimus’s reaction to the overdetermined symbolism of the sky-writer, and one observer’s attempt to make human meaning out of what looked to Septimus like abstract, non-signifying beauty, echoed Clarissa’s revelation about her internal monster: “K… R… said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say “Kay Arr” […] with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke” (21). The state of the spine, its sensations and its uprightness, conveys the quality of Septimus and Clarissa’s socialization in the power structure.

It is crucial that this reflection on her socialization is connected with illness, which diminishes or destroys communicative ability. Clarissa is a model patient, however, and resists the internal vistas opened up by illness. Although the text indicates that she does not believe that the doctors or Richard really know what is best for her, she willingly submits to their prescriptions: “[Richard] would go on saying “An hour’s complete rest after luncheon” to the end of time, because a doctor had ordered it once. It was like him to take what doctors said literally; part of his adorable divine simplicity […]” (117). Despite her cynicism as to the efficacy of the treatment, however, she willingly goes along with it, knowing that taking her role as the invalid and being commanded by paternalist authority guarantees her a share of power. She abhors Bradshaw, too, but she tolerates him for the sake of the power her party gives her,
and she couldn’t have her parties, which Richard thinks foolish because the excitement is “bad for her heart,” if she didn’t submit (118). Her joy at Septimus’s suicide is connected to her recognition of the presocial wildness they share and her recognition that she, unlike Septimus, need not succumb. Her illness may threaten her spine, but she maintains that signifier of courage and uprightness through an act of will. The whole panoply of content is nothing but self-love, but that is fine. She can maintain her civilized, social façade as she has done for thirty years, and she can construct the meaningless world around her in the image of her jôissance. She can have her party, which guarantees for her a certain ontological solidity: “it is Clarissa,” as Peter thinks.

“For there she was” (190, emphasis added).

Her party, for all the care she puts into it, helps her to deny the existence of her unruly, internal beast. The monster that Clarissa’s illness reveals is linked directly to her antisocial or anti-paternalist urges that her marriage to Richard vanquished. Shortly after buying the flowers, reflecting back on her time at Bourton, Clarissa concedes that she really was in love with and sexually attracted to Sally Seton, she “did undoubtedly feel what men felt, […] felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores!” (31). Despite the power of this description, though, Clarissa can no longer feel what she once felt, and when Peter Walsh bursts in to tell her that he is in love, she is at first appalled by his use of the word love: “That he at his age should be sucked under in his little bow-tie by that monster!” Her critique of Peter, however, quickly turns to jealousy for his possession by that monster. “[…] in her heart she felt, all the same, he is in love. He has that, she felt; he is in love” (44).

Clarissa’s resolution to do everything she can to pull herself together and defeat the
antisocial monster of passion is precisely opposed to Septimus’s refusal to do so. Levenback reads Holmes as unable to see Septimus’s mental derangement, but Holmes’s behavior is all the more sinister when one considers how closely it mirrors the advice and rhetoric given in postwar books on neurasthenia by the likes of Milne and Northfield. Holmes’s injunctions to act like a man and, as Northfield puts it, to “get the right idea” demonstrate that he is perfectly aware of the nature of Septimus’s problem, and treats it in accordance with the medical and military views of the day. He thinks Septimus is regressing willfully to an animal state, and so advises Septimus play football. In the debate on the physiological or psychological nature of shell shock, Holmes represents the purely physical side. He determines there is nothing wrong with Septimus because he sees no physical symptoms, and therefore recommends physical rest-cures and diversions: “… play cricket—that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband” (25). The emphasis on sports and repetition of the word game in Holmes’s advice calls to mind the English national character and public school spirit so closely allied with the early enthusiasm for the war, but Septimus is not of the class to whom such appeals might work at a deeply culturally ingrained level. W.H.R. Rivers might consider Holmes’s suggestions the right prescription, but for the wrong case. Dr. Bradshaw, like Rivers, represents the psychological perspective on shell shock, and Woolf presents him as a much more formidable adversary to Septimus and Rezia. Holmes and Bradshaw taken together, though, demonstrate two aspects of the same power. Bradshaw is obviously and firmly allied to the legislative and foundational aspect of power. Holmes’s power is more that of the police. He is direct and brutal in his manner. Bradshaw is closer to the root of power, as his knighthood and his intimacy with the Dalloways indicate. He moves in a wider circle and exerts a more compelling influence than Holmes.
The anti-social inclination toward the pre-civilized space in the center of human subjectivity is what Clarissa shares with Septimus and resists throughout the novel, and what Septimus, in his madness, embraces and expands. Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw, whom Septimus identifies as the oppressive force of human nature, insist that he take an interest in “things outside himself” (21). To do so is necessary for his recovery: if one wants to live in human society, one must adjust to the particular demands not of nature, but of human nature, that is natural inclination subordinated to the social and civilized human order: “Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless” (95). Septimus, cast into the role of the man of the forest, rejects this contemporary human nature for a much older form of the presocial human, a human not endowed with concern for the social good, but with the solipsistic nature of the animal. Distinctly human cruelty tears apart those who cannot hold themselves upright, i.e., the fallen and the spineless.

Septimus sees clearly that Bradshaw and Holmes derive their power not from medical knowledge, but from sovereign power. He interprets their tools not as therapeutic, but as implements of torture: the rack and the thumbscrew. Bradshaw states explicitly that Septimus must be sent to a home because “he had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law” (94). Bradshaw recognizes that Septimus, in proposing his own specifically pagan laws of “universal love” and “no crime,” stands in direct contrast to the sovereign will. As a knight of the realm, Sir William Bradshaw has sovereignty-sanctioned power over his patients. The description of his powers and his duties demonstrates how fully the doctor embodies and conveys the sovereignty of state power: “Sir William not only prospered
himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion […]” (97). He is the embodiment of biopower, intervening at the biological level and at the level of the population to preserve social hygiene. Even in the matter of the power over life and death, Sir William represents sovereignty: “In short, this living or not living is an affair of our own?” his patients ask him. “But there they were mistaken” (99). Septimus is fully caught in the trap of a sovereignty that says his life is not his own. If he lives, he must succumb to living on their terms, to being shut up and taken away from his wife, to lying in bed and drinking milk. Septimus and Clarissa present two responses to the anti-social wildness that presents itself as madness: defeating the monster by getting the right idea and following paternalist doctors’ orders, or reclaiming sovereignty through the sole means available and taking one’s own life.

The third alternative would seem to be finding a way to acknowledge or cope with the hollowness of the socially stabilizing “proportion” advocated by Bradshaw. Septimus’s double bind, which seems to leave him no option between succumbing absolutely to state power and succumbing to suicide, is not an inevitable or inherent aspect of state power. The moment at which Septimus has the misfortune to live, though, is characterized by a more legalistically invasive psychological power that is directly allied with and serves a state that perpetuates an emergency mentality. Conflicting modes of governance and care seem to leave Septimus no choice. Despite Clarissa’s satisfaction at Septimus’s suicide, and the ego-affirmation it seems to give her, the novel does not endorse the suicide, but rather presents it as an indictment of how the medical establishment imposes its decisionist verdicts on the sufferers of mental breakdown, who are always forcibly silenced by those appointed to care for them. The novel does not present any viable way for that to happen. Septimus’s vision of the antisocial reversion to nature does not
reveal a utopia, but rather the impossibility of a Rousseaillian natural paradise. In the end, it is only by reinforcing through her party the social, unnatural structure that has denied her much of what she wants in life, that Clarissa can achieve the fulfillment that sustains her. Septimus’s rejection of civilization makes her feel the fun of a life that is programmatic and unnatural, but at least stable because it leaves her with the illusion of control. Septimus’s suicide, coming at a moment when he could almost reconcile himself to the social aspects of human life, is triggered by the reminder that human nature will always separate him from the nature inscribed on his body, but not his mind. His suicide is not only the act of violence against himself, but also an extreme act of violence, the Arendtean One against All, directed at the entire apparatus of state power. Having preserved himself to defend the state’s property throughout the war, Septimus’s suicide violently destroys a piece of state property. Though he does not want to die, he finds no alternative between forceful subjection into a social order he cannot bear and that only wants to repress and subjugate him, and a final release from social and corporeal concerns in death.
CHAPTER 4:

UNMAKING AND REMAKING:
THE VALUES OF WAR LABOR

I insist on the fact that there is generally no growth but only a luxurious squandering of energy in every form! The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.

Britain was never the same again after 1918 because the country had ruined its economy by waging a war substantially beyond its resources.

And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: “If you don’t work you die.”

I. “What’s in a name?”: Class and Labor at War

Hannah Arendt begins *The Human Condition* by presenting the 1957 launching into orbit of the Sputnik as a manifestation of humanity’s transformed relation to its natural world. Sputnik was one in a series of alterations to the human condition that modern warfare had compelled. It was preceded by other technological inventions that permanently extended the reach of humanity’s destructive power: the institution of mechanized killing as a military standard, the Holocaust and other genocides, and the dropping of atomic bombs. Sputnik also derived from both world wars’ concerted efforts to develop technology that would be both more destructive and more remote, and remove destruction from its previous locus in an individual’s act, and serves in Arendt’s text as a concrete manifestation of humans’ continual attempts to intervene in and transform their given surroundings. The active initiation of war is one such attempt that, in cases such as the Great War, leads to populations reconsidering the values of their *labor*, *work*, and *action*, the
terms Arendt goes on to elaborate in *The Human Condition*.

This chapter will focus on texts about war experience that specifically illustrate soldiers’ and other war workers’ relations to Arendt’s categories of human activity. I analyze the values attached to different forms of war work in personal statements from the war, showing in what ways war work ties subjectivity to identification with or against the state and its professed aims. Arendt’s categories describe human potentialities in the physical world: as laborers, humans recreate the conditions that keep them alive; as workers, they build up the artificial world of culture; in the realm of action, they work together through dialectical communication to affect some form of change. But the conditions of war are unique and not easily subsumed into these categories. Humans labor in war, certainly, to keep themselves alive, but they also work to unmake the constructed human world, both physically and psychologically: as Scarry notes soldiers and other war workers labor to hurt and kill. As a result, many soldiers and civilians who labored for the war effort later struggled to articulate their relation to the labor performed and its retrospective value to them.

As well as reading letters and diary entries expressing various attitudes toward labor and work, I analyze two formally different primary texts that offer substantial meditations on what war labor meant for the individuals who gave themselves over to it. This chapter asks how labor for the national cause transformed citizens’ understanding of their relation to the national values they labored to perpetuate. Vera Brittain’s memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933) chronicles her transformation around the war years from an engaged feminist to a willfully laboring automaton and finally to a fully committed
geopolitical activist. David Jones, like Brittain a victim of shell shock, attempts to resolve his lasting trauma and fit some value to his “inimical, hateful” war experience in his long high modernist poem *In Parenthesis* (1937). Jones renders his years of labor as a soldier into a highly formalized work of art, thus affecting his transformation, in Arendtean terms, from *animal laborans* to *homo faber*.

As previous chapters have shown, the transformations of British society as a result of the Great War consisted of innumerable smaller changes that altered subjects’ relations to their activities, both in and out of the war arena. The war undeniably accelerated certain branches of technology that impacted how soldiers and citizens worked through the war, as well as technologies to rehabilitate and restructure damaged bodies. Both the tanks developed for the war and the acceleration in production and quality of artificial limbs developed for wounded soldiers reflect forms of prosthesis designed to extend human ability. The manufacture and employment of tanks and limbs exaggerated a blurring of soldiers’ bodies and manufactured war materiel.

Furthermore, in Britain the war presented well-known employment opportunities for women. The popular perception of women joining the workforce, often conflated with the more permanent gains of women workers after the Second World War, has sometimes obscured attention to the subjective experience of interruption that women, like men, experienced when their labor was recruited for and subsequently dismissed from the national effort. Especially since Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s comprehensive analysis of women’s political and cultural gains in the war years, literary analyses of the impact of women’s war work has proliferated. Gilbert and Gubar’s essentially optimistic analysis of women’s war work offering liberation and mobility has been challenged by a host of scholars. Janet Montefiore argues that
“the story of women’s experience is complicated by class differences and antagonisms which Gilbert’s and Gubar’s arguments ignore.” Similarly, Sharon Ouditt offers a less idealistic view of the limitations attendant on women’s gains, and some of the ways in which middle and upper class women gained advances to the disadvantage of lower class women. Additionally, although they acknowledge a subsequent backlash against women’s gains, Gilbert and Gubar end their analysis without exploring this hysterical cultural reaction. The propaganda campaign that had been so effective for military recruitment and the recruitment of women into factories and voluntary nursing units was rapidly transformed into a campaign for social, class, and gender reversions to prewar paradigms after the war. Angela K. Smith’s more literary analysis demonstrates the close connection between women’s private writings about war work and the stylistic innovations of modernism. Smith has also published a collection of “Women’s Writing of the First World War,” and her work has been taken up and expanded by Catherine Clay and Victoria Stewart, who explore connections among women’s writing of the First and Second World Wars. Rather than adding to this important and prolific discourse, I am here concerned with a question of equal pertinence to male soldiers’ labor and women’s industrial and nursing labor: how does war labor and its strange economy of value alter the workers’ political relationship to the state?

Arendt’s ideas about humanity’s realms of activity, which she developed after World War II and in consideration of technological changes inconceivable in the nineteenth century, offer a clarifying lens through which to examine subjective experiences of these changes. The increase in industrial production of war material was far more rapid than any other acceleration of the industrial revolution. Although class issues remain crucial for examining how labor functioned throughout the war, the war years introduced new complications to the labor struggles
that characterized so much of the nineteenth century. Certainly, class distinctions were thoroughly observed and even “strengthened” in the military, where officers and enlisted men “ate apart, slept apart, were decorated apart, and were buried apart.” However, such class prejudices had grown gradually from a deep feudal past and more than a century of industrialization. The war brought about several artificially developed antagonistic relationships, such as the generally propagated hatred of Germans and all things Teutonic; the disdain of service-men and women for civilians; an exaggerated and violent disgust among soldiers and civilians for conscientious objectors; and of course the generational conflict that was, according to Samuel Hynes, the primary myth engendered by the war.

Further, as the archival and primary texts under consideration in this chapter demonstrate, labor-oriented tensions developed between soldier and civilian workers, between those disabled in war and those disabled in industry, and between women laborers and male laborers whose masculinity was threatened by the obvious competence of women in occupations from which they had been previously barred.

The Defence of the Realm Act made possible such direct interventions into the struggle of the working class as the Munitions Act (1915), which made general work stoppages in munitions factories illegal. Merely for criticizing the legality of this act in their journal The Worker, members of the Clyde Workers’ Committee were court-martialed and deported from Glasgow. The suppression of the Clyde Workers by the government was not an entirely novel situation—the military had been employed before to suppress workers’ rebellions. But it was unique in that its intervention was not excused by the need to maintain domestic peace. Rather, as munitions makers, the Clyde workers were classified as state “conscripts” as much as the soldiers overseas.

As with gender roles, the war troubled traditional class structures, both culturally and
legislatively, but the effects and magnitudes of these changes were not clear to those who lived through them. In some respects, the relation between subalterns and officers magnified class disparity. On the other hand, the relation cannot be seen simply as exploitation of a lower by an upper class. Officers faced the same appalling conditions as the troops, with the added burden of a sense (often-romanticized) of personal responsibility. The pastoral function of the officers and their obsessive attention to the minor details of the bodily and psychological comfort of the men in their control has been mythologized, too, but it should not be underestimated. The pastoral care of the upper for the lower class may have received more lip service in peace than actual dedication, but the war made this kind of care a part of upper class officers’ official duty. Officers explicitly saw attention to their soldiers, their “flock,” in terms of a personal responsibility, the execution of which reflected their own ability, and, more importantly, the strength of their character. The pastoral role of the officers also grew out of the long liberal tradition of the upper classes expecting and encouraging charity toward the poor, making the pastoral role a choice, rather than a state obligation. Also, in a power structure similar to that underlying shell shock recovery, by maintaining their sense of responsibility and benevolent power over others, officers replicated the power to which they themselves submitted.

The cultural affection for the sometimes obsessive “mothering” of the privates by officers is perhaps best crystallized in the popular story of Lord Kitchener’s development of a new kind of seamless sock to better protect his soldiers’ feet. Commemorated in a London ad for the National Portrait Gallery in 2009, such stories continue, as they did during the war, to naturalize a form of statism that was new to Great Britain (figure 5). The received story of the sudden escalation of centralization with nationalized health care and the retraction of empire after World War Two is generally correct, but even before the First World War, with the passing of the
People’s Budget in 1909 and the diminution of the power of the House of Lords, Britain was easing away from anachronistic, anti-statist, and non-democratic models. The story of Lord Kitchener’s socks demonstrates the way in which individual faces and personal ministrations masked a potentially unpalatable move toward a broad and homogenizing administrative central state.

![Figure 5. London Underground ad, 2009.](image)

![Figure 6. A Tommy shaming a striker (IWM Q80318).](image)

Given the construction of these new prejudices, antagonisms, and myths, it is not surprising that in the interwar years tensions over labor and the rights of workers to compensation often revolved around discrepancies between those who had served and those who had not or could not have. Joanna Bourke points out that disability pensions were a source of much conflict, as those injured in civilian labor were not entitled to the same benefits awarded those injured in the war. Generally, both parties felt themselves at a disadvantage, and their rhetoric often revolved around the value of their sacrifices. Mutilated soldiers had actual monetary sums attached to their
particular form of mutilation, a bureaucratic measure that could feel demeaning and arbitrary. Among the working class, the dangers soldiers faced impacted their attitudes toward the rights of laborers in Britain. Civilian laborers mutilated at their jobs had no recourse even to these. Among the working class, the dangers soldiers faced impacted their attitudes toward the rights of laborers in Britain. As one propaganda poster demonstrates, propaganda employed false analogies between the duties and rights of laborers and soldiers to dissuade laborers from collective action (figure 6). Practices of labor in England thus faced a host of new challenges and dynamics, the war having largely distorted the content and the forms of the old conflict of laborers against owners. Such official disparities exaggerated the infamous disdain servicemen bore for civilians and politicians, who, in Siegfried Sassoon’s words bore a “callous complacence” to “agonies which they [did] not share, and which they [had] not sufficient imaginations to realize.” The greater value attached to qualitatively similar injuries incurred in combat, coupled with the general desire not to be reminded of the war, caused that resentment to flow back towards the demobilized, who found their sacrifices generally slighted by civilians after the war.

Many of the enlisted and conscripted soldiers had been laborers in civilian life, but, depending on education, civilians were conscripted into higher ranks, as well. The class tension the word “labour” brought with it is evident in one air mechanic’s complaint in a letter to his wife about what he sees as the degraded status of mechanics, especially those who felt that their experience qualified them as experts on the unique situations the war presented. A.C. Stanton, who had joined the 13th Section Kite Balloon unit of the RFC after his conscription, wrote to his wife, “Brownie,” on 8 April, 1918:

It was a tactless thing to change the description of 2nd & 3rd A.M.’s to Private-Labourer, and a lot of the men feel it a bit, especially those who have been out here a long time and who have acquired useful knowledge and experience. Shakespeare in enquiring what’s in a name made an ass of himself, there’s a good deal in it, else why do we call a German a Hun or a Bosche—naturally to annoy him, likewise the calling of men labourers under the new scheme isn’t
calculated to promote good feeling.”

Stanton was a professional in civilian life and his letters to his pacifist wife show him to be a well-educated former Fabian. Stanton’s letters demonstrate that the war had a great deal to do with his general renunciation of his erstwhile fascination with “jolly old G.B.S., socialism, art and what-not.” As his disdain for the term “private-labourer” shows, and his comparison of it to ethnic slurs for the enemy, he has a sense of injured pride in the seeming debasement of his war participation, and this notion of his work’s value as greater than that of laboring is tied up in the ongoing argument he has with Brownie over her pacifism and her visits to conscientious objectors. Though he characterizes fellow soldiers as disillusioned about the “glorious traditions of war […] by a continuous round of discomfort, work, boredom and homesickness” he claims not to share this feeling because of his desire to finish the war “by terms imposed upon, not arranged with, Germany.” He rises above the apathy of the other troops by connecting his labor and his place in the war directly with a triumphant victory, lamenting that so many of the other soldiers at the front seem to have become pacifists because of their boredom and their inability to connect the value of their labor to an abstract, political, and constantly deferred form of victory. What Stanton and the other soldiers resent in the label “labourer” is a perceived lack of participation in the larger goals and motives of the war, and the attention it calls to the fact that they are not working at self-determined employment, but that their labor has been appropriated. Stanton sees that the men want recognition commensurate with the propaganda campaign’s promises and interventionist legislation’s insistence that their contribution is necessary and valuable.

Edward Comentale and others point out that the lives of soldiers at the front were characterized much more by monotonous labor than by the action they had been promised.
Though men signed up in the early months of the war expecting an adventure, “[p]aradoxically, twentieth century warfare, despite its novelty and intense productivity, is notable for its tendency toward stalemate, its incredible stasis and apparent endlessness. Its activity is infinitely varied, yet static.”

This stasis was also one of the primary factors of mental breakdown at the front, as repetitive labor had to be carried out not only in intense discomfort, but with the constant fear of sudden attack. The stagnancy of trench life also added a gender dynamic to mental breakdown. Public school boys who had been trained to imagine war as an intense football match (with artillery) found that it was much more a degraded form of housekeeping, most energy expended on attempting to keep a sodden ditch as tidy as possible. Despite the infinite variety of war-labor Comentale points out, trench life generally consisted of daily rebuilding the most basic conditions of existence, only to have them almost daily destroyed.

Gilbert and Gubar point out that the situation was exactly the reverse for women, who escaped domestic enclosure and found extremely mobile occupations as nurses deployed to various foreign lands. “Finally given a chance to take the wheel,” they write, “these post-Victorian girls raced motorcars and motorbikes along foreign roads like adventurers exploring new lands, while their brothers dug deeper into the mud of France and Belgium.”

Certainly some women experienced their war work in this fashion, but Gilbert and Gubar do not address the great distress over the purpose of their labor that many women also expressed. Gilbert and Gubar tend to overlook the fact that this sudden liberation was not on the terms women had been demanding and sometimes dying for in the years before the war. This new freedom of movement in labor was still directed by and in service to the patriarchal forces that administered the war. Brittain, for instance, saw France and Malta. Her sphere of action was permanently expanded by the war. But Brittain and other nurses also labored beyond the point of exhaustion,
lost loved ones, and, like those brothers in the trenches, paid a great price in mental breakdown and looked back with rue and disillusionment on the loss of their youth and the appropriation of their labor.

