

Modernist Affirmation:
Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Discourse of Trauma

By

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Dedicated in memory of my mother

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INTRODUCTION: MODERNIST AFFIRMATION

In 1899, Joseph Conrad published *Heart of Darkness*. As is well known, the novella was inspired by Conrad's six-month expedition in the Congo, filtered through the perspective of his famously unreliable narrator Marlow. As Conrad recalls in "Geography and Some Explorers," the violence of imperialism quickly had become apparent after his initial sense of adventure gave way to a "great melancholy" upon witnessing "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration" (17). For Marlow, this great melancholy manifests itself as a gradual disillusionment with both the imperial project and its primary purveyor, Kurtz, whose famous cry, "'The horror! The horror!'" (69), epitomizes the brutal reality of imperialism in the Congo. At the core of the novella, Marlow witnesses these dying words "as though a veil had been rent," revealing Kurtz's legacy written on his "ivory face" that registers and speaks of "sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair" (69). Unlike Kurtz, Marlow survives the Congo and returns to England where he remains haunted by his experience, compulsively repeating his tale as he sails down the Thames where we meet and return to him in the frame narrative, much like Coleridge's ancient mariner who is fated to "pass, like night, from land to land" (587) repeating his "ghastly tale" (585).¹

Conrad's novella, published on the cusp of the twentieth century, testifies to a bleak outlook on historical and cultural modernity, a tendency toward despair taken up by many of his fellow modernists. For instance, W.B. Yeats envisions the modern era as one of "anarchy" "loosed upon the world" in which "things fall apart" (3-4). For Yeats, the second coming

¹ Geoffrey Hartman performs a reading of the ancient mariner as a traumatized survivor in a foundational essay for trauma studies, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," which establishes how poetic tropes can mirror the symptoms of trauma. He argues that the ancient mariner compulsively repeats his tale, the shooting of the albatross acting as a radical rupture in the symbolic order that constitutes a shock and is reflected in the repetitions and caesuras of the poem (543).

manifests itself not as a joyous resurrection but rather as “a rough beast, its hour come round at last,” that “[s]louches toward Bethlehem to be born” (21-2). Yeats’s beast would find itself at home in T.S. Eliot’s waste land in which “death had undone so many” (63), Eliot’s vision of modernity succumbing to an ambiguity over whether the “dry sterile thunder” (342) will bring rain and renewal or the fragments will remain scattered across the unreal city. Also writing in the aftermath of the First World War, Ernest Hemingway concludes *Farewell to Arms* on a note of despair, Frederic Henry surviving the trenches only to walk back in the rain to his hotel, alone and wretched after Catherine and his unborn child have died. Literary criticism echoes this bleakness with definitions of modernism that characterize it as responding to a version of modernity permeated by crisis and historical calamity. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*, Pericles Lewis posits that both the stylistic innovations of modernism and the artistic period as a whole can be typified by crisis: a crisis of representation, reason, and liberalism (3). Such crises mirror the unprecedented scale of turmoil in the twentieth century, the canonical “high” modernists working during and between two world wars and their contemporary inheritors writing in the wake of colonialism, civil wars, and ever increasing atrocity and global terror. As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane observe, modernism is “the art that responds to the scenario of our chaos,” an art that reflects “Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty principle,’ of the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaningless and absurdity” (27). For the modernists, “the shock, the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis, is a crucial element of the style” (24). Moreover, as Jean-Michel Rabaté suggests, modernity itself is marked by a pervasive sense of loss and mourning after the radical break from the past, the flip side of “make

it new” being a violent return of the repressed haunted by “spectral returns” (xvi). According to such artists and critics, modernism is the art of crisis, shock, and despair, an appropriate style, form, and tone for responding to the horrors of the twentieth century.

Shock, haunting, and crisis are, of course, not only central to conceptions of modernism but are also key features of trauma, from Freud’s initial formulation of war neuroses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to the official categorization of post-traumatic stress disorder as a legitimate medical condition by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. Due to the perceived bleakness of modernist literature, critics and writers often turn to modernism as an exemplary model for the ethical representation of atrocity, particularly in the context of the Holocaust. Modernist aesthetic innovations such as fragmentation, ambiguity, a lack of narrative closure, repetition, paradox, preoccupation with consciousness, and a formal difficulty that resists the relatively easy meaning imparted by realism all embody the imperative to “never forget” and mimic the symptoms of trauma. Theodor Adorno, in defending his statement that lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, argues that art is faced with a paradox to obey his dictum yet also not “surrender to cynicism” (“Commitment” 84). According to Adorno, art taking atrocity as its subject must walk the fine line between making “an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning” and thus allowing genocide to “become part of the cultural heritage” and resisting such easy commodification through form (85). Indeed, Adorno declares that art must “resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men’s heads” (78). As an example of such art, Adorno turns to modernists such as Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett, two authors frequently typecast as the epitome of bleakness. Similarly, when asking what type and genre of literature can be used to ethically and responsibly represent the Holocaust, Hayden White draws a parallel between modernist style and the conditions of

historical modernity that create the possibility of the Holocaust. White argues that the Holocaust is not unrepresentable but rather “requires the kind of style, the modernist style, that was developed in order to represent the kind of experiences which social modernism made possible” (52). In contemporary trauma theory, the formal features lauded by Adorno and White are commonly equated with the symptomatology of Freud’s repetition compulsion and put in service of an aesthetic of melancholia that refuses catharsis and narrative closure.²

Yet “the horror, the horror” is not the only note that modernist literature strikes, and its formal innovations do not need to be equated exclusively with melancholia or a bleak conception of modernity. Instead, many modernists take great pleasure in the experimentation, play, and liberation from convention made possible by the modernist imperative to “make it new.” Think, for example, of the pleasure Gertrude Stein finds in composition and the play of differences running throughout her repetitions, lists, and series. Similarly, James Joyce ends *Ulysses* not with Stephen’s declaration that “History [...] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (28) but with Molly’s “yes and I said yes I will Yes” (644). Rather than a melancholic repetition compulsion, Molly’s affirmative repetition testifies to the possibility of reconciliation with her husband, the waste land having been earlier renewed by Bloom and Stephen’s streams that water the garden of the house on Eccles Street under the “heaventree of stars” (573). In contrast to Hemingway’s dismal response to war, HD’s *Trilogy* emphasizes reconstituting the cultural

² See Anne Whitehead’s *Trauma Fiction* for an example of the trend toward diagnosing how the symptoms of trauma are translated into formal devices such as intertextuality, repetition, fragmentary narration, and ellipses, among others (for similar analyses, see Vickroy and Schwab). Whitehead cites postmodernism and postcolonialism as precursors for such trauma fiction but neglects to mention the modernist innovators who respond to the world wars and who make such “postmodern” devices possible. Such projects arguably originate with Geoffrey Hartman’s pioneering identification of perpetual troping in Romantic poetry with the repetition compulsion and belatedness, notably his work on Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (“Traumatic Knowledge” 541-3). See Patricia Rae’s excellent collection, *Modernism and Mourning*, for readings of how modernists resist national forms of mourning and instead see “mourning [...] as ‘melancholic,’ or ‘resistant,’ or ‘failed’” (289). Tammy Clewell makes a similar argument for the resistance among modernists to conventional forms of mourning, the formal innovations of the period becoming an “aestheticization of loss” (3) and a refusal of consolation.

shards of modernity rather than insisting on their perpetual fragmentation. Writing during the Blitz on London, she concentrates on the recurring image of “a half-burnt-out apple-tree / blossoming,” a luminous image forcing us to “pause to give / thanks that we rise again from death and live” (87). My dissertation follows this current in modernist literature to uncover the possibility of affirmation in the midst of trauma in the fiction of modernists Ford Madox Ford and Virginia Woolf and their contemporary inheritors Pat Barker, Ian McEwan, and J.M. Coetzee. In “Modernist Affirmation,” I argue for a conception of trauma oriented toward survival and an affirmation of life, however tentative, which originates in the very same modernist literature frequently cited by trauma theorists as paradigmatic of the bleak, melancholic vein currently dominating the field. Over the course of five chapters, I unearth the affirmative possibilities for trauma theory as they organically emerge from the literature of the twentieth century, each text contributing further nuance to how the collective traumatic experiences of the century were experienced and how they are remembered, theorized, and represented today.

Modernist Mourning and Melancholia

My argument for modernist affirmation directly engages with current work in literary studies on the subject of trauma, specifically the call to depathologize melancholia. Rather than adhere to Freud’s view of melancholia as a depressive “disorder” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 247), or neurotic “pathological mourning” (250) fused with narcissism, contemporary critics reclaim melancholia as an opportunity to theorize loss in ways that refuse the catharsis, closure, and working through achieved in “successful” mourning. Judith Butler is one of the most prominent advocates of such a viewpoint, arguing for a “national melancholia, understood as a disavowed mourning” (*Precarious Life* xiv) that provides the basis for alternate forms of

community grounded in shared human vulnerability and precariousness. Her analysis acquired urgency in post-9/11 culture, specifically in light of how quickly national grief was replaced by a call to arms, a trend she resists by asking what kind of political community and collective responsibility can be gained from “tarrying with grief” (30). Translating Butler’s arguments to literary and cultural texts, David Eng and David Kazanjian argue for the “creative” potential of melancholia, rather than understanding it solely in terms of negativity (2). As Butler proposes in her afterword to their collection, “[i]f catastrophe is not representable according to the narrative explanations that would ‘make sense’ of history, then making sense of ourselves and charting the future are not impossible. But we are, as it were, marked for life, and that mark is insuperable, irrecoverable” (472). In other words, for Butler, trauma permanently scars the individual and a collectivity, frustrating representation and insisting on a new form of community based on a shared melancholic approach to the future.

The reclamation of melancholia for its creative and political potential is a response to the widespread premise in trauma theory that trauma is unspeakable or incites a failure of language. Judith Herman argues that there is a “dialectic of trauma” expressing the “*unspeakable*” nature of atrocities that are “too terrible to utter aloud” but the simultaneous “imperative of truth-telling” necessary for recovery (1). Maurice Blanchot’s refusal to name the Shoah but rather refer to it as “the disaster” is another example of such an insistence on unspeakability. Similarly, Elaine Scarry argues that representations of the body in pain necessarily conform to the structure of metaphor since all descriptions of pain are approximations due to pain’s fundamental unsharability (4). According to Scarry, “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). Jacques Derrida also falls

into this camp, particularly with his argument that an aporia exists at the core of testimony—an ethical remembrance of the dead is one in which “success fails” and “failure succeeds” (*Memoires* 35). Prosopopeia is Derrida’s ideal rhetorical form for representing this aporia since ethical representations place the dead in a “‘cryptic enclave’ within the self, an imagined space in which [...] ‘I pretend to keep the dead alive, intact, *safe (save) inside me*, but...only in order to refuse, in a necessarily equivocal way, to love the dead as a living part of me’” (Rae 17). The aporia of testimony, therefore, is formulated as an “impossible possibility” since testimony insists on the singularity and exemplarity of the witness while never fully and objectively capturing the event due to the citationality of language. Such arguments typify the bleak trend within trauma studies, literary critics adapting these arguments for melancholia and aporia to insist on figures of failure, impossibility, and unspeakability.

Within modernist studies, these arguments are translated into aesthetic theories that privilege either melancholia or a qualified mourning. Taking their cue from Adorno, such critics contribute to the depathologization of melancholia by citing modernist authors as exemplars of an aesthetic that self-reflexively acknowledges, through its form, the limitations of representing trauma. For instance, Jahan Ramazani’s *The Poetry of Mourning* shows how modernist poetry resists collective and national forms of mourning, “modern elegy” blocking the movement from grief to consolation in favor of a “melancholic mourning” in which modernist poets “attack the dead and themselves, their own work and tradition; and they refuse such orthodox consolations as the rebirth of the dead in nature, in God, or in poetry itself” (4). Similarly, Jonathan Flatley turns to affect theory in order to illustrate how modernists embrace melancholia not simply as a depressive state but also a condition in which one can regain interest in the world through the

“most intense or exceptional devotion” to the lost object of desire (1).³ Lecia Rosenthal, in *Mourning Modernism*, argues that modernism participates in a “catastrophe culture” characterized by a paradoxical longing for a future typified by the aesthetics of the new but one that, as catastrophe, signals the end of futurity (4). Focusing primarily on the ways that modernist aesthetics fail both to curtail or redeem the century’s atrocities and effectively respond to “the demand to supplement the overflow of atrocity with an affirmative spin” (10), Rosenthal’s mourning of modernism’s failures complements models of aporia, melancholia, and bleakness. Indicative of the prominence of melancholia and catastrophe, Michael Roth asserts that trauma has in large part taken the place of the dystopian or visions of negative utopia in modern literature, theories of catastrophe and trauma expressing a pervasive “dystopia of the spirit” (90).

In addition to such attempts to articulate a bleak modernist melancholia, just as many critics turn to mourning as a model for a modernist aesthetics of trauma. Patricia Rae’s collection *Modernism and Mourning* emphasizes reading the modernists in terms of “resistant mourning,” contextualized by the historical and cultural politics of mourning with which the modernists actively engaged. Rae acknowledges that “it is melancholia, not mourning, that involves a forgetting—or at least an inability to remember, differentiate, or understand clearly what has been lost” (22). This forgetting inherent to melancholia prevents a confrontation with the traumatic past, resulting in Rae’s own emphasis on “resistant mourning.” Similarly, Tammy Clewell argues for the political possibilities of resistant mourning, stating that authors like Woolf

³ Although Flatley’s subtitle is “Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism,” he primarily defines modernism in terms of historical and cultural modernity, which he argues is inextricably linked to loss (e.g. the emphasis on the now and the new signal a dependence on the loss of the past). His primary texts include DuBois, Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, and Platonov’s *Chevengur*. See Henry Staten’s *Eros in Mourning* for an analysis with a much wider scope (Homer to Conrad) of how loss is fundamental to all desire. Literary figures of unassuageable mourning illustrate his argument for a dialectic of mourning in which “one may love mutable, contingent beings *as such*, in which case one is subject to limitless mourning; or one may love such beings as a step on the way to the true, ultimate, and unfailing object of love, in which case mourning is mastered or at least mitigated by a movement of transcendence” (7). Staten ultimately emphasizes “unassuaged” mourning and thus aligns with other critics who stress interminable mourning.

and Faulkner create “a social space and shared language for grief, a literary mourning discourse that negotiates, significantly, the intersections between the exigencies of public life and the seemingly private zones of bereaved consciousness” (14). Nouri Gana, in *Signifying Loss*, proposes finding a middle ground between mourning and melancholia, illustrating how the poetics of narrative mourning in modernist and postcolonial literature are “stranded somewhere along a continuum or inside an unresolved chiasmic oscillation between mourning and melancholia or between the demand for consolation and the insistence of inconsolability” (45-6). Instead of reiterating Derrida’s thesis of interminable or impossible mourning, Gana calls for a “situated and flexible theory of mourning” that maintains the possibility of both mourning and inconsolability, depending on the context (10).⁴

Rather than invoke models of melancholia, inconsolability, resistant mourning, or flexible mourning, I employ a vocabulary of affirmation to intervene in such debates. As Greg Fortner has pointed out, the reclamation of melancholia risks “shading into a *celebration* of it,” ignoring the affective dimensions of melancholia that manifest in the “bleak and joyless deadness of depression” (“Against Melancholia” 139). Similarly, models of mourning—interminable, impossible, ceaseless, resistant, or flexible—skew heavily toward loss by retaining the dichotomy with melancholia in an effort to avoid a narrative closure that would betray the symptoms of trauma. Although they stress the possibility of healing and recovery, the vast majority of such studies end up explicating how trauma is represented in a fashion consistent with the symptoms of melancholia (e.g. repetition, paradox, ambiguity, resistance to closure,

⁴ In contrast to Gana, Sam Durrant’s study of postcolonial trauma narratives comes down on the side of melancholia. He calls for the “ceaseless labor of remembrance” (1), which relies on the notion that “the work of mourning is interminable” (8) since postcolonial narrative “is caught between...two commitments: its transformation of the past into a narrative is simultaneously an attempt to summon the dead and to lay them to rest” (9). Paul Gilroy’s seminal *Postcolonial Melancholia*, of course, treats melancholia in a very different manner. He argues that nation-states like Britain engage in melancholic forms of nostalgia for a lost imperial past, which Gilroy argues can be traced directly to neo-imperialist practices that are detrimental to a realization of the possibilities of conviviality present in contemporary multiculturalism.

etc.) at the expense of an aesthetics that would correspond to successful mourning, however qualified. As Dominick LaCapra observes, both art and criticism about trauma attempt to preserve a close proximity to trauma to maintain “the feeling of keeping faith with trauma” (*Writing* 23). LaCapra, in this context, argues explicitly against deconstruction and models of keeping faith that result in “aporia, an endlessly melancholic, impossible mourning, and a resistance to working through” (23). Yet even in models that move away from aporetic melancholia, there is a residual desire to “keep faith with trauma” in models of qualified or resistant mourning that consistently stop short of theorizing an aesthetic of successful mourning. Rather than emphasize mourning or melancholia, Madelyn Detloff has proposed analyzing modernist literature in terms of “persistence” and “resilience” as “a complex adaptation to traumatic circumstances—but an adaptation that does not ‘get over’ or transcend the past as redemptive narratives imply” (15). Similarly, I argue for the possibility for affirmation in the context of contemporary trauma theory and modernist literature. Like resilience, affirmation stresses neither cathartic transcendence of suffering nor redemption but rather the capacity to overcome trauma, a possibility to which modernist and contemporary literature testifies. Such overcoming highlights survival and perseverance and keeps faith with Eros and the life instincts rather than Thanatos and the death drive.⁵

In the remainder of the introduction, I establish a genealogy of affirmation followed by the succeeding chapters, which trace the possibility of affirmation through the most prominent theoretical tendencies in contemporary trauma theory: psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and biopolitics. Psychoanalysis contributes the distinction between melancholia and mourning (or working-through) that has become so prominent in trauma theory, and poststructuralism echoes

⁵ See Sara Guyer’s *Romanticism After Auschwitz* for a valuable analysis of survival within trauma studies but from the perspective of poetry, specifically how Romantic poetic forms such as prosopopoeia reemerge in the context of testimony and post-Holocaust aesthetics.

these concerns with its emphasis on aporia, repetition, and citationality (as opposed to closure and fixed meaning). In addition to psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, the emerging field of biopolitics investigates how the suffering body can resist the increasing drive toward thanatopolitics in the second half of the century. Instead of starting with Freud, the genealogy begins with Friedrich Nietzsche in order to establish the tension between nihilism and affirmation as the constitutive crisis of modernity. Unlike the majority of critical studies merging trauma theory and modernism that analyze trauma from a single theoretical perspective (e.g. psychoanalysis), the genealogical approach provides the grounds for a fuller investigation of the fruitful intersections between modernist fiction and the multiple intellectual discourses shaping the century. This dissertation also presents a much fuller analysis of modernist literature than is usually undertaken in trauma studies, where modernism is either invoked in name only due to its formal innovations or omitted entirely in favor of loose definitions of the “postmodern” as a catch-all for post-1945 literature.⁶ Instead, I argue for the centrality of modernism to a theory of trauma that illuminates affirmative possibility on the edges of the large shadow cast by the twentieth century.

The Discourse of Trauma

Contemporary trauma theory returns to Sigmund Freud for the origin of concepts including melancholia, mourning, traumatic shock, the repetition compulsion, and belatedness. Within contemporary literary studies, Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman have become the central theorists of trauma due to their interpretations of Freud, often cited by literary critics in

⁶ Hayden White’s essay is a classic example of the former. See Whitehead, Vickroy, and Schwab for examples of the latter. Of course, critics like Rae and Detloff present much more nuanced portraits of modernism in their discussions of trauma. Rae’s collection, however, largely focuses on how the modernists resisted cultural and historical mourning practices (rather than the intellectual backgrounds for contemporary trauma theory). Detloff primarily analyzes modernism through a psychoanalytic and queer theory lens and does not also engage extensively with the three theoretical fields outlined above.

lieu of returning to Freud's own work on the subject. In the now canonical *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth establishes the most frequently cited psychoanalytic version of trauma, which she translates directly to literary studies through her deconstructionist methodology. Freud's concept of belatedness is central, as evident in her primary question:

If traumatic experience, as Freud indicates suggestively, is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then these texts, each in its turn, ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness. (5)

Her answer is that the story of trauma and the demands it makes never appear "in a straightforward way, but must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (5). The turn to literature and literary language complements Freud's own reliance on anecdotes and fiction, Caruth famously opening with Freud's interpretation of the story of Tancred and Clorinda. For Caruth, representations of trauma must speak in a language that is somehow literary in that the texts employ rhetorical tropes and motifs (such as her own readings of "falling" and "burning") that hold trauma and loss at the center—an accessible center but one that simultaneously defies understanding and thus the closure of historical fact. Ultimately, Caruth views trauma in terms of shock and belated repetition, even survival conforming to this paradigm since "it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*" (*Trauma* 9).⁷ Despite the exponential growth of trauma studies since the

⁷ Caruth's latest work, *Literature in the Ashes of History*, further investigates this claim, specifically asking: "what does it mean for life to bear witness to death?" (7), "What is the nature of a life that continues beyond trauma?" (7), and "What is the language of the life drive?" (10). She answers these questions by arguing that the life drive speaks in a creative language of departure and parting, such that history "is reclaimed and generated not in reliving unconsciously the death of the past but by an act that bears witness by parting from it" (9). Yet this parting is not necessarily a turn to affirmative modes of life but rather insists on a future that cannot be known and disappears (or turns to ash) precisely as it approaches. For example, Caruth returns to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and argues that the traumatic nightmares of shell-shocked soldiers (nightmares that return them to the traumatic event they didn't fully experience the first time) enact this tension between creation and erasure: "These memories, in other words, in repeating and erasing, did not represent but rather enacted history; they made history by also erasing it

publication of *Unclaimed Experience*, as Roger Luckhurst points out, all the major strands of trauma theory still lead back to Caruth's work: "the problem of aesthetics 'after Auschwitz'; the aporia of representation in poststructuralism; the diverse models of trauma developed by, and in the wake of, Freud" (13).⁸

Caruth's theory relies heavily on Freudian conceptions of trauma; she privileges notions of melancholia over mourning, repetition over closure, and acting out over working through. Although I will discuss psychoanalytic conceptions of trauma at length in the first two chapters, I propose returning to Nietzsche as the genesis of an alternative discourse of trauma that does not preclude the possibility of affirmation. Published in the late nineteenth century and rising in popularity alongside modernism, Nietzsche's work was hugely influential on the modernists in the first half of the twentieth century due to his unforgettable proclamations about modernity, such as the death of God.⁹ For Nietzsche, "the crisis of modernity was largely one of values" in which they "are revealed to be hollow illusions and thereby lose all legitimacy," a crisis "generated by the internal logic of western cultural values, in particular its persistent belief in metaphysical certitude" (Rampley 2). Rather than succumbing to despair, however, Nietzsche

[...]. they archived history by effacing it; and in effacing history, they also created it" (78). This argument for traumatic history as creating/looking toward the future through erasure/departure is very much in line with her earlier argument that trauma claims, even as it defies, our understanding.

⁸ For literary critics, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony* is also a touchstone of the field due to readings of literary texts like Camus's *The Plague*, Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*, and the pedagogical experience of teaching trauma that Felman describes at length. Felman and Laub rely heavily on psychoanalysis, Laub (a psychoanalyst) stating that the genre of testimony repeatedly insists on a failure of language and the unspeakable nature of trauma. Witnesses who attempt to testify exhibit how "no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the speech that cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory*, and *speech*" (78). He concludes that "the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling and, therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails" (79), a phenomenon that Felman proceeds to illustrate through her readings of cultural and literary texts.

⁹ As John Burt Foster, Jr. argues, unlike Freud and Kierkegaard, who came to prominence in literary culture in 1910 and the 1940s, respectively, Nietzsche was a major influence throughout the period traditionally associated with modernism (i.e. the first four decades of the twentieth century). Thus, he proposes that the "vogue for [Nietzsche's] work ran through the whole period, increasing the likelihood of his becoming an active presence for [the modernists] from their formative years onward" (7).

fights against nihilism by arguing for the affirmation of life as it is realized through the will and Dionysian wisdom. Unlike Freud's ultimate privileging of the death drive in his late work, which trauma theory belatedly and compulsively repeats in its melancholic emphases, Nietzsche stresses the affirmation of life as the alternative to the crisis of modernity. Clearly, Freud's work also made a great impression on the culture and intellectual history of the twentieth century, but rather than being a contemporary of the modernists, Nietzsche presents an earlier theorization of modernity as Janus-faced, torn between nihilism and affirmation. Of course, the notion of trauma, as Freud and contemporary trauma theory conceive it, is a problem of consciousness—the wounded psyche being breached by the shock of the traumatic experience and thus conforming to the repetition compulsion in an attempt to belatedly grasp the entirety of the event. Admittedly, Nietzsche does not discuss trauma in this context of consciousness and psychology. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's philosophy poses an overlooked counterpoint to the melancholic vein within trauma theory, largely because he does not discuss trauma as a psychological wounding. By temporarily setting aside this conception of trauma and loosening the hold of psychoanalysis on trauma theory, we can clear a space for an alternative conception of trauma that does not result in the familiar tension between mourning and melancholia.

Although he does not mention trauma specifically, Nietzsche contends that violence and cruelty lie at the root of structures including morality, memory, and responsibility—all of which occupy central positions within trauma studies. As he declares in *The Genealogy of Morals*, “Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole somber thing called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: how dearly they have been bought! how much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all ‘good things’!” (498). As part of his elucidation of the Dionysian

versus the Apollonian, Nietzsche emphasizes the principle role violence and cruelty have played in Western civilization, particularly to the formation of memory:

Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them), the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example), the cruelest rites of all the religious cults (and all religions are at the deepest level systems of cruelties)—all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics. (497)

For Nietzsche, one of the founding uses of memory was as a vehicle for making promises, specifically in the form of contractual obligations in debtor and creditor relationships. Any time promises are made, memory is used to keep and enforce those promises, and “it is here, one suspects, that we shall find a great deal of severity, cruelty and pain” (500). Nietzsche goes on to use the debtor/creditor relationship as a metaphor for the community as a whole, war being a punishment on the scale of nations (508) and the debtor/creditor relationship appearing in every “grade of civilization, however low” (506). As a member of society, one enters into a contractual relationship with his/her fellow citizens and tacitly agrees to obey the laws, rules, and traditions passed down by that community’s ancestors, to whom one is indebted. This realm of contractual obligations is the root of “the moral conceptual world of ‘guilt,’ ‘conscience,’ ‘duty,’ ‘sacredness of duty,’” a world whose “beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time. And might one not add that, fundamentally, this world has never since lost a certain odor of blood and torture?” (501). Nietzsche’s genealogical project thus becomes one of sniffing out the source of this odor, or, as he puts it in *Ecce Homo*, “I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia.—I was the first to *discover* the truth by being the first to experience lies as lies—smelling them out.—My genius is in my nostrils” (326). Ultimately, the “mendaciousness of millennia” is the perpetuation of the

lie that morality and values are universal and timeless when in reality they have very human origins, traceable to a violent past of cruelty, torture, and pain.¹⁰

For Nietzsche, the modern period at the end of his genealogy is overwhelmingly characterized by shame at one's instincts and the corresponding shift to an Apollonian worldview emphasizing rationality, logic, and universal values. Such a thesis recurs, but with the addition of the psychoanalytic concept of the repression of the id and instincts like aggression in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). As Nietzsche states, over forty years earlier:

The weary pessimistic glance, mistrust of the riddle of life, the icy No of disgust with life—these do not characterize the most evil epochs of the human race: rather do they first step into the light of day as the swamp weeds they are when the swamp to which they belong comes into being—I mean the morbid softening and moralization through which the animal “man” finally learns to be ashamed of all his instincts. (*Genealogy* 503)

Nihilism, pessimism, and despair are not modern phenomena resulting from “the most evil epochs of the human race,” but rather can be traced back to the primordial “swamp” in which morality first emerged. As an alternative to the “icy No” of the moralists that makes man “ashamed of all his instincts,” Nietzsche establishes a Dionysian Yes-saying. The Dionysian is a “a formula for the highest affirmation, born of fullness, of overfullness, a Yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything that is questionable and strange in existence” (*Ecce Homo* 272). This Dionysian “yes-saying” redirects the debate about modernity away from questions of morality based in Christianity, with their attendant concepts of the afterlife and the soul, to the mortal life in this world. As Bernard Reginster points out, for Nietzsche, morality is a life-negating system since the realization of our highest values “requires

¹⁰ As Nietzsche's primary target, Christianity violently reinforces this version of morality, and therefore is one of the major causes of modern nihilism. As Nietzsche declares, the “concept of ‘God’ invented as a counterconcept of life—everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity! The concept of the ‘beyond,’ the ‘true world’ invented in order to devalue the only world there is—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! The concept of the ‘soul,’ the ‘spirit,’ finally even ‘immortal soul,’ invented in order to despise the body, to make it sick, ‘holy’; to oppose with a ghastly levity everything that deserves to be taken seriously in life,” including food, sexuality, climate, and the treatment of the sick (*Ecce Homo* 334).

the intervention of God, or the existence of another, metaphysical world” and such values “cannot be realized under the conditions of our life in this, the natural world. They are, accordingly, values from the standpoint of which this life ‘deserves to be repudiated,’” or life-negating values (45). Indeed, as Nietzsche states in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

For, confronted with morality (especially Christian, or unconditional, morality), life *must* continually and inevitably be in the wrong, because life *is* something essentially amoral—and eventually, crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal No, life *must* then be felt to be unworthy of desire and altogether worthless. Morality itself—how now? might not morality be “a will to negate life,” a secret instinct of annihilation, a principle of decay, diminution, and slander—the beginning of the end? (23)

Instead of the soul, the static world of eternal life devoid of suffering, and the being that is born into the “swamp” of moralism, an affirmative interpretation of life stresses the body and a dynamic world of *becoming* complete with struggle, overcoming, and transformation.

The Dionysian and the will to power become Nietzsche’s primary expressions of the affirmation of life against the pervasive nihilism created by morality’s eternal and icy “No.” Yet Nietzschean affirmation is not entirely free of violence and suffering. Unlike the role violence plays in morality, Dionysian violence is understood in terms of creative destruction and renewal:

“Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems; the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I understood as the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not in order to get rid of terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge—Aristotle misunderstood it that way—but in order to be oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—that joy which includes even joy in destroying.” (*Ecce Homo* 273)¹¹

Nietzsche does not call for catharsis through suffering but rather views suffering as a crucial ingredient of life, an obstacle that the will to power overcomes in the process of affirming life.¹²

¹¹ Nietzsche quotes himself in the above passage while discussing the composition of *Twilight of the Idols* in this citation from *Ecce Homo*.

¹² In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Dionysian and the Apollonian are inextricably intertwined in the dualism fundamental to art. There, the Dionysian is aligned with passion and the intoxication of the audience whereas the

The emphasis is placed on *becoming*, affirmation found in “the eternal joy of becoming” that inherently entails a destruction of the old, a sacrifice of the past in order to “rejoice” in the activity of overcoming. Although Nietzsche’s call for revelry even in the “joy of destroying” seems to uncomfortably anticipate the Futurist celebration of warfare or later formulations in fascism, destruction in Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy does not equate to genocide or literal death.¹³ Rather, it can be understood in terms of creativity. As Bernard Reginster notes, “[f]or the strong, creative type, negation is a necessary part of the creative process” (246). Nietzsche aligns Dionysus with “sensuality and cruelty,” the “transitoriness” of becoming “could be interpreted as enjoyment of productive and destructive force, as *continual creation*” (*Will to Power* 539). Furthermore, as he moves away from the dichotomy with the Apollonian to instead emphasize the Dionysian versus the Crucified, he proposes:

The word “*Dionysian*” means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to

Apollonian imparts structure and logic to the work. In his later works, especially *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche broadens the Dionysian to a general affirmation of life that is no longer opposed to the Apollonian but rather to the larger problem of nihilism originating in morality. In this later formulation, the “‘Dionysian,’ is actually a union of Dionysus and Apollo: a creative striving that gives form to itself” (Kaufmann 282). In this new model, the Crucified becomes the primary binary for the Dionysian.

¹³ Suffering, cruelty, and destruction in Nietzsche’s work should be aligned with both the individual’s ability to overcome hardship but also Nietzsche’s overall project of revealing and superseding traditional morality in order to usher in a new era not beholden to the value systems of the past. Nietzsche frequently uses childbirth metaphors to illustrate the cycle of destruction and renewal, since “agony is the price of all birth” (Kaufmann 272). Happiness itself is possible only if it “involves a measure of discomfort and pain” (272) since happiness is not a static state defined by the absence of suffering but rather the process of overcoming pain and hardship. See Julian Young’s biography of Nietzsche for a discussion of how he, unlike the Futurists, turned away from a glorification of war as a way to regenerate culture in the wake of his traumatic experiences in the Franco-Prussian War (137-9). In Young’s view, Nietzsche saw violence and aggression as ineliminable human instincts and, in response, we can despair of human nature and repress aggression (nihilism), give aggression free rein (the barbarism of warfare), or turn to the Greeks and give aggression vent through art and the tragic festivals of Dionysus in which aggression is staged (140). Ultimately, when analyzing suffering and violence in Nietzsche’s work, we should “keep in mind the broad character of [Nietzsche’s] target: he aims to debunk the wholesale condemnation of suffering, which he finds to be deeply entrenched in our ethical sensibilities” (Reginster 235).

fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction.
(*Will to Power* 539)

Although the argument that joy comes from destruction and that negation is the source of affirmation seems to be a contradictory one, as Nietzsche himself says, “I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am nevertheless the opposite of a No-saying spirit” (*Ecce Homo* 327). Dionysian, essentially Nietzschean, “yes-saying” provides access to such a life-affirming force precisely through its ability to overcome suffering and forge new creations by destroying past ones and negating traditions.

Indeed, the Dionysian, as opposed to the Crucified, expresses an affirmation of life and a will to power capable of combating and overcoming the prevailing nihilism characteristic of modernity. Nietzsche declares, as central to his concept of the will, that “[i]t is here I set the *Dionysus* of the Greeks: the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied or in part; (typical—that the sexual act arouses profundity, mystery, reverence)” (*Will to Power* 542). Crucially, he raises sexuality as key to a Dionysian “affirmation of life”—an affirmation of the “whole” of life. As we will see in the first two chapters, Eros is also an integral part of Freud’s initial theorization of external traumatic events, a Janus-faced conception of trauma that is eclipsed by the later emphasis on the death drive. The Dionysian is not merely a celebration of life and life’s optimistic, happy moments, but instead violence and suffering are inseparable from it. Indeed, suffering highlights the pivotal distinction between Christ and Dionysus:

It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom—it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, and will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering—the “Crucified as the innocent one”—counts as an objection to this life, as a formula for its condemnation. – One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so. The Christian denies even the happiest lot on earth: he is

sufficiently weak, poor, disinherited to suffer from life in whatever form he meets it. The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction. (543)

For Nietzsche, suffering is an inevitable part of life, and affirmation, in the form of the will to power, manifests itself in overcoming suffering. Rather than seeking redemption in an eternal, static afterlife, for Nietzsche, affirmation occurs in *this* life, the tragic man being reborn to life anew through his ability to surmount the trials and pain to which he is inevitably subjected.

Ultimately, Nietzschean affirmation emanates from suffering and violence, this necessary and fundamental dialectic governing life itself. Nietzsche's affirmative philosophy presents a point of intervention into contemporary trauma theory without resorting to either the psychoanalytic vocabulary of mourning and melancholia or an understanding of affirmation as a redemptive afterlife or a Messianic time to come devoid of suffering and warfare.

One of the crucial differences between my own concept of affirmation within trauma theory and Nietzsche's affirmation of life is the tone of such an attitude. Whereas Nietzsche's reputation has been cemented in the canon of Western philosophy due to his bold, prophetic, and often shocking proclamations, the modernist authors and their inheritors analyzed in this dissertation assert themselves in a very different tone. Ford Madox Ford takes over 800 pages to elaborate his notion of traumatic consciousness in the context of the trenches, slowly and carefully rendering his impressions with the majority of *Parade's End* meandering through memory, and continually circling back to key images and moments from the home front. Similarly, Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, is a response to the Second World War, but she deliberately sets it in the summer of 1939 and entirely confines the action to the domestic sphere of one small English village where most of the characters never achieve the affirmative vision of their author and the playwright La Trobe. Perhaps most tellingly, J.M. Coetzee continually

employs insects, particularly the cockroach, as representatives of a mode of life outside dominant discourses of colonialism, patriarchy, and apartheid. Rather than loudly declare its power as Nietzsche's superman would, the cockroach quietly persists, its life seemingly beneath the consideration of higher forms of life. While echoing Nietzsche's arguments against nihilism and despair, such tentative, qualified, and muted affirmation sharply contrasts with his booming rhetoric and emphatic prose. Despite the difference in style, all of the authors analyzed in the dissertation, in their unique and various aesthetics, assert an affirmative stance, however tentative, when confronted with the traumatic events of the twentieth century that can be traced back to a Nietzschean affirmation of life.

Apart from such tonal differences, the event that poses the greatest challenge to the possibility of such an affirmative stance within trauma theory is, of course, the Holocaust. Nietzsche, dying in 1900, did not live to see either of the World Wars, and despite the posthumous appropriation of his writings by his sister, the German *Reich*, and Martin Heidegger, all of whom attempted to align him with Nazi ideology, his work remains a valuable alternative to the temptation to view modernity exclusively in terms of despair, nihilism, and melancholia. As Walter Kaufmann has extensively shown, Nietzsche was vocally opposed to German nationalism, even writing in his drafts for *The Will to Power* in 1885, that he wishes he had "written it in French so that it might not appear to be a confirmation of the aspirations of the German *Reich*" (*Will to Power* xxii). Furthermore, his philosophy, when read and cited in full, consistently repudiates anti-Semitism and the Nazi ideology of a master race since, according to Kaufmann, Nietzsche repeatedly "insisted that the Jews had through their history accumulated characteristics that made it desirable that they should become an ingredient of a future mixed race that anti-Semitism was 'the lowest level of European culture, its morass'" (Kaufmann 303).

Yet the Holocaust stands as a limit point in both trauma theory and literary studies, particularly to those representations stressing regeneration and affirmation. This dissertation does not contain a chapter on the literature of the Holocaust, largely due to its status as the core of a negative modernity. This is not to suggest that representing the Holocaust is an impossibility nor is it an argument for the exemplarity of the Shoah in comparison to other atrocities of the century, including the genocides in the Congo occurring over fifty years earlier. Rather, in the following chapters, I shift the focus away from the Holocaust in order to establish the possibility of an affirmative vein within trauma theory. The possibility of such an affirmative genealogy has arguably been eclipsed by the central place the Holocaust occupies in trauma theory, a position that often overshadows alternative conceptions of traumatic temporality, representation, and consciousness.

A brief comparison between Adorno and Nietzsche highlights the stakes of this problem and of the affirmative genealogy I outline. As mentioned above, Adorno famously contends that a negative dialectic is the only ethical response to Auschwitz, an aesthetics of negativity in which modernism excels. As Matthew Rampley suggests:

Nietzsche, in contrast, was hostile to pure negativity. And yet common to both was the conviction that the culture of modernity was caught in a dead end. Nietzsche already foresaw this in the music of Wagner, while even Adorno admits that the music of Schoenberg, the hero of avant-garde composition, is caught in a series of aporias. However, Nietzsche attempted to imagine how this dead end might be overcome, whereas for Adorno it was the *telos* of modern art, whose inevitability accounted for the sense of modern culture as essentially tragic. (12)

This spirit of trying to overcome the negativity and nihilism of modernity exhibits the usefulness of Nietzsche's philosophy to imagining a theory of trauma that does not immediately foreclose the possibility of affirmation. Although Nietzsche rejects modern art in favor of returning to the ancient Greeks, like Adorno, I turn to modernism but with the different aim of uncovering

affirmative possibility in modernist fiction. Despite Adorno's insistence on the necessity of art after Auschwitz to negatively refract reality, he cannot entirely escape the possibility of the affirmative. Indeed, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno admits that, "[w]hile art is driven into a position of absolute negativity, it is never absolutely negative precisely because of that negativity. It always has an affirmative residue" (332). The following chapters seek to explicate this "affirmative residue" that lingers when modernist literature represents trauma. Such texts do not produce bright, gleaming testaments to the power of the human spirit to overcome traumatic events but rather illustrate an affirmative remainder that persists despite the seeming impossibility of recovering from and representing the horrors of the century. The modernist authors and their inheritors analyzed in the succeeding chapters imagine such possibilities in unique and formally innovative ways. Although they do not attempt to represent the Holocaust, such representations nevertheless speak to the traumas of the modern era and, more importantly, to the capacity for literature to transform the negativity and crises of modernity into an affirmation of creativity, regeneration, and survival.

Recovering Affirmative Modernism

Chapter One, "Freud Madox Ford: Impressionism and Psychoanalytic Trauma Theory in *Parade's End*," analyzes Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-8) and Sigmund Freud's work on trauma. The chapter's central question is why trauma theorists have largely ignored Freud's early case studies on sexuality in favor of an almost exclusive focus on the death drive.¹⁴ Well

¹⁴ A notable exception is critics working within African American studies and trauma theory. As Jennifer Griffiths points out, the tension between lived traumatic events and Freud's insistence on reminiscence, opens a gap in contemporary trauma theory that African American studies explores. Thus, critics can "dismantle the classic psychoanalytic model's emphasis on repression and desire and [...] focus more directly on the impact of the actual traumatic event on the historical subject"—in the case of the African American traumatic experience, by not "eliding the suffering caused by actual events and material conditions of institutionalized racism" (4). Griffiths goes on to analyze how the racialized body can figure into a theory of traumatic recovery—not merely linguistic trauma narratives. See J. Brooks Bouson for an analysis of trauma and shame in the fiction of Toni Morrison, particularly

before the shift in Freud's work inaugurated by *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), his seduction theory in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-5) theorized hysteria in conjunction with external traumatic events. Ford's tetralogy, with its unique Impressionistic technique that evolved in response to the pressure of representing the historical trauma of the Great War, consistently couples Eros and Thanatos. I show how Ford's fiction presents us with a new conception of the trauma of the First World War, thus providing an opportunity to analyze Freud's entire oeuvre. In turn, such a pairing affords a new conception of Impressionism as not exclusively responding to epistemological problems but also to historical and collective traumatic events. In other words, the trenches are to Ford what the Congo is to Conrad, both historical sites of violence pressuring the Impressionist to create new strategies to represent consciousness. Instead of merely representing the violence of war (Thanatos), *Parade's End* displays how both Eros and Thanatos become constitutive of the trauma of the Great War for Ford—the thoughts that continually break through the impressions of violence are those of sexuality and vice versa. As such, I argue that Ford's Impressionism evolves into one that defines traumatized consciousness as interpenetrated by both Eros and Thanatos, an aesthetic that illuminates the frequently overlooked intersections between sexuality and violence in Freud's theories of trauma.

“Communicating Trauma: *Regeneration* and W.H.R. Rivers's Psychoanalytic Form,” my second chapter, continues to investigate the First World War and the psychoanalytic foundations of trauma theory by analyzing Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991-5) alongside W.H.R. Rivers's psychoanalytic method. Using a dual focus on literary and psychoanalytic form, I

for how it relates to sexual traumas in the form of both rape and also interracial and inter-generational trauma. Although not explicitly investigating the psychoanalytic external traumatic event, Ron Eyerman, in *Cultural Trauma*, argues that the historical event of slavery functions as a collective memory which is experienced by the African American community as a cultural trauma or a “tear in the social fabric” (2), which grounds a communal identity. Although a full discussion of the intersections between trauma studies and African American studies is beyond the scope of the dissertation, such arguments should be noted, particularly for how they theorize the remembrance of historical collective traumas predating the Holocaust.

challenge the recent tendency among literary theorists to apply a single version of trauma theory as established by Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman to all literary representations of trauma. Rivers, in addition to being one of Barker's protagonists, was a distinguished British psychiatrist, famous for treating Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen during World War I. Rivers's case studies are crucial intertexts for Barker's trilogy that heretofore have not received sufficient critical attention. This chapter argues that Barker does not merely dramatize Freudian psychoanalysis or trauma as a discourse that is ubiquitous in post-1950s British and American culture. Instead, her historical fiction relies on Rivers's significant and unique revisions to the Freudian talking cure, revisions forced by personally confronting the psychological effects of the First World War. Both Barker and Rivers advocate a form of realism or practical therapy, respectively, in response to the difficulty of "high" modernist aesthetics like Ford's Impressionism and the hypothetical, speculative nature of Freud's writing on trauma. Ultimately, Rivers and Barker's realism acts as an antidote to the melancholia so often privileged by contemporary psychoanalytic trauma theorists.

The poststructuralist vein of trauma theory, which emphasizes aporia and the inability of language to fully represent trauma, leads my third and fourth chapters. Chapter Three, "Wartime Affirmation: *Between the Acts* and Heidegger's Ontology of Death," interprets Virginia Woolf's final novel in conjunction with Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). It has become a truism of contemporary trauma theory that language inherently fails to capture the traumatic event in its entirety. This failure of language leads to claims that representing the traumatic event in its entirety is an "impossibility," one that nevertheless is necessary for collective attempts to remember atrocity. In contrast to the dominance of such models of impossibility and the failure of language, I argue that Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), orients itself

toward life-affirming possibilities in an effort to imagine a future in the midst of World War II. As a framework for interpreting Woolf's novel, I return to the antecedent for contemporary poststructuralist trauma theorists: Heidegger's being-toward-death, a conception of being oriented toward life rather than one solely preoccupied with being-at-the-end, or being at the instant of death. Instead of emphasizing fatalism and death, Woolf embodies being-toward-death by writing amidst air raids and frequent bombings. If, as poststructuralist trauma theorists contend, writing the instant of death is an impossibility, Heidegger and Woolf uncover an alternative in writing being-toward-death. Ultimately, being-toward-death presents a new vocabulary to reconcile Woolf's resilience, as evident in her last novel, with her suicide—the pairing of Heidegger and Woolf being a surprising and notable oversight from the critical writing in both Woolf and trauma studies.

The fourth chapter, “The Literary Examined Life: *Atonement* and Second World War Legacies,” analyzes how Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) first adopts Woolf's modernist form to retrospectively imagine the war from the domestic sphere only to later revise her narrative strategy when depicting the Front. One of the chapter's central concerns is the legacy of poststructuralism and modernism within trauma theory, in light of Heidegger's Nazism and Woolf's anti-Semitism. McEwan's novel presents new and imaginative strategies for grappling with this troubled past. Through a comparison of Woolf's playwright La Trobe and McEwan's precocious playwright/author Briony, the necessity of a self-reflexive approach to history and the limitations of Woolf's affirmative vision in *Between the Acts* emerge. Briony's perpetual rewriting of her false testimony and the emphasis on her limited perception find corollaries in the contrast between Walter Benjamin's interpretation of the *Angelus Novus* and the forward-looking gaze of Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Briony's gaze remains fixated on the past and *Atonement*

highlights the limitations of attaining an affirmative, Nietzschean vision of the future in the wake of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Ultimately, affirmation is only possible in the realm of fiction for Briony, and her literary examined life is a self-reflexive interrogation of our ability to atone for the past. Briony's literary atonement also provides an opportunity to acknowledge and analyze the limitations of the dissertation's larger project of finding an affirmative strain within trauma theory, given the context of the Holocaust and its inescapable dominance in the field.

The final chapter, "'One can live': Biopolitics, Colonialism, and J.M. Coetzee's Bodies," expands the geographical scope of the dissertation to analyze the postcolonial in South African literature. Focusing on J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), I examine how the body, within a Foucauldian biopolitical regime, is translated into literary form. I argue that the corporeal adds further nuance to the dominance of melancholia (psychoanalysis) and aporia (poststructuralism), the body posing a third term that resists such binaries, just as postcolonial literature resists binaries within modernism and its legacy. By returning to Michel Foucault's lectures on biopolitics from the 1970s, I ask how life itself can become a force for resistance, rather than one subjected to power and death. Coetzee's bodies present a glimpse of such an affirmative biopolitics amidst what he labels the "fact of suffering in the world," an emphasis on life that counters the current dominance of biopolitics as thanatopolitics (Giorgio Agamben) or necropolitics (Achille Mbembe). This final chapter also responds to the transnational turn in the Humanities and investigates how trauma theory can contribute to ongoing discussions about modernism's reverberations beyond the European center of production.

CHAPTER ONE

Freud Madox Ford: Impressionism and Psychoanalytic Trauma Theory in *Parade's End*

Parade's End is not a typical war narrative, its unconventionality apparent at the level of both form and content. Not only was *Parade's End* published much earlier than the majority of the other Great War narratives appearing in the 1930s (*Some Do Not...* first published in 1924), but the tetralogy also differs from this canon of war literature in its unique Fordian Impressionism that is explicitly preoccupied with consciousness and subjectivity at the expense of the action, drama, and disillusionment of the battlefield.¹ For example, Ford recounts the daily experience of the war as follows:

But, had you taken part actually in those hostilities, you would know how infinitely little part the actual fighting itself took in your mentality. You would be lying on your stomach, in a beast of a funk, with an immense, horrid German barrage going on over and round you and with hell and all let loose. But, apart from the occasional, petulant question: “when the deuce will our fellows get going and shut ‘em up?” your thoughts were really concentrated on something quite distant: on your daughter Millicent’s hair, on the fall of the Asquith Ministry, on your financial predicament, on why your regimental ferrets kept dying, on whether Latin is really necessary to an education, or in what way really ought the Authorities to deal with certain diseases.... You were there, but great shafts of thought from the outside, distant and unattainable world infinitely for the greater part occupied your mind. (*Joseph Conrad* 192)

The Fordian mind at war focuses not on present danger but on things “quite distant” such as worries about one’s children, finances, government, and the men in one’s battalion. Thus, Ford devotes the vast majority of the tetralogy not to impressions of the trenches but to domestic disturbances in the form of adultery, divorce, repressed sexual passion, and the general battle between the sexes. Ford reiterates these sentiments in his dedicatory letter to the second volume, *No More Parades*, stating that the predominant emotion during the war was a “never-ending

¹ *Parade's End* consists of four novels: *Some Do Not...* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up—* (1926), and *Last Post* (1928). Carcanet has recently published critical editions of each volume and my citations refer to each volume individually in line with these new editions.

sense of worry,” a worry “that applied not merely to the bases, but to the whole field of military operations. Unceasing worry!” (3-4). Such “unceasing worry” causes one to become what Ford dubs “*homo duplex*” or “a poor fellow whose body is tied in one place, but whose mind and personality brood eternally over another distant locality,” a condition dramatized throughout his oeuvre but one that is particularly heightened in wartime (*It Was The Nightingale* 197). Not only is the *homo duplex* the exemplary Fordian soldier, he is also the paradigmatic Impressionist subject. One of the defining formal features of Impressionism, as Ford theorizes it, is immersion into a character’s wandering mind, the reader being forced to follow the many detours through memory and association. In addition to being representative of the Fordian soldier and the Impressionist subject, Ford himself embodies the *homo duplex*, as Max Saunders illustrates in his biography in which the war marks Ford’s name change and dual life.² Thus, the *homo duplex* is the chief figure within Ford’s work and life and when transported to the trenches Tietjens becomes the *homo duplex* par excellence, one who was “there, but great shafts of thought from the outside, distant and unattainable world infinitely for the greater part occupied your mind.”

Ford had mastered the Impressionist technique encapsulated by the *homo duplex* earlier in *The Good Soldier* (1915) but had yet to translate it to representing what Valentine Wannop calls the “immense miles and miles of anguish in darkened minds” that remained when “Men might stand up on hills, but the mental torture could not be expelled” (*A Man Could Stand Up*—200). Valentine’s observation about the overwhelmingly psychological nature of the war has come to dominate critical discussions and literary representations of the event, as evident in

² Ford changed his surname from Hueffer to Ford in 1919. Max Saunders takes this as a key moment that divides his two-volume biography of Ford. Saunders argues that the reasons for the name change are many and complex, including a distancing from his German heritage after the war, a new name reflecting the complications of his first and second marriages (disavowing Mrs. Hueffer—Violet Hunt—in favor of a new Mrs. Ford—Stella Bowen), a new identity after his traumatic experiences in the war, and a label that would reflect “one of his most pervasive and profound senses of his own life: the sense of being a dual person, what he described as *homo duplex*” (Vol. 1, 2).

Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* and Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy. Ford's statement via Valentine that mental suffering epitomizes the trauma of the Great War predates such contemporary critical studies and re-imaginings and is tied to his tireless advocacy and use of the Impressionist aesthetic. Indeed, as Paul Skinner states, for Ford, "much of the war's strain, and many of the war's effects—and after-effects—were internal, psychological, confronted in the country of the mind" (*No Enemy* xxii). While occasionally presenting the reader with a glimpse of the violence of trench warfare, the text, particularly at moments in which violence occurs, is continually punctured by "great shafts of thought" from this "country of the mind" apart from the battlefield. Such thoughts, in Tietjens's mind, are those described above relating to domestic concerns such as one's daughter's hair and the playing out of passions. Ultimately, a pattern of juxtaposition between sexual and trench warfare emerges in *Parade's End* when viewing these "great shafts of thought" from the world on and off the battlefield.

Such a juxtaposition of sexuality and violence, or Eros and Thanatos, can be analyzed in terms of Ford's distinctive, Impressionistic conception of consciousness. In one of the most famous images from his essay "On Impressionism," Ford states that Impressionism renders images as seen in a bright glass:

glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole of life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite another. (41)

This description, which tellingly echoes the *homo duplex*, emphasizes how Impressionism's goal is to make visible the invisible processes of consciousness. Impressionism's project is to record "recollections in your mind" in a vivid rendition that captures the processes of recalling these past moments as well as the present physical world surrounding the perceiving subject. Impressionism, therefore, is concerned above all with rendering subjective experiences rather

than factual testimonies.³ In line with this resistance to objectivity, Ford declares that any Impressionist art “is the record of the recollection in your mind of a set of circumstances that happened ten years ago—or ten minutes. It might even be the impression of the moment—but it is the impression, not the corrected chronicle” (41). As a result, consciousness is defined exclusively in terms of subjectivity for the Impressionist, and the literary techniques that represent it are uniquely suited to capturing the workings of the individual mind. As Max Saunders argues, such techniques are “already well on the way to stream of consciousness,” the literary form of choice amongst Modernist authors such as Woolf and Joyce (“Impressionism” 171).

Linking Impressionism to consciousness and to psychology more generally is a commonplace in Ford criticism; indeed, one dominant interpretation of *The Good Soldier* analyzes Dowell psychologically and views his rambling reminiscences as symptomatic of repressed sexuality and his denial of both the failure of his marriage and the true nature of the Ashburnhams.⁴ Ford uses similar Impressionistic techniques such as the time-shift and the *progression d’effet* in *Parade’s End* to depict the consciousness of his protagonists, particularly as they repress their sexual desires. While Eros dominates his earlier masterpiece, when Ford turns to representing his experiences in the war he must now adapt Impressionism to rendering mass trauma, the Thanatos of warfare. Joining the psychology of trauma with that of sexual

³ Max Saunders, throughout his biography of Ford, reiterates the point that Ford’s Impressionism permeated his life and the anecdotes he told to friends, strangers, and colleagues. Such anecdotes were infused with Ford’s spirit as a raconteur and were thus embellished and made into fictions in the repeated tellings. Saunders attributes the more vilifying biographies and infamous attacks on Ford’s character by his contemporaries to this commitment to subjective impressions of events as opposed to the factual truth, particularly when relating his encounters with authors such as Conrad, Pound, Hemingway, and Joyce.

⁴ See Sara Haslam and Sondra Stang for detailed interpretations of repression within *The Good Soldier*.

repression in Ford criticism of the tetralogy has only begun.⁵ Apart from book-length psychoanalytic interpretations of Ford's oeuvre, notably those of Sondra Stang and Sara Haslam, Ford critics have yet to pair Ford with Freud's work in the broader context of contemporary trauma theory. By foregrounding this intersection between Ford and Freud, I argue that Freud's theory allows us to see new aspects of how Ford's Impressionism was heightened by and ultimately evolved through rendering his war experience. Furthermore, such a pairing highlights the interdependence of Eros and Thanatos that characterizes Ford's unique experience and representation of the trenches. Ultimately, this chapter presents the first extended analysis of how Ford's Impressionistic rendering of the psychology of the mind is tested and ultimately evolves under the pressure of representing the trauma of the Great War in the context of contemporary trauma theory.

Although Ford's oeuvre is frequently studied in relation to Impressionism, reading Impressionism itself in terms of the challenges presented to the artist by rendering a collective, historical trauma has not been questioned as frequently. In his masterful reevaluation of Impressionism, Jesse Matz contends that literary Impressionism is predominantly an artistic response to epistemological problems, the Impressionists working between Phenomenology and Empiricism since the impression is neither pure sensation nor pure reason. Matz persuasively argues that literary Impressionism, as differentiated from Impressionism in the visual arts, responds primarily to philosophical questions of subjectivity and embodied consciousness by

⁵ See Ambrose Gordon Jr. for a comprehensive overview of violence and trauma in *Parade's End*, primarily in terms of formal fragmentation as it parallels the psychological fragmentation of the subject. Although Gordon presents the most sustained analysis of trauma in Ford's work, he does not theorize trauma psychoanalytically nor does he engage with contemporary trauma theory, *The Invisible Tent* being published in 1964. See Eric Meyer for an analysis of *Parade's End* as a national allegory in the context of memory studies, specifically for how the disruption of war destabilizes form and creates "gaps and fissures" across the novels (91). See Astrid Erll for a similar analysis of collective memory in the tetralogy in comparison to German WWI narratives. See Jonathan Boulter for a thorough interpretation of trauma in *No Enemy*, specifically in terms of the struggle Ford faces between the desire to narrate trauma yet also recognize its fundamental unnarratability. See Eve Sorum for an application of contemporary trauma theory to the final novel of *Parade's End*, *Last Post*, which I discuss in the chapter's coda.

occupying a middle ground between these two philosophical discourses. The previous critical association between literary and painterly Impressionism “leads us to expect greater devotion to visual sensation, when impressions really lead writers to make experience conform to the structure of the aesthetic imagination” (50). By separating the two mediums, arguing that they are not one in the same but rather sister arts, Matz proposes that while literary Impressionism intensifies visual effects and produces elaborate similes by using visual data, the sensational remains a literary device used in order to “move aesthetic experience *from* the realm of sensuous perception back toward that combination of (or middle ground between) sense and thought always at work in the ‘aesthetic’” (50). This middle ground in literary Impressionism takes the form of collaboration, Matz citing Ford’s uneducated cabman in “On Impressionism” as an example of how the Impressionist must invent a figure (often working class, female, or a colonial other) to embody the corporeal and sensational world in order to retain his or her authorial rationality and bridge these two binaries fundamental to the impression.

Michael Valdez Moses contributes to this redefinition of literary Impressionism as distinct from visual Impressionism by interpreting it as stemming not only from the epistemological problem Matz outlines but also from historical phenomena such as colonialism and imperialism, as evident in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Moses suggests that, in addition to presenting a critique of European colonialism and imperialism, Conrad creates “a cognitive and emotional dissonance that is the experiential ‘aesthetic’ correlative of the shock felt by Conrad’s characters when confronted with the unsavory realities of Western imperialism” (“Disorientation” 47). Such an experience of dissonance and the reproduction of shock resonate with both Ford’s experiences in the Great War and Freud’s description of trauma as a breach in the conscious mind, trauma largely springing from the experience of being unprepared both

emotionally and cognitively for the event. Furthermore, Moses crucially resituates the origins of Conradian Impressionism from a philosophical and epistemological concern to an historical problem of rendering lived experiences and collective, often traumatic, events. He goes on to argue that this aesthetic style defines Conrad's late work and that we should reconsider the urban European metropolis as the sole origin of the modernist aesthetic of alienation, locating such innovations in alternate sites such as the periphery of empire where such dissonance proliferates (52).

Moses's argument is significant since it provides a theory of Impressionism as responding to historical events rather than exclusively epistemological concerns. His focus on Conrad's Impressionism is also highly relevant for an analysis of Ford given Ford's close artistic relationship with Conrad. Although debated among Conrad scholars, Max Saunders documents Ford and Conrad's collaboration as including editing the proofs of *Heart of Darkness* in 1899, co-authoring several novels such as *The Inheritors*, and providing advice to each other on their respective work throughout the years of collaboration.⁶ During this period Conrad perfected his Impressionist technique and Ford found in Conrad's Impressionism a unique aesthetic style that he would go on to refine in works such as *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*.⁷ Thus, if we agree with Moses and reimagine Conrad's Impressionism as largely originating in response to the particular historical event of Belgian imperialism, we can interpret Ford's later Impressionism as similarly responding to historical events rather than solely to epistemological

⁶ In addition to collaborating on the proofs of *Heart of Darkness*, Saunders states that "the bulk of [Conrad's] greatest fiction—the completed *Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostramo*, and *The Secret Agent*—was written while collaborating with Ford" (V.1, 117).

⁷ Indeed, Saunders states that when Ford and Conrad were working together, Ford had not yet found his distinctive style and was in danger of becoming an aesthete since he simply strung together visual impressions without regard to fact. Collaboration taught Ford "the value of art as communication", the "importance of imagining his readers as well as his impressions" and, without "the clarity and narrative drive learned with Conrad, he would never have been able to write *The Fifth Queen*, *The Good Soldier*, or *Parade's End*" (V. 1, 152).

problems. In other words, the trenches are to Ford what the Congo is to Conrad, both historical sites of violence pressuring Impressionism to respond to lived experiences in addition to epistemological challenges. With this framework in mind, I argue that Ford revises the Impressionist aesthetic established in *The Good Soldier* when he turns to representing the historical trauma of the Great War, much as Conrad did earlier with his experience of imperialism. Just as the soldier in the trenches becomes an extreme example of *homo duplex*, Ford's Impressionism under the pressure of rendering the Great War also becomes a dual entity—representing both Eros and Thanatos since the thoughts that continually break through the impressions of violence are those of sexuality and vice versa. More than just the recurring worry of a wandering mind, the tetralogy consistently poses sexuality as *the* thought that pierces depictions of war and violence. Ultimately, Ford's Impressionism evolves into one that defines consciousness, particularly a traumatized consciousness, as continuously oscillating between these two poles, Eros and Thanatos becoming the foundation of both Fordian consciousness and Impressionism.

My description of such a Janus-faced consciousness is deliberately laden with psychoanalytic overtones and, indeed, it is not far from Freud's own conception of the mind as one torn between conflicting instinctual drives of which Eros and Thanatos are the most commanding. Although Ford never records having been influenced by psychoanalysis, he certainly knew of Freud, particularly in the 1920s when the latter's influence was pervasive among the modernists.⁸ The Freudian strains within Ford's work were so obvious to readers in

⁸ Saunders writes, "There is no evidence that [Ford] read Freud," even during Ford's treatment by psychiatrists for a nervous breakdown precipitated by the collapse of his first marriage (V.1, 186). Saunders reiterates the point in his analysis of *The Good Soldier* and its biographical sources. In this context, however, Saunders admits that Ford had "known about—and disapproved of—*The Interpretation of Dreams*" but points out that "the influence of Freud's ideas about the Oedipus complex is probable" (V.1, 425). In his interpretation of *Parade's End*, Saunders also analyzes Tietjens in terms of psychoanalytic definitions of paranoia and neuroses about the father as theorized by

the 1920s that Osbert Sitwell coined the cynical moniker “Freud Madox Fraud” for the author (Gordon *Invisible* 108-9). Just as World War I was a turning point in Ford’s personal life and career, the Great War also figures prominently in Freud’s career and biography, arguably as an equally monumental watershed.⁹ After World War I, an event explicitly discussed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud revises his theory of the mind to make room for the death drive and those events, such as traumatic neuroses, that override the pleasure principle. Thus, after World War I Freud’s theory of the mind remains one of duality but whereas in his earlier work he pits libidinal and egoistic drives against one another, in his work immediately before, during, and after the war he replaces these drives “with a new, more dramatic pair of contestants: life against death” (Gay *Freud Reader* 594).

Although the war can be read as monumental for the shift in Freud’s thinking in the second half of his career, what Freud does not discuss in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (and also something the majority of contemporary trauma theorists neglect) is the role sexuality, as an equally powerful instinctual drive, plays in the theory of trauma.¹⁰ In his earlier seduction theory, however, Freud proposes a direct link between an external traumatic event and hysteria, a position he eventually renounces in order to privilege the role that wish-fulfillment, dreams, and

Freud in *The Schreber Case*, although he is careful to acknowledge that there is no evidence of Ford having read this case study.

⁹ Peter Gay argues that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* marks Freud’s turn away from Eros toward aggression and the death drive. Although psychoanalytic critics also note the death of Freud’s daughter Sophie as a biographical justification for his preoccupation with death in his later works, as Peter Gay argues, the nearly complete manuscript of *Beyond* exists well before Sophie’s illness and thus we should view the introduction of the death drive to psychoanalysis as “not an exercise in autobiography, but as a turning point in theory” (*Freud Reader* 594), influenced in part by witnessing the effects of the First World War.