Only a few weeks after the epistle in which he claims to be unaffected by the tedium and discomfort, Stanton describes to Brownie a coping technique he has developed. “For myself” he writes, “I seem to more & more regard my carcass with a sort of mental detachment as if it belonged to someone else, this is rather convenient so far as aches & pains are concerned.” Such detachment could be one step on the road to breakdown, but it also shows Stanton’s own resignation to his body’s appropriation by the state. Not simply alienated from his labor, he actually conceives of himself as a piece of equipment. Among men and women, such resignation was a common way to deal with the boredom and discomfort of the war, and it is central to many literary and personal accounts of fatigue. This extreme form of alienation from labor signals a resignation of the body as physical property to a higher command. As I will demonstrate, Brittain describes a similar state as her sole means of coping with her exceptional grief, actually willing the eradication of her mind in the labor of her body. Jones’s high modernist aesthetic formally represents this detachment, evolving an aesthetic of corporeal objectification that posits the body as one more of the soldiers’ accoutrements of war.

If the lower ranking officers and private soldiers did not care to be considered mere laborers, the letter of one Captain R.D. Archibald to his wife reveals that some among other classes found the analogy of soldiers to employees of the state salubrious. According to Archibald, the lower classes ought to learn their lessons well, and the state ought to learn how to deal with the threat of subaltern subversion. The occasion to lament the indolence attendant on
democracy merges seamlessly into an equally authoritarian attitude expressed toward his wife in an undated letter:

> The theory of revolution is coconuts. A few shots from the soldiers stopped the Dublin and Welsh riots. The muzzle of a rifle very rapidly changes a mal-content’s views and real punishment could make any man work and abstain. But there is no such thing for if an employer attempts to get rid of a bad work-man and they all strike and there you are. It is very good for politicians to be up against the problems of the employer for once. It has certainly broadened their minds. [...] At any rate, democracy along present lines leads to indolence and self-indulgence amongst all classes. As usual with people of artistic temperament you are spending time on subjects beyond you instead of doing something practical. Leave “international relations” to your chosen representation.³²⁵

The brutality with which Archibald suggests strikes and revolutionary attitudes should be met may or may not reflect callousness developed at the front. His disdain for people of “artistic temperament” and the femininity he implicitly associates with it, however, reveal that his attitudes about the toughness with which laborers should be governed parallels a natural ascendancy of the tough and austere over romantic or merely lazy classes which must be governed not with the pastoral care of a shepherd-officer, but with the violence of a union-busting corporate magnate.

Archibald’s casual statement about the state taking the role of the employer reveals a new set of attitudes about the radical change the war brought to British subjects’ relation to their government. The conscripted soldier has considerably less freedom, even under anti-labour policies, than the casual employee, but is conditioned to his labor by much more powerful discourses than those to which any employer has recourse. The weight of patriotism and propaganda condition the conscript to his employment by the state and the military life puts him in a position to his fellow soldiers in which resistance is more frightening than compliance. Archibald effectively uses emergency to demonstrate to his voiceless wife that democracy “along present lines” is presumably too democratic. Urging her to leave politics to her “chosen
representation” effects a double silencing as, unable to vote, his wife has neither power of speech nor choice. The emergency of war affirms for Archibald the reassuring truth of ultimate power in authoritarian recourse to violence.

While workers were silenced as well, the scale of production obviously caused some industrialists tremendous profit in the private sphere. The war exaggerated economic disparity, putting pressure on smaller middle class businesses to invest in war bonds, or contribute to “tank banks,” at the risk of being ostracized. Trudi Tate describes how during only one working week, businesses in London and other cities were inundated with appeals to contribute all their proceeds of the week to the war effort. The endeavor was described as a “major offensive,” and businessmen were encouraged to take their money personally to one of the tanks that had been brought into cities for that purpose.326 The money poured into such industrial ventures as the tanks fed industry by building and destroying at a prodigious rate.327 Tanks were never as efficient as citizens were lead to believe and often ended up buried in mud and abandoned, huge iron signifiers of waste.328 The wealth generated was illusory. J.M. Keynes warned in 1919, after having witnessed the destructive terms of peace worked out at Versailles, that the English had not yet felt the economic costs of the war as the continent had. “Many of us seem a good deal richer than we were before” he writes. “Where we spent millions before the war, we have now learnt that we can spend hundreds of millions and apparently not suffer for it […] All classes alike thus build their plans, the rich to spend more and save less, the poor to spend more and work less.”329 Long before Britain realized it, the wealth that financed its empire, which would expand and so become more burdensome as the spoils of Allied victory were divided, had been spent.
II. Total Expenditure: Waste and Unmaking

Although the war did not represent as complete a rupture with the problems and narratives of the nineteenth century as many scholars suppose, it did bring about entirely new problems that were inconceivable to nineteenth century thinkers. As a philosopher of beginnings, Arendt provides a useful frame to consider material and class adjustments during and after the war. In *The Human Condition* and elsewhere, Arendt does not espouse a grand narrative of “man” and his teleological crafting of or becoming some kind of ideal. Rather, humanity changes its conditions through the unforeseeable contingencies that the plurality of humanity brings to any kind of political action. Though the beginning of the war signified for many a return to virtue and honor, famously characterized by Rupert Brooke’s “swimmers into cleanness leaping,” less callow observers saw the war as signifying the end of a teleological and naïve European “progress.” Henry James summed this feeling up neatly in his much-quoted letter to a friend of August 4, 1914:

The plunge of civilization into the abyss of blood and darkness […] is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words.

The tragedy that James identifies comes not only from the revelation that the narrative of progress is groundless, but also from the realization that all work conducted under such teleological suppositions has been complicit in bringing about the destruction of an age in which any kind of work could be taken to signify progress or amelioration. The loss of a teleological framework robs this most verbose of novelists of any words: as the accumulation of more words, more work, not only signifies a lack of progress, but even the impossibility of progress as traditionally conceived.
However, this perceived crisis in the project of modernity did not signify an actual end to that project, but with the war, the always unpredictable outcome of action became increasingly evident. The era whose end James documents was one of European exceptionalism and conquest, in which those who espoused progress did so through a rhetoric of empire, and could scarcely question the ideological supremacy of Europe. The war certainly did not end this, especially not in Britain—if anything, victory caused Britain to revert to a thoroughly untenable attempt to retain imperial supremacy over its increasingly rebellious empire—but it was the beginning of the end. The war had turned the violence of imperialism back on England. As Judith Butler has emphasized, violence underscores the mutual vulnerability that holds all human beings in relational dependency. During the buildup to World War II, in which period both Testament of Youth and In Parenthesis were published, Britain was in a historically uncharacteristic moment of retraction. As in France and the Soviet Union, the memory of the previous conflict and its depredations motivated Britain to avoid conflict at (almost) all costs. Imperially and militarily exhausted, many Britons turned inward, as Jed Esty argues, to an anthropological analysis of their own deep culture.

War work and labor were thus experienced and performed in a unique period between two worlds, and recalled and recorded in an interval characterized by a victory that increasingly felt like a loss. In general, Victorian and Edwardian writers and thinkers conceived of work as an inevitable good, and labor as a fundamental necessity for the larger cultural and political work of empire. To those who had participated in Britain’s biggest industrial “push,” however, these suppositions seemed heartbreakingly and demonstrably unfounded. The years immediately following the war would be characterized partially by a reversal of these notions in much of Europe. The work of empire building had led to the oppression of laborers around the world and
an eventual cataclysmic casting off of the excess wealth of Empire in a grand display of heightened production and excessive waste. During the war years, populations from every part of the empire were mobilized *en masse* to affect this casting off of imperial wealth. The revelation that it had been nothing more than an orgy of violence that left Europe in impoverished shambles no doubt had much to do with the appeal of Marxist thought in the countries that suffered the greatest losses, Russia and Germany.

Georges Bataille has described war as nonproductive expenditure, with absolute loss as its end. Bataille avers that both World Wars grew directly out of industrialization and the necessity of casting off excess. “It is sometimes denied,” he writes, “that the industrial plethora was at the origins of these recent wars, particularly the first. Yet it was this plethora that both wars exuded; its size was what gave them their extraordinary intensity.”337 The excesses of World War I, which would become the modern paradigm of worthless expenditure, supports Bataille’s notion that luxury is an excess in an economy, something which must be purged in a destructive expenditure.338 Ultimately, Bataille glorifies such expenditure as a means of escaping closed economic systems because in his system of “general economy” waste is the only possible end of any earthly energy.339 For Bataille and the thanatotic value he represents, if waste is the only end of human endeavor, the glory of war work lies in its essential and total destruction of value. Bataille’s ethical or metaphysical conclusions aside, he is correct about the scale of industrialization. The war caused a huge spike in production, but all it produced was meant to be used in the process of destruction, and to be destroyed itself. This is most obvious in the case of munitions, but all of the other materiel produced was also constantly renewed, even as the numbers multiplied. Gerard DeGroot shows that the British army needed 57 times as many cars and 95 times as many lorries after four years of war.340 Nearly all British industry was engaged
in rebuilding the conditions of the army’s existence, and wasting huge amounts of resources. As Keynes shows, the economic boom of increased wartime production portended long term financial decline.

One of the clearest manifestations of how the war had become an absurd and purely destructive endeavor to create and dispose of wealth and material is recorded in R. Cude’s chilling diary account of the armistice. The soldiers on both sides, aware that peace is coming, make every effort to “use” all of their equipment:

[...] at 9 am, 11th Nov, 1918, we are staggered to read the news that, commencing at 11am, today, an armistice will be in force, at Jerrys asking. I am up forward at the time, and the lads left off all their amm[o], but at a target every time. The artillery too do not mean to be saddled with spare shells, and so right up to the minute of the time fixed for the armistice they are pumping over shells as fast as they can. Jerry must be having a great time, but we get a little back, for Jerry has lost his temper, I suppose, and although I would not miss the sport at any price, I am as nervous as a kitten. If only I can last out the remainder of the time, and this is everyone’s prayer I am awfully sorry for those of our chaps who are killed this morning, and there must be a decent few of them too...  

This example crystallizes the war economy. Material is there to be destroyed. Soldiers participate in the “sport” of casting off the manufactured goods even though it has no possible military advantage. Throughout the war, Britain, like the other belligerents, faced an ongoing shell shortage. Munitions were precious, and soldiers at every level were trained to value efficiency. The munitions would not have lost their value due to the coming armistice, but the soldiers’ behavior betrays an underlying economic truth of the war years. Industry flourished because munitions were made to be destroyed, and were in ever-increasing demand. The soldiers don’t want to be “saddled” with something that they are used to using up in large amounts, and so they make one last glorious show of combustible wealth and power.
As Cude’s example demonstrates, even as Arendtean laborers merely recreating the essential conditions for life, war workers in factories and in combat recreated life’s necessities for the possibility of destroying more life, and ensuring the risk, even the decent probability, that their own lives would end. Despite propagandistic depictions of the value of soldiers’ and laborers’ work, the subjective experience of war labor was not always far removed from the nihilistic casting off of use value described by Bataille. With no end in sight to this total expenditure the war came down to a contest between which force could longest sustain these conditions of pointless expenditure without rebellion or revolution. When the vast and unexhausted pool of US labor entered the effort, the central powers were essentially out-produced. Not surprisingly, many descriptions of Americans entering the war focus on the freshness of the American forces as physical material.

III. War Value and Aesthetic Value

The attempt to make art of their labor is a particular problem for the interwar authors who tried to render their experience of war and war labor in non-propagandistic, but rather aesthetic fashions. In contrast to some soldiers’ immediate accounts that take pleasure in the waste, memoirs and descriptions of war work and labor are frequently characterized by overt attempts to find some redeeming value in the extremity of sacrifice the war demanded. Brittain, in crafting a straightforward memoir, does not attempt to translate her war experience into aesthetic language. Rather, her narrative is consistent with her war experience of constant action to the point of exhaustion. Her narrative actively moves through events, generally with an emphasis on the frantic pace of her labor. The Brittain
of the late twenties and thirties frequently interrupts to reflect on the heady pace of those exhausting, demoralizing years. Jones, on the other hand, shows the subjective experience of stagnation and of rebuilding every day the conditions by which one could expend more by casting off more energy, money, and life the next day. They both struggle with the necessary evaluations their reflections compel. The activity of war presents a unique problem for an aesthetic creative tradition of crafting or forging a work of lasting symbolic poetic value. Especially in its later years of industrial violence, the war seemed particularly opposed to representation within a received aesthetic index, the activity of artistic creation that, Barbara Herrnstein-Smith argues, always entails the designation of value.346

When Smith engages Bataille’s view of excess and death within economic systems, she demonstrates that what he had defined as a “nonproductive expenditure” which results in “absolute loss,” is no such thing because it is still formulated in the same economic terms that Bataille had thought to escape. Smith critiques Bataille’s introduction of this kind of expenditure as merely an inversion of the already familiar terms of utility and symbolic economy. Of his examples, Smith writes “In every case, Bataille indicates that there is a gain in the economy of the individual or the community.”347 That gain renders the expenditure productive in some way. Thus, Bataille has not been able to think beyond the circularity of economic exchange, and the problem of a purely aesthetic approach to wasteful war remains: how does a poet exchange and represent the negation of value and the insistent unmaking of war within an always evaluative lexicon? How, if the experience is, as it was for Jones, “hateful, inimical,” does the poet represent the sensory conditions?
Paul Fussell demonstrates that in early years not only poets, but also journalists and civilians employed archaic language to glorify and aestheticize the new conflict. In the later years Owen and Sassoon’s protest poetry found aesthetic value in translating the waste of the war into elegiac propaganda. Authors such as Jones and the more canonically and commercially successful Edmund Blunden set themselves the more difficult task of translating the “valuelessness” of war experience into the necessarily evaluative language of aesthetics. Both evade direct valuation, or experiment with it, making the question of aesthetic translation central to their projects. The attempt to avoid the assignation of some definite poetic value through symbolic transformation has led to criticism and some marginalization of Blunden and Jones, while Owen and Sassoon, whose attitudes toward the war are never obscured by a greater emphasis on aesthetics than politics, enjoy canonical and curricular status. As Trudi Tate points out, Blunden’s Undertones of War causes “unease” because of its lack of commentary on the significance of war’s destruction. But Blunden, unlike Jones, is not particularly interested in finding aesthetic and non-propagandistic terms to describe making and unmaking and its relation to artistic creation. Blunden described himself as a “harmless shepherd,” and the non-sensational aesthetic of Undertones of War demonstrates that he is primarily concerned with achieving calm reflection amidst the chaos. Jones dedicated his life to aesthetic production, and his poetry is intensely physical, while not emphasizing corporeal destruction to advance pacifism. He navigates this difficult terrain, as I will show below, by finding in absolutely useless labor the capacity still to create an aesthetics grounded not, as Fussell argues, in a larger tradition of warfare, but in a larger tradition of valuing the act of aesthetic creation itself.
Although they employ virtually opposite literary techniques, *Testament of Youth* and *In Parenthesis* exemplify the difficulties war laborers faced in looking back on and giving form to war labor. The active labor of Brittain’s nursing experience and the passive labor of Jones’s trench life were qualitatively different but resulted in nervous exhaustion and mental breakdown for both. Brittain is overtly political and seemingly non-aesthetic. Jones is overtly aesthetic and seemingly non-political. But as I will show, these distinctions do not entirely hold up. Both books are purgative performances that replay traumatic labor, insistently asking and struggling to answer, in direct and indirect ways, what, if anything, did their labor mean, and what, if anything, was it *worth*?

IV. Vera Brittain’s Testaments of Labor, Work, and Action

*Testament of Youth* (1933), a memoir of Brittain’s childhood, experience as a VAD nurse in the First World War, and postwar involvement in the League of Nations, offers valuable insight into the ways in which the war changed the conditions, representations, and political implications of British women’s labor. Throughout the memoir’s three sections, Brittain explores what her own labor meant both in personally coming to terms with her exceptional losses (her fiancé, brother, and two close friends were killed) and for women’s larger political and cultural position. Despite its centrality to *Testament of Youth*, however, few scholars have engaged Brittain’s representations of labor. *Testament of Youth* exemplifies Hannah Arendt’s categories of *labor*, *work*, and *action*, specifically illuminating how they applied to English women’s experiences in the years surrounding the war, and engages these concepts in more sophisticated ways than critics have generally acknowledged. Brittain’s memoir demonstrates how, through constantly attempting to distill a philosophy of labor that will sustain her through the war, Brittain
transforms herself from a prewar provincial “pretty-pretty,” being groomed for marriage and constrained by an Edwardian bourgeois community of constant surveillance, to a fiercely independent political activist. What is most remarkable about this metamorphosis is the extent to which she presents her personal history of trauma and recovery as mapped onto geopolitical narratives, and what her commitment to education, voluntary nursing, and ultimately the League of Nations, suggests about the modern connections among the English subject, state power, and individuality.

*Testament of Youth* was published in 1933, eight years after the period it documents had ended. By 1925, Brittain felt that she was on her way to a new life with new friends, a family, and a career. With few remaining acquaintances to share in the memory of a life that ended for her with the Armistice, she felt the need to revisit a past that was increasingly cut off from the comforts and relative fulfillment of middle age. She writes in the foreword that she had wanted “with a growing sense of urgency” to write about her war experience for nearly a decade. After making several aborted attempts at fictionalizing her story or adapting her diaries, she decided only a memoir would accurately express the lived changes she wanted to convey. She wrote *Testament of Youth* largely by re-visiting and connecting disparate entries from past diaries and letters to and from her family and friends:

> I wanted to give […] an impression of the changes that period brought about in the minds and lives of very different groups of individuals belonging to the large section of middle-class society from which my own family comes. Only, I felt, by some such attempt to write history in terms of personal life could I rescue *something that might be of value, some element of truth and hope and usefulness*, from the smashing up of my own youth by the war (11, emphasis added).

This attempt to salvage some kind of use value from the war is a recurring theme in the memoir. Brittain wants to demonstrate that, even if what she has written “constitutes, in effect, the
indictment of a civilization,” the war, and the labor and lives that were sacrificed for it, will still have use-value for that indicted civilization if only it will learn from its own past (12). The terms of the memoir’s ambivalence toward the war are clearly set, and ambivalence colors nearly every aspect of Brittain’s engagement with work, labor, and action.

Most criticism of Testament of Youth has focused on Brittain’s feminism and her coming to terms with her losses through the process of writing. Accounts of Brittain’s feminism generally focus on its apparent paradoxes or inconsistencies, from Susan Leonardi’s critique of Brittain’s willed ignorance of Winifred Holtby’s lesbian desire, and her frantic imposition of heteronormativity on both her best friend and her texts, to Meg Albrinck’s more nuanced reading of how Brittain needed subversively to inhabit (in de Certeauvian terms) and render habitable the off-limits space of war experience to present her feminist perspective on the war. Although the arena of labor has not been a focal point for understanding how Brittain constituted her feminism, Brittain cites Olive Schreiner’s Woman and Labour as one of the formative texts of her feminism, and writes that she “can still tingle with excitement” on reading the passage that begins “We take all labour for our province!” (41, emphasis in original). This passage inspires her as she repeatedly confronts her father’s injunctions that she should prepare for marriage and forget her ideas of going to Oxford. She only becomes interested in Roland Leighton, her future fiancé and fellow Schreiner devoté, because he tells her that he is a feminist, and has been ever since he realized that his mother’s income from writing novels helped pay for his education (84).

Brittain’s philosophical and physical engagements with labor shape her mourning as much as they shape her feminism. Much scholarship has focused on the nexus of autobiographical form and trauma in Testament of Youth, asserting that it grapples primarily with the subjectivity of the dead. Victoria Stewart posits, for example, that Brittain’s memoir
“testif[ies] on behalf of” her dead companions. In a similar, if more psychoanalytic, reading Richard Badenhausen reads the text as a kind of talking cure for trauma. Badenhausen posits that through her memoir’s method of pastiche, which creates a (male) community of the dead amongst whom Brittain can converse, she is able to escape a state of Freudian melancholia and finally “break faith with the dead” and move on. These readings do not, however, take into account Brittain’s presentation of her relationship to her labor as a volunteer nurse behind the lines during the war, her work at Oxford as a student and writer, and her postwar action as a political speaker for the League of Nations. I argue that the community Brittain needed she found for herself, not in imagined communications with dead men, but by first cultivating her own subjectivity, a radical move for a provincial young woman of her generation, and then moving, in Arendtian terms, from the corporeal and thoughtless condition of labor, through the isolating condition of work, and finally to a relative freedom in action, that inter-human, communal initiative that creates mutual recognition, and the possibility of change. Far from passive pastiche, Brittain’s personally invested postwar action during the early twenties presents an alternative to Britain’s postwar paralytic conversation among the fragments of a ruined civilization and its mania for creating countless but futile memorials to the war’s dead while exhibiting veiled hostility for its survivors. While much interwar modernism (e.g., the Cantos and The Waste Land) self-consciously works (and self-consciously fails) to make the fragments of a lost European order cohere, or, to find cultural identity in England’s deep, mythic history (as in Mary Butts’ Taverner novels, and Virginia Woolf’s later fiction) Brittain’s internationalist action is dedicated to forging a new order of progressive communication in a coherent community of nations.
Brittain moves through these various stages of social engagement alongside the biopolitical transformation of traditional state power. If Brittain’s internationalism never quite breaks the ideological boundaries of this modern paradigm of state power, it at least pushes up against them. As we have seen, Giorgio Agamben points to the First World War as the period in which, through the exercise of the “state of exception” across Europe, state sovereignty’s basis in biopower became apparent. The war was a crucible for the biopolitical model of power within which biopower was strengthened by devising what Julian Reid has defined as “strategies” of control over the “natural body.”