¹⁰ Of course there are trauma theorists who discuss gender, specifically child abuse and rape, in relation to trauma theory (see Judith Herman, Kalí Tal, Suzette Henke, and Deborah Horvitz). For the purposes of this chapter, I will discuss sexuality more broadly in terms of Eros as an instinctual drive that characterizes Ford’s experience of trauma in the Great War. Unlike these other theorists who focus on testimony, memoir, and identity politics at play in depictions of child abuse, sexual assault, and incest, I will attempt to theorize trauma itself (as it is rendered through the fictional representation in *Parade’s End*) as divided between these instinctual drives, not solely defined by Thanatos.

the imagination play in the construction of neuroses. While I do not intend to resurrect Freud's seduction theory, I maintain that we can recover certain elements of Freud's earlier theory in order to arrive at a fuller theorization of the trauma specific to Ford's experience of the Great War. In pursuing this line of analysis, I argue that a conception of trauma defined by Thanatos but also inflected by Eros is crucial to understanding how the Great War is represented in *Parade's End*. Such a conception of trauma does not entirely discard Eros and the life instinct in favor of an exclusive emphasis on Thanatos and the death drive. Many other Great War authors (particularly the World War I poets and contemporary authors such as Pat Barker) comment upon the overwhelming assault to and cultural revaluation of masculinity that occurred during the war and led to widespread disillusionment with nineteenth-century concepts such as heroism, valor, and courage.¹¹ Similarly, well before post-traumatic stress disorder was officially recognized as a legitimate psychological condition in the United States in 1980, shell shock provoked an extensive questioning of masculinity due to its transformation of male soldiers into hysterical and thus "feminized" patients. With these well-documented observations about the effects of the Great War in mind, I offer an analysis of trauma beginning earlier than the Holocaust and Freud's post-World War I work. By refocusing trauma theory on these earlier historical and textual events, the necessity of re-evaluating the psychoanalytically inflected foundations of trauma theory in terms of sexuality emerges.¹² A theorization of trauma

¹¹ Among the many books and articles on masculinity and the First World War, see Joanna Bourke for a detailed historical overview of shell shock and its relationship to masculinity. See Elaine Showalter's classic chapter on shell shock and male hysteria in *The Female Malady* for a comprehensive overview of the subject. See Sarah Cole's *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* for a brilliant interpretation of intimacy and masculinity from pre-war Britain to post-war literature such as Forster's *Passage to India* and D.H. Lawrence's work.

¹² Notably, such an intervention occurs in the realm of trauma theory within literary studies—my chapter focusing on fiction rather than testimony or memoir from WWI. See Judith Herman, a practicing psychiatrist, for a feminist analysis of trauma based on her case studies of women who experience domestic abuse, rape, and incest, which she pairs with the experiences of combat veterans and victims of human rights abuses. Whereas Herman focuses on

originating in the historical specificity of the first World War as represented by Ford Madox Ford challenges us to arrive at a fuller conception of traumatic consciousness, one that takes into account not just the moments of intense bombardment or fighting, but also the experiences of a war defined by an “unceasing worry” often connected to issues of gender and sexuality. Thus, just as the Fordian soldier in the Great War is *homo duplex*, his mind also must be theorized as one that continually oscillates between Eros and Thanatos.

In the remainder of the chapter, I first analyze the passages in *Parade's End* where Ford turns directly to the trenches in conjunction with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this section I present an extended analysis of how Impressionism evolves under the pressure of representing war. In the second section I shift the focus to the Eros-driven side of consciousness and interpret the sections of the tetralogy that focus on sexuality, primarily in the form of Tietjens's wife Sylvia. This part of the chapter concentrates on Freud's early work, further establishing a conception of First World War trauma in terms of sexuality. Finally, the coda comments upon the fourth volume, *Last Post*, and suggests a broader relevance of *Parade's End* for our contemporary understanding of the intersections between trauma theory and First World War literature.

Rendering Thanatos

One of the most striking representations of violence in *Parade's End* is the scene that opens the second volume, *No More Parades*, in which a soldier dies before Tietjens's eyes. The scene does not occur in the trenches but rather takes place as Tietjens is talking to his staff officers in a tent behind the lines. O Nine Morgan, whom Tietjens had just refused home-leave, stumbles into the tent, makes a grim joke with his last breath that “‘Ere's another bloomin'

lived traumatic experiences and sexuality, I refer to contemporary trauma theory within literary studies, as established primarily by Caruth and Felman and adopted by literary critics.

casualty,” and then dies at Tietjens’s feet (28). The entire scene is filtered through Tietjens’s perspective, including his mind’s wanderings and distorted perceptions. For example, after O Nine Morgan stumbles into the tent and collapses, Tietjens remarks that “In the bright light it was as if a whole pail of scarlet paint had been dashed across the man’s face on the left and his chest. It glistened in the firelight—just like fresh paint, moving!” (28). Often taken by critics as a representative scene of Ford’s Impressionism, this vision of Morgan’s blood appearing as moving paint recurs throughout the novel and haunts Tietjens as a traumatic flashback.¹³ In addition to how Tietjens conforms to the symptoms of the shell-shocked soldier during such flashbacks, at the moment of the traumatic event, he becomes *homo duplex*, his mind somewhere other than at the scene of Morgan’s death. As he continues to stare at the body, reflecting on how he was “astonished [...] to see that a human body could be so lavish of blood” (28-9), his mind quickly moves to the following reflection: “He felt as he did when you patch up a horse that has been badly hurt. He remembered the horse from a cut on whose chest the blood had streamed down over the off foreleg like a stocking. A girl had lent him her petticoat to bandage it” (29). This time-shift returns us to the climatic scene at the end of the first part of *Some Do Not...* in which General Campion’s car crashes into Valentine and Tietjens’s dog-cart. At the moment of Morgan’s death, Tietjens remembers this earlier violent scene and mentally digresses to thinking of Valentine. She notably remains unnamed here, appearing in his memory as “a girl,” a

¹³ Mark Conroy discusses how this episode becomes a “hallucination” that haunts Tietjens throughout the novels. He suggests that O Nine Morgan’s blood becomes a blot on “Tietjens’ map of the world, a map too internally riven, too ‘embattled’, to contain the trauma and disorder of Morgan’s death, which overwhelms it” (182). Max Saunders also analyzes the image of Morgan’s blood as an example of how Ford defamiliarizes metaphor itself, “making us see an unforgettably vivid image in terms which arouse doubt about its reality” (V.2 263). Ambrose Gordon argues that the recurrence of this memory in flashbacks constitutes a pattern or “a tangle that moves—and not a tangle either but a fugue, as scene follows scene threaded on not one string but many” (“Diamond Pattern” 476). See Sara Haslam for a discussion of corollaries in Impressionist and Cubist painting, particularly Degas’s “A Maid Combing a Woman’s Hair.”

symptom of the repression of his sexual feelings for her that recurs throughout the second and third volume of the tetralogy.

The deliberate echo between these two scenes reaches its climax as Tietjens lowers O Nine Morgan's body to the ground and the following occurs:

He saw very vividly also the face of his girl who was a pacifist. It worried him not to know what expression her face would have if she heard of his occupation, now. Disgust? ... He was standing with his greasy, sticky hands held out from the flaps of his tunic.... Perhaps disgust! ... It was impossible to think in this row.... His very thick soles moved gluily and came up after suction.... He remembered he had not sent a runner along to I.B.D. Orderly Room to see how many of his crowd would be wanted for garrison fatigue next day, and this annoyed him acutely. He would have no end of a job warning the officers he detailed. They would all be in brothels down in the town by now.... He could not work out what the girl's expression would be. He was never to see her again, so what the hell did it matter? ... Disgust, probably! [...] How would her face express disgust? He had never seen her express disgust. She had a perfectly undistinguished face. Fair...O God, how suddenly his bowels turned over! ... Thinking of the girl... The face below him grinned at the roof—the half face! The nose was there, half the mouth with the teeth showing in the firelight.... It was extraordinary how defined the peaked nose and the serrated teeth were in that mess.... The eye looked jauntily at the peak of the canvas hut-roof.... Gone with a grin. (29-30)

Just as in the moment of Morgan's death when the vision of his blood "vividly" sears itself into Tietjens's memory, here the face of the girl "vividly" appears before him. Yet Tietjens's inability to envision the expression of disgust on Valentine's face is counterbalanced by his inability to erase the vision of Morgan's mangled, "grinning," "half face" that will return to haunt him in subsequent pages. The attempt to envision Valentine's disgust at his occupation in the army displaces his own disgust at the sight of Morgan's corpse and his feeling of responsibility for the boy's death. It is not entirely clear in the above scene whether Tietjens's bowels "turned over" due to his anxiety over Valentine or the bloody corpse before him. Similarly, although he becomes distracted while worrying over mundane military details like sending out runners and giving orders to officers, such thoughts also lead to sexuality in that the soldiers "would all be in the brothels down in the town by now." Notably, neither his nor Valentine's expressions of

disgust materialize in the text but rather only appear as conscious worries over the inability to visualize either. The repeated emphasis on vision displays Ford's Impressionist interest in perception and highlights how the corporeal is imprinted on the ephemeral world of consciousness. In addition to its visual immediacy, the juxtaposition of Valentine and O Nine Morgan mobilizes a series of dualities that become prominent throughout the tetralogy: pacifism versus war, disgust at battle versus glory in battle (the old military values that were so completely destroyed by the First World War), and most important for our purposes, sexuality versus death.

Such a scene displays not only Ford's *homo duplex* as a man whose mind is somewhere else (the past, the home front with Valentine, thinking about the orders he needs to give out tomorrow) while his body remains in the trenches (staring at O Nine Morgan's corpse) but also Freud's theory of traumatic consciousness. For Freud, when experiencing a traumatic shock, the conscious mind's protective barriers are breached such that the mind does not fully experience the event at the moment of its happening because it is overwhelmed. The patient therefore is fated to relive the experience in nightmares and flashbacks. Tietjens, conforming to this theory, suffers from hallucinations and flashbacks to this primal scene of trauma throughout *No More Parades* and into *A Man Could Stand Up*— . For example, as Tietjens meets with General Campion in *No More Parades* he experiences a hallucination of Morgan's blood and admits his distraction, stating that being in the same place as Morgan was killed ““makes me.... It's a sort of.... Complex, they call it now...” (217). Later in the same novel he worries that the repeated inability to shake these visions of Morgan is indicative of a larger problem, perhaps ““a crack in his, Tietjens', brain. A lesion!” (228-9). Such examples clearly display how this traumatic scene

haunts Tietjens, in addition to exhibiting Ford's awareness of psychological terminology.¹⁴ Furthermore, such hallucinations represent Freud's theory of the neuroses as repeated, unprocessed visions haunting the patient and preventing healthy mental functioning. Beyond simply diagnosing Tietjens as suffering from a traumatic neurosis as Freud would define it, such a scene also illustrates Ford's Impressionism under the pressure of trauma. In what follows, I argue that Fordian Impressionism is amplified by the challenge of rendering trauma, an experience in which sensory stimuli overwhelm the perceiving subject. Furthermore, trauma highlights contradictions within Impressionism, primarily in terms of its fidelity to unreflective, immediate experience in contrast to its laborious formal construction. In other words, just as the traumatic event is continually replayed in the mind of the patient after the event, the Impressionist similarly reproduces the traumatic experience in the text in an effort to capture the immediacy of the original while erasing the traces of composition and traumatic reconstruction. Although the traumatic scenes in the Impressionist text appear with vivid immediacy, their aesthetic form (metaphors such as "it was like paint," time-shifts, ellipses) reveals their careful construction and dependence on reflection and recollection rather than spontaneous production.

Paul Armstrong discusses this tension in Impressionism between spontaneity and careful reconstruction in terms of unreflective experience and the resultant "epistemological bewilderment" experienced by the characters and readers. Armstrong singles out defamiliarization as an example of an Impressionistic technique that is uniquely suited to representing war. During war, "life seems strange, both unusually vivid and bizarre, because

¹⁴ Ford served in the British army during World War I and suffered from his own series of psychological and physical illnesses due to the war, most notably the loss of his memory after being bombed (just as Tietjens also loses his memory from his experience at the Front) and his asthma, which he attributed to being gassed in the trenches. See Max Saunders for an extended biographical reading of the overlaps between Tietjens and Ford, as well as with Ford's friend Marwood on whom Tietjens is most closely modeled. I do not intend to diagnose Ford as suffering from a traumatic neurosis, but rather point out the correspondence to illustrate Ford's own knowledge of psychology at the time, particularly after he was hospitalized and treated for his memory loss (although he was never treated by a psychoanalyst, as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen were).

available categories refuse to make sense of the world and the unfamiliar overwhelms the familiar” (236). Max Saunders also comments on the relationship between representing war and Impressionism, noting that “war ought to have been the ideal impressionist subject: experience overwhelming plot; rendering rather than comment” (V.2, 197). Yet, as Saunders goes on to state, “Ford realized with astounding prescience that the mind’s repression of war-suffering made it difficult to exorcise the suffering, and by the same token difficult to convey it in prose” (197). Although Saunders here notes repression as one of the primary symptoms blocking the workings of Impressionism, he limits the psychoanalytic implications to an interpretation of how the “psychological extremity” of the war relates to “ideas of the father, God, and death” (200). Both Saunders and Armstrong resist extending their analyses of Impressionism and war to the broader intersections that emerge when explicitly comparing Freudian trauma theory with Ford’s Impressionism.

Sara Haslam and Sondra Stang go into greater psychoanalytic depth in their important studies of Ford by analyzing repression in his work. Sara Haslam, interpreting *Parade’s End* in terms of a visual aesthetic aligned with Cubist fragmentation, uses the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to argue that Tietjens’s fragmentation as a subject is “keenly known and expressed through the medium of sight” (87). Similarly, she interprets Ford’s abundant ellipses as symptomatic of visual and subjective fragmentation; or, “[t]o use Freudian terminology, as does Tietjens, these are indicative of his repression. This repression is mostly sexual” (87). Haslam ultimately reads the ellipses as a pictorial, Impressionistic tool that allows Ford to find a way to express his experience in the war. She concludes, “[w]hen words fail in Ford, he can resort to pictures. It is his impressionist’s eye that overall solves the problem” of trying to “symbolize repression” (106). Sondra Stang also notes the importance of repression to our understanding of

Ford's work, noting that although both Ford and Freud came to their positions on repression "independently although from a shared intellectual background," they echo one another since Ford is the author who "gave us some of the most powerful delineations we have of repressed feeling" in *Parade's End* and *The Good Soldier* (xxvi). Although this interpretation of Ford as the author of repression makes the link between character psychology and Freud's theory of consciousness fairly obvious, I intend to advance this correlation by explicitly uniting such readings with Freud's theories of trauma.

As noted above, Impressionism is uniquely suited to represent trauma, its tenets as outlined by Ford reading like a catalogue of symptoms of the traumatized individual and its aesthetics corresponding to what many theorists call for in literary representations of traumatic events. Contemporary trauma theorists from Cathy Caruth to Shosana Felman to Dominick LaCapra all specify the need for non-mimetic prose when narrating or rendering traumatic events. The risk such critics see in presenting objective, journalistic prose is making the event easily understood and thus easily forgotten or co-opted.¹⁵ Modernism has long been privileged as a literary style adept at representing trauma due to its formal difficulty and resistance to narrative closure and easy meaning. For example, Hayden White proposes, "modernist modes of representation may offer possibilities of representing the reality of both the Holocaust and the experience of it that no other version of realism could do" (52). In contrast to this broad invocation of modernism, focusing specifically on Fordian Impressionism allows us to dissect the relationship between trauma, literary representation, and consciousness. Not only does

¹⁵ Ford too wrestles with this problem due to his notorious inability to make his readers understand the value of his works as fiction (particularly the reminiscences and "novels" like *Joseph Conrad*)—a failure to separate impressions from facts and nonfiction. Samuel Hynes, in his preface to the Dedicatory Letters to *Parade's End* argues that Ford struggled to find a form for writing "the history of his own time on an immense and public scale" while staying true to his Impressionism (519). Thus, "[t]he observed events, where they are public and verifiable, are treated with sober and exact care, but they are treated impressionistically" (519).

Fordian Impressionism foreground the individual's subjective experience, it also formally reflects the discontinuity of a mind assaulted by a barrage of traumatic occurrences during a shell burst.¹⁶ The subject who becomes fragmented during the traumatic event is reflected in Ford's *homo duplex*, whose fragmented vision Haslam argues is fundamental to Fordian Impressionism. Rather than insist on fragmentation, I argue that, by the end of the tetralogy, the translation of raw sensory data into Impressionistic prose unifies such a fragmented subject. Such a translation echoes the Freudian talking cure, which unifies the neurotic's fragmented psyche by interpreting his/her symptoms as a coherent and cohesive narrative that "cures" the patient. Yet, unlike a psychoanalytic cure, Fordian Impressionism leaves a trace of the fragmented subject throughout the pages of the text—a text that recounts the full process, neither solely the fragmented nor the reconstituted subject. In his dedicatory letter to *No More Parades*, Ford emphasizes this process, stating that *Some Do Not...* "showed you the Tory at home during war-time; this shows you the Tory going up the line. If I am vouchsafed health and intelligence for long enough I propose to show you the same man in the line and in process of being re-constructed" (5). Often cited as justification for reading the novels as a tetralogy instead of a trilogy,¹⁷ this passage also emphasizes Ford's insistence on both forms of traumatic narration: the fragmentation of the traumatized subject but also the unification that is possible once the impressions have been

¹⁶ Although it may be argued that such a reflection is a form of realism (realism in that Ford realistically mirrors the processes of consciousness in language), Ford's representation of consciousness in *Parade's End* profoundly disrupts any attempt to view the tetralogy as a realist novel in the mold of nineteenth-century fiction. I will use this divide between conventional nineteenth-century narrative realism and Ford's Impressionism throughout the chapter. See Tamar Katz, Paul Armstrong, and Jesse Matz for extended discussions of the contradictions in Ford's Impressionism between fidelity to realism and aesthetic experimentation in terms of both formal and social radicalism.

¹⁷ The debate over whether or not *Parade's End* is a tetralogy has a long and controversial past, largely started by Graham Greene's decision to publish the Bodley Head edition of *Parade's End* as a trilogy ending with *A Man Could Stand Up*—. Max Saunders and Samuel Hynes both present arguments using the above passage as justification for Ford's view that *Parade's End* was always conceived as a tetralogy, Hynes suggesting that Ford only began to refer to it as a trilogy after negative reviews of *Last Post* began to appear ("Dedicatory Letters" 522). The new Carcanet edition definitively establishes *Parade's End* as a tetralogy.

pieced together into a vision of the whole. In the end, Ford presents us with a unique form of traumatic narration that privileges neither the unspeakable nor the moralistic messages of journalistic prose and traditionally realist novels.

Before unification, however, Tietjens undergoes a traumatic fragmentation of his psyche, one that highlights Impressionistic and psychoanalytic concerns with subjectivity. Michael Levenson, in his discussion of Ford's founding role in Impressionism and modernism, points out a fundamental contradiction between Ford's emphasis on limiting the text to immediate sensations without the commentary of the artist and his equally emphatic insistence that the work remain the expression of a specific personality or individual. Levenson concludes that Ford's Impressionism "is a *subjectivity in which the subject has disappeared*" (119). Such an interpretation is directly applicable to how Freud discusses the traumatized subject: a subject in which conscious subjectivity has disappeared. Freud states in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "We may, I think, tentatively venture to regard the common traumatic neurosis as a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (35), such a breach not being caused by fright or shock but rather by the "lack of any preparedness for anxiety" (36). This breach in consciousness leads to the compulsion to repeat that overrides the pleasure principle, manifest in flashbacks, hallucinations, and traumatic nightmares. The repetition compulsion is an attempt by the unconscious "to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (37). Thus, it could be said that the person suffering from a traumatic neurosis attempts to reconstruct his/her subjectivity after its fragmentation, the traumatic event having overwhelmed the subject with stimuli and thus shattering normal subjectivity and conscious processes. To return to Levenson's succinct formulation, Fordian Impressionism recreates such a fragmented consciousness,

presenting us with a subject like Tietjens whose subjectivity has been assaulted by repeated bombardments like the one in which O Nine Morgan dies. Instead of focusing on the event occurring before his eyes, Tietjens's consciousness returns to another repression, that of his sexual desire for Valentine. This shifting from one repression to another throughout the scene of O Nine Morgan's death mirrors Freud's argument and displays the way in which the pleasure principle is supplanted—Tietjens being torn between two equally distressing repressions.

In addition to this correlation between the *homo duplex* and the traumatized subject, Ford and Freud both theorize belatedness as central to their respective theories. In "On the Function of the Arts in the Republic," Ford argues that in modern life, due to increased bureaucracy and the speed of interpersonal relationships (e.g. notes and telegrams instead of letters), "it is impossible to see [life] whole" (28). Thus, one must always experience it vicariously through the arts. In the case of literature, Ford argues that "it is only in the pages of naturalistic novels that we can hope nowadays to get any experience of modern life, save that individual and personal experience of our own which comes always too late" (28).¹⁸ This individual and personal experience is precisely what the Impressionist attempts to capture by rendering the consciousness of the characters on the page, an experience that is always belated in that one doesn't realize it is worth rendering until the experience has passed (or an unrealized experience, to use Armstrong's terminology). In "On Impressionism," Ford states that "Impressionism is a thing altogether momentary" (40) and that an Impressionist work "is the record of the recollection in your mind of a set of circumstances that happened ten years ago—or ten minutes. It might even be the

¹⁸ Jesse Matz also analyzes this essay in relation to his argument that the fundamental contradiction in Ford's Impressionism is that between universal perception and the particularity of the individual's experiences. The chapter presents examples of class difference in Ford's reference to music halls and other forms of popular culture that attempt to impart a universal picture of life but do so through a highly classed perspective. Such a contradiction, Matz argues, forces Ford to posit cultural others like the working class cabman in "On Impressionism" as his ideal listeners in order to mediate between the sensory world and the rational control of the author.

impression of the moment—but it is the impression, not the corrected chronicle” (41). Thus, the Impressionist is always belatedly reconstructing experiences and impressions for the reader, rendering remembered stimuli filtered through memory and language (a process evident in Ford’s anecdotes that are constantly revised throughout his life and which continually blur the lines between fiction and memoir). Ford’s point however, is that this belated reconstruction of life’s events appears to the reader with all the vividness and force of the event itself—it cannot read like the “corrected chronicle.” Yet, when applied to the First World War, arguably the war that signals the culmination of the effects of modernity in Europe, the Impressionist struggles more than ever to grasp the image of the whole, of life that has become fragmented and is only experienced belatedly on an everyday basis, especially in the trenches.

Belatedness also figures prominently in Freud’s theory of trauma, not as an image of modernity, per se, but as the way in which a traumatic experience is registered in consciousness. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes the traumatic neurosis as temporarily disabling the pleasure principle:

There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead—the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so they can then be disposed of. (33-4)

Such a description sounds much like the challenges facing the Impressionist who tries to capture the stimuli surrounding him and translate them into language. The individual suffering from the traumatic neurosis is haunted by the event in traumatic nightmares and flashbacks, Freud hypothesizing that traumatic dreams are “endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis” (37). This “retrospective” attempt by the mind to master all the stimuli of the event is the source of the belatedness fundamental to traumatic experiences. The mind never experiences the event fully

the first time and thus must revisit it in dreams and flashbacks to get an image of the whole, much like Ford's observer in the modern world who only experiences the whole vicariously and belatedly in the pages of the novel.¹⁹ The psychoanalyst therefore could be said to function as the Impressionist does: he must interpret the stimuli and the repetitions the patient describes, piecing them together into a coherent narrative of the event, or of modern life in Ford's case.

Indeed, Freud sounds much like Ford in describing his method in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, repeatedly asserting that the pages of his book contain "speculation, often far-fetched speculation" about the inner workings of consciousness (26). He continues, stating, "Psychoanalytic speculation takes as its point of departure the *impression*, derived from examining unconscious processes, that consciousness may be, not the most universal attribute of mental processes, but only a particular function of them" (emphasis mine, 26).²⁰ Thus, the psychoanalyst deals in "impressions" of how the mind functions and what consciousness looks like, particularly since consciousness is not subject to visible proof like the cellular processes Freud refers to throughout the text. Since dealing in impressions, the psychoanalyst must admit that his theory is open to debate given the non-empirical nature of his observations, Freud noting that the hypotheses are "a direct translation of observation into theory" and that the theory of the instincts put forth here "rests upon observed material—namely on the facts of the compulsion to repeat" (71). Thus, just as the Impressionist deals in observations about the world and translates them into language, attempting to render the workings of the individual consciousness, Freud similarly

¹⁹ The notion of trauma as always belatedly experienced is central to Cathy Caruth's interpretation of Freud and her subsequent theory of trauma set forth in *Unclaimed Experience*. She argues that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Such a notion of haunting is common within trauma theory and memory studies.

²⁰ Freud uses the German equivalent of "impression" in the original as well: "*Die psychoanalytische Spekulation knüpft an den bei der Untersuchung unbewußter Vorgänge empfangenen Eindruck an, daß das Bewußtsein nicht der allgemeinste Charakter der seelischen Vorgänge, sondern nur eine besondere Funktion derselben sein könne*" (emphasis mine, 28).

argues that the psychoanalyst translates impressions of consciousness based on observations from life (the example of the WWI veterans suffering from war neuroses and the *fort-da* game of his grandson being the primary “case studies” in the text). Such observations constitute the case studies that, it is often noted, read more like short stories than like empirical scientific studies. In presenting these cases and translating his observations into theory, Freud resorts to the medium of “the figurative language, peculiar to psychology [*mit der eigenen Bildersprache der Psychologie*]” just as the Impressionist renders in the figurative language peculiar to the novelist (72 in English edition, 87 in German).

The point of these observations is neither to make an Impressionist of Freud nor to make a psychoanalyst of Ford. Instead, I am suggesting that such an intersection between the methodologies of Ford and Freud is illuminated by their writing about trauma—Freud resorting to impressions and padding his theory with admissions of speculation in the text that most fully investigates trauma and Ford’s method of Impressionism most strongly challenged by rendering the impressions of a massive, collective experience like a World War. Trauma is fundamentally an experience of an overwhelming impression: the impression of violence imprinted on consciousness. Freud himself makes such a comment in his essay “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915), stating that in the midst of war “we are incapable of apprehending the significance of the thronging impressions, and know not what value to attach to the judgments we form” (1). The remainder of this essay presents an argument along the same lines as *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) in which Freud maintains that aggression is a fundamental drive that civilization represses, along with sexuality, only to have it break out in the form of war. The psychoanalyst must render the traumatic impression into a coherent narrative that reintegrates the experience into the patient’s consciousness so the traumatic

neurosis can be “disposed of.” Similarly, Ford the Impressionist, who himself suffers a degree of traumatic neurosis, must render the impression of the trauma of the Great War into a fictional narrative that reconstitutes a subject and allows the reader and author to vicariously experience an image of the whole, the whole of life in a post-war society remembering a collective traumatic experience. Beyond belatedness in its traditional form of flashbacks that plague the traumatized soldier or patient, belatedness is crucial to this formulation of the intersection between psychoanalysis and Impressionism since both theories depend upon observation taken from life and then translate those observations belatedly into theories that end up carrying traces of their composition.

In returning to *Parade's End*, this convergence between psychoanalysis and Impressionism appears most explicitly in *A Man Could Stand Up*—. As mentioned above, belatedness literally occurs in Tietjens's recurring hallucination of O Nine Morgan's death, a pivotal example of how his consciousness belatedly tries to work through the traumatic event (alongside its attempted working through of his sexual repression). Belatedness occurs at another level, however, in that the tetralogy is peppered with examples of writings and rewritings of Ford's own experience of the war. In the passages analyzed below, Ford rewrites the anecdotes in the tetralogy after previously presenting them in other manuscripts in an effort to work through his traumatic memories. Ford's Impressionist writing carries the traces of repeated attempts at working through the traumatic experience in language. Thus, *Parade's End* displays its composition history as one of traumatic remembrance, undercutting Ford's own emphasis on rendering the immediacy of the sensory experience that is crucial to Impressionism. Clearly, Ford revises all of his Impressionist work, not just the work dealing with trauma. As Sara Haslam observes, one of the hallmarks of Ford's aesthetic, particularly evident in *Ancient Lights*,

is that he “is writing the processes of memory, establishing a multiplicity of narrative personae: Ford as narrator, Ford as implied author, Ford as subject” (23). In conjunction with this interpretation, I contend that this process of writing memory and the history of that composition is heightened when representing his wartime experiences, forcing the Impressionist goal of immediacy to bear the traces of traumatic working through.

The scene that ends part two of the third novel, *A Man Could Stand Up—*, in which Tietjens and his men are hit directly by a shell, parallels the death of O Nine Morgan that opens *No More Parades*. These scenes bookend the two novels and are the most famous depictions of warfare in the tetralogy, both dealing directly with Tietjens’s experience at the Front. After the shell burst, Tietjens and his men, Duckett and Aranjuez, are buried in mud. After digging himself out, Tietjens rescues Aranjuez only to carry him into a sniper’s line of fire. Duckett, whose face continually reminds Tietjens of Valentine Wannop’s, ends up being buried alive and Tietjens struggles to uncover him before he suffocates. Several critics read this scene as Tietjens’s rebirth—the man of *Last Post* who commits himself to being with Valentine emerging after literally being buried in the mud of the trenches.²¹ Instead of a rebirth, I interpret this scene in terms of revisitation, the prelude to the bombing being a rewriting of an earlier traumatic scene in Ford’s *No Enemy* (1929).²² Leading up to the strafe, Tietjens has lunch on top of a mound and contemplates topics ranging from the end of the war to his battalion to Valentine Wannop to

²¹ For example, Mark Conroy suggests that Tietjens’s burial “leads to something like resurrection”, the man who has been likened to Christ by Sylvia is now more akin to Adam in his rebirth into the new world of post-war society (184-5).

²² Although published in 1929, after the publication of *A Man Could Stand Up—* in 1926, as Paul Skinner notes in his introduction to the Carcanet edition, Ford wrote the majority of *No Enemy* in 1919 “between his two acknowledged masterpieces, *The Good Soldier* (1915) and *Parade’s End* (1924-8)” (vii). Skinner views *No Enemy* as a “deliberately distracted book” (xvii) that straddles the genres of autobiography and fiction since it is “both the autobiography that Ford could not write—and the war novel which he was reluctant to acknowledge as such” (ix). He ultimately concludes that *No Enemy*, a necessary precursor that allows Ford to go on to write *Parade’s End*, is “about a writer’s rediscovery of his ability to write—about something even more than ability, the will, the necessity, the *duty* to write” (xix).

skylarks. He recalls an earlier moment during the war when he had been walking down a hill after escaping the German guns feeling elated for surviving and resolving to write to Valentine to declare his love.

He went down with long strides, the tops of thistles brushing his hips. Obviously the thistles contained things that attracted flies. They were apt to after a famous victory. So myriads of swallows pursued him, swirling round and round him, their wings touching; for a matter of twenty yards all round and their wings brushing him and the tops of the thistles. And as the blue sky was reflected in the blue of their backs—for their backs were below his eyes—he had felt like a Greek God striding through the sea.... (167)

After recalling this memory, Duckett joins him and the strafe begins, the shell hitting the earth and turning it “like a weary hippopotamus,” causing the dirt to fall over the men in a “slow wave” that was “like a slowed down movie” (174).²³ Such a rich Impressionistic description echoes and depends on the earlier description of Tietjens’s feeling like a Greek god, no less poignant for the uncertainty as to whether or not he will be able to experience such jubilation again after this current brush with death.

In *No Enemy*, Gringoire, the fictional war veteran Ford constructs to relay his memories of the war, recounts a strikingly similar experience of feeling like a Greek god. Gringoire believes he has escaped death when he falls asleep in a hut and a passing lorry lifts the tin roof and bangs it back down, making him think he is being bombed. When he realizes what has happened and that he is not in danger, he walks down a hill and contemplates how his “subsequent exultation” was due to it just being “so good to be alive after that” (24). He tells the narrator:

“I remember thinking on the other occasion that there were a good many dead amongst the thistles and that I must be putting up a huge number of flies. But that, again, was the

²³ The vast majority of interpretations of this beautifully rendered image focus on Impressionistic devices. The image also echoes the defamiliarization at work in the earlier scene of Morgan’s death in which his blood is described as moving paint. Instead of performing a detailed close reading of this passage, I am choosing to analyze an earlier, equally Impressionistic moment that is a necessary prelude to this bombing. See Ambrose Gordon Jr., Sara Haslam, and Ann Barr Snitow for detailed close readings of the imagery of the shell falling.

thought of my subconscious mind. On the surface I just felt myself to be a Greek god, immortal, young forever, forever buoyant, amongst the eddies of a dark blue and eternal sea.” (24-5)

Clearly the repetition of one’s escape from death inspiring one to feel like a Greek god aligns these scenes. Underneath the jubilant tone in both versions, the repression of the death that permeates such a landscape is striking. The “huge number of flies” Tietjens was “putting up” is implicitly linked in *Parade’s End* to the presence of the swallows feeding on those flies. In the tetralogy, Ford suppresses the explicit naming of the dead, noting that “obviously” the thistles contain “things” that attract flies. The observation in *Parade’s End* that “They were apt to after a famous victory” also hints at the presence of death and the downside to military victory for both sides. Compared to the “good many dead” in *No Enemy*, however, Ford deliberately avoids the explicit mention of the corpses lying just out of sight under the thistles in the tetralogy.

These hints at the death surrounding Tietjens are sublimated by the lavish description in the tetralogy of the visual spectacle of the swallows, a spectacle heightened by the repetition of the blueness of their backs and the waving thistles that give the impression of striding through a sea. Similarly, he omits the psychological terminology used in *No Enemy* such as the “surface” and “subconscious mind” that perceives the corpses. Such compositional differences between the two texts illuminate how Impressionism, through its aesthetic elaborateness that creates lush images and sensory immediacy before the reader’s eyes, represses the traumatic content underlying such a vision. In other words, Ford’s Impressionism represses the trauma of death in these passages and rather highlights visual experiences that impart a tone of jubilation, not trauma. Thus, the response to the sensory overload caused by the dissonance between the beauty of the field of swallows and the distressing presence of decaying corpses lying just under the thistles becomes one of focusing on the French countryside, despite the death permeating it.

Furthermore, the passage in *Parade's End* is also deliberately fictionalized in its aestheticization, a move that distance Ford from the memory of the scene he describes in the first person through his alter-ego Gringoire. Impressionism in the tetralogy, therefore, acts to displace the compositional and biographical working through that appears much more clearly in the less aesthetically polished *No Enemy*.

Ford makes a similar turn to fictionalization and an amplification of rich Impressionistic description at the expense of direct representation of death in an episode with a skylark that first appears in his unpublished war manuscript *True Love & a GCM*. Composed in 1918-9 and left incomplete by Ford, Max Saunders suggests that the manuscript provided a testing ground for *Parade's End*. In the manuscript the narrator recalls a particularly traumatic memory in which, to avoid the shrapnel of a shell burst, he dropped to his hands and knees and “stuck his hand right into a dead, putrid Hun’s ribs” (109). During his current occupation watching No Man’s Land on a rainy night in the trenches, he recalls this earlier episode and fears the same thing happening. In an example of something akin to delayed decoding, Ford describes the action in the present right after the soldier remembers this earlier experience:

He jumped to his feet and said: “Hell! Oh Hell!” and his heart beat fifty to the minute and he felt sick. It was because there had been a loud rustle just under his invisible left hand. A bird had got up from a tuft in the darkness and fluttered away. He caught a glimpse of it against the pale sky [...]. You could see a bird; you could recognise the form—like the lower half of an iron cross. It had been a skylark. What the devil was a skylark doing there; frightening you out of your wits. (109)

The juxtaposition of the two moments of fear due to surprise emphasizes the point of the passage that the skylark and the episode with the German corpse scared the soldier more than the typical bombardment since warfare and shelling are no longer frightening but just routine. In *A Man Could Stand Up*—, Tietjens similarly contemplates the mundane nature of the war and the

boredom that besets him and his men when he is frightened by a skylark in a strikingly similar way. The scene unfolds as follows:

He stepped once more on to the rifle-step and on to the bully-beef-case. He elevated his head cautiously: grey desolation sloped down and away. F.R.R.R.r.r.r.! A gentle purring sound!

He was automatically back, on the duckboard, his breakfast hurting his chest. He said:

“By Jove! I got the fright of my life!” A laugh was called for; he managed it, his whole stomach shaking. And cold! (62)

When Tietjens realizes that what flew by him was not a sniper’s bullet but a skylark, the sergeant-major responds that a similar episode happened to him when on ““a raid in the dark, crawling on ‘his ‘ands ‘n knees wen ‘e put ‘is ‘and on a skylark in its nest. Never left ‘is nest till ‘is ‘and was on ‘im! Then it went up and fair scared the wind out of ‘im”” (62). In *Parade’s End*, Ford displaces the trauma of the original anecdote as it appears in the manuscript onto two different characters: Tietjens experiences the fright in the present (in the relative safety of the trench, not in the middle of No Man’s Land) and the memory of the sergeant-major comes closest to that of the soldier in the manuscript who puts his hand into the corpse. Ford further dilutes the shock of the scene by erasing the corpse entirely and transforming it into a skylark’s nest in the sergeant-major’s story. Similarly, the thick dialect of the sergeant-major also displaces the force of the anecdote, the reader working to interpret the story in contrast to Tietjens’s and the manuscript soldier’s clear prose. Thus, only the overall point about how fright in the trenches comes not from shells but from unexpected surprises like skylarks remains in *Parade’s End*.

Such scenes illustrate what kind of war narrative Ford composes—a chronicle not of facts and dates but of sensory experiences heightened by Impressionism. Indeed, he refers to his war writings as a chronicle several times, stating in *No Enemy* that he is not “writing a military

treatise” but rather is “only chronicling the psychology of an Infantry officer as he was affected by certain circumstances” (101). In recalling the genesis of the tetralogy in *It Was the Nightingale*, he states that after Proust’s death no one was doing a “certain literary work” and he thus saw himself as a novelist who would act “as historian of his own time” (180). In the interpretations above I am not proposing that Ford’s story is less true or valid because he has artistically embellished it to make its visual and aesthetic impact greater. Instead, I suggest that under the pressure of rendering trauma, Ford’s Impressionism forces him to turn away from a literal rendition of the traumatic event and instead elaborate the visual impact of these traumatic experiences on a conscious mind. The final Fordian chronicle of his time in the war either takes the form of amplifying figurative language, as in the revisions analyzed above, or of using the *homo duplex* to interrupt scenes of violence with memories of sexual desire, as occurs during O Nine Morgan’s death and the bombing in which Valentine’s face is superimposed on Duckett’s. In short, Fordian Impressionism deals in psychoanalytic terms—always repressing either Eros or Thanatos in order to more effectively render and amplify the sensory impact of the other.

In his dedicatory letter to *No More Parades*, Ford reflects on the problem of narrating trauma directly, stating that “If you overstate horrors you induce in your reader a state of mind such as, by reaction, causes the horrors to become matters of indifference” (4). Impressionistic techniques allow Ford to find a medium between these two extremes of writing a novel that glorifies war and one that desensitizes readers to violence. The first attempt at rendering trauma in the manuscript parallels horrific descriptions of the trenches in the majority of Great War novels such as Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Barbusse’s *Under Fire*, both of which contain scenes relating the shock of accidentally touching or encountering corpses. In his revisions, Ford ends up using Impressionism’s highly aestheticized language not to narrate these

traumas directly but rather to displace them onto multiple fictional narrators, refracting the horror of the trenches through devices like delayed decoding and the time shift. Such revisions reveal the belated working through of his own war experience. The final form in the tetralogy, after the experiments in *True Love & a GCM* and *No Enemy*, is one that hints at traumas but refuses to narrate them explicitly, instead emphasizing Eros and the life instinct by suppressing Thanatos just under the surface. In moving from more direct, explicit prose to, what I'm calling, the amplified Impressionism in the tetralogy, the tension between immediacy and recollection is highlighted. Such passages show that a belated Fordian working through is a process of amplifying Impressionism, not amplifying the violence of war.

Impressionistic Eros

The previous section argues for a reading of *Parade's End* in conjunction with Freud's theory of trauma as articulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, concluding that Ford's Impressionism, dependent on the *homo duplex*, is heightened when depicting instances of trauma. Such an amplification of Impressionism ends up producing not literal accounts but highly aestheticized descriptions of traumatic events in order to both distance the biographical Ford and also defamiliarize the violence of the war. In the second part of this chapter, I redirect the focus from the trenches to the home front, again pairing Ford and Freud. More specifically, I question contemporary trauma theory's almost exclusive reliance on Freud's later works by arguing that we should reconsider his earlier theory of the external traumatic event put forth in both *Studies on Hysteria* and "The Aetiology of Hysteria" in order to better theorize the interdependence of sexuality and trauma throughout Freud's oeuvre.

As a framework for such a discussion, I turn to Ford's most well known work, *The Good Soldier*, for its tragic characterization of Eros. In that novel, the characters' repressed desires

eventually lead to violent acts such as Edward Ashburnham's suicide, Nancy's madness, and Florence's suicide. Yet such violent events are not the moments of disjunction they are in *Parade's End* in which the character's mind abruptly shifts to another repression, oscillating between Eros and Thanatos. Instead, moments of violence and trauma in the earlier novel are understated and often mentioned as afterthoughts, appearing as the logical conclusion to the mounting repression throughout the novel.²⁴ Edward's suicide is paradigmatic of this, the event being reserved for the very end of the novel when Dowell, in a postscript after the declaration "that is the end of my story," states, "It suddenly occurs to me that I have forgotten to say how Edward met his death" (161). This postscript does not come as a shock to the reader since Dowell mentions repeatedly throughout the previous chapter that Edward is dead and that his death was inevitable given the tragic nature of his story. The most direct depiction of Edward's suicide also appears as a side note when Dowell reflects on how all the characters have used him. He states, "Florence selected me for her own purposes, and I was no good to her; Edward called me to come and have a chat with him and I couldn't stop him cutting his throat" (149). The blunt description of "cutting his throat" sharply contrasts the rest of the passage which revolves around Dowell, not Edward. When the reader is actually told the circumstances of Edward's death in the postscript we are not shown the graphic act but rather only see how he "put two fingers into the waistcoat pocket of his grey, frieze suit; they came out with a little neat pen-knife—quite a small pen-knife" (162). This depiction of the instrument, which is a substitute for describing its use,

²⁴ Florence's death is narrated more dramatically and directly than the other violent acts in the novel but conforms to the conventions of melodrama rather than the cognitive dissonance of *Parade's End*. Discussing the understatement of the violence in the novel, Samuel Hynes observes that these events "would, in a true melodrama, be climactic—the deaths of Maisie Maudan, Florence, and Ashburnham. All these climaxes are, dramatically speaking, 'thrown away', anticipated in casual remarks so as to deprive them of melodramatic force, and treated, when they do occur, almost as afterthoughts" ("Epistemology" 312).

matches the elaborate care Dowell takes in portraying Edward's appearance earlier in the same passage:

He was quite sober, quite quiet, his skin was clear-coloured; his hair was golden and perfectly brushed; the level brick-dust red of his complexion whet clean up to the rims of his eyelids; his eyes were porcelain blue and they regarded me frankly and directly. His face was perfectly expressionless; his voice was deep and rough. (162)

This lovingly detailed portrait stands in stark contrast to the absence of a description of the instant of death of this fetishized object of Dowell's affection and repressed homoerotic desire. After all, the final image in the novel is not Edward's corpse but Dowell, ever worried about what constitutes "English good form," fulfilling Edward's request to deliver a telegram from Nancy to Leonora by "trot[ing] off" to find that "She was quite pleased with it" (162). Thus, instead of the traumatic event being a moment of disjunction in which Dowell is transported to the past and another repression only to be returned more forcefully to the traumatic present (as happens to Tietjens when confronted with O Nine Morgan's corpse), the climactic event of Edward's suicide is downplayed, deemphasized, and almost entirely effaced in favor of amplifying Eros in the form of Dowell's attraction to the living Edward immediately before his death.

Ford's Impressionism in the earlier work is one of a gradually building repression that culminates in the tragedy of what was originally titled "The Saddest Story," the violence appearing as the predestined outcome of Dowell's eventual realization of the true nature of such "good people." Impressionism in *The Good Soldier*, with its famously unreliable narrator, is paradigmatic of the conception of Impressionism as primarily responding to epistemological concerns. Thus, Samuel Hynes describes it as a novel "which postulates such severe limits of human knowledge—a novel of doubt, that is, in which the narrator's fallibility *is* the norm" ("Epistemology" 313). The device of the unreliable narrator and the resultant rendering of

Dowell's conflicting impressions depict a quest for knowledge played out predominantly in the realm of Eros, with Thanatos being the unavoidable yet understated end point.²⁵ Dowell does not typify the *homo duplex* of *Parade's End* who is an individual repeatedly torn between Eros and Thanatos. The tetralogy responds to the epistemological problems fundamental to Impressionism and *The Good Soldier* but with the addition of the collective, historical traumatic event. In turning to the trenches, Ford's Impressionism adapts to capture the dissonance and cognitive overload of war. When moving the action to the home front, primarily in the first and fourth novels, Tietjens continues to embody the *homo duplex* but Sylvia and Valentine also become female versions of this figure. On the home front, the paradigm established in the previous section is reversed: instead of Eros erupting into Thanatos, Thanatos pierces the peaceful, English setting.

In *Parade's End*, Christopher Tietjens's infamously cruel wife Sylvia most explicitly embodies this correspondence between Eros and Thanatos. Sylvia is frequently characterized in terms of a potent mix of cruelty and sexuality, being called everything from a sadist to an unsurpassed villainess in criticism on the tetralogy.²⁶ Sylvia's actions provide ample evidence for such harsh characterizations: she commits adultery repeatedly, Tietjens's son potentially being fathered by another man, and plagues Tietjens with worry, going so far as to pursue him to the

²⁵ Just as the deaths of characters like Edward are mentioned in passing and downplayed, the repeated mention of August 4 alludes to the British entering the Great War on August 4, 1914. The change of title from *The Saddest Story* to *The Good Soldier* has been much commented upon but can be interpreted as an ironic reference to the traditional parade and military values of courage and valor embodied by Ashburnham and later by Tietjens. They are both "good soldiers" in this literal sense before the term undergoes a drastic redefinition when the good soldier is faced with the trenches. Additionally, the irony of the "good" soldier echoes that of "good people," the moral lapses of such "good people" being eventually exposed. In any event, both the title change and the allusions to the war present Thanatos as an understatement in a text predominantly concerned with Eros.

²⁶ Among the many critics who interpret Sylvia's perpetual persecution of Tietjens, Sara Haslam, in her argument that the war exacerbated fears about female sexuality, argues that "It is hard to imagine a more sexually active woman in fiction than Sylvia Tietjens: sadist, serial adulteress, voyeur" (50). See Max Saunders's forthcoming article in the collection *War and The Mind* (Edinburgh UP) for an analysis of how Ford uses the term "sodomasochist" to describe Sylvia in the manuscript of *Some Do Not...*, a term Ford later excises from the final published version of the tetralogy.

Front in order to harass him. From the beginning of *Parade's End*, Ford pairs Sylvia with extreme violence. We first meet her in a hotel room at a German spa where she is vacationing with her mother to avoid the scandal of having run off with another man:

The walls of the large room were completely covered with pictures of animals in death agonies: capercaillies giving up the ghost with goutts of scarlet blood on the snow; deer dying with their heads back and eyes glazing, goutts of red blood on their necks; foxes dying with scarlet blood on green grass. These pictures were frame to frame, representing sport, the hotel having been a former Grand Ducal hunting-box [...] (*Some Do Not...* 35)

Such a scene foreshadows the violence of warfare and how millions of men would quickly become disillusioned with previous conceptions of military service as a glorified sport akin to hunting. The vivid description of the animals lavish with blood, particularly the repetition of “scarlet,” also foreshadows the image of the “scarlet paint” that covers the ground upon O Nine Morgan’s death. The violence of such images, seemingly restricted to the realm of hunting and safely contained in their frames on the walls of an upper class spa, emphasizes the violence underlying everyday, peacetime civilization. A few lines later, Sylvia compares Tietjens to the dying animals, calling him “disgusting” and “the Ox” and stating that he appears to her “like a swollen animal” (39). She explicitly links Tietjens to the images of the dying animals on the walls of the room, pairing the two sports of the disaffected upper classes—hunting and adultery—but more importantly transforming both her cruelty and the tradition of hunting into carnal pursuits. Tietjens as a “swollen” Ox alongside the animals in their death agonies illustrates the intersection between Eros and Thanatos characteristic of Sylvia, one that defines both drives in terms of carnality.²⁷ The violence of peacetime civilization and the battlefield is linked through such juxtapositions, Sylvia’s domestic spats with Tietjens and her sexual sadism alluded to in this first impression of Sylvia.

²⁷ Significantly, this room is the one in which Father Consett makes his prediction that Sylvia will pursue Tietjens until the end as soon as he no longer expresses interest in her, a predication which will haunt Sylvia in hallucinations of the priest just as the apparition of O Nine Morgan haunts Tietjens.

The correlation between Christopher Tietjens and dying animals recurs in *No More Parades* when Sylvia remembers telling Father Consett about the fate of her bulldog, a memory triggered after seeing Tietjens climbing a hill under the beam of a searchlight:

“I remembered the white bulldog I thrashed on the night before it died.... A tired, silent beast...with a fat white behind.... Tired out.... You couldn’t see its tail because it was turned down, the stump.... A great, silent beast.... The vet said it had been poisoned with red lead by burglars [...] And the poor beast had left its kennel to try and be let in to the fire.... And I found it at the door when I came in from a dance without Christopher.... And got the rhinoceros whip and lashed into it.... There’s a pleasure in lashing into a naked white beast.... Obese and silent.... Like Christopher.... I thought Christopher might.... That night... It went through my head.... It hung down its head.... A great head, room for a whole British encyclopaedia of misinformation, as Christopher used to put it.... It said: ‘What a hope!’ ... As I hope to be saved, though I never shall be, the dog said: ‘What a hope!’ ... Snow-white in quite black bushes.... And it went under a bush.... They found it dead there in the morning.... You can’t imagine what it looked like, with its head over its shoulder, as it looked back and said: What a hope! To me.... Under a dark bush. An eu...eu...euonymus, isn’t it? ... In thirty degrees of frost with all the blood-vessels exposed on the naked surface of the skin.... It’s the seventh circle of hell, isn’t it? the frozen one.... The last stud-white bulldog of that breed.... As Christopher is the last stud-white hope of the Groby Tory breed.... Modelling himself on our Lord.... But our Lord was never married. He never touched on topics of sex. Good for Him....” (154)

Such a scene again explicitly links Tietjens with dying and abused animals; “the Ox” of earlier is transformed into the white bulldog that is the last of his breed just as Tietjens is the last Tietjens of Groby. Sylvia explicitly links sexuality with extreme violence. The purity of both Tietjens and the bulldog’s lineages lead Sylvia to thoughts of Tietjens and Christ. Notably it is sexuality that mars Tietjens’s purity, specifically his inability to repress his desire for Valentine. Whereas Sylvia is indifferent to Tietjens and only sees him as an annoyance in the first novel (a “swollen Ox”), she becomes intensely jealous as soon as she detects Tietjens’s desire for Valentine, causing her to pursue Tietjens to the Front. Furthermore, the swollen Ox and the obese bulldog both appear to Sylvia as passive, “silent” beasts that are subject to her violent control, just as Tietjens is restricted by his aristocratic code of gentlemanly honor that prevents him from

actively lashing out at Sylvia by seeking a divorce or publicly shaming her for her adultery. When it comes to Sylvia, Tietjens's sexuality is characterized by anxiety, not desire, since he worries that he has not actually fathered his son and therefore is impotent like the bulldog that is the last of his line. Opposed to Tietjens's conflicted sexuality, Sylvia blatantly performs her sadistic desires in the above passage; she becomes an embodiment of the link between violence and sexuality as she acts out her jealousy on the dying bulldog. It is precisely due to her frustrated desires that she expresses her sexuality in such a violent memory, a clear attempt to regain control over Tietjens, the "obese and silent" man she cannot bear to lose. Significantly, this recollection occurs at the Front, a collision between the violence harbored in everyday domestic relationships and the violence of the war. She makes the link between warfare and sexuality explicit earlier in the same passage when she contemplates how the entire war is an "agapemone.... You went to war when you desired to rape innumerable women.... It was what war was for.... All these men, crowded in this narrow space..." (131). In associating war with an agapemone, or an unsavory "abode of love," Sylvia explicitly couples war and sexuality, making sex an act of violence but also locating the motivations for war in gender politics.²⁸ According to Sylvia, men only wage war for purposes of rape, Ford again associating her explicitly with both violence and sexuality.²⁹ Ultimately, Sylvia mobilizes the correspondence Ford insists on

²⁸ Tietjens also makes the link between war and marriage explicit while discussing the possibility of Britain going to war with Macmaster when he states: "war is as inevitable as divorce...." (*Some Do Not...* 28). Just as Sylvia links the violence of rape to the violence of war, here Tietjens equates the finality of divorce to how war marks an inevitable conclusion, in the case of the Great War, the end of the Edwardian era. Although very different in tone, Ford's coupling of sexuality and violence anticipates Virginia Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas* that the seeds of war lie in peacetime patriarchal society.

²⁹ She also embodies this relationship between violence and sexuality in recalling her past liaison with a man named Drake. Drake had sexually assaulted her and is potentially the father of Tietjens's son since Sylvia makes Tietjens marry her immediately after the encounter. After being "taken advantage of" she begins to have an "intense" passion for Drake (*Some Do Not...* 185). She continues to desire such an encounter, stating that she felt "the longing for the brute who had mangled her, the dreadful pain of the mind" (186). She does not want Drake himself but "she knew it was longing merely to experience again the dreadful feeling" (186). Such reflections both establish the precedent in Sylvia's past for her sadomasochism and arguably provide the basis for her perception of war as an expression of

between sexuality and violence, peacetime civilization's suppressed violence and wartime's explicit violence.

Freud too links peacetime civilization with violence, most famously in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). He argues that aggression is at the root of civilization along with Eros, humanity repressing its natural instincts of aggression and sexuality in favor of being part of society. Thus, Freud declares that "the meaning of the evolution of civilization" is found in:

the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species. (82)

This famous dualism between Eros and the death drive is anticipated, in different terms, in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), the latter most fully establishing the tenets of the seduction theory. In "The Aetiology of Hysteria" Freud revises the groundbreaking conclusion of *Studies on Hysteria* that all patients suffer from reminiscences to argue instead that all neuroses can be traced back to external traumatic events of a sexual nature. The job of the psychoanalyst becomes helping the patient to remember these traumatic events from childhood in order to cure her of her neurosis. The link between sexuality and trauma is fundamental to the seduction theory; Freud states that "Whatever case and whatever symptom we take as our point of departure, *in the end we infallibly come to the field of sexual experience*" (199) and that the experiences in his case studies "which seemed to be the ultimate traumatic experiences, have in common the two characteristics of being sexual and of occurring at puberty" (200). Freud is careful to make a distinction between outright assault like rape and other experiences such as witnessing adults performing sexual acts in his discussion of the three

repressed desires in the form of rape. Although Sylvia here appears to be the victim of sexual trauma, she is largely portrayed unsympathetically and such a confession of assault is subject to doubt given Sylvia's manipulations throughout the tetralogy. Such a portrayal aligns Ford with Freud's own later renunciation of the seduction theory, after which he largely refused to acknowledge the real lived traumas of female patients like Dora.

different forms of sexually traumatic events. Almost immediately after publishing the essay, however, while acknowledging that child abuse remains a very real concern, Freud shifts his focus away from these external traumatic events to emphasize instead his new theses about dreams, desire, and wish-fulfillments.³⁰

Yet sexuality persists in Freud's late work, moving from the narrow context of external sexually traumatic events to a broader concept of Eros that encapsulates both sexuality and the life instinct. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, "from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* onwards, Freud readily uses 'Eros' as a synonym for 'life instinct', he does so in order to insert his new theory of the instincts into a philosophical and mythical tradition of universal scope" (153).³¹ Rather than arguing that the seduction theory, with its literal correlation between external traumatic events and sexuality, should be directly applied to the context of the trauma of the First World War, I propose returning to the seduction theory in order to establish a concept of trauma that does not discount Freud's work before *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Countering the perception that Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory makes it less relevant than later psychoanalytic texts, Jay Greenberg argues that we should instead see the seduction theory itself as the first formulation of psychoanalytic theory. Thus, the early theory "[evokes] the interpenetration of internal and external events, of reality and the way that reality is idiosyncratically experienced, in an extraordinarily subtle and textured way" (66). Greenberg

³⁰ See Jeffrey Masson for a full analysis of the consequences of Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory and the subsequent psychoanalytic repudiation of it, particularly in terms of how it represents "a failure of courage" (xxi) on Freud's part to confront the unequal gendered dynamics pervasive in late nineteenth century society. Similarly, see Judith Herman for a feminist analysis of the seduction theory, particularly the argument that after the seduction theory was abandoned, "Sexuality remained the central focus of inquiry [in psychoanalysis]. But the exploitative social context in which sexual relations actually occur became utterly invisible" (14).

³¹ Laplanche and Pontalis are also quick to point out that Eros and the life instinct do not preclude sexuality since Eros is "very close to what he understands by sexuality," sexuality not being restricted to "the genital function" (153). Freud's preference for using the more explicit term "sexuality" in his earlier work is largely the result of not wanting to "camouflage sexuality" to make it more palatable for a bourgeois nineteenth-century audience (153).

goes on to demonstrate how we should move away from a literal interpretation of “seduction” and instead think of it as a term encapsulating metaphoric, symbolic, and literal meanings (in the same way other key terms in psychoanalysis like castration operate). Thus, even the term “trauma” has a dual meaning in the psychoanalytic canon: it refers to literal external traumatic events like railway crashes, accidents, and life-threatening events but also to “the moment at which some mental event (an idea, a feeling, a wish, a memory, a fear) is experienced as incompatible with what Freud called the ‘dominant mass of ideas,’ the sum total of everything that can be known consciously” (69-70). From this perspective, trauma refers to both external traumatic events, as we see in both the seduction theory and the later work, but also to the feeling of cognitive dissonance, a disjunction, and the shock of epistemological uncertainty. When evaluating the usefulness of the seduction theory today, Helen Meyers reminds us that rather than become mired in debates over whether an external or internal event is at the root of traumatic neuroses, “in the long run, objective reality has meaning to the child only in the way it is processed to become psychic reality, and what counts is psychic reality. What is reconstructed is psychic reality” (82). In other words, the seduction theory holds relevance of a theory of trauma since it unites sexuality and trauma in the realm of psychic reality, be it a memory of an actual external event or a projection, desire, or other psychic symptom.

Indeed, what counts for Ford’s conception of the *homo duplex* and its unique coupling of Eros and Thanatos is also “psychic reality.” Ford famously relied on his memories and impressions rendered from life rather than objective facts from historical chronicles and literal representations of external events. In comparing Freud and Ford, I am not making an argument about sexual traumas as lived experiences but rather the relationship between sexuality and trauma as drives and concepts. It is my claim that Eros and Thanatos are interdependent in the

context of the Great War as Ford depicts it in *Parade's End*. In revisiting Freud after analyzing this interrelationship throughout Ford's work, particularly in the case of Sylvia, we can envision how Freud's work on sexuality provides a more nuanced conceptualization of trauma that does not cordon off sexuality. Freud's conclusions in *Civilization and Its Discontents* about Eros and aggression, arguably the culmination of his late work, are anticipated throughout the trajectory of his career. When pairing the early texts with his work on trauma, the intersection between sexuality and trauma comes to the fore, trauma in his culminating work now appearing in the guise of the broader and more universal instinct of aggression. Of course, making such an argument for the interdependence of sexuality and death, particularly in the context of war, is an ancient pairing. For our purposes, however, revisiting this age-old binary allows us to expand both how trauma is conceptualized within trauma theory and also how it is applied to modernist literature. With a conception of trauma as inflected by Eros (versus exclusively defined by Thanatos), trauma can be linked to the life instincts and more positive forces such as reproduction, love, and sustenance. Conceiving trauma in conjunction with Eros allows us to see healing not as a cathartic forgetting of the event or a "disposal" of the traumatic neurosis, but rather as a productive working through that is a necessary and continual process (like Ford's recurring revisions of his war experience in his prose), a process that always bears the traces of that working through.

Revisiting this early phase in Freud's career also spotlights the importance of the external event in a theory of trauma (as opposed to the emphasis on fantasy and dream that predominates the psychoanalytic canon in the post-seduction theory writings). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is famously subject to critique since Freud's theory of trauma is not based on the detailed case studies of the early work but rather on dreams, anecdotes, and wish-fulfillments. For example,

the famous *fort-da* game is an anecdote about Freud's grandson acting out an Oedipal desire for sole possession of his mother while his father is away at the Front. Such a game, which provides Freud with the foundation for his theory of trauma since the game represents the repetition of an unpleasurable experience, is not essentially tied to an historical, collective trauma, despite the father's occupation. Although Freud also cites examples of shell-shocked patients and survivors of train accidents, his final conclusions about the death drive and the repetition compulsion are not reserved exclusively for such external events, but rather equally apply to traumas that occur in the mind as fantasies and wish-fulfillments. By returning to the seduction theory, which posits an external traumatic event as the source of trauma, we can add further nuance to a psychoanalytic conception of the historical trauma of the First World War.

Presenting a nuanced view of trauma that allows for the possibility of Thanatos as inflected by Eros or, in Ford's case, interdependent on Eros, is appropriate to the historical trauma of the Great War. When analyzed through the lens of shell shock, the First World War is heavily coded in terms of sexual politics (as seen in cultural and literary histories by Fussell, Bourke, Gilbert and Gubar, Eksteins, and Cole). Of course not all histories and literary representations of World War I present such an intersection between Eros and Thanatos and it is important to note that Eros never ultimately eclipses Thanatos even in texts which foreground shell shock. Similarly, sexuality does not figure heavily in Freud's later work; rather, the death drive overwhelms Eros, a telling response to the horrific circumstances leading up to World War II, which are significantly different from those of the First World War. Yet, if we posit a conception of trauma that allows for the possibility of Eros within the most terrible experiences of Thanatos, we can better account for the significant overlap between Eros and Thanatos in much of Great War literature and specifically in Ford's work. In short, my interpretation of

trauma via Ford's Impressionistic rendering illustrates a concept of trauma that is both rooted in the external event as theorized by Freud and does not entirely discount sexuality.

To test our conception of trauma as infused with Eros, we can interpret Sylvia, the embodiment of Thanatos within Eros, alongside Valentine, who can be read as the opposite: the embodiment of Eros within Thanatos. As already demonstrated in the first section, memories and thoughts of Valentine crop up in Tietjens's mind during the most violent scenes in the trenches—during the death of O Nine Morgan and throughout the scene in which he is shelled. Violence also permeates the home front during Tietjens and Valentine's meetings, the most striking example being the culmination of the first part of *Some Do Not...* in which Tietjens and Valentine's dog-cart is hit by General Campion's car. Immediately before the episode with the dog-cart, while contemplating the love triangle in which he finds himself, Tietjens remarks on the opposed qualities of Sylvia and Valentine exclaiming:

Kill or cure! The two functions of man. If you wanted something killed you'd go to Sylvia Tietjens in the sure faith that she would kill it: emotion: hope: ideal: kill it quick and sure. If you wanted something kept alive you'd go to Valentine: she'd find something to do for it... The two types of mind: remorseless enemy: sure screen: dagger ... sheath!
(160)

Here, the two female protagonists of the tetralogy symbolize the dual nature of these “two functions of man.” “Kill or cure” is an equally apt description for Thanatos and Eros, respectively, the love triangle vividly illustrating this binary opposition. As Max Saunders observes, over the course of the novels “the direction of the analogy between sex and war has been reversed: Sylvia made war on Tietjens, but Valentine's passion is the love to end all wars” (V.2, 215). In the above passage, Tietjens explicitly recognizes such an analogy between the two female characters. The colons visually depict this stark difference since Sylvia will, “quick and sure,” with swift, bluntly punctuated jabs, “kill” everything Valentine represents: “emotion:

hope: ideal.” Even the language Tietjens uses is permeated by violence and sexuality, “dagger...sheath” in particular being heavily laden with connotations of both instinctual forces.

After this prelude to the dog-cart episode, violence explodes into the peacetime British countryside. Valentine and Tietjens have been riding through the night, experiencing a bucolic romance that is just dawning on Tietjens, when out of the mist General Campion crashes into their horse and eventually kills the animal. The car first appears in the following fashion:

Not ten yards ahead Tietjens saw a tea-tray, the underneath of a black-lacquered tea-tray, gliding towards them: mathematically straight, just rising from the mist. He shouted: mad: the blood in his head. His shout was drowned by the scream of the horse: he had swung it to the left. The cart turned up: the horse emerged from the mist: head and shoulders: pawing. A stone seahorse from the fountain of Versailles! Exactly that! (174)

Mistaking the car for a “tea-tray” and distortedly seeing the horse rising out of the mist as the “sea-horse” in the fountain of Versailles are distinctive examples of Ford’s Impressionism.