Brittain’s personal experiences in the war always reflected the aleatory changes that the war compelled in England’s biological control over its subjects: the conflict demanded a disciplinary demonstration of the sovereign’s power of life or death over its subjects (the old paradigm of sovereignty elaborated by Hobbes) through direct state interventions into the biological existence of its subjects, in, for example, the Defence of the Realm Act and the Military Service Act, but it also produced more diffuse mechanisms to preserve its sovereignty and the life and well being of the British “species” at the social and biological level. The aspect of the biopoliticization of state power that is most important in regards to Brittain’s development and recovery, however, is that, as Foucault explains, biopower relies on “techniques oriented toward individuals and intended to rule them in a continuous and permanent way.” It is through the process of individualization that Brittain is finally able to accept what had been to her the unacceptable conditions of her subjectivity and move beyond her justified but futile anger against the state and culture for which she had sacrificed everything to become, once again, an engaged state subject. This individualization, which she clearly recognized as inhering in not only herself, but in her entire culture, marked more than any one historical moment or act the end of an age.
Brittain’s initial description of her provincial childhood is unsurprising: she describes her childhood home as representative of “all that was essentially middle-class in that Edwardian decade” (23). She was naïve and sheltered, the only person she knew interested in the larger world outside her provincial town, and evidently terrified by some unnamable presence lurking in the apparent safety of placid Buxton. Her numerous childhood terrors “of thunder, of sunsets, of the full moon, of the dark, of standing under railway arches or crossing bridges over noisy streams, of the end of the world and of the devil waiting to catch me round the corner” seem directly connected to the “tempestuous explosion[s]” of her father, and so by extension of the patriarchal power structure that pervades her community and acts as a constant surveillance mechanism over her subjectivity and her body (23-24). These fears she recalls are mostly not of substantial things, or frightening acts or images, but only of the images that would have saturated her childhood. The constraints on her subjectivity as a provincial Edwardian girl are omnipresent, invisible in their ubiquity, inscribed in everything around her and even directly onto her body, as she realizes when, reflecting on the freedom of the interwar years, she writes: “I am seized with an angry resentment against the conventions of twenty years ago, which wrapped up my comely adolescent body in woolen combinations, black cashmere stockings, ‘liberty’ bodice, dark stockinette knickers, flannel petticoat [etc.]” (34). These sartorial constraints function, at the level of the body, to perpetuate the larger constraints and surveillance against which Brittain struggled. With the psychological insight she has gleaned in the postwar years, and which she continually draws on as an article of faith, Brittain is able to look back at her childhood and teenage years and see how the omnipresent and crushing structure of paternalist control inhibited her subjective development.
This Edwardian community and family structure prevented children and younger adults from developing unique opinions and personalities through the free exploration of ideas.

Recalling her feelings after moving in with Winifred Holtby in 1920, she writes:

There had been no privacy in Victorian or Edwardian childhood, and from the age of thirteen to twenty-seven, I seemed to have lived in public. At school I had gone to bed and got up in dormitories [...], read and worked in the company of others; nothing perhaps is still so oppressive in traditional boarding school life as the inability of a boy or girl ever to be quite alone. [...] no member of that pre-war provincial “set” could hope to live to herself even if adult, and local and family searchlights had played continuously upon the dearest hopes, the most intimate relationships of every young person (546-7).

This reflection is possible because conditions have changed after the war and Brittain’s description presents a tension in that this surveillance is “still so oppressive” and that it was the particular burden of the “pre-war provincial set.” The deep moral structures that had kept surveillance over the early lives of the bourgeoisie have been attenuated by the experience of war and generational alienation. The war colors Brittain’s description of Victorian/Edwardian childhood—the communal vigilance of the family structure scrutinizes the subject with “searchlights”—metaphorically indicating the war “just beneath the surface of peace” that Foucault suggested may be the foundation of power.\textsuperscript{358}

Even in her courting with Roland, the two hardly ever had any time to themselves, as “the whole series of complicated relationships leading from acquaintance to engagement had to be conducted in public or not at all” (120). Such a carceral social structure insures the conformity that was necessary for the war to last as it did, and inexorable scrutiny prevented the discussion of what Ford Madox Ford called “things,” (politics, religion, sexuality, etc.). Not being able openly to discuss any of these things inhibits the formation of individual, self-analytic subjectivity. Even Brittain’s youthful aspirations, such as “to extend love, to promote thought, to
combat indifference, to inspire activity” and “to know everything of something and something of everything,” forged in this provincial obscurity, are, as she recognizes, hollow clichés (43).

Furthermore, this early training in conformity impelled a nearly universal initial welcoming of the war and its worthiness in Britain and an inability, publicly or even privately, to question its use value. Throughout her growth, this stays with Brittain, metamorphically, and gives her later anti-war sentiment a strange tension with what she always wants to believe—that there is yet some redeemable glory in war, or in the sacrifices that she and her friends made for it. Though disillusioned, she still asserts the value of her sacrifice, for instance, in affirming that “it had concrete results in stupendous patience, in superhuman endurance, in the constant re-affirmation of incredible courage” (370). She is always ambiguous about how these results should be valued, given their concreteness but also their having been cultivated and wasted for the sake of waste and destruction. Similarly, her Edwardian upbringing still marks the politically active journalist and novelist of the twenties and thirties; when looking for an apt quotation, Longfellow “will insist upon ousting A.E. Housman and Siegfried Sassoon” (26).

Brittain’s prewar desire to go to Oxford, an idiosyncrasy frowned upon as much by her community as by her parents, was an overt rebellion and insistence on her individuality that was both psychological and political. The social wrong Brittain commits in wanting to be a student is to demonstrate interest in her self, in who she might be, and, what she might, independently, do. In Arendtean terms, this first section of the memoir documents Brittain’s overwhelming desire for work, to take part in the process of shaping the artificial, human-made world, and thereby to shape her own subjectivity, retrieving from patriarchal power “the time that she [was] not qualified to use” (51). Although she already has clear ideas about the kind of social life she wants, Brittain is clearly here concerned first and foremost with that philosophical essential that
Foucault describes as “the care of the self.” The ancient Greek ideal Foucault describes is that the subject relate him or herself to him or herself as a subject, a self-reflection that ideally results in a state in which “not only is one satisfied with what one is and accepting of one’s limits, but one “pleases oneself” […] It is defined by the fact of not being caused by anything that is independent of ourselves and therefore escapes our control. It arises out of ourselves and within ourselves.”

Although Brittain strives after this cultivation of self in her first year at Oxford, it is not until she returns after the war that she recognizes that, to some extent, in aspiring after the work of a student, she has traded in the fetters of one set of social restrictions and regulations for another. The cultivated circles of the educated she once aspired after are not, necessarily, cultivated individual selves as much as they are representative of a conformist culture of cultivation.

Brittain’s achievement in winning a scholarship at Somerville is considerable, but after the tremendous difficulty of arriving at a place in which she can attend to her own subjectivity unimpaired by the constant scrutiny of provincial middle-class expectations, the demands of the larger national community rear up, and she is almost immediately overwhelmed by the conflict between her desire to stay at Oxford and what she perceives as the need to join the war effort. Both her lover and her brother have already signed up, which compounds this need. She desires to remain close to these progressive young men who have, thus far, stood with her in her determination to develop and look to the independent subjectivity they have valued. Torn between “learning” or “life,” and interrupted in her struggle toward independence, Brittain spends a period of stagnation unable to commit to either, “riding [her] bicycle about the hills and dales, feverishly inventing analogies and distinctions between life and death, soul and intellect, spirit and immortality” (138). When she can bear this no longer, she writes to Roland Leighton,
I remember once at the beginning of the War [...] you described college as ‘a secluded life of scholastic vegetation.’ That is just what it is. It is, for me at least, too soft a job.... I want physical endurance; I should welcome the most wearying kinds of bodily toil (140).

Brittain flies to labor in the face of the realization that the putative philosophical claims of civilization mask civilization’s emptiness, at best, or mendacious, murderous greed, at worst. Such realizations characterize much of the literature of modernism. Brittain is consistently torn in this memoir between her idealistic belief in the value of the sacrifices her generation is called on to make, and the realization that those sacrifices were unnecessary and only advanced the materialist needs of a moribund empire. The narration is almost impressionist in its vacillation between a belief in the glorious rhetoric of the early war years and moral condemnation of the war’s pointlessness. Her memoir derives enormous tension from the desire to use the grand and archaic language that Paul Fussell associates with the early years of the war, and the realization that such noble pieties mask ignoble corruption.360

The idealism of labor to which she turns in a moment of moral confusion functions much like that of Ford’s Christopher Tietjens, who conceives his military service as an opportunity to give himself “clean bones” and escape the moral complexities that the war and modern sexuality present.361 This chance to find herself, free of the ambiguity and anguish of political thought, is precisely what Brittain’s mind-consuming years of intensive labor will offer—an end to ineffectual musings and the sure knowledge nursing brings that she is certainly not doing the wrong thing in the face of such destruction. The flight to hard labor, however, is necessary because life at Oxford during wartime, with loved ones at the front, presents a double-bind. Brittain must, ideologically, support the war that she sees destroying all she cares about, but to remain in a state of reflection may challenge her Buxton beliefs too thoroughly before she has properly cultivated and invented an independent subjectivity. She turns to arduous labor,
therefore, for precisely the opposite of that which she sought in the work of a student. The art of attending to the individual self is fundamentally Appollonian in its inward-focused and rational discipline. But Brittain turns, in an odd twist of the Nietzschean paradigm, to the Dionysian exaltation not of thoughtless revelry within a larger group, but of unthinking sacrifice in physically laboring for the group effort of the war. She becomes a nurse to efface, rather than to cultivate, the self.

While fitting into the patriarchal bourgeoisie had been limiting, and constructing subjectivity in the arena of work was now ethically unthinkable, Brittain gives herself over to the hard physical labor, and immediate personal danger, of becoming a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse. She is variously assigned to hospitals in Britain, Malta, and France. Because this work is so closely linked to the men by whom Brittain partially defines herself, it actually helps to preserve the patriarchal order at the level of the male body through a maternal resignation of her powers and abilities to the labor of nursing men. This service corresponds exactly to Arendt’s definition of labor, both producing equilibrium in Brittain’s life through the constant repetition of Sisyphean acts which must be completed for consumption (in this case, the consumption of the soldiers’ labor in their return to active service) rather than any permanent addition to culture, and in its social construction as a maternal activity.

In analyzing work and labor, Arendt breaks from nineteenth century Marxist understandings of the categories. Arendt points out that “every European language, modern and ancient, contains two etymologically unrelated words for what we have come to think of as the same activity.” Arendt also criticizes what she sees as a fundamental contradiction in Marx’s admission that labor had value in its reification, and Marxism’s promise to eradicate that valuable labor. For Arendt, labor is distinguished from work because it simply reproduces
ephemeral products for consumption, rather than adding in some permanent way to the larger structures of the human-made world. The term *animal laborans* correctly describes the condition of the human at labor. He or she is merely creating the conditions for subsistence at a physical level—labor is not social, its results are not lasting, and it is the arena in which humans *produce* existence out of the given world rather than *shaping* it. A “zero-sum” war, where only total victory or total defeat are the possible results, exaggerates these conditions. The condition for subsistence and survival becomes hyper-productivity.\(^{364}\) Energy and resources must be produced and destroyed as fast as possible.

Another aspect of Arendt’s philological distinction between labor and work is that in the European languages the equivalent of the word labor, and not work, is always used to mean both strenuous toil and the condition of giving birth. State power made direct use of the ideological and biological imperatives of maternity in its immensely effective wartime propaganda campaign to recruit women laborers and volunteers, as well as male soldiers, using imagery of mothers and wives to shape both men and women’s feelings of familial obligation to their nation.

Brittain’s decision to be a nurse seems directly affected by this recruitment of women’s maternal labor. She chose to be a nurse rather than to volunteer for other forms of labor because she wanted to get as close to the war as possible, and because she believed herself well suited to the maternal work of nursing. Meg Albrinck has shown how the state’s propaganda machine reinforced gender roles. Albrinck traces the emergence of a pro-natalist propaganda campaign aimed at replenishing the diminishing male stock, embodied in such books as the 1918 *Women Wanted*, which “puts the very catchphrase that drew women into the factories into a new context” by adding the words “for maternity!”\(^{365}\) Albrinck cites one of the most iconic propaganda posters: three figures, two adults, clearly female, and one child, all representing,
potentially, a mother, wife, and daughter; they stand hugging one another and wrapped in shawls at an open window gazing on the backs of a departing group of soldiers in the distance. Above

Figure 7. Propagandistic portrayal of the maternal injunction to join the army (IWM Q70864)

them an inscription reads “Women of Britain Say—GO!” A similar piece of propaganda with an even more commanding maternal overtone is the poster of the mother telling her son “Go—it’s your duty lad.” Her extended, pointing arm, recalling Kitchener’s pointed declaration “your country needs you,” lends the mother paternal authority, vesting the state with the immediate and uncontestable power of both the father and the mother, whose labor produces the raw material for war. The same trope was used for nursing recruitment posters, representing the mother as a powerful and dominant figure, taking control of the male soldiers. This maternal labor produces material goods in the bodies of babies. Brittain’s labor as a nurse is similarly concrete, mending damaged bodies generally so they can be returned to active service or cleared off the battlefield. Brittain always conceives herself when she is on active duty as nursing, by proxy, either her fiancé or her brother (166). Her transformation of every patient into Roland or Edward
demonstrates an ambiguous desire both to be with these beloved men and to overcome or overpower them at the physical level. In her maternal role as nurse, Brittain exercises a kind of control over both the men she loves and the perilous situation of the war by giving herself the clear tasks of daily re-creating the physical conditions necessary for the war. Like the figures in the propaganda posters, Brittain can loom above the soldiers, and so the war, thus trumping political consideration of the world with the fundamental act of re-creating its conditions.

In taking on self-effacing labor Brittain ends up subjecting herself as much to the propaganda and the rhetoric of the war that suggests “if a man cannot be useful to his country, he is better dead” (89). The extent to which this propaganda figures in Brittain’s psychology cannot, of course, be precisely gauged, but it is remarkable that, after her close friend Victor, who
had been, among Roland (who was the first of her acquaintances killed) and Edward, one of the
“Three Musketeers” of Uppingham Public School, is blinded, she almost immediately hatches a
plan to marry him for the sake of sacrificing her future for a lifetime of the extended labor of
being a war nurse.

The idea occurs to her when she learns one morning that another close friend, Geoffrey,
has been killed. She remembers an advertisement she had cut out and sent to Roland two years
earlier: “Lady, fiancé killed, will gladly marry officer totally blinded or otherwise incapacitated
by the war.” In the letter, she had commented

“At first sight it is a little startling. Afterwards the tragedy of it dawns on you. The lady (probably more than a girl or she would have called herself ‘young lady’; they always do) doubtless has no gift or qualification, and does not want to face the dreariness of an unoccupied and unattached old-maidenhood. But the only person she loved is dead; all men are alike to her and it is a matter of indifference whom she marries, so she thinks she may as well marry someone who really needs her. The man, she thinks, being blind or maimed for life, will not have much opportunity of falling in love with anyone, and even if he does will not be able to say so. But he will need a perpetual nurse, and she if married to him can do more for him than an ordinary nurse and will perhaps find relief from her sorrow in devoting her life to him. Hence the advertisement; I wonder if anyone will answer it? It is purely a business arrangement, with an element of self-sacrifice which redeems it from utter sordidness. Quite an idea, isn’t it? (343-4).

So she meant to marry Victor, partially, as she admits, to guard her mourning for Roland. But the
self-negation implied in self-sacrifice also appeals to her. The life she envisions for such a wife-
nurse is completely reduced to physical labor. It collapses the distinction between private,
individual care of the body, and the body as a commodity to be sold on the market. Brittain
realizes, in retrospect that Victor’s death “probably saved [them] both from a relationship of
which the serenity might have proved increasingly difficult to maintain” (359). The complete
reversal of her characteristics, from the independent college student to the universal mother and
thoughtless caregiver demonstrates the extent to which the necessity of raw, difficult labor
effaces the individuality constructed through the cultural activity of work. The control this world-preserving labor has given her is an illusion that depends on the self-erasure she had fought against in escaping provincial Buxton. Her value in nursing or in marrying Victor for the sake of prolonging her nursing labor indefinitely is only a function of her working body; it is not fundamentally a manifestation of her self. In the photo of two nurses attending soldiers in perambulators (figure 9), the power structure is necessarily confusing. The nurses loom above the infantilized men, whose bodies, used by the war, are the sites of constant labor and ministration from the healthy bodies of the women, who both serve and control. As Brittain looks back to the period after Victor’s death and her preparation for a third stint as a VAD, now headed for France where she will once again face imminent bodily danger, she reflects on the relation between her and her friends’ constant renewal of commitments and state propaganda: “Between 1914 and 1919,” she writes “young men and women, disastrously pure in heart and unsuspicous of elderly self-interest and cynical exploitation, were continually re-dedicating

Figure 9. Nurses attending wounded soldiers in perambulators (IWM Q27814).
themselves […] to an end that they believed, and went on trying to believe, lofty and ideal” (370). What their rededication meant was a physical sacrifice to the state, a sacrifice that did not permit them to work constructively to contribute to their culture, nor to act and speak meaningfully to reshape the world. Indeed, the conditions of the nurse were much like the conditions of the soldier, and both were similar to the position of ideological impasse and imprisonment in which Brittain had been raised—one important difference being, however, that the demands of labor, of daily recreating the conditions of physical existence, obviated, mercifully, in Brittain’s case, the possibility of thought. Throughout the war, though especially at its start, she “longed intensely for hard physical labor which would give [her] discomfort to endure and weariness to put mental speculation to sleep” (146).

Brittain’s return to Oxford after the war constituted a time of trial and transformation in which, having lost her only friends to the war, she struggled to find meaning in the experiences that seemed of so little value to her classmates, who had been too young to experience it directly. But the war had propelled Brittain and her generation from the collectivity-based community structure that had made Edwardian life so uniform and enabled the mass physical sacrifice of labor for the war possible, to one based on the individual and individual needs.

Back at Oxford, the individuality Brittain had to fight so hard for the opportunity to forge is now taken for granted. It is encouraged in almost as insidious a way, it seems, as it had been denied before the war. This move from what had seemed like the “we-based” culture of her youth to the “me-based” postwar culture of her young adulthood presents Brittain with a dilemma: how will she use the individuality to which the state, in Foucault’s terms, addresses its power over the subject? Postwar, Brittain is set adrift from the tight control that her Edwardian youth and state service had enforced. In 1919, amidst the atmosphere of that “thoroughly nasty
Peace” being “waged” in Paris, she observes “the hectic reactions of [her] generation, frantically
dancing night after night […] in the vain hope of recapturing the lost youth that the war had stolen” (467-9). To make up for their sacrifices, Brittain observes, other survivors of the war turned to the hedonistic pursuit of individual pleasures the exhausted moral state of England now permitted and, through the agency of postwar culture, encouraged.

But Brittain has returned to Oxford under the internalized scrutiny of too many dead, measuring her actions against their lost lives, to enjoy the egotistical pleasures of individuality. She is admittedly, after four years of intentionally obliterating thought through the anodyne of labor, less than enthusiastic about returning to the thoughtful life and vegetative work of the student. The transition from labor back to work, as Brittain feared, was disastrous, for in finally having to think, she had to confront for the first time the utility and value of the deaths of her four close relations, the sacrifice of her own youth, and the complete mental exhaustion that had left her in a state, essentially, of shell shock.

While Brittain was most probably, as Badenhausen and others have shown, suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, her descriptions of her mental breakdown at Oxford revolve around a grief that is unresolved because it cannot attach significant use-value to its cause. In the months immediately following the war, when Brittain is able for the first time to think about the war in political terms, the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles seem to render the deaths of her relations and her own sacrificed years worthless:

[…] these negotiations […] did not seem to me to represent at all the kind of “victory” that the young men whom I had loved would have regarded as sufficient justification for their lost lives. Although they would no doubt have welcomed the idea of a League of Nations, Roland and Edward certainly had not died in order that Clemenceau should outwit Lloyd George, and both of them bamboozle President Wilson, and all three combine to make the beaten, blockaded enemy pay the cost of the War. For me the “Huns” were then, and always, the patient, stoical Germans whom I had nursed in
France […] So when the text of the Treaty of Versailles was published in May […] I deliberately refrained from reading it; I was beginning already to suspect that my generation had been deceived, its young courage cynically exploited, its idealism betrayed, and I did not want to know the details of that betrayal (470).

This immediately precedes Brittain explaining that she had decided to switch her subject at Oxford from English to History because “[a]fter the first dismayed sense of isolation in an alien peace-time world, such rationality as I still possessed reasserted itself in a desire to understand how the whole calamity had happened” (471).

The desire to understand the political past while ignoring the political future is a symptom of the melancholia that Badenhausen reads in Brittain’s text. Reading her melancholia through Freud’s 1917 delineation of “Mourning and Melancholia,” Badenhausen interprets Brittain as unable to “take on another object of desire” because “she wishes to remain faithful to those who have died.” These first few years of melancholic stasis back at school are chronicled in a chapter called “Survivors Not Wanted,” which seethes with resentment at the lack of community and compassion Brittain confronted after her long ordeal. The students who have not shared her experience seem to partake still of an insular British world that Brittain recognizes as feebly predicated on the assumption that larger historical and international political narratives cannot intervene. The incident that crystallizes Brittain’s inevitable disillusionment comes when she is asked, by her then-nemesis Winifred Holtby, to take part in a debate, arguing that travel and experience are more valuable than a University education. Feeling that she and her own international experience are on trial, she is enraged and humiliated when the younger students, who were not involved in the war, make light of her sacrificial labor, arguing for the more culturally insular academic experience, which now seems to Brittain so much vegetative, masturbatory self-involvement.
Brittain represents this experience as traumatic because she felt isolated from those who had not experienced the labor, and its “exaltation” as she had. However, another, hidden source of the trauma is the fear that her labor has been in vain. As she had set out to nurse by proxy the four men she cared about, and they all died, her labor yields no use value, and the lost years that she dedicated to physically demanding labor appear unredeemed. Her poem “The Lament of the Demobilized,” published in *Oxford Poetry* in 1920, makes this point forthrightly:

“You threw four years into the melting-pot—
Did you indeed!” These others cry. “Oh well,
The more fool you!”
And we’re beginning to agree with them (467, ll. 12-15).

The old faith in the war that had sustained her, even in her most disillusioned moments, cannot stand up to this new perception that the war has meant nothing for her culture but destruction. It has not changed the world, and the labor she put into it merely did, as Arendt suggests labor must, balance back to zero in the end.

The most remarkable manifestation of her trauma in these immediately postwar years, and the aspect of her story that has engendered the most scholarly work, also manifests itself in terms that uncannily mirror international politics. When confronted with the news of the death of yet another friend (from pneumonia), Brittain writes that she “flung herself furiously into […] tennis parties, for I was sick beyond description of death and loss” (484). This refusal to face loss and submit to becoming one of the Dionysian postwar revelers comes at a price: “I looked one evening into my bedroom glass and thought, with a sense of incommunicable horror, that I detected in my face the signs of some sinister change. A dark shadow seemed to lie across my chin; was I beginning to grow a beard, like a witch?” (484). Thus begins a year of hallucinations in which mirrors become Brittain’s tormentors: “the horrible delusion […] that my face was changing […] became a permanent, fixed obsession” (496). The darkly ironic climax to this
disorder comes when Brittain is assigned a room at Oxford that contains five enormous mirrors. The room was assigned to Brittain because the bursar “was amusedly aware of the vain interest in clothes” for which Brittain was good-naturedly teased by her classmates. The room is “invaded at night by armies of large, fat mice,” and when Brittain has to enter the room, she writes, “I pressed my hands desperately against my eyes lest five identical witches’ faces should suddenly stare at me from the cold, remorseless mirrors” (500).