Notably, such aestheticism occurs in a moment of extreme violence, just as it does earlier in the scenes of the swallows disguising fields of the dead and O Nine Morgan’s death. The episode explicitly echoes the earlier impression of Morgan’s blood as moving paint when Tietjens observes that the “horse, trembling, was looking down, its nostrils distended, at the blood pooling from its near foot” (175). Tietjens quickly begins to tend to the cut with part of Valentine’s petticoat, the horse’s upper leg eventually being “swathed with criss-crosses of white through which a purple stain was slowly penetrating” (142). Such a juxtaposition of the white petticoat and reddish purple “stain” visually symbolizes how violence and death seep through the placidity of Edwardian society, harshly “penetrating” the budding romance between Tietjens and Valentine. Significantly, it is Valentine’s petticoat, a symbol of femininity and civilization, which is torn off to mend the gushing wound of the injured animal. The crash disrupts the rigidly hierarchized, gendered society in which sexuality, as symbolized by the spotless white petticoat,

is repressed along with the violence of aggression. The reality of violence is further ironized by Champion's appearance, another instance of delayed decoding. Tietjens observes, "something like a scarlet and white cockatoo, fluttering out of the small car door ... a general. In full tog. White feathers! Ninety medals! Scarlet coat! Black trousers with red stripe. Spurs too, by God!" (176). Here, the scarlet of the horse's blood against the white of Valentine's petticoat is contrasted with the scarlet and white of the General's uniform. His "cockatoo" appearance illustrates the traditional attitude toward warfare in Edwardian England before the First World War, the attitude of pomp and military parade so heavily ironized in the subsequent novels of the tetralogy. Ford, along with the majority of Great War authors and artists, continually undermines parade and this perception of war as a heroic and noble pursuit. Such a scene displays the affinities between Ford's Impressionism on the home front and when under the pressure of narrating the violence of the trenches. Here, the aestheticism of delayed decoding and the striking color contrasts amplify violence by symbolizing both Eros and Thanatos in a series of visual impressions.

As Tietjens comforts Valentine after the accident by telling her about Groby and his childhood, thoughts of Sylvia pierce his consciousness, just as thoughts of Valentine interrupt Tietjens during his experiences at the Front. As Tietjens describes the horses at Groby and his ability to relate to animals, the following suddenly occurs to him:

The child wasn't his. The heir to Groby! All his brothers were childless... There was a deep well in the stable yard. He had meant to teach the child how, if you dropped a pebble in, you waited to count sixty-three. And there came up a whispering roar.... But not his child! Perhaps he hadn't even the power to beget children. His married brothers hadn't.... Clumsy sobs shook him. It was the dreadful injury to the horse which had finished him. He felt as if the responsibility were his. The poor beast had trusted him and he had smashed it up. (178-9)

The anxiety over his potential sterility links directly to Sylvia in that she would be cruel enough to trick Tietjens into marrying her when she is already pregnant with the child of another man.

The child comes to symbolize not only the future of Groby and the entire Tietjens line but also Sylvia's cruelty in her repeated cuckolding of her husband. Thus, just as thoughts of his sexual desire for Valentine interrupt his traumatic experience in the trenches, here his anxiety over his marriage and his son's parentage distract him from another scene of violence. Similarly, the responsibility he feels toward the horse that "had trusted him" echoes the haunting sense of responsibility for O Nine Morgan's death since he had refused him leave. In both cases, it is sexuality that barges into depictions of bloody death. Yet in the case of Morgan, Tietjens is surrounded by death on the Western Front whereas here he is immersed in peacetime civilization and the company of Valentine who sparks desires in him that Sylvia so easily and pleasurably kills. The scene with the dog-cart, therefore, represents the saturation of peacetime civilization with violent premonitions of war—General Campion's modern car literally smashes into tradition in the form of the horse and carriage. Valentine, the epitome of Eros for Tietjens, is again linked to Thanatos just as she is when thoughts of her occur in the midst of the fighting in the trenches. In both cases, Valentine gives Tietjens the hope to persevere through such violent episodes, a relationship cemented by their reunion in London on Armistice Night and their subsequent decision to live together.

Thus, Valentine embodies Eros in Thanatos just as Sylvia represents Thanatos in the midst of Eros. Traumatic events occur both on the Western Front and on the home front throughout *Parade's End*, yet the similarity lies in how both forms of trauma are infused with Eros. In the tetralogy, Eros extends beyond the will to live experienced at jubilant moments such as when Tietjens feels like a Greek god. Eros, as both the life instinct and repressed sexual desire, fundamentally constitutes the experience of the trauma of the war for Tietjens. Similarly, Eros and sexuality permeate trauma in Freud's oeuvre, sexuality and violence being the two

primary instincts that define consciousness, particularly the conscious subject in the modern world.

Coda: *Last Post*

In an unpublished typescript entitled “Years After,” included by Max Saunders in the collection *War Prose*, Ford recollects visiting Paris years after the war and coming upon an unpretentious memorial to the British who died in World War I on a tablet on a column of Notre Dame. He notes how “oddly, it is good” that the memorial is “obscure and little and pretty and mostly ignored,” a more fitting tribute to the men who died to make the world better, at least morally, since we no longer glorify war rhetorically after the mass disillusionment and irony caused by World War I (276). In reflecting on this “totally inadequate and yet so tremendously fitting” “shrine” to the war dead, Ford recalls the words of the French statesman Léon Gambetta “who said: ‘*N’en parlez jamais; pensez y toujours*’ [Speak of it never, think of it always]” (276). Although the original quotation refers to the loss of French territories to Germany in the late nineteenth century, which was one of the causes of the war, Ford reinterprets the quotation as a fitting motto for remembering the war.³² The quotation speaks to Ford’s desire to not have “vainglorious utterance” made in remembrance of the war, just as he does not want to see a large mass of stone commemorating the dead (276). Despite its location on foreign soil, hidden away on a column in an immense structure, it is a constant, permanent reminder of the war even if it is not frequently discussed or visited. Significantly, Gambetta’s phrase is not spoken or written at the site, it only appears in Ford’s memory as he views the plaque and recalls the motto.

Similarly, fifteen years later and at the start of yet another war, the Great War is always in Ford

³² In his analysis of the causes for the First World War, Martin Gilbert discusses Léon Gambetta’s motto, observing that “the loss of the territories annexed by Germany in 1871 rankled [in France] for four decades” and that Gambetta’s advice “rang in French ears” throughout the war (3).

and other veterans' minds even though they will not speak of it. When Ford does speak of it, he laboriously constructs his memories in a fashion that distances his biographical trauma from the direct prose of autobiography and memoir.

I take this Fordian anecdote as one of my final images for the way in which it and Gambetta's motto speak to how traumatic, historical events are remembered and worked through by survivors and subsequent generations. As mentioned briefly above, one common theme within trauma theory is that of the unspeakability of the traumatic event. The impossibility of fully capturing the traumatic event in language becomes a key issue alongside the imperative to "never forget" since one must always remember the disaster but simultaneously forestall a cathartic working through that would lead to forgetting. The traumatic event is to be held in memory and never fully worked through in order to prevent it from being collectively forgotten, and thus creating the possibility for it to occur again. Holocaust testimony is frequently acknowledged as a vital part of such remembering and collecting survivor testimonies has become an increasingly urgent project of Holocaust studies as we move further away from the event. Yet, despite this urgency and desire for testimony, many trauma theorists simultaneously acknowledge that such a project will never be complete or fully capture the event in language. Something essential about the disaster will always escape comprehension. When paired with Ford's use of Gambetta's motto, this demand for memory embedded in an acknowledgement of language's failure takes on new meaning. Instead of being caught in the impasse between working through and compulsively repeating, or mourning and melancholia, by thinking of it always and speaking of it never, Ford captures both responses to the event. Impressionism's depiction of consciousness establishes a medium through which Ford can vicariously think of the event always through his fictional characters yet never speak of it in explicitly autobiographical

terms. Furthermore, the *homo duplex* illustrates how trauma is represented in *Parade's End* but simultaneously deferred and defamiliarized by Tietjens's wandering mind.

The characters of Christopher and Mark Tietjens in the final volume, *Last Post*, embody this Fordian response to the problem of remembering and memorializing the traumatic event. Since Graham Greene's publication of the Bodley Head edition of *Parade's End*, an ongoing debate has persisted over whether or not *Last Post* belongs in the series. The main justification given by Greene for the exclusion of *Last Post* is that Ford originally intended the series as a trilogy since the final novel is "a disaster" due to his "unashamed" (5) sentimentality and "carefully arranged happy *finale*" (7). Although several critics come to the defense of the final novel, notably Max Saunders and Samuel Hynes, most rely on biographical criticism or analyses of Tietjens's political and social beliefs as a justification for its inclusion. In closing, I posit that when analyzing the tetralogy as a whole through the lens of trauma theory the significance of the fourth novel emerges. Instead of merely presenting a romantic happy ending and an escapist fantasy that ignores the problems and challenges of the war's legacy in post-1918 British society, I view *Last Post* as illustrating the Fordian interpretation of Gambetta's motto. The war, specifically as experienced by Christopher Tietjens, is never spoken of after Armistice Night and crucially not by Christopher himself. Rather, Christopher only appears once in the entire final novel and he only speaks four sentences about Groby Great Tree, his thoughts and impressions largely remaining absent. Despite this central silence of the main protagonist, whose consciousness and speech dominate the previous six hundred pages, the war is ever present consciously and unconsciously in the thoughts of the other six characters who take center stage in the final novel. In these characters' thoughts, the memory of war primarily revolves around memories of Christopher. Thus, although it is not mentioned explicitly and the war veteran

himself does not speak of it, the war is ever present, just under the surface, of the entire fourth novel, much like the corpses in the field of thistles Tietjens strides through in *A Man Could Stand Up*—.

Last Post is dominated by Mark Tietjens, who takes his brother's place as protagonist. Mark's consciousness occupies the majority of the pages in the fourth novel, as he lies speechless in an open-air canopy bed in the orchard of the Tietjens country estate. Mark has chosen not to speak since Armistice Night when he learns of the British peace terms in which they will not avenge France but rather will allow the Germans to retreat, an act that Mark interprets as the "betrayal of France by her Allies at the supreme moment of triumph" that is "a crime, the news of which might well cause the end of the world to seem desirable" (27). Just as Christopher does not speak in the final novel, Mark similarly and quite literally embodies the impossibility of speaking of the war. Mark does not speak at all but rather acts as a perceiving eye, his "whole face was carefully shaven and completely immobile" but the "eyes moved [...] with unusual vivacity, all the life of the man being concentrated in them and their lids" (10). The emphasis on Mark's visual perception of his surroundings and how sight triggers mental detours, memories, and chains of thought personifies Ford's Impressionistic method. In Mark, the *homo duplex* becomes a man who lies immobile while his mind wanders the world, past and present. Such a depiction is justification enough for the inclusion of *Last Post* in the tetralogy—Mark takes Christopher's place as the *homo duplex* par excellence who epitomizes Ford's Impressionism, his anti-war sentiments, and opinions on how the war should be memorialized and represented.

Yet Mark breaks his silence in the final scene of *Parade's End*. His only words are uttered right before he dies, and are spoken to Valentine as advice for her future life with

Christopher and their unborn child.³³ After Christopher briefly appears on the scene with a piece of Groby Great Tree that has been chopped down by the new American tenants, Valentine chastises him for not selling some prints and thus not making any money to support the family. After Christopher dejectedly goes off to find the prints, Mark speaks to Valentine alone, quoting an old song his nurse sang to him. He advises her to ““Never thou let thy child weep for thy sharp tongue to thy goodman.... A good man! Groby Great Tree is down....”” (204). Instead of speaking of the war, Mark speaks of the future through the voice of the past, the lyrics of the song being an archaic folksong of the Groby peasants. The destruction of Groby Great Tree symbolizes a new beginning for the Tietjens family at the end of an era, just as the Great War marks the end of the Edwardian era and the start of the modern age. Similarly, the lyrics relay his message of being a good wife to his brother and nurturing the future generation. As Mark dies, with his last breath, he imparts these words for the future generation, a final example of Thanatos (Mark’s death) infused with Eros (the birth of the child). This ending is strikingly different from other World War I narratives, of which the downbeat ending of Hemingway’s *Farewell to Arms* can be taken as representative. In Hemingway’s final image of the effects of the war, Henry walks away from the hospital in the rain after Catherine and their child both die in the delivery room. Ford also ends his Great War masterpiece with a death but a death that signifies new birth and hope for future generations. While the war will remain an unspoken memory that consistently occupies one’s thoughts, as in the case of both Mark and Christopher, Ford

³³ See Eve Sorum for an excellent reading of the final novel in relation to mourning and particularly for the ways in which, when focusing on Christopher’s silence, the novel fails to present successful working through but rather represents the collective amnesia and anti-Arcadianism typified by postwar British culture. Although I agree with Sorum that Ford is critical of collective mourning on a national scale in *Last Post* (and I acknowledge her valid points about how problematic it is for Ford to undermine Valentine’s radical feminism as a suffragette by returning to conservative gender roles), by focusing on Mark I interpret the last novel as more regenerative in its use of the *homo duplex*.

advocates healing and the power of Eros in the form of Valentine and her child as the necessary counterpart to the overwhelming Thanatos of the war and postwar era.

Ford's emphasis on both the Thanatos of the trenches and also Eros's power to interrupt such horrific experiences, allows us to see how Eros permeates trauma, and vice versa, throughout *Parade's End*. Theorizing traumatic consciousness in conjunction with Eros presents healing not as cathartic forgetting, but rather as a productive working through that is necessary and will always bear the traces of that process. As a result, Ford's Impressionism makes a unique intervention in what Cathy Caruth calls the "doubling telling" central to narratives of trauma that oscillate between "the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (*Unclaimed* 7). Ultimately, through his portrayal of a Janus-faced traumatic consciousness, Ford makes his traumatic past bearable by amplifying his Impressionistic aesthetic yet not overstating such unspeakable horrors. By analyzing the intersection between Eros and Thanatos, especially in the final volume, we can see how Ford's Impressionism provides a means to circumvent the impasse within trauma theory over unspeakability yet the imperative to never forget, without succumbing to simplistic catharsis. In conclusion, an analysis of Ford in conjunction with a reassessment of Freud allows us to perceive, on the one hand, how Ford's Impressionism evolves when depicting historical trauma and, on the other, the relevance of Eros for a conception of the trauma of the First World War.

CHAPTER TWO

Communicating Trauma: *Regeneration* and W.H.R. Rivers's Psychoanalytic Form

When discussing her *Regeneration* trilogy,¹ Pat Barker continually invokes contemporary conceptions of trauma, largely stemming from a cultural context in which Freudian psychoanalysis and post-traumatic stress disorder have saturated the popular imagination. Barker's trilogy, of which the third volume, *The Ghost Road*, won the Booker Prize, is an historical fiction narrating the experiences of World War I soldiers, including the iconic war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, in treatment for shell shock and in battle on the Western Front. Along with representing shell-shocked soldiers, Barker tells the story of their doctor, W.H.R. Rivers, a British psychiatrist who was one of the first to adopt psychoanalytic techniques to treat shell shock at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland where Owen and Sassoon were among Rivers's patients.² Barker repeatedly cites being raised by her grandparents as the reason for her interest in World War I, despite the Second World War's closer chronological proximity to her generation (Barker was born in 1943). In interviews across her career, she relates an anecdote about the scar from her grandfather's bayonet wound as the genesis for her fascination with the historical period, and particularly as the reason for the shift to masculinity as a major theme in her work. For example, Barker narrates the following:

My grandfather had a bayonet wound that was something I noticed particularly as a small child, and he didn't talk about the war. So in a sense the bayonet wound was speaking for

¹ The trilogy consists of *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995).

² W.H.R. Rivers is a familiar figure in cultural and literary histories of the First World War. Most famously, Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* includes a comprehensive chapter entitled "Male Hysteria: W.H.R. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock," a chapter that Barker acknowledges in the reading lists at the end of the trilogy as a major source for her fictional portrayal. Also cited by Barker, see Eric Leed for an account of Rivers's theories of war neuroses. In addition to Showalter, see Samuel Hynes (*A War Imagined*) and Jay Winter for accounts of Rivers's relationship with Sassoon at Craiglockhart. Finally, see Richard Slobodin's biography for a full portrait of Rivers, particularly for his diverse activities outside medicine in ethnography, anthropology, and politics before and after the war.

him. Silence and wounds were therefore linked together in that particular way. And my stepfather was certainly also marked by that war: he had a paralytic stammer, and my grandfather was very deaf. So the idea of war, wounds, impeded communication, and silence, of course—silence about the war, because the war was not a subject of revelation—all became entwined in my mind with masculinity. (Stevenson 175)³

As frequently cited by trauma theorists, “trauma” derives from the Greek *τραύμα*, or “wound.” In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud cites Tasso’s poem about Tancred and Clorinda, in conjunction with the famous *fort-da* game of his grandson, to establish the ways in which non-traumatized individuals exhibit the repetition compulsion at the root of traumatic neuroses and melancholia. In the poem, Tancred accidentally kills his beloved, Clorinda. After holding an elaborate funeral for her, he travels through an enchanted forest and, as Freud summarizes, “[Tancred] slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again” (24). Cathy Caruth, in one of the founding texts of trauma theory for literary critics, *Unclaimed Experience*, cites Freud’s reading of Tasso to define trauma as “much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: *it is always the story of a wound that cries out*, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (emphasis mine, 4). Barker’s description of her grandfather’s bayonet wound echoes Caruth’s now canonical description of the belated narrative of trauma, “the story” of the “wound that cries out.” Just as Clorinda’s voice is heard through the wound, “the bayonet wound was speaking for [Barker’s grandfather]”, and for men more generally who endure the trauma of war but cannot give voice to their experience. The slippage between speech and

³ Barker gives detailed descriptions of the wound in other interviews, saying it was a “dirty great hole in his side, which of course I noticed and shoved my fingers in when I was two or three” (Garland 187). She also notes that the bayonet wound was “One of my earliest memories” (Nixon 6). Additionally, her grandfather never talked about it “until the end of his life when he was dying of stomach cancer. The doctors back then were rather patronizing and they refused to tell him that he had cancer. Instead they told him that it was his old war wound [that] was the problem. I thought it best to tell him the truth. It’s interesting, though, that after all he went through he didn’t die from the war. Of course, he believed the doctors, so perhaps in the end he did...” (Hughes 38-9).

silence, the corporeal and the psychic wound, in Barker's anecdote and the Tasso poem is particularly apt for the context of the Great War in which shell shock challenged masculine and military ideals. Although frequently praised for her historical accuracy, Barker and the *Regeneration* trilogy are fully immersed in our contemporary trauma culture. Whether or not Barker has read either Caruth's interpretation of Freud or the original Freudian interpretation of Tasso's poem, Barker's anecdotes and the trilogy itself both cry out for critical analysis in relation to trauma theory.

And indeed, critics analyzing the trilogy frequently answer this cry. It is impossible to consider what Barker's trilogy would look like if it were written without the current widespread knowledge of the psychology of trauma. Roger Luckhurst, in his cultural genealogy of trauma, argues that Barker "retrofits the Great War with modern trauma theory" and that "Rivers appears as an emissary of our trauma-sensitized present" (53). Luckhurst's suggestion that Barker's trilogy could not have been written without contemporary trauma discourse is the result of the pervasive cultural understanding of Freudian psychoanalysis in the late twentieth century. Psychoanalytic interpretations of the trilogy are common, Dennis Brown stating, "Barker's whole trilogy is a tribute to the 'talking cure' as a form of healing for what is now termed 'post-traumatic stress disorder'" (190). Similarly, Mark Rawlinson posits that Caruth's definition of trauma as the narrative of belated experience "would also be a good description of the trilogy, which could be considered in this context a form of belated vicarious experience" (94). Such a collapse between Freud, Barker, and contemporary trauma theorists like Caruth is prevalent, particularly the frequent argument that Barker belatedly examines the Great War through tropes of haunting. The consensus among critics referencing trauma theory is that Barker successfully

acts as an agent of collective remembrance by employing psychoanalysis, intertextuality, and the cultural history of shell shock.⁴

In conjunction with this dominant interpretation, I argue that Barker does not merely adapt psychoanalysis generally or as Luckhurst would have it, trauma as a discourse that is ubiquitous in post-1950s British and American culture. Instead, I contend that she puts the trauma discourse of the late twentieth century in conversation with W.H.R. Rivers's specific psychoanalytic method. In a critical field in which trauma studies has many diverse applications and frequently falls into generalizations of popular psychology, I propose a much closer analysis of the trilogy in relation to Rivers's specific adaptations to Freud's talking cure and dream interpretation. As readers of the trilogy will recall, W.H.R. Rivers was an anthropologist and psychologist who worked for the British army during the First World War. Elaine Showalter notes that in addition to treating Siegfried Sassoon, Rivers's name is "associated with the most enlightened, probing, humane, and sensitive studies of wartime neurosis" (184). Rivers is one of the central protagonists of the trilogy and Barker continually borrows from his case studies to sketch patients at Craiglockhart to the point that the majority of the first volume can be interpreted as an adaptation of Rivers's texts. Although several critics cite Freud's and, less frequently, Rivers's respective texts about trauma, none present extended close readings of the crucial differences between Freud and Rivers's interpretations of dreams. Similarly, although there are several studies that discuss the intertextuality of World War I literature in the trilogy,⁵ no critics to date have performed extended analyses of Barker's repeated borrowings from

⁴ Among the many critics who apply contemporary trauma theory to the trilogy, John Brannigan, Anne Whitehead, Laurie Vickroy, Karen Patrick Knutsen, Ankhi Mukherjee, Maria Holmgren Troy, and Madelyn Detloff present the most extensive analyses. For the haunting imagery in Barker's work see Catherine Bernard, Anne Whitehead, and John Brannigan's *Pat Barker*.

⁵ See Kaley Joyes on Barker and Wilfred Owen. See Anne Whitehead on Barker and Sassoon's memoir *Sherston's Progress*. See Alistair Duckworth for intertextual borrowings from Edmund Blunden and Robert Graves. See Hemmings for an analysis of *Sherston's Progress* alongside Rivers's case studies.

Rivers's texts on war neuroses: "The Repression of War Experience" (1917) and *Conflict and Dream* (1923). Ultimately, Rivers's original case studies present crucial intertexts for Barker's trilogy that heretofore have not received sufficient critical attention.

One of the hallmark features of the trilogy is how Barker puts historical figures like Rivers, Wilfred Owen, and Siegfried Sassoon in conversation quite literally with her fictional narrative of the war. Such dense intertextuality is one form of dialogue at work within the trilogy, complementing the repeated dramatizations of conversations between Rivers and his patients at Craiglockhart in the first volume and in hospitals in London in the last two novels.⁶ Yet the conversational relationship between analyst and analysand also extends to Barker's creative method itself. As frequently as she tells the anecdote about her grandfather's bayonet wound, Barker describes her writing method as one of dialogue with her characters. In response to a question about dissociation, she observes:

I would say, for example, that when my characters are working, they are talking all the time. So in a sense I hear voices: they have conversations that never get recorded in the books. I know bloody well if I went to by GP and said, "I keep hearing voices, it happens all the time", there would only be one possible diagnosis. I would end up inside and yet this is a perfectly switchable-on and switchable-off phenomenon. Until this has happened, no matter how much thinking I've done about the book or how much I think I know things about the characters, until those voices are there, until they've started talking in a sense independently of me, I have made no headway at all and it would be completely dead if I tried to put it on the page. (Garland 191)⁷

⁶ Barker is interested in the relationship between patient and therapist in her other novels too, most notably *Border Crossing* (2002). She has said that "as far as psychologists are concerned, I'm interested in the dialogue and the extent to which people have to listen, as well as the selective nature of the narrative, in response to the listener" (Stevenson 181), and the way in which the psychologist has to balance "detachment and involvement," which are similar characteristics between the doctor and "the concentration camp guard" (181).

⁷ Barker similarly notes in an interview with Donna Perry, "When they [the characters] start talking to each other, you start writing" (239). In response to Sharon Monteith's question about her writing method, Barker says that dialogue is important since "a novel doesn't really get going until the characters begin talking to one another and until they begin to have conversations that I don't feel I am making up, by which I mean that I feel I am listening to them as well as making them talk" (21). In yet another example, this one with maternal connotations of the author giving birth to her characters, Barker says "Dialogue really is the key—for me the key to everything. [...] It's great, that moment when they break into the first person. That is the moment when they, in some sense, sever the cord with you. And I know this is a very naïve way of talking about fiction, but it's what I experience when I write, and it's what I experience when I read, a lot of the time" (Brannigan "Interview" 378).

Barker's anecdote reveals a fundamental reliance on dialogue at the root of her aesthetic. Barker dramatizes the talking cure throughout the trilogy but also conceives of fiction itself as the verbal autonomy of characters from the author. Such a phenomenon echoes the patient who has successfully worked through her neurosis; she is "cured" when she no longer needs the analyst and can interpret her past and present independently. Throughout the trilogy, but especially in *Regeneration*, Barker dramatizes Rivers's psychoanalytic method. She reproduces his central thesis that the talking cure is the most successful method for treating shell-shocked soldiers. Barker's characters repeatedly show that they have been "cured" when they have internalized Rivers's specific methods, and Rivers cites the eventual autonomy of his patients in his case studies as evidence of successful treatment. Barker's formal conception of the role of dialogue within her creative process exhibits an emphasis on successful working through and productive uses of the talking cure, particularly in relation to remembering trauma.

Extending the significance of Rivers beyond the trilogy, Barker proposes that *all* her novels focus not on violence but on recovery:

The truth is, my major theme—of all my work—is recovery. Somebody has a traumatic event—a prolonged experience of something terrible that destroys his or her sense of identity. In the trilogy the war does that by the sheer grind of it, and the disgustingness. In *Union Street* a little girl is assaulted and gets no help from the adults around her. She has to claw her way back. It's people's capacity to survive, what they do for themselves that inspires. In the trilogy, the soldiers are helped by Rivers but in the end it is up to them to heal themselves. (Hughes 37-8)

The trilogy repeatedly illustrates recovery and the ability of the talking cure to help soldiers ultimately "heal themselves." Unlike the majority of trauma theory relying on Caruth's reading of Freud and emphasizing the repetition compulsion, melancholia, and unspeakability, Barker stresses the regeneration found in verbally articulating survival. Throughout his writings on war neuroses, Rivers also continually insists on recovery and the successful application of his version

of the talking cure. Rivers's numerous examples of successful working through starkly contrast Freud's notoriously open-ended discussions of trauma detached from clinical case studies, which eventually lead to poststructuralist analyses like Caruth's. Unlike the poststructuralist tendency in psychoanalytic trauma theory, Barker and Rivers's continual insistence on the successful talking cure emphasizes recovery and regeneration instead of unspeakability and aporia. Reevaluating Barker's aesthetic in light of Rivers's unique psychoanalytic method echoes recent critical concerns that caution against a blanket application of Caruth's theory to all literary representations of trauma, irrespective of historical particularities.⁸

Of course, Barker does not unproblematically present working through as the solution to remembering the Great War. Both the fictional and historical Rivers express deep concern over what recovery means in the context of sending soldiers back to the Front.⁹ Thus, at first glance, successful treatment supports the military and national objective of continuing the war, a paradox in Barker's expressly anti-war trilogy. Barker solves this problem by self-reflexively using dialogue, intertextuality, and Rivers's specific version of the talking cure to reinforce levels of critical distance between the reader, author, and the historical trauma of the Great War. Barker's realism does not ignore the problems with attempting to represent trauma, but rather continually foregrounds its own historical distance. As John Brannigan observes, Barker develops a "critical realism" that revises post-war social realism "to accommodate the unrepresentable trauma of twentieth-century mass warfare or post-industrial urban dereliction" (*Pat Barker* 5). In

⁸ See Greg Forter, Madelyn Detloff, and Ruth Leys for critiques of Caruth's theory of trauma when not carefully applied to the particularities of various literary texts, especially those not representing the Holocaust.

⁹ In his biography of Rivers, Richard Slobodin notes that through his encounters with Sassoon and his later friendships with George Bernard Shaw, Leonard Woolf, and Bertrand Russell, Rivers started to question his support of the war. Ultimately, "It was [...] not so much the varied eloquence of Fabian and internationalist interlocutors but the logic of wartime and postwar events that was moving Rivers from an apparent unquestioning traditionalism in politics toward a Labourite position and an anxiety about the fruits of imperialism" (69). At the time of his death, Rivers was becoming heavily involved in politics and was actually running for political office in the Labour Party.

conjunction with Brannigan's case for Barker's "critical realism," I argue that such realism, when employed in the trilogy, depends upon dialogue and Rivers's specific revisions to the Freudian talking cure. Ultimately, when interpreted through Rivers's theory of trauma, Barker presents an alternative to the problem of representing trauma than that proposed by the aesthetics of "high" modernism and contemporary, poststructuralist trauma theorists citing such aesthetics as exemplary representations of traumatic events. Barker offers successful working through not as a process that limits meaning and effectively closes the event, but rather as one based in dialogue and a "critical realism" that insists on survival through voiced remembrance.

Considering Barker's critical realism based in dialogue, the *Regeneration* trilogy could not appear more different from *Parade's End*.¹⁰ Despite the subject matter of the Great War and the epic scale of both novels (when combined, the novels add up to more than fifteen hundred pages), formally, the works diverge given Barker's realism as opposed to Ford's Impressionistic and highly subjective rendering of the war. Yet, when comparing the two, we can see how Barker's retrospective interpretation of the First World War responds to the same problems of representation Ford faced in the immediate aftermath of his experiences in the trenches, albeit in a strikingly different fashion. Whereas Ford internalizes and subjectivizes the event, Barker externalizes and historicizes the war. Whereas Ford filters his lived experience through the highly subjective impressions of the fictional Tietjens, Barker's intertextuality relies heavily on both actual historical figures who were witnesses or combatants in the war such as Rivers, Sassoon, and Owen but also fictional characters like Billy Prior. Furthermore, the reading lists at the end of each novel in the trilogy highlight Barker's distanced, third generation perspective and

¹⁰ There has been no extended critical comparison of Ford and Barker, to date. In *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker*, Dennis Brown briefly mentions Ford in his discussion of Barker's form, citing Ford's Impressionism in *Parade's End* as the antithesis of the realism Barker employs in passages taking place at the Front. Barker never mentions Ford in the reading lists or interviews.

her subsequent indebtedness to historical sources. Unlike the Impressionist “high” modernism of Ford, the trilogy is a historical fiction that relies on dialogue to represent trauma while constantly acknowledging its belatedness and critical distance. Although realism has a bad reputation among trauma theorists as a genre that imparts meaning too easily and objectifies the event, I show how Barker’s critical realism poses a successful response and alternative to the highly aestheticized works of modernists like Ford.

Despite such formal differences between Barker and Ford, the *homo duplex* as representative of a Janus-faced concept of trauma torn between Eros and Thanatos can be fruitfully adapted to the *Regeneration* trilogy. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *homo duplex* in the context of World War I is the soldier who was “there, but great shafts of thought from the outside, distant and unattainable world infinitely for the greater part occupied your mind” (*Joseph Conrad 192*). On a literal level, Barker dramatizes scenarios in which characters’ minds wander through flashbacks, hallucinations, and dreams, all of which transport characters like Sassoon and Owen to the past in the trenches or, in Rivers’s case, to previous anthropological excursions in Melanesia. Throughout the trilogy, however, Barker’s fictional protagonist Billy Prior comes to embody the *homo duplex* to the greatest degree.¹¹ His status as a fictional character allows Barker to frankly depict the intersection between his sexuality and traumatic experiences at the Front. Remaining faithful to the lived experiences of her historical characters, including the patients described in Rivers’s case studies, Barker resorts to fictional characters like Prior to explicitly explore the relationship between Eros and Thanatos. One of

¹¹ Several critics focus their analyses of the trilogy on close readings of Prior, predominately in relation to either Barker’s arguments about class or her arguments about masculinity, homosociality, and father/son relationships. For the former, see Peter Hitchcock for a Marxist interpretation of the trilogy that focuses on ideology and working class masculinity. For examples of the latter, see Greg Harris for an overview of masculinity in the trilogy and the intersection between pacifists, homosexuals, and shell-shocked men in both the novels and the historical period. David Waterman also presents a masterful analysis of the intersection between pacifism, homosexuality, and the rhetoric of contamination in the trilogy and the historical period. See C. Kenneth Pellow, Catherine Lanone, and Anne Wyatt-Brown for extended analyses of father/son relationships throughout the trilogy.

Rivers's most significant revisions to classic Freudian psychoanalytic method, particularly as it exists before 1914, was to downplay the role of sexuality. Although Barker largely adopts Rivers's theories of trauma throughout the trilogy, she departs from them in Prior's case to explore the role of sexuality in traumatic consciousness. In short, Prior allows Barker to extend Rivers's theory of trauma to include sexuality, much as the concept of the *homo duplex* in *Parade's End* allows us to see resonances between Freud's early writing on sexuality and his later theories of trauma. Barker, with the benefit of hindsight and Freud's entire corpus, repeatedly juxtaposes sexuality and violence through Prior's interpretation of his and Rivers's traumatic experiences.

By detaching the *homo duplex* from Ford's use of it as an exclusively Impressionistic device, I put forward the *homo duplex* as a mobile concept that, in turn, advances the intersection between Eros and Thanatos surrounding the trauma of the First World War. A concept of trauma as torn between Eros and Thanatos is highly relevant when analyzing the poetry of Owen and Sassoon, both authors frequently juxtaposing and symbolizing the correlation between these instincts. Furthermore, expanding the concept of the *homo duplex* to describe the trauma of the Great War supports our current understanding of shell shock as encapsulating both sexual anxiety (the fear over being labeled "feminine" given stigmas against hysteria) and the unprecedented violence of the trenches. Ultimately, by making Ford's *homo duplex* a mobile concept, I hope to provide a critical term to further express the complex but frequent intersection of Eros and Thanatos in the World War I literary canon.

In the following pages, I discuss the *homo duplex* in conjunction with both the *Regeneration* trilogy and Rivers's unique psychoanalytic method. The first section analyzes Rivers's specific revisions to Freud's theory of dream interpretation. I argue that Rivers's

psychoanalytic method can be extended to the wider discussion within contemporary trauma theory about both the representation and interpretation of traumatic events. Rivers's case studies provide a theoretical precursor for contemporary critics who push back against the overwhelming dominance of deconstructionist reading practices within literary studies about trauma. In the second section I turn directly to the trilogy and analyze how Barker explicitly invokes Rivers's case studies in the various portraits of soldiers in Craiglockhart Hospital to insist on recovery and the success of the talking cure. The third section analyzes Billy Prior in detail and establishes him as a contemporary embodiment of the *homo duplex*. This final section illustrates the relevance of the *homo duplex* for our understanding of the World War I poets and the particularities of the trauma of the First World War.

Rivers Conversing with Freud

In the fourth chapter of *Regeneration*, Barker presents a paradigmatic example of a psychoanalytic session between Rivers and a shell-shocked patient named Anderson. The chapter begins, without preface, with quoted speech from Anderson that relates a recent nightmare in which he met his wife and a group of ladies only to look down and realize he was naked, followed by his father-in-law and two orderlies chasing him, his father-in-law carrying a "big stick" with a "snake wound round it" "hissing" (28). When captured, he is tied up in "a pair of lady's corsets" and transported in a coffin-like carriage to a place where Rivers awaits him "wearing a post-mortem apron and gloves" (28). After hearing Anderson describe his dream, Rivers clarifies that the corsets were "[l]ike a strait-waistcoat" (28) and asks him if they belonged to his wife. Anderson responds hostilely that they were not but admits, "I suppose it is *possible* someone might find being locked up in a looney bin a fairly *emasculating* experience?" (29). In response to Rivers's later question about whether or not he often dreams of snakes,

Anderson “exploded at last” and declares ““Well, go on then, [...] That’s what you Freudian Johnnies are on about all the time, isn’t it? Nudity, snakes, *corsets*. You might at least try to look *grateful*, Rivers. It’s a gift”” (29). Rivers calmly replies that the only association he has with snakes is ““probably with the one that’s crawling up your lapel”” in the form of Anderson’s caduceus badge of the RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps) (29). The heated exchange eventually leads Rivers to suggest that Anderson’s dream was an expression of the conflict he feels between returning to medicine after the horrors of the Front and the necessity of financially providing for his family as a doctor. The snake therefore symbolizes not the phallus but simply the familiar symbol of medicine.

Such a scene accomplishes many objectives for Barker within the first thirty pages of the over eight hundred page trilogy. She establishes Rivers as a clinician and his typical interactions with patients (everyday patients, not the historically well-established and atypical Sassoon who appears throughout the opening three chapters). She also depicts the officers’ commonly hostile response to his methods and the fact that they need to be treated for a breakdown at all. Furthermore, the scene introduces the tension between Rivers’s methods and classic Freudian analysis, but also, the popular conceptions of psychoanalysis during the war and today. Anderson’s comment that his dream is “a gift” begging for Freudian analysis is addressed to not only Rivers but also the late twentieth-century reader. Anderson and the reader can both construct a reductive, Freudian analysis of the dream: the corsets symbolize Anderson’s emasculation from being shell shocked (also symbolized by his appearing not in uniform but naked before a group of women) and the snake is a phallic symbol waved by his father-in-law to express Anderson’s castration anxiety over not financially providing for his family since the neurosis prevents him from performing both as a doctor and also in the manly job of soldiering.

Yet Rivers immediately forestalls such an analysis, denuding the dream of its sexual overtones and rejecting the sexual symbolism for which Freud was so (in)famous. Barker, at the start of the trilogy, effectively shows the reader that Rivers is not a typical “Freudian Johnny” who sees sexual significance in everything. After the session, Rivers reflects on the dream privately, specifically his own cameo. He aligns his appearance in a post-mortem apron and Anderson’s paralyzing fear of blood with a veiled consideration of suicide (31-2). Rivers contemplates Anderson’s knowledge of Freud and how it is “derived mainly from secondary or prejudiced sources” and that Anderson “disliked, or perhaps feared what he knew” (31). Given Britain’s notoriously hostile reception to Freud’s ideas, particularly the sexual theses, Anderson’s reaction is not surprising. Again, the comment is directed at both Anderson and the contemporary reader. Rivers’s private reflections act, on one hand, as an invitation to the reader to play the game along with Barker of tracing the Freudian influences throughout the trilogy with the benefit of hindsight (since only the reader, not Anderson, is privy to Rivers’s private reflections). On the other hand, Barker cautions against conflating this popular conception of Freud with both the actual content of his theories and Rivers’s unique psychoanalytic method.

Although Barker does not explicitly acknowledge it in the reading list at the end of *Regeneration*, this episode is a rewriting of one of Rivers’s actual case studies.¹² In *Conflict and Dream*, Rivers establishes his method of dream interpretation by analyzing a patient’s dream that is strikingly similar to Anderson’s. “The ‘Suicide’ Dream” belongs to one of his patients in the RAMC who had a horror of the medical practice after treating a Frenchman who died in his care. Rivers quotes the dream in full, the patient having given him a written account of it. The scenario

¹² In the author’s note at the end of *Regeneration*, Barker mentions *Conflict and Dream* and “The Repression of War Experience” in the general context of “Rivers’s method of treating his patients” (251). She also cites Sassoon’s “brief appearance as ‘Patient B’” but she does not list the other sources from Rivers’s case studies for her patients who proliferate the trilogy (251).

is slightly different in that the dreamer gives a speech about the war and how they must continue to fight (*Conflict and Dream* 23). The dreamer fixates on a man in the audience who initially supports and cheers the speech but then becomes increasingly depressed. Two men appear on either side of him: “a Canadian with the face of my father-in-law, and the man on my right was Dr X, wearing his post-mortem apron and gloves” (23).¹³ The father-in-law proceeds to wave a stick with “a snake [...] crawling up [it] and it seemed to menace the man in my seat” (23). The man appears to be in so much pain that the dreamer thinks “it would be merciful if I killed him immediately” followed by the Canadian father-in-law saying “‘I’ll deal with him’” upon which he takes a “lady’s corset and cried: ‘I’ve a straight-waistcoat for him’” (24). Rivers then appears in the dream, declaring that the man in the audience is sick. The dreamer disregards Rivers and the dream ends when he raises a revolver only to hear “the voice of [his] son saying, ‘Don’t do it, daddy, you’ll hurt me too’” (25).

The historical Rivers follows the dream transcript with the analysis in which he interprets the man in the audience as the “dream-surrogate” of the patient and the act of homicide as a desire for suicide, the intervention of the son representing the stigma that would be attached to his family if he killed himself (*Conflict* 25). Just as in Barker’s version, the historical Rivers interprets the corset as a symbol for his wife and family’s insistence that he return to practicing medicine despite his debilitating phobia of blood (*Conflict* 26). The historical Rivers also identifies the snake writhing around the stick as the caduceus, “the badge of the R.A.M.C.” which the patient wears “on his tunic” (29). The historical Rivers diagnoses the desire for suicide as the central conflict; Barker’s version repeats this while Rivers contemplates his cameo in a post-mortem apron and gloves (Barker 31-2). Finally, Barker omits the context of the speech

¹³ Although Rivers later appears in the dream, Dr. X is a doctor the patient knew in waking life who had recently committed suicide (32).

about continuing one's duty to fight, yet the dreamer's speech is dramatized throughout the trilogy itself since the central conflict, especially in *Regeneration*, is Rivers recognizing his duty to "cure" soldiers despite his growing anti-war sentiments.

Given Barker's obvious borrowing from Rivers's case study, we can now ask how and why Rivers's unique psychoanalytic method is crucial to *Regeneration* (beyond historical authenticity). The answer lies in the divergences between Rivers and Freud and how those differences impact the resultant interpretations of the trilogy based on contemporary trauma theory. Rivers, in *Conflict and Dream*, acknowledges his debt to Freud, particularly Freud's definitions of the latent and manifest content in dream interpretation. He goes on, however, to list three major revisions based on his experiences treating war neurotics: a focus on conflict instead of Freud's thesis about wish-fulfillments, "transformation" instead of Freud's use of "distortion" to describe the dream-work (*Conflict* 4), and a dissatisfaction with Freud's methodology of dream interpretation which seems "forced and arbitrary, and the general method of so unscientific a kind that it might be used to prove anything" (5). This last critique speaks to Rivers's reluctance to accept Freud's theories of the sexual origin of neuroses. Rivers nevertheless admits his awareness of the typical psychoanalytic interpretation of "The 'Suicide' Dream," noting that there will be many who see the snake as "a universal phallic symbol, and will explain the dream in a way very different from that which I have adopted" (*Conflict* 176). Rivers does not disagree with Freud that "the male genital organ should be represented by a long object and the female genital organ by one of a rounder form" but he takes issue with the universal application of such symbols (176).¹⁴ He concludes, "the symbols to which a universal

¹⁴ A large part of this critique is directed at Freud's followers, particularly Jung. Rivers cites several examples from his Melanesian experiences as an anthropologist in which symbols established by Jung as universal are questioned (179). See Slobodin's biography for a full account of Rivers's involvement with the British Psychoanalytic Society despite such reservations on the sexual origin of neuroses. According to Slobodin, Rivers's involvement helped lend

sexual significance is attached, may at least in some cases bear a meaning of a different kind” (177).

In addition to this reluctance to accept the sexual theses, Rivers’s three major revisions are significant since they show how war neuroses challenge established psychoanalytic method. Based on his experiences at Craiglockhart, Rivers’s first revision tackles Freud’s wish-fulfillment thesis. After witnessing patients suffering from horrific battle nightmares Rivers concludes, “It is difficult to see how such awful and terrifying experiences as those of dreams of this kind can be the result of wishes of the dreamer” (67). Instead of wish-fulfillment, Rivers posits that dreams are “an attempt to solve a conflict of the waking life by such means as still remain open when the higher levels of mental activity have been put out of action by the inhibition of sleep” (68). For Rivers, interpreting “The ‘Suicide’ Dream” as an expression of a conflict in the patient’s waking life holds more water than seeing the dream exclusively in terms of sexual repression since the dream comments directly on the patient’s anxiety over providing for his family, his inability to practice medicine, and his repressed desire for suicide. Thus, suicide in “The ‘Suicide’ Dream” becomes a concrete solution to a lived conflict; suicide is “not the fulfillment of a wish, but the direct negation of the wish which was at the time most prominent in the mind of the dreamer” (39). The goal of analysis, therefore, becomes translating the self-destructive solution into a more productive solution to the conflicts in the patient’s waking life.

Of course, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud also voices Rivers’s critique of the wish-fulfillment thesis. In that text Freud analyzes war neuroses as experiences that challenge

respectability to psychoanalysis in Britain (76) and “says something for Rivers’ lack of bias that he publicly associated himself with the psychoanalysts even though he disagreed with them on the ‘universal sexual significance’ of dream-symbolism [...] and had developed a theory of instincts differing markedly from Freud’s at that period” (77). Elaine Showalter echoes this point, noting that despite his dismissal of the sexual theses, “Rivers helped domesticate [Freudian theory] for an English audience” (189).

his earlier theories and conform to his new concepts of the repetition compulsion and the death drive. Freud states that the war neuroses are “impossible to classify as wish-fulfillments” since “[t]hey arise, rather, in obedience to the compulsion to repeat” (37). Rivers, working with Freud’s pre-war work, anticipates these later revisions.¹⁵ Whereas Rivers focuses on conflicts in the patient’s current waking life, Freud revises the wish-fulfillment theory to argue for the present eruption of the past traumatic event. Thus, instead of dreams presenting solutions to current conflicts in the patient’s waking life (Rivers), Freud views these dreams as attempting to retrospectively “master” the initial traumatic event, to re-experience it since it was never fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence. As a result, Freud views psychoanalysis as doing the work, not of interpreting a current conflict, but of uncovering the past event that is at the root of the war neurosis. The goal for Freud is to get the patient to remember the repressed experience “as something belonging to the past” instead of repeating it (19). In treatment, the analyst must get the patient to “re-experience some portion of his forgotten life” but it is also imperative that “the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything, to recognize that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past” (19).

Despite his emphasis on the present conflicts in the patient’s waking life, Rivers does not discount the significance of the past traumatic event. Rivers prefaces “The ‘Suicide’ Dream” with an account of the patient’s experience at the Front, insisting on starting with the past traumatic event in order to interpret the dream correctly. Furthermore, his thesis in “The Repression of War Experience” is that war neurotics must be made to remember their experiences instead of actively repressing them. Even in this thesis, however, he emphasizes

¹⁵ Rivers and Freud were simultaneously revising the theory of wish-fulfillments. Freud published *Beyond* in 1920 in German and the first English translation appeared in 1922; Rivers delivered lectures on “Conflict and Dreams” at Cambridge and in London in 1920-1, although the book-length study was published posthumously in 1923 after Rivers’s untimely death in June 1922. See Slobodin for an account of Rivers’s diverse activities during these years.

present conflict, arguing that the symptoms of shell shock are “not the necessary result of the strain and shocks to which they have been exposed in warfare, but are due to the attempt to banish from the mind distressing memories of warfare” (3). Thus, for Rivers, it is not the initial traumatic event that causes shell shock but rather the present conflict over being forced to repress memory. This differs notably from Freud’s focus on the repetition compulsion that uncovers the past event, untouched by any present conflicts. For Freud, the present is only significant in that the affective symptoms of hysteria the patient exhibits occur in the present. Alternatively, Rivers believes his patients remember past traumas *too* well and need to stop repressing those memories to solve current conflicts caused by such repression.

Anne Whitehead performs the only other extended comparison of Rivers and Freud in the context of Barker’s trilogy. Also analyzing Rivers’s revision to the wish-fulfillment thesis, Whitehead concludes that Rivers falls short of Freud’s later theory since he does not identify the repetition compulsion and the way in which patients are haunted by the original traumatic event. Ultimately, according to Whitehead, Rivers fails to realize the significance of the patient being “possessed by a belated experiencing of the traumatic event, which is beyond his will or power to control” (“Open” 681). Her argument hinges on critiquing Rivers for his emphasis on the present conflict because it downplays the importance of the haunting, belated experience of the traumatic event. While Whitehead’s points about haunting in Barker are compelling, she largely conflates Rivers and Freud (Rivers only appearing as a lesser version of Freud) in order to conform, not to Freud’s theory of trauma necessarily, but to Cathy Caruth’s interpretation of Freud, which Whitehead cites repeatedly. By more closely analyzing Rivers’s divergences from Freud, I argue that we can better understand the significance of Barker’s repeated re-writings of Rivers’s case studies. More importantly, the lack of extensive critical analysis of Rivers

highlights the dominance of Caruth's theory of trauma and the subsequent reliance in trauma studies on figures of belatedness, haunting, and literal repetition. Since Rivers does not conform to this interpretation of trauma, critics of the trilogy largely ignore his specific theories and rather focus on Freud or contemporary trauma theorists. Just as we must parse out of the specific intertextual references in Barker instead of reading her only in relation to a generalized trauma discourse of the late twentieth century, we also need to go back to the primary texts of psychoanalysis to uncover the significant differences between various modes of interpretation at work in the context of the Great War.

We can take a textual exchange between Cathy Caruth and another trauma theorist, Ruth Leys, as representative of the interpretive stakes of analyzing Barker's trilogy through contemporary trauma theory. Caruth, in her now-canonical *Unclaimed Experience*, argues that trauma always speaks in a language that is "somehow literary" which "defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (5). Caruth favors this "somehow literary language" since it can be self-reflexive and does not pretend to speak objectively or empirically (does not grant the listener full knowledge, full vicarious experience of the event). Texts always bear the traces of the traumatic event; they can never entirely move past it but rather must always repeat it in a language that insists on its inability to capture the event but also the necessity to bear witness.¹⁶ Caruth's theory thus conforms to Freud's notion that the traumatic event presents a breach in normal consciousness, an event that exceeds normal functioning and is never fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence but is "forgotten" by the waking consciousness. Freud's use of Tasso's

¹⁶ In support of this argument, Caruth traces several rhetorical figures (departure, falling, burning, awakening) that represent this literary language privileged to express trauma. The "literary dimension" in these rhetorical figures "cannot be reduced to the thematic content of the text or to what the theory encodes" and, even in attempting to theorize this literary dimension, it "stubbornly persists in bearing witness to some forgotten wound" (5).

poem in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* becomes a paradigmatic example of Caruth's conception of trauma. For Caruth:

Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (4)

The wound crying out and haunting the survivor becomes a central image in Caruth's theory of trauma. Caruth reads Tancred, furthermore, as a dramatization of psychoanalytic method itself, in that "Tancred addressed by the speaking wound constitutes [...] not only a parable of trauma and of its uncanny repetition but, more generally, a parable of psychoanalytic theory itself as it listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which it nonetheless bears witness" (9). What later becomes a distinction between speaking and unspeakability, here is the knowing and unknowing central to the relationship between analyst and analysand or listener and survivor. Caruth, in her interpretation of Tasso, dramatizes both the inability of the psychoanalyst to ever fully know the traumatic event and the impossibility of the patient to ever fully represent the event in language. The theory of trauma evident in this close reading of Tasso can and frequently is applied to Barker's characters. From this perspective—which is to say the perspective of late twentieth-century trauma theory—Barker reanimates the dead soldiers and historical figures throughout her text while simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of speaking for them. Barker acts as a witness in that she "listens" to the bayonet wound of her grandfather that is characterized precisely by its inability to speak, and then attempts to bear witness to that trauma in her fictional narrative of the war that uses actual historical witnesses like Owen and Sassoon to speak for national, collective trauma.

While such an interpretation of Barker is seductively compelling, it neglects both Rivers's unique ideas about trauma and post-Caruth trauma theory. Ruth Leys, in *Trauma: A*

Genealogy (2000), devotes an entire chapter to critiquing Caruth, specifically taking issue with her insistence on the literalness of the traumatic event in her readings of Freud. The Tasso myth becomes a paradigmatic example for Leys of “the hazards of Caruth’s approach to trauma” (292). Instead of interpreting Clorinda’s second wounding as a literal acting out of the original event in conformity with the repetition compulsion, Leys argues that the second wounding is “symbolic, metaphoric” (294). She points out that the repetition diverges from the original since it “takes the form of a slashing or wounding of a tree that bleeds, a figure that [...] has a long literary history and whose deployment by Tasso is [...] charged with symbolic significance, including Oedipal symbolic meaning” (294). Leys is right to point out that the second wounding, in which Clorinda has been transformed into a tree, looks more like a nightmare that has assumed a fantastical form than a literal hallucination or flashback. Thus, in a surprising reversal, it is not Caruth the literary critic who emphasizes the literary nature of the second wounding, but rather Leys the historian who explicates the symbolism in Tasso. Leys proposes that Caruth must “ignore” the symbolic and metaphoric dimension of the second wounding in order to support her claim that “Tancred is the unconscious victim of a traumatic neurosis the experience of which remains unavailable to his consciousness except in the form of an exact and unremitting repetition” (294).

With this debate in mind, we can return to Rivers and propose an alternate reading of Tasso that, in turn, establishes new insights into Barker’s realism. In addition to arguing for conflict over wish-fulfillment, Rivers’s second revision is that the dream-work is a “transformation” of the patient’s lived experiences and desires, not a “distortion” (*Conflict* 4). Rivers prefers transformation because it approximates the patient’s complete inability to recognize obvious symbols like the caduceus badge of the RAMC in the image of the snake.

Distortion implies some similarity between the manifest and latent content whereas transformation signals complete difference to the point of being unrecognizable in the mind of the dreamer. Transformation is crucial to Rivers's method of treating war nightmares and the affect they produce. He writes:

Moreover, it is often in my experience one of the first signs of improvement that some amount of transformation appears; the events of the actual experience are replaced in the dream by incidents of other kinds, such as the appearance of terrifying animals, which stand in no direct relation to the actual war-experience of the dreamer. Though in these cases the dream continues to be accompanied by fear, this is less intense and accompanied by less severe physical manifestations, and in many cases this transformed character serves as a stage toward the disappearance of the "nightmare" character of the dreams. (67)

Only when the dream starts to take on a more symbolic character, when it becomes less literal and rather appears more fantastical, does "improvement" begin; Clorinda's second wounding can thus be interpreted as a traumatic nightmare in which transformation has taken effect. Rather than occurring as a literal repetition of the original event, as Freud and Caruth would argue, if applying Rivers's psychoanalytic method the second wounding appears as a *transformation* that attempts to pose a solution to both the past traumatic event and its current psychological effects. Significantly for Rivers, healing, or something akin to the start of working through, lies not in the literalness but rather in the *literariness* of traumatic nightmares. For Rivers, the dream that has become more literary or figural, like Anderson's dream, signals healing, rather than another symptom of the repetition compulsion. Instead of interpreting figurative representations like the corsets and the snake with Caruth's "somehow literary language" of trauma that insists on the necessity to bear witness but also the impossibility of ever fully representing the event, when applying Rivers's theory, such imagery signals the ability of the unconscious to fictionalize the actual lived traumatic event (versus replaying it in a literal flashback). Although Rivers as a clinician and Caruth as a literary critic have different objectives, Rivers's goal in analysis is

much like that of the literary critic: to translate this transformation, this figurative language, into a coherent narrative that presents a concrete interpretation of the conflict posed in the dream or the text (not a narrative insisting on ambiguity and unspeakability).

The third major critique Rivers levels against Freudian dream analysis unites the first two in a general concern over the scientific validity of psychoanalysis. Specifically, Rivers focuses on free association's failings, calling conclusions reached by its methods "pure assumption, and one which needs far firmer foundations than have been provided by the psycho-analysts" (*Conflict* 60). Instead of a complex process of free association that blurs the distinctions between the manifest content, the patient's waking life, and all other associations the patient could possibly have, Rivers calls for a straightforward analysis based on recent conflict. In addition to viewing Freud's conclusions as "forced" (5), Rivers notes, "the idea that an event of a dream may indicate either one thing or its opposite, gives an arbitrary character to the whole process of dream-interpretation, which must be most unsatisfactory to anyone accustomed to scientific method" (6). Here, Rivers voices a classic critique of psychoanalysis that it does not conform to "scientific method" despite Freud's many efforts to make it a legitimate science. Rivers, a distinguished member of the British medical community, remained committed to such "scientific method," particularly as seen in his nerve regeneration experiments with Dr. Henry Head conducted between 1903-7. During these experiments, which Barker also recounts and adapts for the title of the trilogy, the cutaneous nerves in Head's forearm were severed and then sutured back together. As Rivers's biographer, Richard Slobodin, notes, "a total of 167 days was spent in which Rivers explored and mapped the absence, extent, nature, changes, and recovery of sensory perception in Head's left hand and arm" (31-2). Rivers meticulously adhered to scientific method in these "regeneration" experiments, as is also evident in his research on fatigue in 1908 that was

one of the earliest, if not the first, double-blind scientific experiments (31). It is to Rivers's credit that this fidelity to scientific method did not lead him into a narrowly positivist empiricism when treating war neurotics. Indeed, war neurotics were not able to "regenerate" in the same way nerves could and Rivers became famous for his version of psychoanalysis that remained grounded in scientific method, a fusion that resulted in his sympathetic treatment of shell shock at a time when war veterans were either accused of malingering, treated with electroshock therapy, or encouraged to repress their symptoms to return to the Front.¹⁷ Part of Rivers's critique of psychoanalysis is due to the fact that dreams are highly subjective and function like texts inviting multiple interpretations—a subjectivity that free association exacerbates. Rivers acknowledges these multiple interpretations (e.g. his admission that someone could read "The 'Suicide' Dream" in terms of phallic imagery) but he ultimately calls for a dominant interpretation, particularly when treating patients in an effort to return them to active duty.

Ultimately, Rivers's three main critiques of Freudian dream interpretation converge in this discontent with free association. Rivers's primary intervention in psychoanalytic method, particularly when applied to trauma theory, can be summarized as a desire for a straightforward interpretation of the dream transformation based on the patient's recent lived conflict. Whereas for Freud, particularly in caricature, snakes are always phalluses, for Rivers, snakes are often just snakes or, as the case may be, the caduceus. Such a postulation does not imply that Rivers is against symbolization in dreams. On the contrary, as noted above, symbolization and the fantastical nature of dreams indicate healing and a move away from the literal repetition

¹⁷ Barker repeatedly invokes these experiments with Henry Head throughout the trilogy, emphasizing how Rivers's medical training and scientific method must adapt when treating patients like Siegfried Sassoon and the fictional Billy Prior. In the second volume of the trilogy, the fictional Rivers recalls his collaboration with Head and notes to himself, that "[i]t had to be remembered Prior was no mere bundle of symptoms, but an extremely complex personality with his own views on his condition" (*The Eye in the Door* 143). See Knutsen for an analysis that links Freudian acting out and working through to Henry Head and Rivers's theory of nerve regeneration, particularly their discovery of protopathic and epicritic nerve fibers (Knutsen aligns the protopathic with acting out and the epicritic with working through) (164).

compulsion. For Rivers, symbolism and figurative language remain the tools of the unconscious, not the analyst. The analyst does the work of translating the dream into a relatively simple and straightforward narrative. If the dream relates its story using defamiliarization, figurative language, and complex symbols, the task of the analyst is akin to re-telling the dream as a realist narrative.

This translation of the dream into a realist narrative reveals why Rivers's revisions to Freud are crucial for understanding Barker's representation of trauma in the trilogy. Barker does not write an aesthetically challenging, "high" modernist text. Although several critics use Caruth and other poststructuralist trauma frameworks to interpret Barker's work, her realism stubbornly resists such theories that celebrate aporia, paradox, and ambiguity. Barker's trilogy is anything but ambiguous in its anti-war message, its frank use of psychoanalytic history and methodology, its explicit reference to cultural studies of the war such as Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*, and its direct borrowing from Sassoon and Owen. While critics cite Baker's intertextuality and tropes of haunting to fit her into contemporary trauma theory, Rivers's theory of trauma presents an alternate frame through which to view Barker's realism. Rivers provides a model of trauma that reclaims realism as therapeutic and an inevitable part of the healing process. Instead of vilifying realism as a form that makes trauma easily consumed and forgotten, realism for Rivers is a necessary part of psychoanalytic treatment. Of course, "healing" is highly problematic in Rivers's case since it implies moving past the event in order to return to the Front. As a result, Barker does not blindly adopt Rivers's methods but rather, as I will argue in the next section, occupies a middle ground between these two poles of trauma theory. On the one hand, Barker adopts what I'm calling Rivers's realism but on the other, she complicates him in her refusal to present a simplistic closure of the event. In other words, Barker mediates the tension

within trauma theory by occupying a middle ground between the endless repetition of melancholia and the working through of mourning via the tension between Rivers and Freud (or at least Freud's legacy among literary critics).

Barker's Dialogue with Rivers and Freud

As discussed above, Barker's use of Rivers's original case study in *Conflict and Dream* is substantial in her portrait of Anderson. While the deliberate borrowings present a crucial intertext for the trilogy, just as significant is what Barker chooses to embellish. For example, Barker greatly elaborates Rivers's introduction to "The 'Suicide' Dream." In the original, Rivers merely states that the patient was serving in France in the RAMC and had a horror of the medical practice after "the death of a French prisoner who had been mortally wounded during his escape from the German lines" (*Conflict* 22). In Barker's version, after Rivers interprets Anderson's dream as a conflict rather than a phallic representation, Anderson admits that his phobia of blood is the reason he cannot practice medicine since he sees it and immediately starts vomiting. He then shares the following story:

"They brought in this lad. He was a Frenchman, he'd escaped from the German lines. Covered in mud, it's five, six inches thick. Bleeding. Frantic with pain. No English." A pause. "I missed it. I treated the minor wounds and missed the major one." He gave a short, hissing laugh. "Not that the minor ones were all that minor. He started to haemorrhage, and...there was nothing I could do. I just stood there and watched him bleed to death." His face twisted. "It pumped out of him." (*Regeneration* 30)

Anderson's ability to tell Rivers this story after the dream analysis indicates the progress made in just one session. Unlike the original in which Rivers reads his patient's written account of the dream and then presents his analysis to the reader, Barker dramatizes the talking cure by posing Rivers and Anderson conversing with one another. Although Anderson is not fully "cured" and remains skeptical of Rivers's methods, the conversation between Rivers and Anderson crucially

displays Barker's insistence on the success of the talking cure and the importance of face-to-face dialogue. For Barker, Anderson *must* articulate the lived experience at the root of his phobia of blood in order to fully convey the significance of the dream and the value of Rivers's methodology.

The success of the talking cure and Barker's subsequent dramatization of it is evident to an even greater degree in another adaptation of Rivers's case studies, this example from "The Repression of War Experience." In this essay Barker finds her model for Burns, a patient appearing throughout *Regeneration* who, with the exception of Billy Prior, presents the greatest clinical challenge Rivers faces. After describing several successful cases in which patients remember and articulate their memories, Rivers presents examples of patients who suffer from experiences that are "so utterly horrible or disgusting, so wholly free from any redeeming feature which can be used as a means of readjusting the attention, that it is difficult or impossible to find an aspect which will make its contemplation endurable" (7). Rivers continues:

Such a case is that of a young officer who was flung down by the explosion of a shell so that his face struck the distended abdomen of a German several days dead, the impact of his fall rupturing the swollen corpse. Before he lost consciousness the patient had clearly realized his situation, and knew that the substance which filled his mouth and produced the most horrible sensations of taste and smell was derived from the decomposed entrails of an enemy. (7)

The patient was subsequently haunted by images of the taste and smell of the corpse and frequently vomited as a result.¹⁸ Rivers goes on to note that the only time the patient experienced relief from his symptoms was when he spent time in the country—the cure often promoted by the medical establishment along with active repression of the traumatic events. Rivers admits that although the patient became better while at the hospital, the dreams still recurred and "it was

¹⁸ See Eric Leed for an interpretation of this case study in terms of the motif of pollution that characterizes the experience of the First World War.

thought best that he should leave the Army and seek the conditions which had previously given him relief” (7).

Barker adapts this case study for Burns, who resists treatment to the point that he is discharged and sent home to the countryside. Burns is introduced as follows:

Rivers had become adept at finding bearable aspects to unbearable experiences, but Burns defeated him. What had happened to him was so vile, so disgusting, that Rivers could find no redeeming feature. He'd been thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell and had landed, head-first, on a German corpse, whose gas-filled belly had ruptured on impact. Before Burns lost consciousness, he'd had time to realize that what filled his nose and mouth was decomposing human flesh. Now, whenever he tried to eat, that taste and smell recurred. Nightly, he relived the experience, and from every nightmare he awoke vomiting. Burns on his knees, as Rivers had often seen him, retching up the last ounce of bile, hardly looked like a human being at all. His body seemed to have become merely the skin-and-bone casing for a tormented alimentary canal. His suffering was without purpose or dignity (*Regeneration* 19)

Clearly, the imagery and scenario directly echo the original case study. Burns appearing inhuman, like “the skin-and-bone casing for a tormented alimentary canal” positions him as the most extreme example that plagues Rivers’s conscience over his complicity in perpetuating this type of mental and physical suffering. Furthermore, the imagery of Burns as pure bodily suffering literalizes the origin of trauma as a wound, both corporeal and psychic.