Coming so soon after her disgusted reaction to the remorseless Treaty of Versailles, it is hard to miss the connection between Brittain’s personal hall of mirrors, invaded by bellicose mice, and Versailles’s Hall of Mirrors, invaded, as it was, by still bellicose statesmen intent on prolonging, rather than preventing, ongoing hostility. Brittain’s hall of mirrors represents her failure to experience the Lacanian mirror stage moment in which one recognizes the (false) unity of the subject in her own body. Brittain’s own internal trauma is multiplied and reified by the geopolitical events in Versailles’s hall of mirrors that her own mirror experience recreates at the personal level. What in Versailles is meant to be an act of international unity becomes an act of further breakdown and fragmentation, implying that the breakdown of the “European Civil War” has made reunification impossible. Likewise, Brittain’s inability to achieve subjective unity in her hall of mirrors indicates the level of traumatic personal breakdown that has caught up to her after her years of supposedly thoughtless labor. This confrontation with a multiplied self, the self that, looking out, sees only a multiplied and hideous distortion of itself look back, is the pinnacle of Brittain’s traumatic isolation, and it compels Brittain to create community, to speak among and be recognized by others. She begins sleeping in Winifred Holtby’s room, and as the two students start working for the League of Nations, Brittain is able to develop a new identity through action as a professional internationalist pacifist speaking at public lectures on behalf of
the League of Nations.

Brittain’s specific notion of internationalism shows an eagerness to escape the racially species-preserving control of biological life that the state had so explicitly propagandized as the point of the war. Her commitment to internationalism, so at odds with the frivolous youth and the hedonistic survivors that she describes, certainly owes something to her specific experiences as a nurse to both British and German soldiers. She has been in a unique position to see that the state power that asserts its control over the subject by guaranteeing “protection of the species” fulfills the same political functions, and for the same reasons, from state to state. Brittain cannot, however, fully transcend the racial insularity into which she was born and brought up, and her own ideological limitations correspond to those of the League of Nations in which she is so invested. She has made a leap to the realm of action, what Arendt describes as taking part in a larger community in which people speak and interact among others to “reveal actively their unique personal identities.”369 In the arena of action presented by the League of Nations, Brittain can act in a communal and not merely self-interested way. The League presents an opportunity to be with others not, as in the provincial pre-war paradigm, in a prison of constant surveillance, but in the ultimately fulfilling if utopian sense of what Arendt describes as the possibility of people being “with others and neither for nor against them,” and which Agamben elaborates in his utopian vision of the coming community in which people can cultivate, finally, an unmediated being together.370

Although the ending of Brittain’s story is not Utopian, and history will add the bitter sequel of a Second World War, Testament of Youth shows that the ideological structures of war and waste are not irresistible, but subject to bold actions that resist violence and clear a space in which to articulate non-martial international action. Brittain’s movement through work, labor
and action is ground-breaking and reflects a modern progression that could, perhaps, only have been possible as part of the cataclysm of the war that proved to be the telos of Victorian English imperial culture.

V. David Jones’s “Artificial Guts”: Re-crafting the Subject
A drastically different memoir written, like Testament of Youth, in the late twenties and early thirties, David Jones’s war epic In Parenthesis (published in 1937) is deeply concerned with the value of war labor. Critical reception of In Parenthesis has been polarized by the question of whether it is pro- or anti-war. Many of the complications it brings to modernist poetics and themes have thus remained obscure, particularly regarding modernist reactions to new technologies of violence engendered by World War I—such as poison gas, the tank, increasingly powerful hand-held explosives—and their effects on modernist conceptions of the body as a site of labor, work and action. In Parenthesis is situated uniquely at the nexus of high modernism and war poetry. Understanding Jones’s poeticization of his experience as a war-laborer surrounded by and laboring with new destructive technologies adds significantly to any discussion of modernist reactions to the modernized war’s impact on British life. In Parenthesis presents the quotidian reality of laboring to produce the war more than it either condemns or redeems the war’s motives and techniques. Perhaps more than any other text drawing on personal experience of the war, In Parenthesis shows that trench warfare and attrition meant daily rebuilding what was daily destroyed, merely to stay alive, and, if possible, interrupt the life-sustaining labor of the enemy. It presents Jones’s larger concerns about artistic and social unity, their fragmentation in the face of technological and modern mass culture, and the increasingly tenuous role of homo faber, the artist who works to construct the artificial, “human-made” world.
For Jones, the war was a parenthetical period of labor in a life dedicated otherwise to the pursuit of art. Presenting himself and his body as lost in and appropriated by the physical labor of soldiering for the duration of the war, Jones carefully constructs the attraction that mind-numbing labor presents in such psychologically and physically traumatic situations. Jones’s poetic version of himself, John Ball, shares Brittain’s determination to lose himself in labor—not merely to void his mind temporarily, but literally to erase himself as an autonomous subject and merge with some lifeless entity of reified war and death. *In Parenthesis* is both a modernist *thanatopsis* and a modernist ode to labor, defined by an ambiguous mixture of sexualized attraction and revulsion to the technological violence of modernity and mechanized war that endlessly fragments the laborers who bring the war into being. The poem concludes with a surreal vision of the transformation of the soldier’s condition from that of a laboring human to an embodiment of state war-making labor from which the human, as mental and physical subject, is gradually eradicated. Through the articulation of this vision—and *In Parenthesis* is a visionary poem—Jones writes his own way back from shell shocked, unthinking *homo laborans* to autonomous, fastidious *homo faber*. Unlike Brittain, Jones sees little to hope for in international co-operation, and he follows other artists of the 1930s in his turn toward a deep British (largely Welsh) culture. As with other modernists, this tendency has troubling parallels to the *völkisch* turn within fascist Germany.

The social changes of the interwar years, in England and on the Continent, inform the text’s climactic but largely ignored vision of the prosthetic re-integration of the soldier’s body, and while *In Parenthesis* is a “war-book” as much as it is a work of high modernism, it also reflects the late thirties political atmosphere out of which it emerged. John Ball’s 1916 vision of future prosthetic automaton soldiers, I argue, is informed, however dogmatically Jones and his
coterie argue for the poem’s pure formalism, by what Jones has seen since the war—a lost
generation of damaged subjectivity giving rise to totalitarianisms addressed most specifically to
the individual body and asserting their mandate to ensure and protect that body’s purity.

Tim Armstrong gives a valuable account of how ideas about the body changed in the
early twentieth century as a result of new technologies, but he deals only briefly with World War
One in his discussion of prosthesis, focusing almost entirely on how its new technologies, and
their promise of fixing a corporeal lack, were redirected to cosmetic ends in capitalist
societies. 371 In Parenthesis demonstrates, however, that the improved and more complete
reconstructive and prosthetic corrections that grew out of the war, signified an inherently
nostalgic promise of a reunified whole. In In Parenthesis, such prosthetic reconstruction
becomes analogous both to totalitarianism’s promise of social, cultural and ethnic unity, and the
highly fragmentary and prosthetic amalgamation characteristic of the artificially unified
modernist texts of the postwar literary avant-garde, of which In Parenthesis is a representative,
if late, contribution.

Despite Jones’s statement, however, that “[t]here is little in In Parenthesis that is not
straight reporting,” In Parenthesis is as fastidiously constructed through a dense layer of
mythical and cultural allusion as any canonical work of modernism. 372 Furthermore, though the
poem was begun in 1928, and, more or less completed in 1932, it was not published, due to
Jones’s war-related nervous breakdown, until 1937. Furthermore, Gareth Joseph Downes notes
that in the years between the work’s inception and its publication Jones continued to make minor
adjustments, did illustrations for the poem (only two of which, the frontispiece and end piece
discussed below, were included), and added many of the inter-titles, attempting to unify the
modernist fragmentation of his narrative more fully into a sensory gesamtkunstwerk. 373
This attempt to present the fragmentary poem, with its allusions culled from diverse sources, its polyglot tendencies, and its incorporation of often conflicting literary techniques, is representative of Jones’s lifelong concern with re-integrating the subject fragmented by modernity. Born in Kent in 1895, he admitted that one of his earliest childhood anxieties had to do with the changing of his family’s Kent address to a London address as the city expanded: already, Jones felt modernity encroaching on the bucolic ideal of deep British culture. Jones entered the war at a young age, interrupting his art school training, and spent the years afterwards pursuing traditionalist artistic endeavors. He converted to Roman Catholicism after meeting Eric Gill and lived with the Gill artisans for a time. Gill served as a father figure to Jones (who was briefly engaged to one of Gill’s daughters) and later introduced him to the reactionary Roman Catholic Chelsea group, whose politics were symptomatic of a broader underbelly of English fascist sympathy. As Downes points out, Jones was not only pro-Chamberlain in the years leading up to World War II, but pro-Hitler, and the political tensions of continental conflict form a substantial subtext that makes the completed In Parenthesis very much a product of the 1930s.

As for many of his modernist peers, Jones’s appalling political views in the 1930s have engendered an ongoing debate about the extent of his fascism and anti-Semitism. On one side of this debate are critics such as Neil Corcoran, Paul Fussell and Joseph Gareth Downes, who read In Parenthesis as “deeply conservative” and sympathetic to Nazism, and anti-Semitic. Corcoran indicates that Jones has not been adequately taken to task by his biographers and critics for these disturbing aspects of his life and work, which are “inexcusable and disgusting;” however, he believes, like Downes, that Jones “understands… the collusion between myth and power, how myth is an element of ideology.” Fussell’s reading of the poem’s conservatism
hinges on its sympathy for old European ideals, which Fussell sees (wrongly, I believe) as an attempt to redeem the war by fitting it into a longer European tradition of noble and mythical conflict. Downes furnishes evidence from Jones’s private correspondence, providing some biographical background on his involvement in the Chelsea Group, which was so far to the right in English politics that it hardly fit within the parameters of Catholicism.

Downes writes most specifically against Thomas Dilworth, who argued that “at the deepest level of feeling and conviction, [Jones] was out of sympathy with fascist political policy.” Dilworth claims that in the substantial amount of unpublished documents to which he has access, there is no anti-Semitism or racism, and there is none in the published material. Downes directly and incontrovertibly challenges this in his analysis of Jones’s stereotypical character in *In Parenthesis* called “the little Jew” who is consistently excluded by the poem from the brotherhood and camaraderie of the British, and even of the British and the Germans, who are engaged in what Jones sees as fratricidal conflict.

Downes is correctly intent, like Corcoran, on seeing *In Parenthesis* as a text of the late 1930s, and it is for this reason that the sympathy it extends to the Germans of the First World War is troubling. This sympathy for “THE ENEMY FRONT-FIGHTERS WHO SHARED OUR PAINS AGAINST WHOM” Jones claims in the inscription “WE FOUND OURSELVES BY MISADVENTURE” is reasonable, and demonstrates, rather against Fussell’s reading, that Jones is aware of the almost arbitrary nature of the conflict. Vincent Sherry has recapitulated the public debate in England leading up to the war and demonstrated how capriciously the potential enemies of England (Slavic or Teutonic) were cast as either civilized or uncivilized, valorous or cowardly, closely related or barely human, up until the last possible moment that a public decision to enter the war against Germany was announced. Jones’s sympathy for the Germans
can thus be read as a sign of resistance to the overstrained language of logic in which, Sherry argues, English propagandists made their case that this was a war for English civilization against barbaric foes who had been, until the war began, civilized German cousins.

However, the poem’s 1937 publication is not all that upsets this sympathetic reading of Jones’s Teutonic commiseration. As Downes demonstrates, Jones specifically uses the language of the 1930s to show an enduring commiseration with Germany throughout the interwar years, long after Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 and the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. Downes argues that the poem shows a consistent disdain for “the essential foot-mob,” the poorest, but in many ways most useful, of the soldiers. At one point in the poem Jones writes that they are best suited in the service of the “sturmbteilung,” a word meaning “storm troops” that would, according to Downes, “evoke images of the terrifying spectacle of the massed formations of Hitler’s paramilitary SA.”

But Downes does not need to rely only on the text to make his point. He also quotes the Chelsea Group’s publications, which are so anti-communist as to support fascism, showing that in April, 1939, Jones had written in a letter that, despite reservations about Hitler’s violence, and the fact that he was not a “unifying maker,” a phrase which signals Jones’s obsession with resolving the fragmentation of modernity through work, Jones “‘back[ed] him still against this currish, leftish, money thing.’”

Although I agree with Downes and Corcoran that a close investigation of Jones’s relationship to fascism both in and out of his texts is crucial, it is important to remember that Jones was hardly a demagogue, and his reprehensible tryst with fascism should not obscure the achievement of his poetry any more than Pound’s or Eliot’s. As with the Cantos or The Waste Land, In Parenthesis is far from politically dogmatic; it is almost endlessly ambiguous. Kathleen Henderson Staudt is overly generous in her reading of Jones as too politically bewildered to have
known much of anything about the fascism he endorsed, and in any event, ignorance is always a poor excuse. Still, there is good evidence from his personal life and his texts that his conservatism was based more on fears of mechanization, technology, and mass culture (all of which, probably without Jones realizing it, were and remained preoccupations of many fascisms) than any seriously considered political program. Like his politically unsavory modernist brethren, Jones espoused an archaicism that was concerned, in Staudt’s words, with “humanity’s fundamental identity as homo sapiens, homo faber (man the knower, man the maker).” Staudt argues that homo faber figures in the poem like Aneiren Merddyn Lewis and Dai Greatcoat “[underscore] the poet’s role as a person conscious of history yet speaking to a present day audience.” Jones is preoccupied in In Parenthesis almost as much with the role of the “unifying maker” (poet, artisan, painter, engraver) as with the war itself. For Jones, this really sacred role is jeopardized by the rapidity and harm of labor technologies that render it obsolete, such as assembly line industrialization, communism, and Somme-style mass butchery.

The divided critical response to the poem results not only from its moral ambiguity concerning the war’s causes and technological developments, but also from its aesthetic and structural ambiguity. Of the poem’s seven parts, critics have focused mostly on Part Four, King Pellam’s Launde, and Part Seven, The Five Unmistakable Marks. Part Four seems to present the most concentrated distillation of Jones’s moral, aesthetic, and religious philosophies. The middle section of the poem, and the longest, it is a chronicle of thoughtless labor, of soldiers who perform motions, making without thinking what they are making, and making inexorably toward their own disposal. Part Seven presents the Battle of Mametz Wood as a passion play, in which Ball bears witness to the novel biotechnical perversions that result from an industrialized war of attrition. The frontispiece and end piece (discussed below) both mirror each other and serve as
prologue and epilogue, demonstrating the fragmented, finally prosthetic, soldier’s physical transformation into an automaton, and his figurative transformation, through textual, cultural and mythic intervention, into a unified and organic symbol of sacrifice.

The poem begins in England, late in 1915, and follows Ball through his journey to France, his day-to-day drudgery in the trenches, and his injury at Mametz Wood, where Jones himself was injured in the leg and so temporarily returned to England. 386 Jones ends the narrative here because, as he says in the ambiguous preface to the poem, which I read as integral to the experience of In Parenthesis, around that time there was “a change in the character of our lives in the Infantry on the West Front. From then onward things hardened into a more relentless, mechanical affair, took on a more sinister aspect” (ix). 1916, with the introduction of conscription and the increasing mechanization of the war, marks a falling off point for Jones from the first few years in which there “was a certain attractive amateurishness, and elbow-room for idiosyncrasy that connected one with a less exacting past” (ix). Jones here displays, like Eliot in Four Quartets, the nostalgic desire to reach back through modernity’s historical time to a lost cultural integrity in which one could experience full and autonomous subjectivity even in the laborious drudgery of trench-warfare. Though such sentiments in the preface are often more ironic than scholars have recognized, they are nonetheless consistent with Jones’s artistic interests and personal anxieties. What appalls him most about the war is its modern character: “Just as now there are glimpses in our ways of another England—yet we know the truth. Even while we watch the boatman mending his sail, the petroleum is hurting the sea” (ix). Behind the old ways of doing—and making—things, Jones laments, destructive technologies’ excess and artificiality necessarily damage the integrity of the cultural and natural world from which the artist draws inspiration. Such excesses abound and accumulate over the seven sections of In
Parenthesis as the “less exacting past” that Jones projects through allusion onto the early years of the war is lost, the pace of modernity quickens, and the soldiers’ labor becomes less their own.

John Ball is a clumsy soldier, not suited to the work, but able to find joy in “the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men” (ix). Jones unreservedly values homosocial domesticity, and his community of laboring, unique men is idyllic. When the violence of the war intervenes, however, Ball begins to ruminate on death and its possibility; the homosocial bond of laboring men is interrupted by a dark femininity, which, nonetheless, attracts him: “He would hasten to his coal-black love: he would breathe/ More free for her grimly embrace, and the reality of her” (28). These romantic interludes are contrasted to the monotony and fatigue of attending to the real instruments of war with which Ball manufactures the death that he will most likely share.

In writing the poem, Jones re-integrates his experience into an artistic whole, recentering the human as maker of cultural meaning. He often attributes the observations of the poem, however, to other characters within it, endowing them with poetic vision. Although Ball is the organizing center of the text, the speaker moves in indirect free style from the consciousness of one character to another, usually indicating whose subjectivity is being presented, as in this novelistic description of Lewis’s rumination on “man”:

Temporary unpaid Lance-Corporal Aneirin Merddyn
Lewis had somewhere in his Welsh depths a remembrance of the nature of man, of how a lance-corporal’s stripe is but held vicariously and from on high, is of one texture with an eternal economy (1-2).

Lewis is a privileged character in the text who, as Staudt points out, along with Dai Greatcoat, becomes a poetic chronicler of the battalions’ experiences. Ball is the sensory and animal center around which the external poetic voices organize. He is an everyman for whom these voices
speak, and so is more intimately connected with the common soldiers, whose subjectivities and voices come in and out of focus with especially protean ease in Part Four, the alltagesgeschichte of trench life, and Part Five, in which myriad soldiers’ thoughts, songs, blasphemies, and invectives blend together to create a textured, tactile and sensory world of near-Joycean dimensions.

Focusing mostly on Part Seven, Corcoran argues that objectification of the soldier’s bodies creates a queer sexuality that amounts to a condemnation of the barbarism of violently ripping apart beautiful young men. Corcoran is right that the poem’s violence is highly sexualized. Its undeniable same-sex desire and morbid misogyny mediate Ball’s physical and mental reactions to violence, weaponry and death. The initiating moment of this sexualized attraction to the technology of violence comes at the end of part 2, when Ball witnesses his first shell explosion. The passage contains a coded but revelatory sexuality akin to that of Coleridge’s Kubla Khan, projecting the sexuality of the characters onto the violent rending of the earth. A building of tension precedes this climax as Ball, incapable of motion but alert to the coming explosion, experiences a heightening of sensation:

He stood alone on the stones, his mess-tin spilled at his feet. Out of the vortex, rifling the air it came—bright brass-shod, Pandoran; with all-filling screaming the howling crescendo’s up-piling snapt. The universal world, breath held, one half second, a bludgeoned stillness. Then the pent violence released a consummation of all burstings out; all sudden up-rendings and rivings-through—all taking out of vents—all barrier breaking—all unmaking. Pernitric begetting—the dissolving and splitting of solid things. […] Behind ‘E’ Battery, fifty yards down the road, a great many mangolds, uprooted, pulped, congealed with chemical earth, spattered and made slippery the rigid boards leading to the emplacement. The sap of vegetables slobbering the spotless breach-block of No. 3 gun (24).
In this section-closing epiphany, Ball is awed by an orgasmic violence that has broken all barriers, literally and metaphorically, between the organic world to which Ball the man belongs, and the chemical and technological world, of which Ball the soldier-laborer is both a subject and a custodian. The splitting and transgressing of physical boundaries in the explosion awakens Ball to the reality of the body’s vulnerability and what William Blissett calls its “thinginess,” both as an object and an object with sexual “things.” Part 1 had concluded with a flat admission of anxiety, more jarring for its stylistic change within its context than for its content: “You feel exposed and apprehensive in this new world” (9). Metaphorically, this first shell explosion is the loss of Ball’s martial virginity; afterwards, he is no longer the exposed and apprehensive virgin in the brothel. The explosion also highlights the miscegenation of the technologically new chemicals with the organic earth, a theme that will build throughout the poem as distinction between artificiality (technology) and the organic body decreases.

In a refutation of Fussell’s charge of the poem’s valorization of the war, Vincent Sherry claims that Fussell has failed to do the close and difficult work of examining the poem’s allusions in order to understand its anti-war meaning. In his deft analysis of this passage he sees the ambiguities as ironic, and tied directly to the horrors of technological war and its dual uses of creation and destruction. Sherry explains that “‘Pernitric’ is the chemical term for compounds containing nitrogen, and nitrogen’s two uses—in fertilizer and explosives, in “begetting” and “unmaking”—match the double role of Mars. But there is an unheroic factor in the compound: the excessive violence of technological war.” Sherry reads the excess here as crucial, for he sees it as marking a lack of balance in Jones’s rendering of the war that makes it necessarily antithetical to the perfectly balanced ecology of archaicism that Jones celebrates. His use of heroic myth does not redeem this war within a deeper European tradition so much as it signals
the end of Europe’s ability, in war, in art, and in culture, to strike a balance that will sustain the cyclical rhythms of myth, here suggested by Mars’s dual functions.

Jones explicitly addresses his ambivalence to such modern technologies of violence in the preface, showing trepidation about how his writing addresses the novelty of rapid technological changes in warfare and their impact on the poeticization of war. While Fussell reads the preface as an assertion of the immediate assimilability of modern technology into established modes of describing war, Jones pointedly writes that he is unsure how these technological changes affect the rendering of lived martial experience into poetry: “It is not easy in considering a trench-mortar barrage to give praise for the action proper to chemicals—full though it may be of beauty. We feel a rubicon has been passed between striking with a hand weapon as men used to do and loosing poison from the sky as we do ourselves. We doubt the decency of our own inventions, and are certainly in terror of their possibilities” (xiv). Jones’s ambivalence about these new technologies is played out in the poem’s simultaneous dread and attraction to technological violence and its immediate effects on epistemologies of the body. This response to the methods of the war is more complex than either pragmatist approval or humanist revulsion. On the one hand, Jones’s nostalgic yearning for the lost European tradition of homo faber the artisan, his Roman Catholicism, and his seeming inability to live in modernity all signal that he was the belated modernist par excellence, for whom modernity offers nothing but horror. On the other hand, there is a giddy, erotic and religiously teleological attraction to extremity in the horrible passing of this Rubicon.