Despite these obvious overlaps, Barker diverges from Rivers’s account after Burns is discharged from the army. The fictional Rivers pursues Burns to the countryside to try the talking cure one last time. He contemplates why he allowed himself to give up on Burns, thinking, “Surely what had happened to Burns was merely an unusually disgusting version of a common experience” (173). He continues, berating himself for turning Burns’s experience into “some kind of myth. He wasn’t dealing with Jonah in the belly of the whale, still less with Christ in the belly of the earth, he was dealing with David Burns, who’d got his head stuck in the belly of a dead German soldier, and somehow had to be helped to live with the memory” (173). After a

particularly terrifying hallucination that causes Burns to leave the house in the middle of a stormy night, Rivers finds him in a moat that looks like a trench, trembling and fixated on the image of a tower that “gleamed white, like the bones of a skull” (180). The next morning, Burns narrates his time in the trenches. This is an unexpected occurrence for Rivers since “Even in Craiglockhart, where [Burns] couldn’t altogether avoid talking about it, the bare facts of his war service had had to be prised out of him” (182). At this point Barker stops quoting Burns’s speech directly and rather turns to Rivers’s paraphrase, narrating, “Slowly, Burns began to talk” followed by details of his service. Rivers mentally reacts to Burns’s account, thinking “The story was one Rivers was well used to hearing: healthy fear had given way to indifference, and this in turn had given way to a constant, overwhelming fear, and the increasing realization that breakdown was imminent” (183). In the end “[t]hey talked for over an hour” (183). The chapter concludes with Rivers’s prognosis for Burns:

If today really marked a change, a willingness to face his experiences in France, then his condition might improve. In a few years’ time it might even be possible to think of him resuming his education, perhaps pursuing that unexpected interest in theology. Though it was difficult to see him as an undergraduate. He had missed his chance of being ordinary. (184)

Instead of simply dismissing Burns, Barker deliberately poses this meeting with Rivers to insist on the success and necessity of “facing” the traumatic experience and putting it into language. Burns does not remain an exception to Rivers’s method of treatment; he instead becomes a story that is all too common in both Rivers’s case studies and also the literature of the Great War. Although Burns has “missed his chance of being ordinary” compared to civilian noncombatants, Barker transforms him into an entirely ordinary patient. The fact that Barker can paraphrase Burns’s story illustrates just how familiar his account is to Rivers and the contemporary reader. Ultimately, instead of remaining one of Rivers’s failed case studies, Burns appears as a hopeful

example for the possibility of future recovery precisely because, in finally talking about his experience, he has become an “ordinary” war neurotic.

Such optimism for Burns’s future recovery is tempered, however, by the fictional Rivers’s skepticism about the success of the previous session. He notes that Burns will never be fully “cured” because he “had missed his chance of being ordinary.” In this final reflection, Barker refuses to interpret the talking cure as simple catharsis. Instead, even if Burns recovers and faces his memories of the Front, he will never be ordinary, never be entirely healed in the context of peacetime society. On the one hand, by embellishing Rivers’s article, Barker insists upon the success of the talking cure and the necessity of working through the traumatic event in language. On the other hand, she does not simply or superficially rely on such a optimistic “cure” since the patient is fundamentally changed by the traumatic experience and will never be ordinary again. Such a revision displays how Barker occupies a middle ground between a cathartic working through that ignores the continued effects of the traumatic event and endless melancholia. To revisit Anne Whitehead’s observation that Barker seems to “subvert Rivers’s theories at the same time as [she] appears to uphold them” (“Open” 685), we can see here that Barker adapts Rivers’s case studies in order to actually expand their significance and broader relevance for the Freudian talking cure. In her adaptations, she does not subvert Rivers’s theories but rather extends them even further than Rivers himself does. Instead of admitting cases in which the talking cure fails, Barker insists on its success through Burns and Anderson, a success that is not cathartic forgetting but rather a narrative of the event in the form of critical realism.

Instead of turning to Freud to theorize haunting and traumatic nightmares, I argue in the following section that Barker ends up using Freud to theorize the role of sexuality. As mentioned above, Rivers rejects Freud’s seduction theory and dream interpretations based exclusively on

sexual symbolism. In contrast to Rivers's theory of trauma that is almost entirely denuded of sexuality, Barker fuses Rivers with Freud's theories of sexuality in order to derive a conceptualization of trauma much like the Janus-faced Fordian traumatic consciousness torn between Eros and Thanatos. While I do not discount other critics' interpretations of haunting in Barker's work and the validity of using Freud to theorize such symptoms of trauma, I suggest that by combining Rivers's theories with Freud's work on sexuality we can establish new insights into how Barker represents trauma in the trilogy and, in the process, rethink the familiar issue of masculinity, sexuality, and the trauma of the Great War.

Regenerating the *Homo Duplex*

One of the most erotically charged poems of Great War literature is Siegfried Sassoon's "The Kiss" (1918). The poem invokes the bayonet as an image of phallic significance that collapses death and sexuality. The poetic speaker invokes "Brother Lead and Sister Steel" as the two forces he trusts, admiring the bullet's "blind power" and guarding the bayonet's "beauty" from rust (lms 1-4). Although the bullet wins the speaker's "praise" through the way he "spins and burns and loves the air, / And splits a skull", the bayonet "glitters naked, cold and fair" throughout the marching days (5-8). The last stanza privileges the bayonet's power in the following appeal:

Sweet Sister: grant your soldier this:
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward darting kiss. (15-18)

Unlike the bullet's randomness and power that is detached from the individual soldier, the bayonet represents control and individual agency in the act of violence. Thus, the poetic speaker desires to "set his heel" on the unnamed "body" of the foe, an act of dominance and control

heightened by his standing position on top of the victim. The body of the victim “quailing” under the “downward darting kiss” of the bayonet is a sexually charged image that is infused with intense violence—sexual climax and the throes of death intimately linked in these final lines. Despite the feminization of the bayonet as “Sweet Sister,” the phallic significance is not lost on the reader, particularly the reader who is familiar with Sassoon’s biography. Such imagery contributes to how the bayonet has become a symbol within the literature of the Great War for the homoeroticism and intense male friendships developed in the trenches.¹⁹

Barker is well aware of the potency of the bayonet as a symbol for both sexuality and violence. As mentioned in the opening of the chapter, it is her grandfather’s bayonet wound that speaks to her of masculinity, silence, and the legacy of the Great War. The bayonet also resonates with the sword in Tasso’s myth that wounds Clorinda twice, a phallic image fusing violence and sexuality. In the second novel of the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door*, Barker makes the relationship between sexuality and violence explicit during a conversation between Rivers and Charles Manning, an officer who is being “treated” for homosexuality and who is Billy Prior’s lover. While discussing the persecution of homosexuals on the home front, Rivers proposes that society must make the distinction absolutely clear between the “right kind of love” and the intense male bonding in the trenches (156). Rivers goes on to point out that civilians experience a “vicarious” pleasure during war that arouses “sadistic impulses [...] that would normally be repressed,” as seen in Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* when the title character kisses John the Baptist’s severed head (156). Rivers eventually uses this topic to prompt Manning to discuss his war experience. After asking if Manning is familiar with “the strict Freudian view of war neurosis,” Rivers explains:

¹⁹ For example, Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, discusses both the bayonet and the bullet as erotically charged images since they “‘kiss’ or ‘nuzzle’ the body of its adolescent target” in Sassoon, Harte, and Owen’s poetry (160).

“the experience of an all-male environment, with a high level of emotional intensity, together with the experience of battle, arouses homosexual and sadistic impulses that are normally repressed. In vulnerable men—obviously those in whom the repressed desires are particularly strong—this leads to breakdown” (158).²⁰

When Manning asks if that’s what Rivers believes, Rivers deflects his question and says he is only interested in what Manning thinks. Manning admits that he’s not a repressed homosexual and so it is not specific to his breakdown, but when Rivers presses him to think if it is possible, Manning responds by referring to Sassoon’s “The Kiss.” Manning says it is the best poem Sassoon has produced and describes Sassoon’s reputation as a “*bloodthirsty* platoon commander” who could still come back to the billets and take out a notebook and write poetry (158). “The Kiss” succeeds, according to Manning, because it is able to capture both versions of the author (158). Manning goes on to discuss how the army’s attitude toward the bayonet is just as sexually ambiguous as Sassoon’s. From the army’s perspective, close combat is ““proper war. *Manly* war. Not all this nonsense about machine-guns and shrapnel,”” an opinion reflected in the training that is ““one long stream of sexual innuendo. *Stick him in the gooleys. No more little fritzies.* If Sassoon had used language like that, he’d never have been published”” (159).

This discussion between Manning and Rivers captures the unique intersection of sexuality and death characteristic of Great War literature. The bayonet is significant in its phallic potency, and Rivers and Manning’s discussion hedges around stating the literal correlation that is displayed in military training and, by comparison, Sassoon’s subtler homoeroticism. The bayonet also can be read in terms of the *homo duplex*, as a symbol of the interrelationship between Eros

²⁰ Such a “strict Freudian view” of the war neuroses does not actually come directly from Freud. Freud wrote little on the war neuroses but his followers, including Sandor Ferenczi and Ernest Jones, applied Freud’s existing theories directly to the war neuroses. In a statement similar to Rivers’s, Ernest Jones states that during the war, “All sorts of previously forbidden and buried impulses, cruel, sadistic, murderous, and so on, are stirred to greater activity, and the old intrapsychical conflicts, which, according to Freud, are the essential cause of all neurotic disorders, and which had been dealt with before by means of ‘repression’ of one side of the conflict, are now reinforced, and the person compelling to deal with them afresh under totally different circumstances” (48). Jones and Ferenczi both hypothesize a theory of the war neuroses as conforming to narcissism and the desire for self-preservation (self-love), rather than reading them explicitly in terms of repressed homosexual desire, as Barker posits.

and Thanatos. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ford presents the individual minds of Tietjens, Sylvia, and Valentine as oscillating between Eros and Thanatos when faced with violence and traumatic events. Barker's characters also frequently couple Eros and Thanatos in their nightmares, actions, and accounts of the trenches. Billy Prior, however, embodies Ford's *homo duplex* to the greatest degree, literally becoming a split personality in *The Eye in the Door* during his fugue states. Even without the literal splitting of Billy Prior's consciousness, his nightmares and recollections from the Front repeatedly couple sexuality and death. Prior, and his sexually charged repression of war trauma, embodies Barker's major departure from and revision to Rivers's theory of trauma. As *homo duplex*, Prior comes to personify the "downward darting kiss" characteristic of the trauma of the Great War, particularly as it is depicted from Barker's vantage point at the end of the twentieth century.

Yet, given Barker's historical realism, we must detach the *homo duplex* from Fordian Impressionism. Instead of interiorizing and subjectivizing consciousness and the workings of the mind through the *homo duplex*, Barker presents Prior as a figure who externalizes the workings of his consciousness in his analytic sessions with Rivers. Prior articulates flashbacks and nightmares, verbally transporting himself back to the Front while he remains in the safety of the walls of Craiglockhart or in Rivers's office in London. Alternatively, Tietjens is transported between the home front and the trenches in his time-shifts but he never verbalizes the phenomenon to other characters, instead outwardly displaying the taciturnity of the English gentleman throughout *Parade's End*. Such a distinction is significant since it shows how Barker explicitly engages with the history of the Great War as it is passed down through cultural studies, history, personal memoir, and the poetry of Sassoon and Owen. The Great War, from the perspective of the late twentieth century, is a complex and highly mediated dialogue with the

past, instead of Ford's first hand experience that he internalizes through Tietjens's shifting consciousness. As a result, the *homo duplex* is transformed from a figure of internalization to one of externalization through both the dramatization of the talking cure and Barker's intertextual aesthetic.

In addition to formal differences, Barker's version of the *homo duplex* is doubly externalized in Billy Prior: his fictionality within such a densely historical novel and his dreams throughout the trilogy.²¹ In terms of the former, Prior's status as an entirely fictional character is crucial to making him an embodiment of the *homo duplex*, unlike the semi-autobiographical Tietjens. Prior's fictionality allows Barker to narrate his experiences without having to worry about historical authenticity as she does with Rivers, Sassoon, and Owen. Unlike Sassoon's open and Owen's reputed homosexuality that are both weighed down by decades of criticism and biography (and Rivers's ambiguous sexuality that is never definitively established²²), Prior provides a comparatively blank slate onto which Baker can project the overlap between Eros and Thanatos that has come to characterize the literature of the Great War. Prior is depicted as bisexual, promiscuous with both men and women on the home front and with men on the Western Front. Thus, he fuses both the heterosexual tension that occurs throughout Ford's

²¹ Notably, Prior and his dreams are narrated throughout all three volumes of the trilogy, as opposed to the other characters such as Sassoon, Manning, Anderson, and Burns who appear predominantly in a single volume and then not at all or very briefly in the others. The only other character who appears as consistently throughout the three volumes and who also repeatedly narrates and analyzes his dreams is Rivers.

²² Rivers remained a bachelor his entire life, as Richard Slobodin, his biographer, notes. Slobodin paints a portrait of a man who led a "monastic" lifestyle (18) but maintained close friendships with his sister and friends like Henry Head. He does not speculate on Rivers's sexuality, beyond noting the following "[i]t nowhere appears that Rivers was particularly concerned with or for women as such, but he did not share in the dislike or fear of women in higher learning that was widely prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and of which university women from that era tell painful stories" (39). Although she hints at the potential for Rivers's homosexuality through Prior (Rivers has "refused more than one invitation to 'adjourn upstairs'" from Prior (*Ghost Road* 101)), Barker does not explicitly depict Rivers as gay like Sassoon and Charles Manning.

tetralogy in both locales and also the homosexual and homoerotic tension expressed by World War I poets like Sassoon and Owen. As Mark Rawlinson states:

The Eye in the Door begins to tease out the relationship between the violence of fantasy, the violence which is going on abroad (Owen's poetry insists that only soldiers know what this is like) and the violence that has been going on, unacknowledged, behind closed doors in every street in England. (83-4)

Notably, the focus shifts from Rivers and Sassoon to Prior as the central protagonist in *The Eye in the Door*, his storyline establishing this parallel between the persecution of homosexuals and the violence of war. Prior's fictionality also extends to the historical Rivers's publications—Prior does not appear in any of Rivers's texts about the war. Prior's dreams repeatedly highlight the overlap between Eros and Thanatos and, in his analytic sessions with Rivers, he poses the greatest challenge to Rivers's resistance to interpreting the manifest content in terms of sexual symbolism. Unlike Rivers's historical case studies, in which he divests patients' traumatic nightmares of their sexual symbolism, Prior repeatedly forces the fictional Rivers to contemplate the role of sexuality in relation to the trauma of the Great War.

I have chosen to focus primarily on dream interpretation throughout this chapter because the traumatic nightmare becomes an externalized text within the larger trilogy. Just as Rivers externalizes his patients' dreams into case studies, removing them from their original context and author into the pages of his essays, Barker uses dreams as expressions of her fictionalized patients' unconscious desires and conflicts. She further mediates Prior's dreams by narrating them to the reader twice, first when he initially experiences the nightmare and second in his own words during his sessions with Rivers. Unlike the immediacy of the impression in Ford's time-shifts, the dreams are distanced heavily from historical events and lie safely in the realm of fiction or the symbolic language of the unconscious. Barker's reliance on the fictional nature of dreams and their dual narration stems from the crucial difference between dreams and testimony,

the latter describing a lived traumatic event as objectively as possible and making claims to veracity, first-hand witnessing, and authenticity.

Prior's recurring traumatic nightmares center around what has become known as the gob-stopper episode, in which Prior witnesses the deaths of two comrades and finds one of their eyes, which reminds him of a candy gob-stopper, under the duckboards.²³ In *Regeneration*, Prior's recollection of this original traumatic event is prefaced by a discussion of the overlap between sexuality and violence. Reluctant to undergo Rivers's analysis since he wants to be hypnotized, Prior admits that he is able to remember some of his nightmares but says that they wouldn't interest Rivers since they are "*Standard issue battle nightmares*" and "Nothing you wouldn't have heard a hundred times before" (100). He continues, however, admitting:

"*sometimes* they get muddled up with sex. So I wake up, and...' He risked a glance at Rivers. When he spoke again, his voice was causal. 'It makes it really quite impossible to *like* oneself. I've actually woken up once or twice and wondered whether there was any point going on.'" (100)

Rivers agrees to try hypnosis almost immediately after this admission, largely due to the suicidal sentiment Prior expresses. During the subsequent hypnosis, Prior narrates the gob-stopper episode in which he asks himself "What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?" (103) as he holds Towers's eye in his hand. When Prior comes out of the hypnotic state he is immediately disappointed with the memory, demanding, "*Is that all?*" and seeming "beside himself with rage" (104). Such a reaction stems from the realization that the episode precipitating his

²³ See Alistair Duckworth for an extended reading of this episode in conjunction with Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*. He concludes that Barker borrows the gob-stopper episode heavily from Blunden (Blunden's "gobbets of flesh" translated into the gob-stopper) but that we must realize that "a historical novel such as *Regeneration* achieves its most authentic effects on the basis of attested facts; and the recognition, second, that the attested facts, as in *Undertones of War*, are already aesthetically shaped" (67). Although the initial traumatic event comes from Blunden, the prefatory context and Barker's subsequent iterations of this initial content do not trace back to Blunden and thus allow Prior's fictional status to remain largely intact.

breakdown is entirely ordinary for the trauma experienced in the trenches.²⁴ In conjunction with the confession of his emissions during traumatic nightmares, Prior's disappointment is the result of a lack of a sexual trauma that would explain why his nightmares "get muddled up with sex." Rivers forestalls Prior's insistence on a link between Eros and Thanatos by explaining that his breakdown is not a reaction to a single event but rather is an "erosion" that is the result of "Weeks and months of stress in a situation where you can't get away from it" (105). Here, Rivers voices his own theories of war neuroses as resulting from present conflicts and the passivity of the men in the trenches who are helpless to control their fates—neuroses are not the result of repression of homosexual or sadistic impulses, as Freudians posit.

Yet neither Barker nor Prior simply accepts Rivers's interpretation of the original traumatic event. Instead, Barker repeatedly returns to the gob-stopper episode in Prior's nightmares, always pairing it with his sexuality. Thus, just as in the initial occurrence where it is prefaced by Prior's admission of his sexual arousal during traumatic nightmares, during an analytic session in *The Eye in the Door*, Rivers repeatedly reminds us of Prior's confession. Prior first tells Rivers about the painted eye in the door of Beattie Roper's cell and how he had a nightmare about the eye watching him to the point that he woke up stabbing the wall with a knife, thinking he was attacking the eye (68).²⁵ Prior initiates the interpretation, saying "I

²⁴ Anne Whitehead argues that this episode displays how the trilogy questions "the historical status of the traumatic event: Prior's narrative appears to him to be more immediate, more real than the memory of the past that he recovers. A problem thus arises in relation to modernist history: based on notions of narrative and authorship, the past can become the site for a number of competing fictions. In this situation, the most compelling narrative account can become a substitute for the event itself" ("Open" 689). While a compelling interpretation, Whitehead does not address the sexuality that frames the episode and the subsequent iterations of this nightmare throughout the trilogy.

²⁵ One of the major subplots within *The Eye and the Door* concerns the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA) that was passed during World War I and allowed the government much more power in controlling, disciplining, and spying on its citizens. One of the side effects of the law was the widespread campaign against homosexuality, particularly in reinforcing clear demarcations between homosociality of soldiers and explicit homosexuality. Beattie Roper is a working class woman from Prior's hometown who had been imprisoned for attempting to poison Lord George, the Prime Minister. Prior experiences guilt throughout the novel over working for the government on the home front,

suppose Towers is the obvious connection” and noting that he thought about the original gobstopper incident while he was with Beattie since ““later I remembered I used to go and buy gobstoppers from Beattie’s shop”” (69). When Prior becomes sick during the course of the analysis and leaves the room, Rivers contemplates their previous meetings, effectively recapping the earlier scene from *Regeneration* by reminding us that Prior’s “dreams of mutilation and slaughter were accompanied by seminal emissions” (71). Upon Prior’s return, the conversation shifts to Charles Manning who is being treated by Rivers for his homosexuality. Prior harasses Rivers about his efforts to “cure” men of their sexual orientation and probes Rivers about the possibility of patients actually needing to talk about their sexual encounters, alluding to his own experiences with Manning that Barker narrates in the opening chapter (72). Prior proposes, ““Suppose I’m racked with guilt?”” followed by an admission that ““No. I don’t seem to feel sexual guilt, you know. At all, really. About anything”” (73). Rivers reminds the reader a second time of Prior’s original confession, mentally responding, “Not true [...] Prior had felt enormous guilt about the nocturnal emissions that accompanied his nightmares. Guilt about an involuntary action” (73). He does not force Prior to think about this, however, and Prior instead discusses how he felt guilty about sex when he was twelve and was taught not to masturbate. He then mentions his childhood friend Mac’s sexual prowess at the time and how he convinced Prior that the headmaster’s prohibition of masturbation was wrong (73-4). This discussion leads Rivers back to the dream analysis, noting that the conversation had made Prior look “much more relaxed” (74). Yet the repeated references to Prior’s sexual guilt and his past sexual experiences are not simply detours from the dream analysis. Rather, Barker deliberately places this discussion of sexuality

seeing it as a betrayal of his working class roots and exhibits symptoms of paranoia over the surveillance caused by DORA and his own homosexual activities.

in the middle of the dream analysis to emphasize how sexuality and violence are intimately linked in the context of the Great War, even if Rivers refuses to acknowledge the connection.

When they eventually return to analyzing the dream, Prior parrots Rivers's theory of conflict, saying that if "Dreams are attempts to resolve conflict" he cannot see any conflict in the dream of himself stabbing the eye in the wall (74). Rivers disagrees, linking the manifest content to Prior's visit with Beattie Roper and asking Prior leading questions about who the spy was in that scenario. Prior responds "in a disgusted singsong, jabbing with his index finger" that "'eye' was stabbing myself in the 'I'. And God knows one wouldn't want a reputation for puns like that!" (75). Prior admits, regardless of the poor pun, that such an interpretation is possible and Rivers ends the session by asking Prior to keep a journal of his dreams. Prior's singsong parody shows how fully he has internalized Rivers's methods and, in this case, he settles for Rivers's interpretation that disavows an explicitly sexual link. In contrast, Barker interrupts this scene of dream analysis between Rivers and Prior with a flashback to Prior's sexual past, just as she prefaces the original gob-stopper narration with Prior's sexual confession. Barker, who has also internalized Rivers's methods, extends Rivers's ideas to insist on a link between Eros and Thanatos through the repeated pairing of past and present sexuality in the context of the traumatic nightmare. Yet, notably, such a link is implicit and does not rely on sexual symbolism. Unlike a classic Freudian analysis, in which the manifest content would be firmly equated with a schema of sexual symbols, the dream is merely juxtaposed with information about Prior's sexual history. Barker thus resists fully conforming to Freudian dream interpretation, instead remaining faithful to Rivers's idea of conflict with the addition of a version of Eros not tied exclusively to Freud.

Barker's stance on the interdependence of sexuality and violence is even clearer in the initial "eye in the door" dream. Before going to bed, Prior moves through a series of recollections including his time at the Front, his meeting with Beattie in prison, and his relationship with her as a child. The memories revolve around a precise moment from Prior's childhood when he went into Beattie's shop to buy candy. He thinks of Beattie as a maternal figure, having lived with her for a year while his mother was sick (56). To reinforce the pseudo-Oedipal nature of the memory, Prior recalls encountering a local woman in Beattie's shop who smokes a cigarette while breast-feeding her son, "puffing and sucking alternately" the baby "peering round the white curve at Prior" (55).²⁶ In the middle of this scene, he recollects Beattie's patience "as if she hadn't said all this a million times before, reel[ing] off the list" of candies, ending with "his favourite because it lasted so long—a gob-stopper" (55). In the midst of this parallel between sucking on a gob-stopper and the baby sucking on his mother's breast, Prior immediately thinks about Tower's eye lying in his hand and his question "*What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?*" (55). These recollections are then followed at the end of the chapter with Prior's nightmare of stabbing the eye in the door that he analyzes with Rivers the following day.

Barker deliberately prefaces the nightmare with this Oedipal sexual imagery just as she interrupts the dream analysis with Prior's sexual past and reminders of his arousal during war nightmares. Significantly, Prior omits the obviously Freudian elements of his waking thoughts that precede the dream from the account he gives Rivers. Such an omission, like the earlier phallic interpretation of Anderson's dream, displays Barker's implicit conversation with the

²⁶ This imagery of breast-feeding is explicitly sexualized later when Prior recalls being breast-fed by two local, working class women when his mother was ill. Upon returning to his hometown he ends up having sex with one of them, "feeling every taboo in the whole fucking country crash round his ears" as "he sucked Mrs Riley's breasts" (117).

contemporary reader who shares a cultural knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis. Thus, we are presented first with Prior's experience that conforms to a Freudian interpretation and then in the next chapter we are given Rivers's interpretation based on Prior's current lived conflict over betraying Beattie in his position as intelligence officer. Although Rivers gets the last word in this example, Prior's interjection of his sexual memories during the session illustrates Barker's continual insistence on pairing sexuality and violence, even when largely conforming to Rivers's theory of conflict. In short, through Prior, Barker continually juxtaposes sexuality and violence. Prior makes a comment to this effect during the memory sequence leading up to the nightmare: "The past is a palimpsest. [...] Early memories are always obscured by accumulations of later knowledge" (55). Such a statement clearly describes both the gob-stopper's recurring presence in Prior's dreams, layered with his past and present sexual encounters along with his trench experience, and also Barker's intertextual aesthetic.

Perhaps the strongest link between sexuality and violence occurs five chapters after the analysis of the eye in the door nightmare. Prior tells Rivers that he's had another nightmare, but this time he's walking in a desert and an eyeball appears on the path ahead of him. It was not life-size but rather "Huge. And alive. And it was directly in front of me and I knew this time it was going to get me. [...] Do whatever it is eyeballs do" (133). The dream ends with Prior jumping in a river to get away from it and he concludes the narration with a jab at Rivers that "I suppose all your patients jump into fucking rivers sooner or later, don't they?" (133). As they start to analyze the dream, Prior is openly hostile to the process, expressing his frustration over not remembering anything that occurs in his fugue states but being plagued by these unforgettable nightmares. He starts to analyze Rivers, pointing out that he covers his eyes during conversations when things seem to strike a nerve. Rivers explains that he has no visual memory

and then as Prior continues to badger him with questions, Rivers gets fed up and makes Prior switch seats with him. He says that he's "going to show you how boring this job is" and precedes to "offer Prior an illustration from his own experience that he'd already used several times in public lectures" (137). Rivers then recounts a story from his childhood about how he lost his visual memory when he was five but can remember his childhood home in vivid detail, except the upstairs—a story which appears in almost exactly the same way in the historical Rivers's version in *Instinct and the Unconscious*. Prior's immediate response to Rivers's story is: "You were raped. [...] Or beaten" (137). Such a quick conclusion that sexual trauma must be the source of Rivers's lack of visual memory shocks the fictional Rivers who says he doesn't think he was (137).²⁷ Prior responds glibly that "No, well, you wouldn't, would you? The whole point is it's too terrible to contemplate" (137). They then discuss how the parish priest sexually abused Prior when he was a child. Instead of focusing on Prior's childhood sexual trauma, however, they come back to Rivers's lack of visual memory, Rivers admitting that his stammer started around the same time. When Rivers says he wasn't implying there was a connection, Prior exclaims, "For God's sake. Whatever it was you *blinded* yourself so you wouldn't have to go on seeing it" (139). Rivers continues to resist Prior's sexual interpretation, proposing benign alternatives such as a dressing gown or a big dog as the cause of a childhood fear exaggerated by imagination. Prior rejects these explanations, concluding, "You destroyed your visual memory. You put your mind's eye *out*" (139).

Prior's interpretation repeats his singsong parroting of Rivers's method in the previous session. Here, Prior interprets Rivers putting his "mind's eye out" and "blinding himself" to the

²⁷ In the original account in *Instinct and the Unconscious*, Rivers does not indicate a trauma of any kind as the cause of his lack of visual memory, specifically the complete blank in his memory of the upper floor of his childhood home. Instead, he notes that he has been unable to come up with an explanation although he sometimes has "the sense that something is there, lying very near emergence into consciousness" (13). He ends up using the anecdote as an example of experiences that pass into the unconscious at any age (14).

traumatic memory just as Prior, in the eye in the door dream, concludes that “‘eye’ was stabbing myself in the ‘I.’” According to Prior, given the full context of his palimpsestic past, Prior’s blinding has a sexual source just as Rivers’s stammer and lack of visual memory are rooted in sexual trauma. Rivers reluctantly accepts this interpretation, saying that this must be what happened (139). After the session ends, however, Barker narrates Rivers’s private reflection that the assumption of a “totally traumatic explanation” for his lack of visual memory reveals “more about Prior than he was aware of” (140). Instead of admitting that Prior’s interpretation could be possible, Rivers recalls Prior’s sexual confessions, noting that “He might talk about being incapable of sexual guilt, but, Rivers thought, he was deeply ashamed of his sadistic impulses, even frightened of them” (143). Rivers concludes that Prior’s insistence on a sexual origin for his traumatic nightmares is a symptom of his fugue states since Prior “believed in the monsters—and whatever Rivers might decide to do, or refrain from doing—Prior’s belief in them would inevitably give them power” (143-4). Rivers thus remains skeptical of the strict Freudian interpretation of the neuroses, seeing sexuality as the monster that is not necessarily always there since sometimes a simple explanation, like a dog or a dressing gown, is the cause of the traumatic nightmare. In aligning sexuality with more figurative interpretations, Rivers again insists on straightforward interpretation, as discussed above. Although Barker repeatedly juxtaposes sexuality and trauma, they are never definitively linked, unlike her repeated reinforcement of Rivers’s straightforward interpretations.

Despite such privileging of Rivers’s theories, Prior as *homo duplex* allows Barker to put the Freudian view of sexuality in conversation with Rivers’s theories of conflict. Prior’s embodiment of the *homo duplex* is translated from analytic sessions with Rivers to the Western Front in *The Ghost Road*, the final volume of the trilogy. This is the only novel to actually

narrate warfare at the Front; the first two novels restrict themselves to the home front and direct narration of the war is confined to flashbacks, nightmare, and conversations with Rivers. In fulfilling Rivers's request for data about how his methods succeed in patients who return to battle, Prior promises to keep a journal and to send Rivers letters about his experiences. Instead of acting as an omniscient narrator and representing the lived experience of her characters at the Front (including Owen), Barker narrates warfare through these dated journal entries and letters, which maintain a critical distance from the events described. As in his sessions with Rivers, Prior continues to act as *homo duplex*, translating the overlap between Eros and Thanatos from unconscious suggestion in dreams to lived events in the trenches. For example, in one of the most memorable passages of the trilogy, Prior records in his journal a sexual encounter with a local French boy. The boy first greets Prior in German and Prior is aroused by the thought that "on the other side of that tight French sphincter, [is] German spunk", not literally but "there nevertheless, the shadowy figures one used to glimpse through periscopes in the trenches, and my tongue reaching out for them" (248). The image collapses the difference between enemies, here sharing a common humanity in the form of sexual desire and bodily emission. The semen of the German equated to the "shadowy figures" glimpsed across No Man's Land further literalizes the analogy. The canal bank setting also echoes Prior's observation, during an early analytic session in *Regeneration*, that he feels like going over the top during marches is "sexy" (*Regeneration* 78). Although Rivers disregards this comment at the time (like he does with most of Prior's comments about sexuality), Prior returns to this memory in his journals, writing that he doesn't "think [Rivers] believed me, but actually there *was* something in common—racing blood, risk, physical exposure, a kind of awful *daring* about it. (Obviously I'm not talking about sex in bed.)" (*Ghost Road* 172). Such sensations are akin to his illicit encounter with the French

boy on the canal bank—another moment of physical exposure containing an “awful daring about it.” Such an intersection between sexuality and battle, particularly the iconic Great War act of going over the top, displays what kind of *homo duplex* Prior is, one who externalizes and literalizes such correlations between Eros and Thanatos.

In an interview, Barker admits that she “loves” this scene on the canal bank where German, English, and French all collide in a sexual act (Garland 197). She also says that readers are shocked by the encounter between Prior and the French boy and that she wishes she “could say the shock was equal” when the men meet on another canal bank in the battle that kills Prior and Owen at the end of the trilogy (196). Although she admits that the shock of the two meetings is not equal, she concludes, “perhaps it ought to be” (196). The episode is shocking in its blunt statement of sexuality just as the violence of the Great War is, or should be, shocking. Despite this effective analogy between the two canal banks, Prior later censors the incident in his journal. The night before the attack that kills him, he rereads his description of the encounter with the French boy and writes that he “tore out and burned [it]. Another canal bank meeting awaits—but this time the sort people approve of” (255). Prior, in his final journal entry, like Barker, directly equates the two encounters: one of sexual desire and the other of violent death. Yet it is Prior’s self-censorship that becomes shocking here, the analogy between sexuality and death lost to his imagined reader—Rivers. Such an exclusion illustrates the journal’s status as an extension of his psychoanalytic sessions. Just as he omits the Oedipal connotations surrounding his eye in the door dream in order to privilege Rivers’s interpretation of current, lived conflict, here he similarly privileges Rivers’s methods by editing out the sexuality so inherent to his specific experience of trauma. Prior thus embodies the *homo duplex* while simultaneously acting as a

surrogate for Rivers, carrying on the dialogue so fundamental to Barker's aesthetic even when released from the psychoanalytic couch.