Jones presents the technological advancements in explosive weapons that create this Rubicon in “currish” terms. As Sherry demonstrates, England’s involvement in the war was sold entirely in a twisted and manipulated language of the liberal political tradition. Jones’s
conservative, even primitivist, abhorrence of modern materialist political ideas such as socialism
and capitalism, leads him to an indirect but clear condemnation of the technological advances of
the war. New technologies are associated with money, and, as Downes has shown, the poem
often refers distastefully to money and material concerns that Jones believes are opposed to the
Anglo-Germanic civilization he eulogizes. When Ball and his comrades have just arrived in
France, before they have experienced any shelling, the bombing officer gives them a didactic
presentation. He is an efficient young businessman who “told them lightly of/ the efficacy of his
trade” and “predicted an important future/ for the new Mills Mk. IV grenade, just on the market”
(13). His emphasis, however, is not on how these will help the soldiers, but how they will help
Britain economically. When he leaves, he is compared, with restrained disdain, to a “commercial
counterpart,” an analogy mirrored, in part seven, by the derisive prediction of “a Cook’s tourist to
the devastated areas” who will find Ball’s abandoned rifle (186). In the context of the poem, the
word “efficacy” also conjures disparagement, as Jones elsewhere refers to “the efficacious
word,” explaining in the notes that it is the “one expletive which, above any other, was
considered adequate to ease outraged susceptibilities,” i.e., the “F-word.” (53). The technology
and those producing and distributing it belong to the side of the conflict for which Jones has the
most antipathy: those civilian bureaucrats, businessmen, and politicians who stand to profit from
the conflict (xvii).

In further consideration of these new technologies in the preface, Jones writes that “[i]t
would be interesting to know how we shall ennoble our new media as we have already ennobled
and made significant our old—candle light, fire-light, Cups, Wands and Swords, to choose at
random” (xiv). Although it may be optimistic for him to think that these new military media,
such as the poison gas and bombs, will be ennobled, there is an irony here that points toward an
even greater biopolitical and theological ambiguity in the poem. Jones has not chosen these old media at random, as he claims; they all portend the mystic-religious significance of the Christian mass, the Tarot deck, or both. They are closely associated with death or the religious mediation between death and the subject. The focus on these particular ancient media, which have been ennobled by their relation to death, seems to suggest that these new media could be, if not ennobled by the same proximity, dreadfully empowered despite or because of their grander scale of destruction. The comparison of these old and new technologies ironically underlines Jones’s knowledge that to ennable poison gas and explosives through myth or sheer will is impossible (Marinetti and his Futurists notwithstanding) as these are not phenomena that have emerged concomitant to civilization, but have been competitively dreamt up by modern warring nation states. Furthermore, the persistence of the old and venerable media is poetically ennobled in the poem in opposition to these new technologies.

One of the most startling and revealing moments concerning Jones’s attitude to these new weapons, their sources and their purposes, occurs in part seven, when Ball finds a German bomb:

You grab his dropt stick-bomb as you go, but somehow you don’t fancy it and anyway you forget how it works. You definitely like the coloured label on the handle, you throw it to the tall wood-weeds” (169).

This moment of aesthetic reflection on the stick-bomb is glossed with a note explaining that, though Jones does not remember what exactly he liked about it, “the sight of it gave me some kind of pleasure—just as one likes any foreign manufacture, I suppose” (222). The casual tone of the note, and the inability to come up with any real reason for why Ball does not “fancy” the bomb but definitely likes the label, are surprising when one recalls the function of the item under consideration—the destruction of Ball and the other British soldiers. Ball considers the phallic explosive in an intimate and human way; he sees its aesthetic appeal and is able to draw human
warmth from the notion that it was manufactured—made, at whatever distance, by some human hand—but he is simultaneously put-off and confused by it. It is an exotic commercial commodity, the usage of which is not immediately clear. It is not ennobled as a sword might be, by a deep and shared cultural background. The stick-bomb is clearly a product, labeled and sold, and as such it induces psychosomatic confusion.

The incident of the stick-bomb is typical of the attention to the detail and materiality of physical experience that makes In Parenthesis such a noun-oriented and concrete poem. The fourth section, King Pellam’s Launde, is the section in which Jones presents material reality and the day-to-day labor of the trenches in most detail. Blisset argues that the entire poem has an “arch structure,” in which “the first and last sections [balance] each other, the second and sixth, the third and fifth, leaving the fourth as the keystone of the arch.” This section thus bears a great load of structural weight, and it is correspondingly tightly structured to present a day in the life (it happens to be December 25th, 1915) of soldiers at the front.

Jones’s insistent emphasis in this section falls on the corporeal conditions of labor. The section begins, at “stand-to,” the daily ritual of standing for one hour at the ready as the sun rises, anticipating enemy action. Stand-to functions as a daily birthing ritual, bringing the subjects of the war back into its material conditions:

Stand-to.
Stand-to-arms.
Stealthy, imperceptibly stript back, thinning
night wraps
unshrouding, unsheafing—
and insubstantial barriers dissolve. […]
The flux yields up a measurable body; bleached forms emerge and stand (59).

As the sun rises, the “insubstantial barriers” signifies by verbs and adjectives give way to the central object of the poem, the body. From this birth the material conditions of the trenches
emerge in greater and greater detail, and the poem follows Ball and his fellow soldiers through such mundane actions as cleaning their rifles, making tea, and jostling around for a ration of rum. Woven among the mythical allusions are myriad minutiae and detail, elevated to as great an importance as the mythical framework. Jones dedicates as much space in the notes to explaining the utility and scarcity of thin wire gauze for cleaning rifles, for instance, as for elucidating Arthurian and Welsh myth. This section, more than the others, is littered with the mundane accoutrements of war: “Picks, shovels, dredging-ladles, carriers, containers, gas-/rattles, two of Mrs. Thingumajig’s patent gas-dispersing flap-/pers, emptied S.A.A. boxes, grenade boxes, two bales/ of revetting-wire, pine stakes.” (90). Jones seems anxious not to let any detail go, to focus on the aesthetic sensation of being there and living through the daily tedium of remaking this novel world with often-novel prostheses.

Labor, rather than battle, is also a key focus of Dai Greatcoat’s long boast, which occurs in the middle of this middle section, making it the apex of the keystone. In this five page boast, Dai stands in for the universal soldier. He retains the experience of the average soldier in every significant battle in cultural tradition, present at the first murder, and before that at the battle for Paradise. Dai slips fluidly from victim to aggressor, but throughout the various scenarios he describes conflicts as processes of making and unmaking. Early on in the boast, he claims

I was with Abel when his brother found him,
under the green tree.
I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes.
I was the spear in Balin’s hand
that made waste King Pellam’s land (79).

In these lines, Dai Greatcoat floats from incorporeal spirit allied with the first human victimization, to a custodian of the body’s most basic laboring of consumption and excretion, to
the spear of a victory that reduces an entire land to waste. What these examples share is their emphasis on combat’s reduction of life at every scale, from magisterial religious, historical and mythical narratives, to a Kristevan corporeal abjection of waste-making and being made waste.

Whether it is objectified sexually, as a military tool, or religiously, the human body is routinely fetishized, as In Parenthesis consistently figures and presents it as a (first mentally, later physically) constructed object. Eve Sedgwick has explained how Christianity, especially Catholicism, fetishizes the male body: “Catholicism [is] filled with what could, ideally without diminution, be called the work of the fetish […] And presiding over all are the images of Jesus. These have, indeed, a unique position in modern culture as images of the unclothed or unclothable male body, often in extremis and/or in ecstasy, prescriptively meant to be gazed at and adored.” While the fetishization of the male body in In Parenthesis is rarely mediated by the image of Christ, the bodies of the soldiers become identified as Christly and objectified as works of art by Jones’s remarkably visual poetics. This identification is accomplished first, and most obviously, in the frontispiece which (unlike most representations of Christ) foregrounds the genitals, but also in the way the bodies of soldiers are presented throughout the poem. Corcoran rightly points out that the frontispiece prepares the reader for the body’s centrality in the poem, particularly linking the “almost prepubescently tiny” and vulnerable genitalia of the soldier it depicts with the sexual connotation suggested by Ball’s name and his position in the army roll call immediately adjacent to Private Leg. In the text, as in the frontispiece, the male body becomes the negative shape around which all of the other material aspects of the war assert and define themselves. The technologies of hard metal and explosions, the “scrut scrut scrut” of the rats, the twisted and deformed tree limbs, which are doubled in the crucified soldier’s contorted arms and spread fingers, are all emphasized in the landscape of the poem (54). The
soldier is almost naked, but the parts of his body that are clothed, particularly his left leg and upper right torso, seem not to wear clothes as much as to become them. There is no clear line to indicate where the boot on the leg is separated from the leg itself. The flesh and the fabric blend seamlessly. Similarly, the ragged jacket not only blends into the soldier’s body, but also into the background of the drawing, and the entire body is punctured and invaded by both the objects that surround it and the lines and shadings of the background. The line that defines the body is fully permeable to the concrete objects of war, as well as war’s abstractions, that contain it and into which it is subsumed. The various incursions that the surrounding technologies make into this sacrificed soldier’s oddly propped body show how the violence of destruction has been redoubled in the violence of reconstruction, making this organic human being into a mechanism of war. Artificial elements like barbed wire and coil run through the body like arteries and veins, the intricate pockets of his uniform suggest organs embedded in his transparent abdomen, and tree branches reach through the helmet into a head whose vacancy, signaled by its empty eyes, suggests that the soldier is an automaton, mechanized and controlled by outside forces.

Of course, the soldier as mechanism produced by the state was not novel to the Great War. In describing the formation of modern military “docile bodies,” Michel Foucault writes that “[b]y the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is slowly corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit.” The poem is quite clear, from the first section in which Ball is punished for his tardiness, that the state has manufactured these soldiers and that the means of production has changed since the eighteenth century. The soldiers of this industrialized war, by the time it gets to the Somme and the
conclusion of *In Parenthesis* at Mametz Wood, are mass-produced, and in much greater numbers and for much quicker expenditure. The soldier in the frontispiece is a work in progress, both ground down by the inhuman demands of the war and built back up by its inhuman prostheses, which, as Armstrong points out, can, etymologically considered, be any tools designed, like the shovels in the background of the picture, or the bayonet at the soldier’s side, that attach to and extend the power of the body.  

The frontispiece offers the mutilated soldier as transformed physically and corporeally into an empty machine, but he is figuratively transformed, over the course of the poem and in Jones’s conscious mythmaking and redemptive hagiography of the soldiers, into the scapegoat of the engraving that closes the book. This goat figure (actually it is a ram), caught in barbed wire and struck through the heart with a spear, even more clearly invokes the crucifixion. The spear represents the wound in the side and the barbed wire nestled around the sheep’s head, along with his horns, suggests a crown of thorns. The landscape has been almost entirely cleared out: the rats, rifles, shovels, jagged lengths of metal and distant toiling soldiers are gone. The twisted and broken trees remain, now finding their analogue in the goat’s horns and his splayed forelegs and crossed hind legs. The heartiness of the genitalia, with all their logos-making implications, has been restored. The crescent moon of the frontispiece has been replaced by a full moon, and, although the picture is smaller, a much greater expanse of sky is visible. As if proceeding directly from the ram’s head (its eyes empty, like the soldier’s, but also much larger and distinctly human in shape), a large white star shoots into the sky. The Christian significance of this star, resurrection and ascension, is obvious.

Before this entirely allegorical and poetic transformation from soldier to sacrificial (and redeemed) lamb can be made, though, the soldiers must harrow the demonic hell of Mametz
Wood. In part seven, as the battle begins, Jones frequently describes the soldiers as if separate from their bodies: “each inclined his body” (154); “So you just lay where you were and shielded what you could/ of your body” (168); “they come as sleep-walkers whose bodies go unbidden of the mind” (170). All these examples call specific attention to the soldiers’ bodies as objects that are as separate from them as their equipment. This sundering of the body from the self redirects the violence from people to objects, and allows Jones to describe the violent deaths of certain soldiers in detached, casual, and almost humorous tones:

Talacryn doesn’t take it like Wastebottom, he leaps up and says he’s dead, a-slither down the pale face—his limbs a-girandole at the bottom of the nullah, but the mechanism slackens, unfed and he is quite still (158)

This emphasis on the dissociation of the individual from the body is typical of In Parenthesis, for what seems like a Christian conceit of separating souls from bodies actually demonstrates the ironic distance that the poet feels from the really unheroic spectacle of absurd carnage. That Talacryn’s body—not Talacryn—is described as a “mechanism” early on in part seven is crucial, for it is in this section, and in the many violent deaths and injuries that follow Talacryn’s, that the metaphorical mechanization of soldiers’ bodies is stretched furthest.

The constant slippage between a Cartesian separation of soul and body and an integration of the two—like the slippages among animal life, vegetable life, inanimate matter, machines, and human bodies—demonstrates the simultaneous attraction to and revulsion from physical death that Jones’s liturgical act of poeticization mediates and transforms. While Jones is clearly drawing on the Western Christian tradition of responsibility throughout the poem (especially in the boast of Dai Greatcoat), there is an orgiastic and demonic opposite of that Christianity written into Ball’s perceptions. In Parenthesis dramatizes the tension between demonism and
responsibility by describing not only the animal and human world, but the organic and artificial world, as well, in intentionally confused and confusing terms. In the landscape, as in the two illustrations which function as prologue and epilogue, wounded and tortured trees resemble people. People, as they die, resemble animals; when dead, they become clods of earth to be piled on other dead. The poem is never so mistrustfully ambivalent about its human subjects becoming animal or dead organic matter, however, as it is about their becoming a part of the artificial world, or their integration into a liminal world between the organic and the artificial. As Jones’s reflections in the preface indicate, this artificial reintegration presents an entirely modern problem with no historical precedent.

As the title implies, *The five unmistakable marks* reads the battle of Mametz Wood not only through Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark*, but also through the Passion, as the five marks invoke the five wounds of Christ’s body. This conflation of Christ and Snark is not flippant, but indicates the unique nature of the soldiers’ sacrifice, suspended between the rhetoric of honorable sacrifice and the reality of beastly death: like Christ, the soldiers will be sacrificed for the ostensible salvation of others; like the Snark, they are beasts to be captured and destroyed for a profit. Also, it highlights the intended ambiguity and irony of part seven by setting the stage for the battle as both absurd and sublime. Mametz Wood is a Golgotha to which the soldiers have willingly carried the burdens on which they will be destroyed:

> Those happy who had borne the yoke  
> who kept their peace  
> and these other in a like condemnation  
> to the place of the skull (154).

Not only are the British soldiers valorized by the comparison to Christ, “these other” recognizes the German soldiers. The agent of destruction in this crucifixion, or Snark-hunting expedition, if the Germans and the English are to be hunted and crucified together, is the state. As Downes has
shown, Jones is not interested in condemning the politics of England or Germany, *per se*; what the poem condemns is the state’s authorization to expend its subjects for profit, to churn out soldiers from mass-production assembly lines without the religiously informed care to individuality and detail of the “unifying maker.” While Jones, unlike most other chroniclers and poets of the war, has been criticized for infrequently looking directly to the source of the soldiers’ sacrifice, *The five unmistakable marks* acknowledges that the responsibility rests with those powers and propagandists who, like the despicable Lord Agravaine in Dai Greatcoat’s boast, “[urge] with repulsive lips” and “[net] us into expeditionary war” (83).

Although the mediation of death through religion leaves it open to the charge of conservatism or complacency, Jones carefully demonstrates the religious doubt that the battle of Mametz Wood inspires in Ball:

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you can’t believe the Cup won’t pass from
or they won’t make a better show in the Garden.
Won’t someone forbid the banns
or God himself will stay their hands.
It just can’t happen in our family
even though a thousand
and ten thousand at thy right hand (158).
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This is one of the most poignant passages of the poem because it is one of the few moments in which Ball’s terror is not vitiated by morbid or erotic poeticizations of death. The clear distinctions between this impersonal and absurd mass sacrifice and the intimate story of the passion do not redeem the cause of the war, at the commencement of its most mechanized phase. Rather, the comparison serves, like the fluid and formally unrestrained language of the poem, with its wide net of allusion and ubiquitous indeterminacy, to underscore the disintegration of human integrity (as both dignity and unity) in the mechanized condition of modernity.
The ritual aspect of disintegration is all the more apparent because Ball’s moment of
doubt and pain also describes the battle of Mametz Wood as a marriage, another consummation
that recalls Ball’s first sexualized taste of violence. The metaphorical rendering of the battle as
marriage and consummation, of which Ball is naturally terrified, is ambiguous and
overdetermined. It is the marriage of English and German soldiers, but it is also the marriage of
individual soldiers to the dark, feminized earth for which Ball, since his first shell explosion, has
secretly yearned. The rhetoric of the Passion also opens this marriage up to Christian
interpretation: believers wed to Christ, the bridegroom, who is unified in death with the Father.
More importantly, the language clearly evokes parents outraged by miscegenation or incest: “it
just can’t happen in our family.” This is an unnatural union in many respects. It is incestuous, in
that the German and English civilizations, in Jones’s economy, are closely related. It is perverse
in its fetishistic displacement of human relationships and the human body onto the terrible
prostheses and accoutrements of mechanized war, such as phallic stick-bombs and face-
distorting gas masks. And it is a union of miscegenation in its blending of the natural world of
earth, vegetation and flesh, with machines and synthetic chemicals.

From soldiers who have given up their agency, to automatons, to animals, to trees, to
cloths of earth, the soldiers are increasingly dehumanized, but the last and most grotesque step in
this process is their literal transformation into works of state-issued technological machinery.
The demonic conjunction of the animal and human is still, for Jones, subsumable within the
Christian tradition, because it is that which Christianity, in Europe, largely replaced; but a
conjunction between the human and the technological has no place in the traditional moral
universe that Jones has artificially constructed, with deliberate and inescapable irony, around the
absurdities of the Western Front. Jones writes in the preface that “[w]e who are of the same
world of sense with hairy ass and furry wolf and who presume to other and more radiant
affinities, are finding it difficult, as yet, to recognize these creatures of chemicals as true
extensions of ourselves [...]” (xiv). In Part Seven, however, Jones takes up the fearful possibility
that these new technologies are becoming “extensions of ourselves” quite literally in the form of
soldiers resurrected by medical science as the technologies responsible for taking apart the body
become, when the mangled body is removed from action, responsible for putting it back
together.

In the description of the rescue of a badly wounded soldier, Jones presents the terror of
the body, mauled beyond usefulness, living biologically, but spiritually and mentally vegetable:

They can cover him again with skin—in their candid coats, in their clinical shrines and parade the miraculi.
The blinded one with the artificial guts—his morbid neurosis retards the treatment, otherwise he’s bonza—and will
learn a handicraft.

Nothing is impossible nowadays my dear if only we can get the poor bleeder through the barrage and they take just as
much trouble with the ordinary soldiers you know and essential-service academicians can match the natural hue and
everything extraordinarily well.

Give them glass eyes to see and synthetic spare parts to walk in the Triumphs, without anyone feeling awkward and O, O, O, it's a lovely war with
poppies on the up-platform for a perpetual memory of his body (175-6).

This monstrous spectacle of the soldier’s body cobbled back together by technology in order to
be paraded as a monument to victory, while that same body is paradoxically commemorated by
poppies, is perhaps the most bitter part of the book. The irony of the passage is clear, as Jones
mimics the comforting voice of some safe commanding officer or civilian, condescendingly
addressing the aggrieved family or friends of the mutilated soldier with such casual and detached
phrases as “my dear” and “you know.” But this voice, so distinctly not the voice of a soldier,
speaks in the same utterance as the soldiers who are trying to “get/ the poor bleeder through the barrage,” and whose choice of epithet simultaneously evokes camaraderie, pity, and the physical truth of the dying body.

Similarly, the religious language which elsewhere offers, if desperately, some solace to the soldiers and to Jones, is here invoked in a similar ironic confusion of voices, as the doctors and directors of the war become priests of a scientific religion that regards the body only as a piece of property, emptied of individual spiritual or intellectual significance. The casual assertion that his body has been fixed but “otherwise he’s bonza—and will/ learn a handicraft” demonstrates the disregard that Jones sees in the mental treatment offered to veterans, such as himself, who suffer from post-traumatic stress. “Bonza” is an Australian slang term—meaning, roughly “dandy,”—that was first introduced to British soldiers by ANZACs. Here the unfamiliar word, coupled with the subject’s taking up of a handicraft, implies mental disorder or disruption. The casual term dismisses the importance of the veteran’s mental state, reflecting the willed ignorance of a citizenry that transforms discomfort at the maimed body into an assurance that if he has been physically put back together, he is fine.

The parallel between the modernist text, fragments shored against the ruins of a disintegrated whole, and the prosthetic soldier, is clear in the allusion to *The Waste Land*, as a pop-culture voice sings “O, O, O it’s a lovely war,” trivializing the death of integrated European culture as much as *The Waste Land’s* “O, O, O, O, that Shakespeherian rag” made light of its Olympian pinnacle. The final Rubicon that lay between that culture and ruin, the automatized soldier suggests, was the integrity of the literal human corpus, whose final use is as much in the service of the state as it was in fighting: the repaired veteran will embody triumph and nationalist
triumphalism, and not just the triumph of one nation-state over another, but that of modernity over the mysteries of the flesh.

This automaton represents a degradation of the heroism of willful sacrifice and of embracing bodily death to achieve Christian salvation and resurrection. The mechanical Lazarus that Ball envisions is incompatible with the conservative Christian heroics that Fussell sees in the poem, and that Sherry, rightly, denies. Such “miraculi” cannot be redeemed by a poetics of valor and sacrifice. As Jones realizes, there is no literary or Christian precedent to redeem it. The soldier with the “artificial guts” suggests that Jones is more than aware of the considerable cost of these new technologies, which both take life and perpetuate a horrifying life in death. The perversion of replacing the very entrails of the human body with the manufactured invention of the industrialized state is a highly refined symbol of the primary injustice done to the soldiers by their indoctrination into what Sherry shows to be the unreasonable British justification for the war. The companionship celebrated by Jones in the preface, the intimacy and room for artistic improvisation, the unity of men marching in the integrated corps of military formation, has all been predicated on the artifice of propaganda that has given the soldiers the unnatural courage, the artificial guts, to sacrifice their bodies in vain.

The poem ends in the aftermath of the battle. Ball is injured, having parted reluctantly with the rifle to which he was wed, and which has been a prosthetic extension of himself, “the Last Reputable Arm” for which he has been trained to give nearly as much care as he gives his own body (86). The mythical “Queen of the Woods,” the embodied and eroticized Death of Ball’s morbid fancies, traverses the battleground bestowing special flowers on the dead and dying and so integrating them fully back into the cultural, mythical, natural and organic unity of the past. The injured Ball’s relation to his similarly eroticized rifle demonstrates that this
reintegration in death is not yet for him. He belongs still to the artificially integrated mechanizations of the war that Jones’s modernist poetics reveal, imitate, and describe in the sensory barrage of In Parenthesis.

Jones and his work resist easy classification, and the critical literature on his work has been marred by both the hagiography of his most immediate critics and by a few critics eager to condemn him for his inexcusable late 1930s political inclinations. Still, In Parenthesis and his other poetry and art deserve and are in need of more close and careful critical commentary. In Parenthesis uniquely uses the style of high modernism to address, retrospectively, not only the problem of assigning value to war labor, but also what can still be considered the defining crises of modernism—the necessary reconfiguration of the human relationship to modernity, technology, and mass culture at the center of the experience of the Great War.

Vera Brittain’s extended and straightforward analysis of the use value of her war experience, and David Jones’s poetic meditation on the aesthetic value of his, come to some surprisingly similar conclusions about the political place of the human in interwar Britain and Europe. Both chronicle an experience of the emptying of human subjectivity at the bidding of the state, and of the reduction to an unthinking, laboring body. In the latter section of Testament of Youth, and in biographical material on Jones, it is clear that the sequel to this dehumanizing experience for both was mental breakdown and a reappraisal of Britain’s place in the world. Brittain concludes that there has been some value in her experience, if only because it leads her to find an identity in international action, working for the prevention of further dehumanization. Jones, who would have preferred to write about peace, shows that the degrading exploitation of war labor provides sensory experience that, in recollection, can be transformed into highly meaningful and complex art. While their political sympathies are antithetical, Jones and
Brittain’s experience of diminished humanity leads them both to understand that national exceptionalism and economic motivation can have disastrous consequences. Brittain finds expression for this conviction in her admirable work for the league of notions, while Jones, unfortunately, succumbs to the deep parochialism of retreat into a mythically pure and ethnically exclusive deep European culture.
POSTSCRIPT

As the preceding chapters demonstrate, when Britons looked back on the impact of the First World War, they saw fundamental changes to the political constitution of the human subject and the forms of administration of populations. In the texts I examined in depth and peripherally, the administration of the war affects the value of the lives of civilians by altering both a previous understanding of the state’s obligations to protect its population, and individual citizens’ obligations to protect the state. Based on the cultural and political confusion that wartime legislation generated, and the intensity of feeling surrounding it, it is hard to imagine that these questions would not arise, in some form, in any sustained interwar consideration of Britain’s experience of the First World War. While they may have parallels to questions that arise out of conflicts in other times and places, the problems of political inclusion and legal protection in British texts looking back on the war are unique to their historical situation and the singular details of that conflict. The fundamental question underlying many reflections on the biopolitical exigencies of the First World War might look, reductively, like this: “Must we, who have been taught that we are at the apex of civilization, and that our essential character proves us so to be, accept that we are in fact reducible to mere animal bodies, subject to the revocation of rights, physical torture, and ultimately death, all in the name of our own protection?”

The answers to this question were varied. On the Schmittian side, the answer was yes, and it’s a good thing, because how else could a state prepare for the inevitability of external violence? For most of the authors I have examined, though, the response to the politics of decision was not stoically to “pull themselves together” and “make up their minds” to the
sacrifice this realpolitik demanded, but rather to keep questioning and analyzing the events of the preceding years, and the juridical forms and decisions that had exposed a population to death in the name of its own protection. The indeterminacies of modernist form helped most of the authors negotiate and question the absolute enclosure legally codified in the Defense of the Realm Act, medically expounded in the government’s enquiry into shell shock and the treatises of shell shock doctors, and culturally enforced in propaganda’s call for self-sacrifice. Eliot’s consistent undecision in The Waste Land, for instance, resulting partially from his failure to unify the poem through a central voice, quickly became the model for a modernist aesthetic that seems to always simultaneously mean more (overburdened with symbolism) and less (fragmented and inconclusive) than the words on the page can amount to. Building on prewar impressionism, West and Gibbon present unreliable and ironically baffled narrators, who both present the values of their culture with firm conviction, and in so doing reveal the absurdity and violence those cultures hold up as ideological ideals. In a less aesthetically complex style, Brittain’s memoir (the only primary text in this study that can’t quite fit under the broad umbrella of modernism) overtly demands answers to a seemingly endless procession of questions about the political rights of the citizen in wartime, and the use-value of sacrifice for the state. The fact that these texts raise more questions than they could possibly answer indicates a form of resistance to political philosophies such as Schmitt’s decisionism or Agamben’s ahistorical reduction of the human to potential bare life on the sole criteria of its inclusion in a political order from which it can always be excepted. Rather than seeking a political position of finality, these writers’ preoccupations with the political forms of the war years suggest a tendency to keep talking, and to try to talk more plainly about the “things,” such as religion, politics, and the relations of the sexes, that would have scandalized (if only superficially) polite Edwardian culture.
Furthermore, the similarities of the political questions raised among these texts demonstrate the extent to which forms of humanizing political inclusion during periods of violent conflict are always contingent on specific historical situations. For instance, while Britain technically won both World War One and World War Two, it entered the first with a sense of jubilation that gradually turned to despair and doubt in the cause as subjects felt trodden down by the war to the point of animalization. Britain entered World War Two with great reluctance, and after much greater provocation and threat than before World War One. In historical perspective, however, most Britons probably came to look back on their involvement in the conflict as not only justified, but laudable.

For all their differences, though, the two conflicts were in many ways one extended war with a lengthy interlude. My project has focused on how Britons considered the changes the first episode in this conflict brought about to their forms of political inclusion and protection. In the remainder of this very brief conclusion, I want to look beyond that interlude, and beyond the British realm, to suggest that the foundational political crises I have here discussed had long lasting repercussions on forms of colonial resistance. I intend here only to sketch a way in which I believe the issues of political legitimacy, the sovereign exception, and biopolitical inclusion in an ordering and protecting state may be useful for postcolonial studies. This is not intended as a thorough endeavor in that direction, which would require an extended project. Rather, I want to suggest that the ideas discussed in this dissertation, which I believe could be of use in analyzing many situations where obligations and responsibilities between states and their subjects are contested, can extend to the analysis of situations in which the legitimacy of sovereign rule is already and obviously tenuous, as it tends to be in relationships between colonizing powers and the colonized.
As I have shown, following the war, as the general haze of jingoism faded, and citizens were left to make sense of their losses, Britons asked themselves why—if British character had been everything its wartime propaganda indicated in terms of fairness and justice in comparison to German militarism, and if Britain had represented a civilization so worthy of protection—was it necessary for the British government to reserve the right to debase whole populations virtually to the level of bare life in the name of sovereign protection? This was not necessarily a question that implicated Britain any more than the other belligerent powers, most of which suffered losses that compelled either some form of political introspection or wholesale revolution. However, during the Victorian and Edwardian years, it was ideologically almost impossible to doubt that Western Europe had constituted the most imperially powerful and politically advanced group of nations in the world, sharing, for all their differences, common values and common economic interests. If Britain had not necessarily excelled beyond other European nations in every cultural, social, military or political endeavor, Britons could feel their nation was relatively advanced and in possession of the largest Empire in history. Further, Britain seemed to be making advances in the direction of greater equality and social protection in such legislation as the Parliament Act, Home Rule for Ireland, increasing sympathy towards suffragists’ demands, and the increasing influence of New Liberal and Fabian groups, who advocated state intervention to increase political inclusion. The conflict that had arisen in the midst of this apparent progress had revealed that these most advanced forms of political organization were hardly capable of protecting their own populations, and in the name of national security, must find juridical forms such as DORA to insure that all citizens could technically be dehumanized in the name of national security.
Considering how bleak this picture is, it is not terribly surprising that the “war to end all wars” ended in trans-European chaos that eventually led to an even worse and more dehumanizing conflict. If the forms of government that had seemed most stable and most conducive to peace and protection, at least for citizens lucky enough to be born in the metropolitan center, were in fact so hollow as to offer no substantial humanizing political guarantee when conflict arose, then a drastic revision of foundational political philosophy was clearly in order. The development of Schmittian politics based on the inevitability of violent conflict makes a kind of brutal sense that could gain a broad following in the nation that lost the war, was vindictively punished with impractical policies that would ensure generations of poverty, and immediately began constructing the “stab in the back” mythology of the First World War.402

Victorious Britain, at least, could indulge in a more measured reflection on what had gone wrong. Looking back on the pointlessness of the war’s destruction resulted in cultural weariness with external conflict, both on the continent and in the wider Empire. The late modernist period was one of cultural retraction and introspection in which many writers took up cultural forms and concerns that preceded both the era of total war and that of industrialization and imperial expansion.403 However, in the years following the war, Britain’s empire was larger than it had ever been, while the imperialist will, not to mention the wealth to administer so huge an empire, was drastically diminished. Although most of Britain’s Empire did not gain its independence until after World War Two, the 1916 rebellion in Ireland and the beginning of a real independence movement in India in the interwar years indicate that some postcolonial political philosophies were strengthened or originated in this first global conflict. While this study has focused solely on the political impact of the war and its measure on the culture and
literature of one of the primary fighting nations, it is important to remember that both the Allied and the Central powers recruited huge numbers of soldiers from their colonies around the world. The image of British Schoolboys sinking in the mud of in France and the Dardanelles may primarily constitute Britain’s memory of the destruction of the war, but Africans, Indians and other colonial subjects also fought for the Allied powers, while civilians and politicians in colonized countries witnessed the virtual self-destruction of the powers that had ordained themselves so superior in their civilization as to have an unquestionable mandate to administer massive foreign populations.

Obviously, the impact of the political and economic results of the First World War on countries colonized by Europe is far too complex for me to do it justice in this brief conclusion. However, I would suggest that when, after the Second World War, postcolonial authors analyzed the forms British sovereignty had taken in its administration of the empire, several of the same questions of political humanization and sovereign legitimacy were bound to arise. Canonical texts of postcolonial literature frequently confront political problems similar to those I have elucidated in this dissertation. For instance, many texts focus on problems of deciding which subjects, or which forms of life, are worthy of protection in Britain’s colonies; or they revolve around how British cultural claims to pastoral care of imperial subjects conflicted with pre-existing forms of sovereignty in colonized populations. Chinua Achebe’s depiction of the world shattering spread of British culture in Nigeria through missionary work in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), for example, revolves around one family patriarch battling the British Empire for the right to exact obedience from a son. Okonkwo becomes a bad father to Nwoye, when the pastoral care of the missionaries offers the semblance of less direct and less corporeal protection. It is also worth noting that much postcolonial writing in the British Empire was overtly based on
modernism of the Interwar years, as the title of this novel—from Yeats’s *The Second Coming* (1920), and the title of its sequel, *No Longer at Ease*—from Eliot’s *The Journey of the Magi* (1930) indicate. These titles suggest how the cultural fragmentation of modernism spoke to postcolonial authors depicting how colonial selves were split between the demands of a sovereign foreign power and their own traditions of political, communal, and humanizing organization and local cultures.

Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1976) is even more centrally concerned with sovereign legitimacy and the question of life or death decision. The play reverses the typical dynamic of sovereign power over life and death in its central conflict between Elesin, the king’s horseman, bound by Yoruba custom to follow the king after his death, and Pilkings, the British colonial administrator who is bound by his culture and the laws of his government to prevent the suicide. As the two conflicting modes of sovereignty clash, the play highlights the tenuousness of British claims to legitimacy in Nigeria. The play also demonstrates the fundamentally corporeal relation of sovereignty to subjects. Sovereignty is inscribed directly on the body through commands that must be obeyed, but this relationship also makes the sovereign power rely on the obedience of its subjects, demonstrating that it is not sovereign in the indivisible way espoused by Schmitt or Agamben. Indeed, Elesin’s failure to commit suicide invalidates the sovereignty of the king he was bound to follow, and throws the Yoruba culture into crisis. That crisis, however, does not legitimate Pilkings and the British government he represents. On the contrary, Pilkings’ intervention, which comes through no genuine conviction on his part, but from the sense of duty to an imperialist sovereign who alone can take life or let live, causes chaos among the Yoruba, demonstrating that profound and essentially political values of forms of life, as well as obligations to sovereignty, cannot ahistorically move across
cultures. Rather, when differing, but deeply held values of the obligations that exist among a sovereign power and its subjects come into conflict, the result is less likely to be a dialectical conference resulting in a legitimate sovereignty through synthesis, than it is likely to be a violent and physical conflict.

I have presented these two brief examples to suggest that the conflicts of political philosophy that underlie the questions in my dissertation do not only illuminate the interwar period in Britain, but are connected both by themes and by history to Britain’s ongoing conflicts, and representations of past conflicts, beyond Europe. Imperial expansion was, in many ways, at the root of the Great War, and literature produced in response to Empire is not separate or unconcerned with the European crises that lead to the most violent conflicts in human history.
CHAPTER ONE

4 In addition to Paul Fussell’s influential literary analysis, a number of thorough studies have addressed some of the mythical aspects of the war. In particular see Samuel Hynes’s *A War Imagined* (New York: Collier Books, 1990) and Modris Eksteins’s *Rites of Spring* (Boston: Haughton Mifflin, 1989). Both offer valuable overviews of how the war’s cultural impact was understood throughout most of the twentieth century, demonstrating that much cultural memory of the war had been inaccurate.
5 Among the hundreds of novels and stories advertised on *The Daily Telegraph*’s “Current Literature” page in mid-April, 1916, were such frequently sensational sounding propaganda, adventure, and ostensibly documentary books as: *Somewhere in France;* *The Super-Spy; A Hilltop on the Marne;* *An Englishman in the Russian Ranks;* *The Ravings of a Renegade;* *Let Priest and People Weep; Verdun to the Vosges;* and *Daughters of Germany,* advertised with the blurb “What the German male is capable of in Depravity is common knowledge. In this book the veil is to be lifted! The promise is made that the book will disclose an alarming amount of vice behind the veneer of Kultur in Berlin and elsewhere.” (Accessed at the British Library Newspapers Room, Colindale, UK).
7 The legend of the wild men extends beyond Britain by incorporating troops from all involved armies, and so is a rejection of the human in general. However it may have surfaced in the other armies, though, if at all, it clearly has local significance for how the British troops imagined their political relation to their particular state.
8 The Duke of Wellington is frequently quoted as saying that “the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.” Although the average man in the trenches would obviously not have attended Eton, the public school spirit defined the officer class, which was expected to present unwavering bravery as an example to subordinates. In this conflict, the officers arguably bore as much, if not more, psychological trauma as the privates, because they had added to their burden an enormous degree of responsibility.
9 Although Britain was under a coalition government by the end of the war, the lead up to war occurred under the New Liberal leadership of Lloyd George. Vincent Sherry argues that the language leading up to the war was thus a strange hybrid of liberal justification for an essentially anti-liberal undertaking (*The Great War and the Language of Modernism* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 27).
10 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Agamben describes the utopian concept of a community that would not be bound by adherence to political or national identities, but merely by the shared
fact of existence. His later work on the state of exception and *homo sacer* seem to attempt to work through the many obstacles to such a community.


12 The paranoia about statism that this allegorical figure implies does not reflect Wells’s professed political beliefs. Wells was “on the more radical flank of Liberalism” (Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, 61). A Fabian and a socialist, Wells would later advocate a single world state to terminate nationalism and war.


14 In *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1935) Dangerfield argues that, by forcing George V to create enough new peers to pass the People’s Budget, which proposed increased taxes on the land of Lords to create more social welfare programs, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill had struck liberal England its *coup de grâce*.


16 Ibid., 12. Also, in nineteenth century France resistance to state power did not take the form of individualism, but collective action, aimed at establishing more collective governments, as in the 1848 revolution, or the Commune of 1871.

17 Ibid., xii.

18 Fussell reads Sir Henry Newbolt’s 1898 poem *Vitai Lampada* as capturing the essence of British national character’s commitment to stoicism and “playing the game.” Fussell quotes the first two stanzas, which imagine a schoolboy first on the sports field, then on the colonial battlefield:

There’s a breathless hush in the Close tonight—
Ten to make and the match to win—
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it’s not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season’s fame,
But his captain’s hand on his shoulder smote—
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

The sand of the desert is sodden red—
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;
The Gatling’s jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke;
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England far, and honor a name;
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

(Quoted in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 25-26). Kipling’s much more famous poem offers a similar, if less psychotically violent, picture of unshakeable masculinity.

21 Ibid., 10.
22 Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, 67 (emphasis in original)
23 Paul K. St. Amour argues that the airplane that captivates the Londoners’ attention (and allows the limousine, symbolizing state power, to glide by unremarked) certainly would have called to mind the air-raids of the war. (“Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism,” Comparative Literature Studies, (2005): 42:2, 130-61).
24 In a crucial event in Parade’s End that ends up pitting the ever-hapless Christopher Tietjens against his military superiors, Tietjens and Valentine Wannop are lost in the early morning fog on a country road. General Campion wrecklessly runs into the horse with his car, injuring it badly. Christopher immediately takes control of the situation and dresses the horse’s wound, demonstrating, in his care for the animal, his inherent aristocratic nobility and masculinity (Parade’s End, 139-144).
25 Hobsbawm writes that “By 1914 virtually everything that can take shelter under the broad and rather undefined canopy of “modernism” was already in place: cubism; futurism; pure abstraction in painting; functionalism and flight from ornament in architecture; the abandonment of tonality in music; the break with tradition in literature (The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991 [New York: Vintage Books, 1994], 178-9). It is worth noting, however, that Hobsbawm’s description here of pre-war literary modernism is quite vague.
27 Ford’s monographs were When Blood is Their Argument and Between St. Dennis and St. George (both 1915). The propaganda campaign was organized by C.F.G. Masterman, and Wollaeger names, among those who attended the first Wellington House Meeting “William Archer, J.M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, Robert Bridges, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Anthony Hope Hawkins, Thomas Hardy, George Trevelyan, H.G. Wells, and Israel Zangwill.” Additionally, “Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Quiller Couch could not attend, but sent messages offering their services. With the exception of Hardy, all those in attendance chose to help, and many others, including Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad, joined the campaign later” (Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006], 14).
28 Ibid., 128.
29 Ibid., 129.
30 Even Max Saunders’s sympathetic biography concedes, “though it would be a travesty to call Ford a liar, an unequivocal rebuttal would miss a fundamental quality of his art, and of his literary personality” (Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 8).
31 Ford recalls that during the Boer War, he “made one or two speeches in the interests neither of Boer nor of Englishman, but of the African natives. To them it seemed to me—and it still seems so—the African continent belongs. I received on that account a certain amount of mishandling from either party. By the pro-Boers I was contempitously silenced as an impracticable sentimentalist; by the Imperialists my clothes were torn”

32 In her analysis of gender, madness and melancholy in Britain, Elaine Showalter writes, “The English have long regarded their country, with a mixture of complacency and sorrow, as the global headquarters of insanity” (The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 [New York: Virago 1987], 7).

33 Quoted in Goodlad, Victorian Literature and the Victorian State, 24.


35 W.L. Boxall, an imprisoned conscientious objector, made the relation between the private economic sector and the war (apparently the cause for his objection) the subject of a poem recorded in a C.O.’s autograph book. The poem, “The Dance of Death,” contains six stanzas which variously repeat the form and theme of the first:

Skeleton Death gave a ball one day
In the halls of death to dance.
Decked was the room with its tenants gay
Gun and cannon in brave array
Played the grim music that festive day
By the order of King-Finance.

(Imperial War Museum). For more on C.O.’s autograph books, see Chapter 2.

36 Though generally associated with Foucault, Roberto Esposito demonstrates that the term biopower, significantly, first appeared in Interwar Germany, and was the subject of several political monographs, none of which Foucault cites (Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy, trans. Timothy Campbell [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008], 16). Laurent Dubreuil has argued that Agamben’s use of this distinction is purely linguistic, and limited to Aristotle’s thinking, not, as Agamben frequently implies, the ancient world in general (“Leaving Politics: Bios, Zoe, Life” [Diacritics. 2006 summer; 36 (2)] 83-98).


38 Ibid., 136-7

39 Hynes writes that “[Civilization] is a word that appears again and again in responses to the beginning of the war. One finds it in Parliamentary debates, in newspapers, in private diaries and letters, in reported conversations. Civilization is threatened, is toppling, is mutilated or destroyed; the clock of civilization has been put back” (A War Imagined, 4).

40 Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes, 29.

41 “At the juncture of the ‘body’ and the ‘population,’ sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death” (History of Sexuality, Volume I, 147).

42 From the “Active Service Pay Book” issued to each soldier (courtesy of the Imperial War Museum).


Organized prostitution at the Front was one of the scandals of the war that was not discussed at home during the war, but that arises as a powerful subtext in much interwar literature.


Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy, consisting of *Regeneration* (1990), *The Eye in the Door*, (1993), and *The Ghost Road*, (1995), demonstrates how ideas of discipline, surveillance, and the power over life and death have been incorporated into our historiography and our popular imagination of the politics of the war. Barker’s novels depict the biopolitical implications of conscription, of the policing and administration of sexuality, and of the organization of men and women in barracks, hospitals, and factories. The trilogy explores each of the themes of my subsequent chapters on law, psychology, and labor, in addition to issues of sexuality, corporeal medicine, and imperialism.


Much earlier, in *Regeneration*, Rivers has a similar thought, looking into the stained glass window of the church:

He lifted his eyes to the flag-draped altar, and then to the east window. A crucifixion. The Virgin and St John on either side, the Holy Ghost descending, God the Father beaming benignly down. Beneath it, and much smaller, Abraham’s sacrifice of his son. Behind Abraham was the ram caught in a thicket by his horns and struggling to escape, by far the best thing in the window. You could see the fear. Whereas Abraham, if he regretted having to sacrifice his son at all, was certainly hiding it well and Isaac, bound on a makeshift altar, positively smirked.

Obvious choices for the east window: the two bloody bargains on which a civilization claims to be based. The bargain, Rivers thought, looking at Abraham and Isaac. The one on which all patriarchal societies are founded. If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons. Only we’re breaking the bargain, Rivers thought. All over Northern France, at this very moment, in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together and sang hymns.

In his later reflection on his experiences on Vao, Rivers comes to understand there are myriad forms of suspending the conditions of this patriarchal bargain. Illegitimate birth is such a way on Vao, and the ostensible threat to the realm in Britain is another. (New York: Plume 1991), 149.

Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). At the opposite end of the spectrum, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest that biopower ushers in a liberatory, transnational politics that may spell the end of both capitalism and the nation state. Hardt and Negri may be overly enthusiastic about the decline or death of the nation state as a form of political organization. The democratic nation state can, after all, provide both protection and accountability for its populations in a way that global networks cannot. See *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Shortly after the war, for instance, “on October 29, 1920, in a time of strikes and social tensions” the Emergency Powers Act was issued in Britain, extending the executive’s power in essentially the same legal form as it had been extended in 1914. Agamben likewise demonstrates that the US took similar measures in combating the Great Depression in 1933, quoting a speech in which Roosevelt claimed that he would “‘ask congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad Executive power to wage war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were invaded by a foreign foe’” (Ibid., 22).


George Schwab, “Introduction” *Political Theology*, xxxviii.


Ibid., 192.

Ibid., 179.


Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 69.

Theories of sovereignty had attempted to legitimate the sovereign by elucidating the source of its power, but in delineating the aims of sovereignty, Foucault exposes an inescapable circularity. The sovereign will always work for the “common good,” but because that “means essentially obedience to the law, either that of [an] earthly sovereign or that of God, the absolute sovereign, […] the end of sovereignty is the exercise of sovereignty” This circularity rehearses Schmitt’s notion of underived, indivisible sovereignty that exists for its own sake and as an inherent, inarguable good, but it does not legitimate sovereignty or explain its sources. (Michel Foucault, “Afterword: The Subject and Power,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edition, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], 210).

Ibid., 208.

Ibid., 211.

Ibid., 219-220.

Ibid., 253.

Ibid., 254. Ernst Kantorowicz argued that sovereignty had existed in the medieval period in the form of a king who was both an embodied person and the symbol of the larger body

76 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 217.
77 Ibid., 211.
80 Ibid., 61.
81 In Foucault’s primary example, taken from Plutarch’s *Lives*, Plato is sentenced to death (though he escapes) for criticizing the tyrant Dionysius. Ibid. 49.
82 Peter Ackroyd writes, “the Allied misfortunes of early 1918 seem to have persuaded Eliot that it was his duty to join the American army—if he could enter it at a rank high enough to provide for himself and Vivien” (*T.S. Eliot: A Life* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984], 87).

CHAPTER TWO

87 Ibid., dci.
88 One of the many legends of the war is about the strengthening of friendship and communal bonding through suffering. Groups from the same villages and towns would sign up together, but they would not stay together throughout the conflict. Sarah Cole has shown that soldiers who formed bonds of friendship were almost inevitably separated either by death or because friendship was “treated with contempt by a bureaucracy that ceaselessly and arbitrarily separated friends from one another” (148). Cole demonstrates that for many civilians and uninitiated soldiers, the war seemed to create an environment wherein male friendship trumped every other form of social bond, and was widely considered the one sustaining factor that helped soldiers endure. In reality, “one of the basic facts of the war was that it destroyed friendship” (*Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 138).
89 Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London. Subsequent images reproduced from the collections of the Imperial War Museum will be marked with their call number.
90 Sherry specifically examines how C.K. Ogden writing in the *Cambridge Magazine* under the pseudonym Adelyne More, mocked conscription by suggesting, in what Sherry calls “an idiom of egalitarian duty all too familiar in government defenses,” that the elderly should be conscripted so the young could “go about their work in this world” (*The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, 67).
During one of the parliamentary debates, T. Edmund Harvey stated his opposition by warning that conscription could lead to Prussian measures: "A number of men in Germany at the outset of the war, who on religious grounds held it that it was wrong to fight under any circumstances, were shot in consequence of their belief. That is the logical outcome of a Military State and the Militarist position" (Alfred Bishop, For Conscience Sake [London: Headley Bros. Publishers, 1917], 12).

Once a conscientious objector submitted and agreed to his involuntary enlistment, any further resistance could be punished by military law. If a one-time conscientious objector were deemed to have deserted, he would certainly be shot. Will Ellsworth-Jones relates the story of John William Hasemore, for example, who was shot for disobeying military orders in a training camp (We Will Not Fight: The Untold Story of the First World War's Conscientious Objectors [London: Aurum, 2007], 153).

Bishop not only explains this system, but offers the full text of the “Second Schedule to the [Military Service] Act” under which it was instituted (15).

Before the bill was passed in the House of Commons, an opponent of the bill in its entirety, Sir John Simon, stated that conscription would not be productive because “you are bound to come in conflict with individuals here and there, who, whether it be on religious or whether it be on political grounds, declare conscientiously their opposition, and nothing that you can do can meet the difficulty that hence arises” (13).

Bishop not only explains this system, but offers the full text of the “Second Schedule to the [Military Service] Act” under which it was instituted (15).

Ibid., 3 (emphasis in original).

Ibid., 11.

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Ibid., 13 (emphasis in original).

Ibid., 13.

Private Diary of Viola Bawtree. Courtesy of The Imperial War Museum.

Joanna Bourke, Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and The Great War (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 78.


Ibid., 114.

Letter from N.A. Thomas apparently to his girlfriend, April 25, 1917. Courtesy of The Imperial War Museum.


Foucault coins this term in Discipline and Punish, stating that the production of docile bodies is at the heart of military discipline, in both senses of the word. (Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: Vintage, 1977], 135).

Foucault begins Discipline and Punish with a graphic account of the elaborate torture and execution of Robert-Francois Damiens, who had attempted to assassinate Louis XV. Every detail of the execution symbolizes the sovereign’s power of life and death over the subject by restoring the inverted power relationship the attempted regicide symbolized. Given Foucault’s later theorization of how state power is disseminated through other institutions of power, such as the police, the military, or even the family, and how
power becomes an influence over others’ actions, rather than over their bodies, Beardsworth’s treatment occupies an interesting junction of sovereign violence and power over actions, in which the actions are compelled by force, but no official or symbolic “punishment” as such is enacted (Discipline and Punish, 3-6).

109 Ibid., 164-5.
110 Ibid., 165.
111 A favorite boast of the soldiers and officers charged with breaking the involuntarily enlisted was “we tame lions in the army” (Ellsworth-Jones, We Will Not Fight, 122).
112 Althusser writes that “Pascal says more or less: ‘Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.’ He thus scandalously inverts the order of things...” The suggestion that internal acceptance does not lead to actions, but rather that actions lead to internal acceptance animates the military’s elaborate and veiled torture of conscientious objectors (“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in Literary Theory: An Anthology. eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, [Malden: Blackwell, 2000], 298).
113 Beatrice Webb offers a description of the No-Conscription Fellowship’s National Convention, asserting that its motives were not merely to resist conscription in Britain, but to inaugurate “a strike against war by the armies—actual and potential—of all warring peoples” (Women’s Writing of the First World War, 117).
114 From a collection of Conscientious Objectors’ autograph books. Courtesy of The Imperial War Museum.
116 The allusions to Christ are notable as a common trope of pacifist literature of the era. In poems such as Sassoon’s “The Redeemer” a suffering soldier is compared to Christ. In Eva Gore-Booth’s short story The Tribunal (1916), distributed as a one-penny pamphlet, Christ appears as an objector before a tribunal, which dismisses his objections.
117 By most accounts, conscientious objectors were forcibly stripped and put into khaki uniforms, as in the treatment of Beardsworth. Ellsworth-Jones describes many such cases, as well, and Barker’s fictionalized objector endures the same treatment of being left naked with an army uniform that Bunting describes here (Ellsworth-Jones, We Will Not Fight, 125-127).
118 The juridical position of the conscientious objector is similar to that of Agamben’s homo sacer in its exclusion from the protection of the sovereign, but unlike homo sacer, the conscientious objector remains a concern of the state.
119 Though Bunting did not adhere to the Quaker religion, he grew up surrounded by its beliefs in Northumbria, and set his later much acclaimed long poem “Briggflatts” at a Quaker Friends’ meeting house of that name near which he had grown up (Matthew Hart, Nations of Nothing but Poetry [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 80).
120 According to Robert Daniel the name Archipiada “is the result of a misunderstanding [...] the name seems to be a variant of Alcibiade, which was assumed by Villon and his contemporaries to be a woman’s name” (The Poetry of Villon and Baudelaire [New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997], 32).
Hipparchia was a 3rd century BCE Athenian cynic philosopher and wife of Crates, known for her independence. [http://www.women-philosophers.com/Hipparchia.html]

Bertillon, as “chief of the Department of Judicial Identity of the Paris Prefecture,” pioneered many forensic methods of investigation, and is widely considered “the first fingerprint man.” He developed many methods for measuring and identifying criminals, but this work, as Bunting’s poem implies, was widely applied beyond police work (Henry T.F. Rhodes, Alphonse Bertillon [New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1956], 11-13).

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Hart, Nations of Nothing but Poetry, 79.

124 Agamben, State of Exception, 23.

125 Whether or not Eliot was paying any attention to the meaning of The Waste Land, my argument reads the poem’s aesthetic as essentially, if unconsciously or unintentionally, opposed to the conservative politics Eliot was already cultivating during and just after the war. (The Waste Land and Other Poems, ed. Frank Kermode [New York: Penguin, 2003], xx).

Andrew John Miller, Modernism and the Crisis of Sovereignty (New York: Routledge, 2007), viii.


128 Peter Ackroyd, T.S. Eliot: A Life, 43. The Dardanelles campaign, orchestrated largely by Winston Churchill, consisted in landing 70,000 allied troops (many Australian and New Zealand) at Gallipoli. The allied forces were “mown down from entrenched Turkish artillery positions” and Gallipoli became a symbol for the wastefulness of the war. (Simon Schama, A History of Britain. Volume III: The Fate of Empire [London: Miramax Books, 2002], 437).

129 In his 1919 essay on Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” Eliot theorized the objective correlative as the image, object, or symbol that would evoke a specific emotion, even if it were not explicitly linked to that emotion.


130 In this case, Eliot’s trauma may be at the loss of Verdenal, or it may be the breakdown he experienced in 1921. In either case, it coincides with the larger backdrop of the war.

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132 Jacob’s Room ends with Jacob’s friend Bonamy visiting Jacob’s home. In the final chapter, he and Clara go up to Jacob’s room, which has been left as a kind of monument: “He left everything just as it was,’ Bonamy marvelled. ‘Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn about for any one to read. What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?’ he mused, standing in the middle of Jacob's room” (Virginia Woolf, Jacob’s Room [New York: Penguin, 1998], 200).

133 James Miller based his study on a 1952 essay by John Peter which, although it did not suggest anybody in particular, went against the grain of The Waste Land criticism by reading it as an intensely personal poem about a lost love. Eliot, upon reading this essay “with amazement and disgust,” had his solicitors track down Peter and ordered both him and Essays in Criticism, where the article had appeared, to cease publication or face a lawsuit (13). Both complied, at least until after Eliot’s death in 1965. In 1969 Essays in Criticism republished the essay with a lengthy postscript by the author, in which Peter suggested that the object of love was Verdenal,
with whom Eliot had lived in a Parisian pension from 1910-1911. Even in 1977, though, Miller’s more detailed study was roundly criticized by Eliot scholars for going against the traditions of literary formalism that Eliot had suggested, and that for so long had held sway in literary criticism in general, and Eliot criticism in particular. Furthermore, Peter’s and Miller’s suggestions of homoeroticism, in an era before the rise of queer theory and gender studies, caused many to dismiss their arguments as vulgar or libelous. James Miller, *T.S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977).

134 Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish suggest that Eliot’s work is more complex in its engagement of queerness and sexuality than polarizing political readings often suggest. Laity points out that “early in-depth studies of Eliot focused almost exclusively on his patriarchal images of women, violence against women, and aversion to the female body,” but that always positioning Eliot on the culturally and politically oppressive side of a modernist/postmodernist binary risks erasing or eliding the many ambiguities that suggest a more complex Eliot. Gish and Laity are correct to argue for less reductive readings of Eliot’s work, readings that rely less on the often appalling statements of bald, chauvinistic opinion in his letters and lectures, and more on the ambiguities of the poetry and drama itself. Especially for *The Waste Land*, about which Eliot later said he “wasn’t bothering whether he understood what he meant,” no unifying vision of the poem can suffice (*Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T.S. Eliot*. [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 4).

135 James Miller points out that G. Wilson Knight interprets the manuscript of “The Waste Land” as demonstrating that the Hyacinth Girl was a man because Eliot’s notes to the line from *The Tempest* “Those are pearls that were his eyes,” (l. 126) directs the reader back to the line about the Hyacinth Girl (*T.S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land*, 76).

136 Virginia Woolf, for example described the unveiling of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior as in her diary as “a lurid scene, like one in Hell,” and was generally skeptical of such nationalist mourning rituals. (Karen Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* [Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999], 38).


138 Miller begins his reading with an extraordinary account of Eliot’s positive reaction to “In Memoriam,” which Miller points out is surprising, given the extent to which Tennyson goes against Eliot’s formal criteria for poetic excellence (2).


141 Ibid., 31.


143 Eliot’s general note on the poem directs the reader to Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) and Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1911-15). Weston describes the significance of the Fisher King and its relation to Christianity: ““Christianity did no more than take over, and adapt to its own use, a symbolism already endowed with a deeply rooted prestige and importance […] the Fish is a Life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and […] the title of
Fisher has, from the earliest stages, been associated with Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of life (The Waste Land, Norton Critical Edition, 8).

The phenomenon here depicted, of a subject caught between two opposing forces, is also the theme of a parable by Franz Kafka, written in 1920, but unpublished until 1946. The protagonist “He” is caught between a force pushing him forward and a force pushing backward. His probably unrealizable dream is to jump out of the conflict and become “an umpire over his antagonists.” Hannah Arendt reads the parable as descriptive of the simultaneous struggle against the past and future, seeing the protagonist’s aspiration to mediate the conflict as indicative of his ignorance that his presence is what brings the conflict into existence in the first place. (Hannah Arendt, Between Past and Future [New York: Penguin, 2006], 7-10.


Cynthia Giles notes that the Hanged Man “has provoked perhaps the most speculation of any Tarot image” but that the position of the Hanged Man, strung up by one foot with his arms tied behind him, was a method of executing traitors during the Middle Ages. The Tarot: History, Mystery, and Lore (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 15-16.

Ackroyd describes the Eliots’ relationship as one of mutual antagonism but also codependence (T.S. Eliot: A Life, 85).

Ibid., 115.

Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press printed the first editions of Freud’s work in London. At this time the Woolfs were cultivating their friendship with Eliot.


Freud writes, “The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely. The Melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale” (“Melancholia and Mourning, The Freud Reader, 584).

While the sex of the speakers is never definitively identified, it is easiest for the sake of pronoun usage to follow traditional criticism in reading the speaker as female and the listener as male.

“Melancholia and Mourning,” The Freud Reader, 588.

Reports of war babies may have been exaggerated in periodicals. In Ford’s Parade’s End, the brilliant Tietjens informs Mrs. Wannop that “there weren’t any war babies to speak of,” which causes a problem for her sensational article on the topic. (Parade’s End, 158.


Schuchard, Eliot’s Dark Angel, 13.


See my reading of In Parenthesis in Chapter 4, for example. For Eva Gore-Booth, see Note 75. Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen made frequent religious appeals in their pacifist poems.

Honig, Emergency Politics, 99-104.


Foucault describes pastoral care as evolving from Christianity and differing from sovereign power in that the pastor, unlike the sovereign, must look after the subject's salvation, in this world as well as the next. Security, Territory, Population, ed. Michael Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2007), 147.


Booth, "Sir Ernest Shackleton, Easter Sunday, and the Unquiet Dead." 29

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) is another allusion of resurrection in the poem. The Waste Land obliquely recalls the novel also in the note about Shackleton’s journey, which shares the teleological and progressive spirit of empire building that characterizes both Shelley’s Robert Walton, who attempts to reach the North Pole, and Victor Frankenstein. Moreover, the monster is a fundamental signifier of a physical body missing a unified subjectivity. Throughout the novel, the monster shores various fragments of western culture against his ruin; he constructs his identity from Paradise Lost, Plutarch’s Lives and The Sorrows of Werter (86), forming a fragmented ideology to match his patched together body. The Monster’s body is analogous to the form of his subjectivity, and so analogous to The Waste Land, as it symbolizes the inevitable failure of the social drive towards progress. The monster is also exemplary of Freudian melancholia; He laments a lost ego-ideal beyond any love object—he mourns that he has been abandoned by his creator, and later that his creator made him a partner only to destroy her before his eyes. The monster’s violence vacillates between finding outward victims and turning suicidally inward. He also ends as a subject fundamentally barred from human community; a missing person pursued by his moribund creator. Ultimately, however, like the fragmented non-persona permeating The Waste Land, which seems to be caught between life and death, the monster suffers the pain of not knowing who or what he is. His subjectivity is the absence that shapes his melancholy. Frankenstein, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. Frankenstein: the 1818 Text, Contexts, Nineteenth-century Responses, Modern Criticism. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.


Ackroyd, T.S. Eliot: A Life, 93.

Matthew Hart develops the concept of synthetic vernaculars in Nations of Nothing but Poetry. Hart cites Hugh MacDiarmid, who knew and worked with Gibbon, as a modernizer of synthetic vernacular Scots (51).
In the second and third novel, Chris’s son, Ewan Tavendale, becomes the primary protagonist. He works at organizing unions in both rural and urban Scotland.


Schoene wrongly criticizes Gibbon for perpetuating a nationalist vision of Scotland as inherently, but nobly, committed to linguistic and political isolationism.

Hart, Nations of Nothing But Poetry, 52. MacDiarmid wrote in a much more highly stylized synthetic Scots than Gibbon, whose meaning is almost clear without consulting the glossary. As Hart point out, some of MacDiarmid’s Scots poetry is easily intelligible to the average English speaker, but most of it requires constant recourse to notes.

Recourse to the hunger strike underscores the extent to which Rob’s objection is to his exclusion from participation in the social and political order. Many feminists had resorted to hunger strikes (and been painfully force-fed) when imprisoned for actions aimed at enfranchising women. (Schama, A History of Britain Volume III, 432).

The Defence of the Realm Manual stipulates that the English and Scottish Agricultural Departments had authority to determine the best use of uncultivated land (v), and that any alteration to land would be restored (12). Obviously, despite this guarantee, woods cannot easily be restored.

The Manse is the minister’s house, which is attached to the church.

For more on this type of propaganda poster, see my discussion of Vera Brittain in Chapter Four.

Gibbon points out that the old songs of Scotland, primarily sung by Long Rob of the Mill throughout the novel, have been replaced by English war songs, particularly the ubiquitous “Tipperary”(231).

CHAPTER THREE

Ford, Parade’s End, 178-9.

195 Ibid., 16.
196 Ibid., 60.
197 Showalter, *Female Malady*, 190. The past twenty years have seen renewed interest in several key modernist works engaging shell shock, especially West’s *The Return of the Soldier* and Ford’s *Parade’s End* tetralogy (1924-28). The politicization of Virginia Woolf, as well as popular adaptations and Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* have also kindled fresh interest in Woolf’s use of shell shock, as has Barker’s aforementioned *Regeneration* trilogy (1990-95).
199 Ibid., 39.
200 Ibid., 43.
201 Northfield, *Conquest of Nerves*, 120.
202 Ibid, 16.
203 Apparently a man of means, he takes it for granted that his readers will be beyond the necessity of earning a living. Also revealing is Northfield’s explanation of how he came to write the book based on an advertisement in a newspaper placed by a lady looking for a cure for phobia. The opportunity paternalistically to impose his successful vision of the world on an imagined female subject finally spurred him to write the book he had often thought about, but never initiated (13). In *Parade’s End*, Christopher Tietjens and Valentine Wannop first meet when she and a friend illegally raid a golf course, advocating female enfranchisement.
204 Neither author goes into the details of the war experience that wounded or traumatized him. In Milne’s case, there is no need to talk about the war because, as the conditions under which a soldier is shot in the leg will not matter to a doctor, who can see the nature of the wound, the sources of their mental trauma are irrelevant. For Northfield, on the other hand, the sources of his neurasthenia are irrelevant because neurasthenia is so omnipresent a condition of the times.
205 The source of Milne’s and Northfield’s neurasthenia was novel, but their rhetoric reflects the widespread diagnoses of neurasthenia in the decades before the war, and concerns that neurasthenia reflected a degeneration of masculinity and virility that would effect England’s ability to sustain itself as both an Empire and a nation.
206 Milne, *New Life*, 44.
207 *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1922), 14. The report contains expert testimony of 59 witnesses, many of whom affirm this belief. Although the inquiry reads the existence of shell shock as clear grounds for suspicion of the sufferers’ honesty, at worse, or general constitution and intellectual ability, at best, the designation of shell shock was not merely applied to those who complained of their condition. As soon as it had been epistemologically constituted, it could also be used by the state, in conjunction with psychiatry, for the benefit of military operations. Consider, for example, the case of a young Lieutenant who was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital against his will. His letters to a friend reveal that the ruling came as a surprise, as he felt healthy, and would mean the loss of his pension. The unfortunate case of this lieutenant demonstrates that shell shock, almost as soon as it was defined, could also be used against soldiers.

Arendt, *Human Condition*, 24. Inequality is what Jacques Rancière takes to be the sole condition of politics. He writes “for a thing to be political, it must give rise to a meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic” (*Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose [Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1999], 32).

Foucault, *History of Sexuality I*, 87. In discussing paternal models of state power, Agamben points out that, though both Foucault and Arendt are interested in and studying the same problems, their discourses never converge around the key biopolitical issues that each study separately. Foucault’s theories of biopower seem to me more inductive, based on disparate aspects of Western law and culture, whereas Arendt, without developing a theory of biopower as such, uses deductive reasoning to explain what for Agamben is, rightly, the biopolitical situation *par excellence*: the genocidal totalitarian state.

Conscientious objectors, equally subject to state intervention, although not to capital punishment, also pose a problem to state power, but not so fundamentally. Though they occupy a similarly ambiguous space between criminality and legality, they pose no threat to the biopolitical exercise of sovereignty. They willfully defy, and can simply be punished, the only question being the type of punishment fitting this transgression. See Chapter Two.


Foucault, *History of Sexuality I*, 137.

In proposing the investigation into shell-shock, Lord Southborough stated “If it is the fact that a true identification of the disorder was wanting in the early months of the war, then I fear that, through inadvertence and want of knowledge, dreadful things may have happened to unfortunate men who had in fact become irresponsible for their actions” (*Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords* [Wed. April 28 1920, vol. 39. Number 29], 1096).

The shell-shocked poets Sassoon and Owen spent many years of the war writing popular and effective anti-war propaganda poems chronicling the soldier’s suffering, frequently from Craiglockhart War Hospital.


Ibid., 6.

Bonnie Kime Scott points out that extensive details of the War Office’s Inquiry into Shell-Shock were published in the *Times* in 1922, and Woolf may have been inspired by these accounts in writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, at the end of which Dr. William Bradshaw, Septimus Smith’s doctor, confers with Richard Dalloway, MP, about the “deferred effects of shell-shock” (*Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott [Harcourt: Orlando, 2005], 217-218).


Loughran, “Evolution, Regression, and Shell-shock,” 18

Private letter of James Butlin (Imperial War Museum). These letters, written on Craiglockhart stationary, are quite literate and amusing; Butlin and his dear friend Basil war primarily preoccupied with bridge, flappers, and dissipation. A coded discussion of venereal disease runs throughout their correspondence.
Showalter is right that Rivers did radically champion Freud and the use of his work in dealing with neurosis, but he did not apply Freudian psychoanalysis as exclusively as she claims (The Female Malady, 189). Freud himself was still committed to mapping psychoanalytic theory onto the physical brain.

Loughran, "Evolution, Regression, and Shell-shock," 2


Indeed, the Aristotelian distinction between bios and zoe, the basis of modern biopolitical discourse, relates directly to the physiological/psychological distinction that creates this crisis of sovereignty. Roberto Esposito explains the problem succinctly in dealing with modern cases of biological or mental indeterminacy confounding state power: “What appears undecidable in terms of the law is the relation between biological reality and the juridical person, that is, between life and a form of life” (Bios, 3).

Foucault, Abnormal, 94.


“Civilization and its Discontents” (The Freud Reader), 740.

Foucault, Madness and Civilization, 40 (my emphasis).

Ibid., 78.

Showalter, The Female Malady, 176.

War Neurosis and Military Training (The National Committee for Mental Hygiene, inc.: New York City, 1918), 3.

Ibid., vi.

Ibid., 5.

Showalter, The Female Malady, 178.


Yealland, Hysterical Disorders, 11-12.

Showalter, The Female Malady, 187. Sassoon’s rebellion was not metaphorical, but public and propagandistic. He was not, by most accounts, actually suffering a major psychological disorder, but only objecting to the continuation of the war. Still, Rivers contained his rebellion and got him back to France.


Ibid., 253.

The novel was written mostly in 1916, but publication was delayed until spring of 1918 (Carl Rollyson, Rebecca West: A Life [Scribner: New York, 1996], 63-64).


For an excellent discussion of war’s impact on codes of masculinity, see Paula Krebs’ *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).


Ford and West were acquainted, and West wrote a very positive review of *The Good Soldier*. Indeed, *The Return of the Soldier* owes not only much of its style to Ford’s earlier novel, but also many of its themes, and, to some extent, its plot. The many points of comparison between Edward Ashburnham and Chris Baldry, as well as between John Dowell and Jenny Baldry, add further support to my argument about Jenny’s inability clearly to recognize or interpret Chris’s sexuality.

Varney writes that the illegitimacy of Chris as a father results in the novel’s “traumatic infondé”—a Lacanian term signifying detachment from the foundation of a legitimate paternal authority (254).

The horse also represents aristocracy, to which the Baldrys clearly aspire. Ford Madox Ford especially uses the horse as a symbol of aristocracy and deep English culture in *The Good Soldier* and *Parade’s End*.

From *Vitaï Lampada* (see note 15).


Wyatt Bonikowski “*The Return of the Soldier Brings Death Home.*” (MFS: Modern Fiction Studies, 2005 Fall; 51 (3): 513-35), 515.

For instance, Jenny states that as a boy, in playing imaginative games Chris “thought that the birch-tree would really stir and shrink and quicken into an enchanted princess, that he really was a red Indian, and that his disguise would suddenly fall from him at the right sundown, that at any moment a tiger might lift red fangs through the bracken, and he expected these things with a stronger motion of the imagination than the ordinary child’s make-believe” (8).


The general belief that Neurasthenia was increasing is expressed, for instance in one Dr. Rumler’s 1901 book on Neurasthenia. Rumler writes that “we hear nothing so frequently nowadays as the significant moan, “My nerves are weak!”—“I am nervous!” Furthermore, he laments that neurasthenia had once been restricted mostly to “fashionable ladies” whose complaints could be reported with “the shrug of the shoulders and the rather sarcastic laugh [which] showed how little importance was attached to the state of my lady’s nerves.” In 1901, however, neurasthenia “has become a very general malady, suffered by aristocracy and proletariate alike, a real disease, which no one can treat as a mere matter of parade” (*The Causes, Nature, and Cure of Neurasthenia in General and of Nervous Disorders of the Generative System in Particular*. 15th ed. [Geneva: published by the author, 1901], 39).
Mr. Gray is at one point sent off by Margaret to spend the evening with his friend, Mr. Brown. The heavy-handed names insist upon the drabness to which Margaret has fallen.

The spread of syphilis in the army was well known during the war, and parliament revived the Contagious Diseases Act in 1916, an act that required testing of prostitutes for venereal disease. In her book on Sexual Health, Two Years in Paris (1923), Ettie Rout describes London as being nearly as full of Venereal Disease as Paris, but Paris, where so many soldiers had been living, represented to her “Faith at its lowest ebb.” She also points out, however, that “one appeal never failed to touch the soldier—the Appeal on behalf of his own women and children.” Another possible cause of Chris Baldry’s amnesia, then, could be the desire to forget both his women and his dead child precisely in order to be mentally free to achieve the relief that other men found, in Rout’s words, “after the horrifying ordeal in the Firing Line” (Two Years in Paris. [London: Privately printed, 1923], 9).

See Figure 4, Chapter Two.

Fussell describes how the blasted churches of France became emblematic of the war (The Great War and Modern Memory, 133).

The war was frequently described in terms of football, and the famous occasion on which a battalion began an attack by kicking a football into no-man’s-land became a beloved symbol of British pluck, to some, while it no doubt encapsulated the tragic naïveté of a generation for others.


In this, Septimus may be based on T.S. Eliot, about whose potential attraction to Verdenal Woolf could potentially have known. At any rate, several contemporaries suspected his marriage to Vivienne of being an impulsive response to homosexual longing.

Paul K. Saint-Amour emphasizes the narrator’s unique mobility: “Mrs. Dalloway’s narrator achieves these radiant portraits of the social matrix by way of extraordinary powers of mobility, penetration, observation, and juxtaposition—by, in effect, turning and racing and swooping exactly where she likes, swiftly, freely, like a skater” (145).


Scarry argues that pain and trauma take away a subject’s capacity for self-expression, and so her ability to construe the world in which she lives (The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], 7).

Woolf’s entire oeuvre reflects an ambiguous love of England, and she flirts with a Fordian patriotism that is not about the politics, but about the land and its deep cultural significations, not only in her last novel Between the Acts, but as early as in her response to the aerial attacks on England recorded in her diary during the first world war.

Quoted in Rollyson, Rebecca West: A Life, 35.

Peter’s later musings on water closets and flirtatious youth mirror Clarissa’s thoughts in this scene (70).
The loss of manor houses or other traditional sites of English custom is a major theme in much interwar literature, and was already a concern before the war, as *Howards End* demonstrates. Ford’s *The Good Soldier* and *Parade’s End* both end with vulgar Americans occupying the highly fetishized estates of dissolute aristocracy.

Clarissa’s cousin, the frumpy Ellie Henderson, is only grudgingly invited to her party (115).

Woolf, *Diary*, 56.


Many of the accoutrements and *objets d’art* described here evoke “*The Fire Sermon*” from *The Waste Land*.

Woolf expresses some surprise that Lytton Strachey claimed that she alternately ridiculed Clarissa and “cover[ed] her” with herself (*Diary*, 182).


Ibid., 107.


Ibid., 44.

Ibid., 42.


Several potentially queer relationships are interrupted in the text: Those between Clarissa and Sally, Miss Kilman and Elizabeth, and Septimus and Evans.

In the 2005 Harcourt edition, Bonnie Kime Scott writes in a note “Woolf could have read extensive details of [the War Office’s] report, issued in 1922, in the *Times* (218).

Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*, 56.


Siegfried Sassoon, for example, was partially considered to be suffering from shell shock because he exhibited conspicuously reckless behavior.


In *The Social System* (1951), Talcott Parsons argued that, a sick person faces and responds to a certain set of social expectations about his attitude toward self-care and improvement. Exceptions are made for the ill, provided they carry out their obligation to get better and re-join society (London: Routledge, 1991).


Of the many literary associations Septimus invokes, none is more pervasive, or more important for understanding what Septimus reveals about the biological foundations of power, than the missing central figure from Eliot’s “*The Waste Land,*” the present absence around whom the poem takes its shape (see chapter one). This protan figure is the drowned Phoenecian sailor as much as he is Arthur or the Fisher King, the figure that guarantees life and rebirth in the natural world, and that translates the natural, biological and vegetable world to the cultural, human constructed world. Interestingly, the dog becoming a man is mirrored in reverse later when Richard Dalloway, from Peter’s perspective, seems to become a dog with human aspirations: “Seriously and solemnly Richard Dalloway got on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare’s sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes” (73).
Walter Benjamin describes the power, or the “law” of the police, as marking “the point at which the state, whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends its desires at any price to attain. Therefore, the police intervene “for security reasons” in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists, when they are not merely, without the slightest relation to legal ends, accompanying the citizen as a brutal encumbrance through a life regulated by ordinances, or simply supervising him (Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott [New York: Shocken Books, 1978], 287).

CHAPTER FOUR


Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes, 30.


Scarry, The Body in Pain, 63.


Mark Wollaeger analyses recruitment posters encouraging men to enlist in the armed forces by emphasizing their duty to their countrywomen, particularly in Ireland (Modernism, Media and Propaganda, 176-200). He does not, however, address recruitment posters encouraging women to volunteer or to join the work force. Gilbert and Gubar and other feminist scholars of World War I propaganda tend also to focus more on the use of women in recruitment posters for the military than on posters urging women to join the workforce.

No Man’s Land, Volume 2: Sexchanges (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989


Angela K. Smith, ed. Women’s Writing of the First World War (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). Smith’s edited collection of women’s writing of the war, culled from unpublished journals and diaries as well as published accounts and fiction, is a valuable and comprehensive collection that bears out her claims that many women diarists independently developed modernist stylistic innovations (1988). Catherine Clay traces the professional and friendship relations among influential women writers of the two wars (British Women Writers 1914-1945, Burlington: Ashgate, 2006). Stewart follows Smith’s example in exploring the autobiography of women writers, but focuses specifically on trauma (Women’s Autobiography: War and Trauma. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Eric Hobsbawm notes that war in the twentieth century “used, and destroyed, hitherto inconceivable quantities of products in the course of fighting,” noting that Napoleon’s forces
won the 1806 battle of Jena “with no more than 1,500 rounds of artillery. Yet before the First World War France planned for a munitions output of 10-12,000 shells a day, and in the end its industry had to produce 200,000 shells a day” (Age of Extremes, 45, emphasis in original).


Hynes writes that the myth of a generational antagonism is enduring but inaccurate. He points out, for instance, that the clamor for a war to restore England’s vigor came as much from the younger artists and pundits as from the older (A War Imagined, 18). Still, many who died in the war would have been fourteen to eighteen years old when the war began, so it is hard not to see, in this as in most wars, some element of the young being sacrificed by the old.

For more information on the strike and deportation, see the Glasgow Digital Library: http://sites.scran.ac.uk/redclyde/redclyde/docs/rcgrocwec.htm

A sense of pastoral care over their men is a common theme of much war literature about the front. Many cultural and literary tropes are collapsed in the image of the pastor-officer: the enduring sense of noblesse-oblige, the emphasis on semi-feudal guidance that endured from the eighteenth century, and the poetic tradition of peaceful pastoral that authors frequently call upon to express the destruction of the natural world at the front. Edmund Blunden famously described himself as a “harmless young shepherd in a soldier’s coat” (quoted in Tate, Modernism, History, and the First World War 76). Ford’s Christopher Tietjens is the most extreme example of lingering eighteenth century feudalism. He seems to embody everything that Ford values in Englishness, and his care for his men is excessive. He is haunted by the death of one of his men on his return to England. The relation haunts Tietjens like that of a dead child: “But your dead… yours… your own. As if joined to your own identity by a black cord. …” (356).

Goodlad demonstrates that throughout the nineteenth century Britain’s anti-statist had engendered a culture of pastorship (Victorian Literature and the Victorian State, 18).

Frequently, soldiers recorded experiences of admiring and taking the most comfort from officers who would not shy away from obscenity. Some officers seemed to take on the role of obscene jocularity not through any personal taste for it, but through a sense of pastoral duty to do whatever they knew would relieve the strain. Robert Graves, whose war experience colors his Claudius novels, describes Julius Caesar as particularly popular because of his obscene humor among his soldiers. David Jones writes in In Parenthesis of “Lectures on/ hygiene by the medical officer, who was popular, who/ glossed his technical discourses with every lewdness, whose/ heroism and humanity reached toward sanctity” (13). Hereafter cited in the text.

Bourke, Dismembering the Male, 49.

Bourke provides a chart showing the monetary value of particular disabilities. A soldier would be awarded a 100% pension for “Loss of two or more limbs, loss of an arm and an eye, loss of both hands or all fingers and thumbs, loss of both feet, loss of a hand or a foot, total loss of sight, total paralysis, lunacy, wounds or disease resulting in a man being permanently bedridden, wounds to internal organs or head involving total permanent disability, very severe facial disfigurement.” For the “amputation of leg below knee or the left arm below elbow” or “loss of vision in one eye,” a soldier could expect a 50% pension (regardless, apparently, of whether he was left or right-handed). “Loss of two fingers of either hand” would get a soldier a 20% pension (Ibid., 66).

Ibid., 65.
This was, of course, an extremely common complaint. See Brittain’s “Lament of the Demobilized,” quoted on pages 40-41. This sentiment is expressed in many war books, poems, and memoirs among all belligerent countries.

From the private letters of A.C. Stanton. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London. A.M.’s most likely stands of “Air Mechanics.”


Letter of 5 October, 1917.


Gilbert and Gubar, *Sexchanges*, 293.

Emily Wilding Davidson famously died by throwing herself under the first horse to come along (it happened to be the king’s) at the Epsom Derby of 1913 (Schama, *A History of Britain III*, 433). The rough treatment and force-feeding of women who were imprisoned and went on hunger strikes also foreshadows the treatment of male and female conscientious objectors during the war. Gilbert and Gubar celebrate the women who felt liberated by war work, but they do not address the brave women who were jailed for their opposition to the war.

Letter of 16 October, 1917.

From the private letters of R.D. Archibald (Imperial War Museum).


The working class had additional financial burdens during the war. Tate points out that they would have been unaccustomed to paying much for postage, but would have suddenly been forced to rely on the post, which began charging more, to keep in touch with relatives abroad.

Ibid., 143.


Quoted in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 3.

Teleological progressive notions underpin the nineteenth century emphasis on work as a good in itself. Conrad problematically and ambiguously parodies this notion of work in Marlow’s reflections in *Heart of Darkness*. For Conrad, however, work still offers a certain anodyne from reflection or idleness, even if its results seem incapable of enlightening the world’s darkness. Woolf’s parody of the championship of work (and its sexism) is much more direct. Richard turns to “work” as the only anodyne to an otherwise worthless existence: “For the worthlessness of this life did strike Richard pretty forcibly […] If he’d had a boy he would have said, Work, work. But he had his Elizabeth; he adored his Elizabeth” (111).

Michael Valdez Moses and Richard Begam note that “the British Empire reached the height of its geographic expansion not in 1877, when Victoria was proclaimed empress of India, nor in the 1880s and 1890s when England made substantial territorial gains in Africa, but during the boom years of modernism: the early twentieth century, especially the period between the two
World Wars” (“Introduction,” *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, eds. Michael Valdez Moses and Richard Begam, [Durham: Duke University Press, 2007], 2). However, as the second epigraph to this chapter demonstrates, the war had used up any resources that Britain might have directed to administering these new acquisitions (Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 30).

338 Ibid., 106.
339 Ibid., 11.
342 Hobsbawm explains that “the First World War was waged by the leading powers as a zero-sum game, i.e., as a war that could only be totally won or totally lost [because] unlike earlier wars, which were typically waged for limited and specific objects, [this war] was waged for unlimited ends. In the Age of Empire, politics and economies had fused” (*Age of Extremes* 29).
343 Brittain’s description and word choice of her first encounter with American troops tellingly emphasizes the conditions of the physical material of war: “I pressed forward with the others to watch the United States physically entering the War, so god-like, so magnificent, so splendidly unimpaired in comparison with the nerve-racked men of the British Army” (421, emphasis added).
344 This is a major preoccupation for Fussell, who values poeticization of war largely, but not entirely, on the degree to which poets describe war as total irredeemable waste. He also prefers poets who state this clearly, such as Sassoon and Owen, but not the ambiguous David Jones (147).
345 Angela Smith shows that diarists of war experience frequently revised their diaries substantially for publication (and in some cases for entirely personal reason) to make their words from the time accord better with a more dramatic or emotional memory (49).
347 Ibid., 135.
348 Fussell presents a lengthy list of contemporary English words and their archaic wartime analogues. For instance, “Actions are deeds; To die is to perish; The draft notice is the summons; To enlist is to join the colors; Nothing is naught; Nothing but is naught, save; One’s death is one’s fate; The sky is the heavens” etc. (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, 22).
349 Blunden describes no Owenesque “shrill demented choirs” or “hanging face[s] like a devil’s sick of sin.” Instead, he attempts to avoid transforming an aesthetic experience of waste into one of political use value. Rather than bombast, he employs euphemistic cliché and litotes: “a man had gone west,” (75) “outside men were killed from time to time,” (172) and “the skeleton seemed less coherent than most” (27), for example (Quoted in Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, 76).


While neither was English, the internationalism and aesthetics of Eliot and Pound were polemically impersonal and resisted the kind of materialist “progress” of coherence and community in which Brittain is interested. *The Waste Land* reflects solely on a shared past in incoherent fragments, and Pound had no interest in unifying the fragments of modernity, and would end *The Cantos* fifty years later with the admission that he could not make them cohere.


Foucault, *Power*, 300.

Throughout the memoir, Brittain relies on psychology as a modern panacea. Foucault writes that an aspect of ancient care of the self was to “be equipped with, have ready to hand, a “helpful discourse,” which one has learned very early, rehearses often, and reflects on regularly” (101). Psychoanalysis, like feminism and the League of Nations, constitutes a discourse Brittain knows thoroughly (at least she knows the popularized version of the 1920s upper middle class) and draws on regularly. David Jones has a similar relationship with mythological and aesthetic discourses.


Ibid., 102.


Albrinck, “Borderline Women,” 275. Also, see Chapter Two, figure 4.

This individuality is paradoxically founded on the increased bureaucratic and centralized statism the war compelled. With increased state intervention, an exhausted citizenry turned to personal pleasure, relaxing the communal vigilance that had tormented the young Brittain.

Badenhausen, “Mourning through Memoir,” 2.


Ibid., 180.

Quoted in Colin Hughes’ “David Jones: The Man Who Was on the Field” (In David Jones, Man and Poet, ed. John Matthews [Orono: University of Maine Press, 1989] 163). Hughes’s argument that In Parenthesis is a journalistic account is thin because, among other things, he does not acknowledge how Jones’ poeticization of the events shapes and colors the facts that he describes.


Jonathan Miles and Derek Shiels (David Jones: The Maker Unmade [Bridgend, Wales: Seren, 1995], 1).


Neil Corcoran, “Spilled Bitterness: In Parenthesis in History” (David Jones: Man and Poet), 211.


Quoted in Downes, “2 Alleluias and a Heil,” 15.


William Blissett, “To Make a Shape in Words” (Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature. 50.3-4 (1998) 283-98).

Fussell writes of Jones’s live question “…if Mr. X adjusting his box-respirator can be equated with what the poet envisaged, in ‘I saw young Harry with his beaver on.’ Jones believes such an equation can be made…” (146). Here, Fussell has answered the ambivalent and clearly undecided questions of the preface for Jones, but his answer, which renders *In Parenthesis* a poetic claim that established and conservative modes of conceiving warfare can and do work in the 20th century, is simplistic and unconvincing. It implicitly denies the poem’s excessive experimentation and its relentless focus on World War I as an industrialized war of attrition.

Blisset, “To Make a Shape in Words,” 284.

Dai Greatcoat appears to be based on an amalgamation of a character named Dai who “goes for a soldier” in the Welsh folk song “Sospan Fach” and Malory’s Sir Breunor, a knight of the round table initially nicknamed “La Cote Male Taile” by the wicked speaking damosel Maledisant for his ill-fitting clothing (201, 205). Dai, with his “misfit outsize greatcoat” embodies both nobility and vulnerability (79).


The cramped and paradoxically agoraphobic and claustrophobic style (which Fussell dismisses in his attention to the frontispiece as “too much”) is typical of not only Jones’s paintings of scenes from the war, but of the entire school of German expressionist painters such as Otto Dix and Georg Grosz whose 1920s paintings of veterans depicted mutilated and prosthetically re-assembled soldiers in a much more sinister and less sympathetic manner than Jones’s frontispiece, which evokes the simultaneously fetishistic and narcissistic (in a Freudian sense) pity for the male body.


Jacques Derrida has traced the development of modern Christianity through an emerging European tendency toward responsibility that negates pagan or orgiastic social tendencies. He writes that a “distinction is to be made between the demonic on the one hand (that which confuses the limits among the animal, the human, and the divine, and which retains an affinity with mystery, the initiatory, the esoteric, the secret or the sacred) and responsibility on the other” (*The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995] 6).

The Australia New Zealand Auxiliary Corps, whose losses in the Dardanelles campaign were extreme.

This is one of many allusions to Eliot’s poetry in the poem. Jones invokes “The Hollow Men” when a guard is told “to report any hostile movement—and the/ counter-sign is/ Prickly Pear/ Prickly Pear/ not to forget/ important not to forget,” for example (50). In a note explaining his use of mythical birdsong he does not name Eliot, nor the poem, but quotes “Sweeney Among the Nightingales,” writing that “The greatest English poet of our own time has written:

‘And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud.’

Eliot, in turn, was a great admirer of Jones, and wrote an introductory note to a 1961 edition of *In Parenthesis* in which he wrote “David Jones is a representative of the same literary generation as
Joyce and Pound and myself, if four men born between 1882 and 1895 can be regarded as of the same literary generation” (viii).

POSTSCRIPT

406 Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).
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