Coda: Critical Realism's Silences

Barker's trilogy is ultimately an act of collective and personal remembrance of the Great War enacted through conversation, either in the talking cure or in self-analysis, both derived from Rivers's methods and their complex intersections with Freud and contemporary trauma culture. As discussed above, Barker privileges Rivers's interpretations throughout the trilogy. The final interpretation of the origin of Rivers's characteristic stammer and lack of visual memory is no exception. In the first half of *The Ghost Road*, in a series of memories recounted during self-analysis, Rivers recollects a painting of his namesake having his leg amputated while stoically refusing to cry out. Rivers connects this painting with a memory from his childhood of crying out while getting his hair cut only to be slapped on the leg by his father, being told that he should be silent like his namesake (94-5). Barker describes this memory as occurring to Rivers "Quite casually, a bubble breaking on the surface" (94). After this memory bursts into consciousness, Rivers realizes that he has "been stammering ever since" and that he started avoiding the painting of his ancestor at all costs, questioning if he "deliberately suppressed the visual image of it" (95). Rivers thinks back to Prior's argument that he must have been raped or beaten to put his mind's eye out in such a dramatic fashion. Instead of "Prior's lurid imaginings," Rivers contemplates how this seemingly trivial incident is actually not trivial at all but speaks to the core of the trauma of the Great War that stems from the culture of the British stiff upper lip (96). It is not the blood or violence in the painting that attracts his attention now but rather the silence, "that resolutely clenched mouth" that contrasts the twitching mouths of his patients, who

he encourages to “cry” and “grieve” but simultaneously tells to “stop crying. Get up on your feet. Walk” (96). Rivers concludes that “[h]e both distrusted that silence and endorsed it” (96).

Such meditations reveal Rivers’s ambivalence about the success of his talking cure; he insists on its necessity to combat shell shock yet questions the ends to which it is used since the cure ends up returning soldiers to the Front. Although he encourages the soldiers to talk, cry, and grieve, he also silences them, particularly their protest as in the case of Sassoon. Prior’s journal entries reflect this paradox between speech and silence—he narrates his experience with the French boy on the canal bank but then censors himself in the final entry. Barker also illustrates this tension in her portrayal of Rivers and Prior’s relationship. On the one hand, she voices (and allows the reader to imagine) a Freudian interpretation of trauma through Prior (that Rivers must have been raped or beaten). On the other hand, she respects the historical Rivers by inventing this comparatively innocent memory bubble that explains both his stammer and lack of visual memory.²⁸ What I’ve been calling Barker’s version of the *homo duplex*, therefore, provides a means to link Freud’s theories on externally traumatic sexual events with Rivers’s theory of trauma.

In the climactic conclusion of the trilogy, Prior as *homo duplex* illustrates this point, embodying Eros and Thanatos as well as Rivers and Freud’s respective theories of trauma. In one of his last journal entries, Prior records the battle in which a fellow soldier, Hallet, suffers a gruesome head wound and is eventually rescued from No Man’s Land. Prior prefaces the description of the battle with the following observation on the imperative to remember but the inherent flaws in memory:

²⁸ Slobodin does not speculate on the cause of Rivers’s stammer and loss of visual memory. He simply mentions that Rivers stammered badly in an overview of Rivers’s adolescence and notes that Rivers’s was on the roster for his father’s classes to cure stammering when he was twelve (8). Slobodin also mentions the story of Rivers’s namesake (but not the painting) who lost his leg in battle (3).

What can one say? And yet I've got to write something because however little I remember now I'll remember less in years to come. And it's not true to say one remembers nothing. A lot of it you know you'll never forget, and a few things you'll pray to forget and not be able to. But the connections go. Bubbles break on the surface like they do on the flooded craters round here—the ones that've been here years and have God knows what underneath. (192)

Echoing Rivers's earlier image of memory as a bubble bursting, Prior here translates the image to the trenches and powerfully fuses psychology and the trauma of the war. Memory emerges from a shell hole, like a bubble that rises from the murky depths of the unconscious to burst into consciousness. Despite the inevitable failure of language to express the horrors of his experience ("What can one say?"), Prior writes his memories to preserve them for himself and also to keep the promise to Rivers to record his experiences. He repeatedly mentions the failure of language to express memory, his final journal entry acknowledging the fact that "words didn't mean anything any more. Patriotism honour courage vomit vomit vomit. Only the names meant anything. Mons, Loos, the Somme, Arras, Verdun, Ypres" (257). Such names signify the homosocial bonds forged in the trenches between soldiers that do not translate to those who were not there. Along with the names, "there's another group of words that still mean something" to Prior, words that "trip through sentences unregarded: us, them, we, they, here, there" (257). Just as traumatic memories burst to the surface of consciousness like bubbles in a shell crater, these small words will "lie about in the language, like the unexploded grenades in these fields, and any one of them'll take your hand off" (257). When those memories belatedly burst into consciousness and are verbalized in the language of homosociality, in either psychoanalytic sessions or in conversation between veterans, they explode with the power of grenades.

Prior's final journal entries from the Front channel Rivers by repeating the imagery of memory as a bubble bursting to reveal the tension between speech and silence when confronted with the traumatic past. After writing this reflection on memory, Prior describes "[t]wo bubbles"

that break from a recent battle, one of a comrade sliding back into the trench “with a red hole in his forehead and an expression of mild surprise on his face” (193). The other is “the bayonet work. Which I will not remember” (193). Prior continues, carrying on an imagined conversation, since he knows “Rivers would say, remember now—any suppressed memory stores up trouble for the future. Well, too bad. Refusing to think’s the only way I can survive and anyway what future?” (193). Unlike Barker’s typical method of interrupting analytic sessions between Rivers and Prior with “suppressed memory,” particularly regarding sexuality, here Barker respects Prior’s silence. This bayonet work is never narrated in Prior’s journals. Similarly, it is not retroactively censored like the memory of his sexual encounter on the canal bank. Instead, Prior entirely refuses to narrate the experience and the horror of it is left to the reader’s imagination. Prior has become autonomous, writing independently of both Barker and Rivers in his choice to remain silent about the bayonet work. Such an act of censorship speaks to Barker’s own refusal to narrate certain traumatic experiences that are impossible to describe given her historical belatedness and inability to access the actual event, an acknowledgement also apparent in her paraphrase of Burns’s experience in the trenches. Although Rivers tells the reader that Burns finally begins talking, Barker does not directly quote Burns’s speech and his testimony remains an absence in the pages of the trilogy, just as it remains silent in the archive as one of Rivers’s failed case studies. Billy Prior’s censorship of the bayonet work condenses the symbolic significance of the bayonet into a final refusal to speak that mirrors Barker’s grandfather’s bayonet wound, which remains stubbornly silent across generations. Although Barker’s trilogy regenerates Rivers’s unique psychoanalytic method and gives voice to the Great War at a time in British history when first-hand witnesses were disappearing, she simultaneously respects such

silences, acknowledging the imperative to remember but also the impossibility of speaking for veterans like her grandfather.

CHAPTER THREE

Wartime Affirmation: *Between the Acts* and Heidegger's Ontology of Death

I begin with two moments of death, both imagined in literary form and both arising from the Second World War. The first comes from Virginia Woolf's diary. Just over a year into the war, Woolf is permanently residing in the country, at Monk's House, and recording daily raids over the village of Rodmell. Planes, bombs, and air raid sirens are frequent notes resonating throughout the diary from this period. In an entry dated 2 October 1940, she begins with the query "Ought I not to look at the sunset rather than write this?" (326). In an effort to appreciate the view and continue writing, she records Leonard gathering apples from the garden, the smoke from a train across the downs, cows grazing, the elm tree "sprinkling its little leaves against the sky," and the "solemn stillness" held by the evening air (326). Such a bucolic setting, of course, will be disturbed, precisely at "8.30 when the cadaverous twanging in the sky begins; the planes going to London" but Woolf continues to write, noting "its an hour still to that" (326). This peaceful countryside and the war metaphorically collide in her recollection of the previous night when "A plane had passed dropping this fruit" (326), the bomb falling so near to the house that both she and Leonard started. Echoing her initial question, upon remembering this event she now asks if she should instead "think of death" given its nearness since "[the bombs] get closer every time" (326). Such reflections lay the ground for the following visualization of what dying in an air raid would be like:

Oh I try to imagine how one's killed by a bomb. I've got it fairly vivid—the sensation: but cant see anything but suffocating nonentity following after. I shall think—oh I wanted another 10 years—not this—& shant, for once, be able to describe it. It—I mean death; no, the scrunching & scrambling, the crushing of my bone shade in on my very active eye & brain: the process of putting out the light, —painful? Yes. Terrifying. I suppose so— Then a swoon; a drum; two or three gulps attempting consciousness— & then, dot dot dot. (*Diary V* 326-7)

Woolf's imagined instant of death is notable for its self-reflexivity and preoccupation with how, if at all, such an event can be rendered in language. The dashes, choppy prose, and final "dot dot dot" visually illustrate the difficulty, arguably the impossibility, of representing death. She admits this frustration and defeat saying she "shant, for once, be able to describe it." The "it" intimately links her life with the ability to write, "it" referring to her inability to describe both the bombing but also her desire for continued existence, for "another 10 years" versus "this," the war and such a violent end that is out of her control. However, her own clarification forestalls this interpretation: "It—I mean death." It is death that is indescribable, death that interrupts her attempts to both write and live. Yet the semicolon and "no" further suspend this clarification. It is not only death itself that cannot be described but also the moments and seconds leading up to death, the literal "scrunching & scrambling, the crushing of my bone shade" that will destroy her "very active eye & brain." The instant of death shifts here from the actual moment of "putting out the light" to the bodily sensations immediately preceding it. She imagines swooning, gulping for air and a final attempt at consciousness "—& then, dot dot dot." She can and does imagine the physical sensations that lead up to this instant but the actual moment resists language and instead becomes a verbalization of silence. The ellipsis, a punctuation mark symbolizing an omission that cannot be voiced, is nevertheless spelled out, as John Whittier-Ferguson observes, to "gesture toward the emptiness that follows, on the page, after the voice has been stilled, the writing stopped" (248).¹

¹ See Whittier-Ferguson's full article for an excellent reading of this passage in terms of the differences between Woolf's later work and her novels of the 1920s. Unlike the early work, he proposes that "Woolf's late fiction [...] brings us often to this point where we see her working with the minima of language, all that was discarded or spectacularly repurposed by high modernism: catch-phrases, clichés, conversational filler, recycled parts of other books, cultural commonplaces—the devices that allow articulation to go on, even when there's not much new to say" (248). Roger Poole also analyzes this passage but in terms of how Woolf saw her suicide as a choice, arguing that a death by water was comforting to Woolf and "As to actually dying, her reaction is almost resigned, philosophical: 'I shall think—oh I wanted another 10 years—not this'. It is being killed 'by a bomb' that terrifies her" (*Unknown* 276).

The second imagined death is from Maurice Blanchot's 1994 work *L'Instant de la mort* (*The Instant of My Death*), which also takes the difficulty of writing one's death as its occasion. The narrative relates an event that actually happened to Blanchot in 1944 when he was sentenced to death but escaped. Instead of a straightforward memoir, the piece is framed as a prose narrative with an unnamed narrator recalling the story of a Frenchman who was sentenced to death but escapes when the firing squad, which turns out to be Russian, lets him go while the Nazi lieutenant is distracted by the explosion of a nearby battle.² The narrator begins the narrative with: "I remember a young man—a man still young—prevented from dying by death itself—and perhaps the error of injustice" (3). Blanchot proceeds to depict the "death" of the Frenchman, as follows:

I know—do I know it—that the one at whom the Germans were already aiming, awaiting but the final order, experienced then a feeling of extraordinary lightness, a sort of beatitude (nothing happy, however)—sovereign elation? The encounter of death with death?

In his place, I will not try to analyze. He was perhaps suddenly invincible. Dead—immortal. Perhaps ecstasy. Rather the feeling of compassion for suffering humanity, the happiness of not being immortal or eternal. Henceforth, he was bound to death by a surreptitious friendship. (5)

The narrator's hesitation in the dashes, questions, parenthetical asides, and repetition of "perhaps" relates the difficulty, even the impossibility, of describing the death of oneself and of another (since the Frenchman, the narrator, and Blanchot are all versions or shades of one another). He "knows" that the man experienced a "feeling of extraordinary lightness" [*un sentiment de légèreté extraordinaire*] but immediately questions such knowledge, grasping for

² Such a narrative is further complicated by the story's English publication in the same volume as Jacques Derrida's interpretation of it, *Demeure*, in which he cites a letter from Blanchot describing the actual event. In this letter, Blanchot writes "'July 20. Fifty years ago, I knew the happiness of nearly being shot to death'" (52) followed by Derrida's response, "Like this sentence, this letter does not belong to what we call literature. It testifies, as I am testifying here, in a space supposedly unrelated to fiction in general and the institution of literature in particular. But it says the same thing. It testifies to the reality of the event that seems to form the referent of this literary narrative entitled *The Instant of My Death* and published as literary fiction" (52).

synonyms (“ecstasy”? “elation”? “invincibility”?) to capture the experience accurately. The feeling of lightness stands in marked contrast to the definitive statement “Dead—immortal” [*Mort—immortel*]. This short phrase moves the narrative from the lightness of the moment of death to the fixity of death in the past tense that becomes equated, by the gap and silence of the dash, with the solidity of immortality. Yet such lightness emanates from the happiness of *not* being immortal and eternal; the realization of one’s mortality and the imminence of death is what grants such lightness.

As the narrative continues, Blanchot persistently returns to the impossibility of expressing this feeling of lightness, a feeling that is intricately wound up in awaiting death’s arrival. After the Frenchman escapes, the narrator observes “[t]here remained, however, at the moment when the shooting was no longer but to come, the feeling of lightness that I would not know how to translate: freed from life? the infinite opening up?” (7). He repeats these doubts over his ability to translate the experience, relying on imagination rather than firm knowledge, in the admission: “I know, I imagine that this unanalyzable feeling changed what there remained for him of existence” (8). Indeed the narrator’s inability to find a translation, for the “feeling of lightness” [*le sentiment de légèreté*] speaks to the impossibility of voicing the instant of death and echoes Woolf’s attempt to depict the experience in the visual language of punctuation. The critical distance established between the protagonist, narrator, and author is heightened through such self-reflexivity and the repeated acknowledgement that the narrator is only approximating, “imagining” what “this unanalyzable feeling” was like for the Frenchman, but also for Blanchot who attempts to translate it to a reader fifty years after the event. Blanchot characteristically establishes a slippage between these three figures (the “I” and “he”) throughout, heightening the theme of substitution in death: the protagonist escapes death only to discover later that three

farmers were executed in his place. As Hent de Vries notes, the weight of his guilt over their deaths stands in sharp contrast to the lightness he experiences upon escaping.³

Both Woolf and Blanchot imagine death as a form of anticipation: Woolf awaits the seemingly inevitable death by a bomb and the Frenchman awaits the shots from the firing squad. After these actual and imagined experiences, both authors are left still awaiting death due to their mortality. Yet whereas Woolf imagines the moment of death in terms of concrete physical sensations in which bone fragments literally pierce her brain, Blanchot repeatedly focuses on abstraction in the feeling of lightness so intricately tied to awaiting death's arrival. Part of this abstraction stems from the fact that the Frenchman's death is a death in the realm of language since the execution verdict is a speech act (the actual death sentence remains an absence within the pages of the text, however). In other words, he is alive but simultaneously "already" dead, or as the narrator states, it is "As if the death outside of him could only henceforth collide with the death in him. 'I am alive. No, you are dead' [*Je suis vivant. Non, tu es mort*]" (9).⁴ Here, Blanchot again slips between pronouns, using the first person to make the easy observation "I am alive" but then moving to the second person for "you are dead." Similarly, Woolf glides between pronouns, imagining how "one" dies from a bomb but then shifting into the first person throughout the description of her body only to erase pronouns all together with "dot dot dot"—the unspeakable ellipsis signaling the moment of death. These pronoun shifts and Blanchot's

³ See de Vries's article for an extended interpretation of Blanchot's narrative, particularly for his observation that Blanchot's texts about death "are marked by the transition from the first- to the third-person singular, substituting the 'il' for the 'je.' It is as if [...] the event of death can only be grasped by analyzing the death of the other or, more precisely, by appropriating my own death as the death of an other, that is to say, by not appropriating it at all" (52). Derrida also discusses this theme in *Demeure*, expanding the focus to broader issues of substitution and citation in language and within the canon of philosophical literature on testimony (particularly Emmanuel Levinas's work).

⁴ Derrida, in his interpretation of Blanchot, discusses the verdict as a speech act at length and relates this to his argument for testimony as a speech act and an event that is an impossible possibility. Shoshana Felman also describes testimony as a speech act in her canonical work on the subject, arguing emphatically that "To testify—to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one's own speech as material evidence for truth—is to accomplish a *speech act*, rather than to simply formulate a statement" (5).

quoted statement “I am alive. No you are dead” cut to the heart of the autobiographical paradox that the genre depicts a life but can never narrate the instant of death. In short, the statement “I am dead” remains an impossibility for both writers.

I take these two narratives of death as my starting point not only because they both emerge out of the Second World War but also—and more importantly—because they encapsulate poststructuralist trauma theory’s fixation on the difficulty, arguably the impossibility, of representing death in language. Within trauma theory, the inability to narrate the instant of one’s death extends to the broader issue of testimony and the notion that language fails to fully and objectively describe the traumatic event. Such an issue gains urgency in legal debates surrounding the Holocaust, given the imperative to provide testimony and historical documentation of the atrocity. Blanchot’s text occupies a central position in such discussions of testimony, in no small part due to Jacques Derrida’s extended interpretation of it in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (published jointly in English with Blanchot in 2000). In this essay, Derrida deconstructs Blanchot’s narrative to illustrate how testimony is always tainted by fiction—since testimony is a linguistic phenomenon, it is subject to citationality, thus undermining the exemplarity and singularity of death and traumatic events. Derrida goes so far as to suggest that the very possibility of testimony depends upon this affiliation with fiction, stating, “In order to remain testimony, it must therefore allow itself to be haunted. It must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the *possibility*, at least, of literature” (29-30). Derrida thus proposes that testimony is an “impossible possibility” since it, by definition and for legal purposes, must linguistically and objectively capture the traumatic

event but inherently fails due to this parasitic and spectral affiliation with literature.⁵ Derrida formulates this aporia of testimony as follows:

In saying: I swear to tell the truth, where I have been the only one to see or hear and where I am the only one who can attest to it, this is true to the extent that anyone who *in my place*, at that instant, would have seen or heard or touched the same thing and could repeat it exemplarily, universally, the truth of my testimony. The exemplarity of the “instant,” that which makes it an “instance,” if you like, is that it is singular, like any exemplarity, singular *and* universal, singular *and* universalizable. The singular must be universalizable; this is the testimonial condition. (41)

According to Derrida, testimony is a speech act that is caught between singularity and universality, the fact that “the instant makes testimony both possible and impossible at the same time” (33). The difficulty of testifying to an instant of trauma is compounded by the impossibility of testifying to the instant of death itself.

Yet the formulation of testimony as an impossible possibility found in Derrida’s deconstruction of Blanchot’s literary instant of death, originates not in Blanchot but in Martin Heidegger’s ontological study of death in *Being and Time* (1927).⁶ Because Derrida writes explicitly about testimony and the Holocaust, Heidegger’s writing on death as an ontological phenomenon has been brushed aside in the majority of poststructuralist trauma theory (particularly within literary studies). Instead, critics imitate Derrida’s deconstructive methodology in order to apply it to trauma more broadly and specific literary representations.⁷

⁵ Derrida makes a similar claim about testimony as an “impossible possibility” in his article “The Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event.” In that article, he extends the formulation beyond testimony to other aporias such as forgiveness, confession, the gift, hospitality, and invention. See Sara Guyer for an analysis of how testimony is ordered by a figurative language that reanimates central concerns in Romantic poetry.

⁶ Other scholars, particularly in the discipline of continental philosophy, have pointed out this conflation between Blanchot, Heidegger, and Derrida on the subject of death. For example, see Iain Thomson for a careful explication of Derrida’s engagement with Heidegger in *Aporias*, a work that Thomson concludes offers interesting arguments about death but ultimately “turns out to be Blanchotian themes read into Heidegger’s text” (34).

⁷ An exception is the trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra who cites Heidegger, particularly in his most recent work *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*, but predominantly in terms of Heidegger’s late work on poetic and performative works of art that present opportunities to question humanist paradigms of intellectual history.

Thus, critics like Cathy Caruth follow Derrida in theorizing trauma in terms of aporia, arguing that the language of trauma is one “that defies, even as it claims, our understanding” (5). Elaine Scarry shows how trauma and pain “destroy” language and unmake the victim’s world but, nevertheless, it is language, through a long process of reconstruction, which ends up remaking that world. And, as a final example, Shoshana Felman, without reference to Derrida or Heidegger, interprets Claude Lanzmann’s canonical film *Shoah* as one that affirms “the *necessity of testimony*” that “derives, paradoxically enough, from the *impossibility of testimony*” (224). Such statements by the founding figures in trauma theory for literary critics illustrate the ubiquitous acceptance of the maxim that trauma is an impossible possibility since literary representations of historically traumatic events must obey the imperative to “never forget” but simultaneously acknowledge their inevitable failure to capture fully those events.⁸

While compelling and important, ultimately, this dominant narrative within contemporary trauma theory overemphasizes impossibility and the failure of language at the expense of Heidegger’s original thesis centered upon possibility and potentiality. For Heidegger, the possibility for *Dasein* to achieve an authentic understanding of the entirety of its being is revealed through *Dasein*’s mortality and resultant anticipation of death. Existence in *Being and Time* is defined by potentiality; the possibility that authentic being in the world will be disclosed to the individual stems precisely from the awareness that she will die. According to Heidegger, death is always a possibility that can occur at any moment and authentically existing *Dasein* exists in a state of being-toward-death, an attitude of anticipation. In Derrida’s application of

Clearly, there is also a canon of literature in Holocaust studies on Heidegger’s complicity with Nazism, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁸ Clearly, part of the “failure” of such representations is deliberate on the part of the author in an effort to prevent closure within the text. The representations celebrated by poststructuralist critics forestall mourning and prevent catharsis, instead self-reflexively depicting how language falls short of expressing the entirety of the event, particularly when representing corporeal pain.

Heidegger to his work on testimony, he focuses heavily on the instant of death, or being-at-death, thus eclipsing being-toward-death and the possibility inherent in such an attitude. Because Derrida is explicitly concerned with testimony and is working within poststructuralism's framework of the citationality of language, the impossibility of writing or speaking one's death becomes paramount. Derrida's work on testimony and the instant of death becomes the foundation for the majority of poststructuralist trauma theorists and directly leads to the resultant dominance of concepts such as aporia, unspeakability, and melancholic repetition. Just as the first two chapters analyzed why Freud's early work on sexuality is frequently overlooked, the current chapter questions the general neglect of Heidegger as a key origin for the later concepts of impossibility and aporia among contemporary trauma theorists, particularly those working in literary studies.

In answering such a question, I shift the focus in such discussions away from the instant of death and the resultant emphasis on impossibility to instead spotlight Heidegger's original formulation of being-toward-death. If writing the instant of one's death is an impossibility, can language instead capture being-toward-death? This will be the central question investigated in the following pages through an analysis of Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Woolf's continued writing in the face of constant air raids and the threat of a Nazi invasion embody being-toward-death, the novel standing as a testament to such an ethos. By linking Woolf's late work to Heidegger's concept of being-toward-death, we uncover a new vocabulary with which to understand Woolf's courage and perseverance as a writer in the face of another world war.⁹ Such a pairing performs the first extended interpretation of Woolf's late fiction in

⁹ Although there is no evidence in either her writing or her biographies that Woolf read Heidegger, they were contemporaries and both write extensively about ontology, temporality, and phenomenological sensation. See Poole's *Unknown Virginia Woolf* for a phenomenological reading of "embodiment" in Woolf (with brief mentions

conjunction with Heidegger, a surprising oversight in both Woolf and trauma studies given both authors' interest in questions of ontology, phenomenology, and time. Although Woolf eventually succumbed to the fear of "going mad again,"¹⁰ the menace of the war, and her isolation upon feeling that she had lost her audience, all of which threatened her lifeline in the form of writing, we can nevertheless uncover an affirmative thread within her final work that embodies an attitude of being-toward-death that is neither fatalist nor fixated on the impossibility of writing the instant of death.¹¹ As J. Hillis Miller suggests, although a text such as *Mrs. Dalloway* "seems almost nihilistically to recommend the embrace of death, and though its author did in fact finally take this plunge, nevertheless, like the rest of Woolf's writing, it represents in fact a contrary movement of the spirit" (201). Similarly, Woolf's last novel ultimately presents a life-affirming narrative, one upon which Heidegger's terminology sheds new light. Such a narrative depicts a mode of existence turned toward the horizon of future possibilities that appreciates life precisely because of its fleeting nature.

Before turning to the particularities of *Being and Time* as they apply to Woolf's work, a comment on Heidegger's biography must be made. Just as locating a life-affirming force in Woolf's work seems counterintuitive given her suicide, finding authenticity in an attitude toward

of Heidegger). See Storl for a reading of Heidegger in conjunction with *To the Lighthouse*, an article that does not comment on either author's depiction of death.

¹⁰ This is the phrase she uses in both suicide notes to Leonard. Also, as frequently observed by Woolf scholars, her first episode of "madness," in which she attempted suicide, occurred during the First World War. Critics align the stress of both wars with the recurrence of her mental illness, particularly in light of the depression that typically followed the completion of her novels (*The Voyage Out* and *Between the Acts*, respectively). It should be noted, however, that Woolf attempted suicide on two additional occasions, apart from the context of war (once after her mother died and again after her marriage to Leonard).

¹¹ In making such an argument, I align myself with the majority of recent scholarship on Woolf that celebrates her literary achievement despite her mental illness, her sexual abuse at the hands of her half brothers, and the pressure of the war. My emphasis on affirmation dovetails with Madelyn Detloff's convincing and important argument for Woolf's "resilience" in the face of such challenges. Whereas Detloff focuses primarily on negation through "performative affirmation" as applied to the gender and sexual politics in Woolf's late work and her strategy of resisting national forms of mourning (27), I argue for affirmation in terms of future potentiality in conjunction with Heidegger and phenomenology.

death becomes particularly problematic given Heidegger's Nazism and the anti-Semitism that has been noted in *Being and Time*. I address this issue in the next chapter in conjunction with a discussion of the history of complicity in poststructuralist trauma theory, given Paul de Man and Heidegger's different affiliations with Nazi ideology. For the purposes of the present analysis, I focus more narrowly on Heidegger's writing on death in the second part of *Being and Time*. With full acknowledgement of Heidegger's Nazism, I hope to recover key concepts from his pre-World War II work that have been immensely influential on both continental philosophers such as Derrida and contemporary trauma theorists.

Anticipating Death as Potentiality: Heidegger, Derrida, Woolf

Moments of anticipating death abound in Virginia Woolf's diary from the late 1930s until her suicide in 1941. Anticipation of a violent death caused by the war can be said to begin with worries over the outbreak of war throughout the 30s, culminating in the 1938 Munich crisis. Such anxieties were precipitated by Woolf's devastation when the rise and eventual triumph of fascism during the Spanish Civil War hit home with the death of her nephew Julian, an event combining the personal and political out of which the pacifist polemic *Three Guineas* (1938) is written. Once the Second World War finally begins, commenting on the anticipation of air raids and blacking out the windows of Monk's House become frequent occurrences, almost as frequent as the mention of her anxiety over a Nazi invasion. In the diary, remarks about invasion are almost always coupled with anticipation of Leonard and her suicide, preparations having been made to gas themselves in their garage, an act all the more pressing given their outspoken protest of fascism, Leonard's Jewish heritage, and their status as public intellectuals with a press at their disposal. In a particularly telling passage from 9 June 1940, Woolf writes: "I will continue—but can I? The pressure of this battle wipes out London pretty quick. A gritting day.

As sample of my present mood, I reflect: capitulation will mean all Jews to be given up. Concentration camps. So to our garage” (*Diary V* 292-3) followed by “[a]nother reflection: I dont want to go to bed at midday: this refers to the garage. What we dread (its no exaggeration) is the news that the French Govt. have left Paris. A kind of growl behind the cuckoo & t’other birds: a furnace behind the sky” (293). During such distressing and terrifying times, Virginia and Leonard live their lives in a state of anticipation of death, the war actively forcing them, along with the vast majority of Europeans, to contemplate and confront death on a daily basis.

Anticipation is also a key element in Heidegger’s conception of being-toward-death as articulated in *Being and Time*. As stated above, for Heidegger, existence only has meaning due to *Dasein*’s mortality. In other words, our choices and actions carry meaning and significance because our lives occur in time—life is neither eternal nor repeatable and this temporality is at the core of Heidegger’s interpretation of being. *Dasein* is thus always in a state of anticipation and anxiety for the end, anticipating the possibility of death that could occur at any moment. Mortality is the key to *Dasein* ever achieving an authentic state of being since death holds the potential for *Dasein* to see itself as a whole alongside the world. On the type of death that *Dasein* experiences (as distinct from other animals or objects in the world),¹² Heidegger writes the following:

The ending that we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify a being-at-an-end of *Dasein*, but rather a *being toward the end* [*Sein zum Ende*] of this being. Death is a way to be that *Dasein* takes over as soon as it is. “As soon as human being comes into life, he is old enough to die.” (236)¹³

¹² Heidegger distinguishes three different types of death in *Being and Time*: perishing, demise, and dying. Perishing is simply the ending of what is alive, a form of death that animals and plants can also experience. Demise is exclusive to human beings but refers to an intermediate phenomenon in which *Dasein* dies but inauthentically. Finally, dying [*Sterben*] is reserved for “the way of being in which *Dasein* is toward its death” (237-8). See Derrida’s *Aporias* for an extended analysis of these categories and a thorough questioning of the hierarchies that Heidegger establishes between them.

¹³ All quotations from *Being and Time* are from the Joan Stambaugh translation. I’ve noted any significant discrepancies with the Macquarrie and Robinson edition in the footnotes.

Thus, *Dasein*'s entire life is understood as having this attitude, this way of being, which is oriented toward its end. Death is "a way to be" that begins as soon as *Dasein* exists; it is not a single moment at the end of life. Importantly, dying for Heidegger is not understood as being-at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*] since that would posit that there is a definite end to *Dasein* that can be experienced. Alternatively, throughout its life, *Dasein* is in the state of "not-yet" or in a state of anticipation of its possibilities, as opposed to a mode of being that is automatically fulfilled, finished, or simply disappears at the end of its life (e.g. how fruit is ripe or not). Thus, "Being-at-an-end means existentially being-toward-the-end. [...] The end is imminent for *Dasein*. Death is not something not yet objectively present, nor the last outstanding element reduced to a minimum, but rather an *imminence* [*Bevorstand*]" (240). As an imminence, death is always on the horizon, is always awaited and anticipated by *Dasein*. For Heidegger, "death is a phenomenon of life" (237) and life is thus oriented toward this ending with all the possibilities in life laid out before it. However, death does not necessarily guarantee an authentic realization of wholeness (i.e. human beings can die without achieving this state of authenticity) but rather only holds the possibility that such wholeness will be disclosed or revealed to *Dasein*. These points are condensed in the following:

The full existential and ontological concept of death can now be defined as follows: *as the end of Dasein, death is the ownmost, nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and insuperable possibility of Dasein. As the end of Dasein, death is in the being [Sein] of this being [Seinenden] toward its end.* (248)

Thus, death is a certain yet indefinite *possibility* that is unique to each individual ("ownmost"). Furthermore, the ontological concept of death is found in this attitude of being *toward Dasein's end*—not *at the end*.

Clearly, possibility and potentiality are key features in Heidegger's concepts of death and being-toward-death. Heidegger makes two concise statements to this effect: "we must characterize being-toward-death as *being toward a possibility*, toward an eminent possibility of Dasein itself" (250) and "Death is the ownmost possibility of Dasein" (252). In regard to the latter, in its "ownmost," death is radically individual, it is not substitutable and one cannot die in the place of another or represent death through the other.¹⁴ As such, "Death does not just 'belong' in an undifferentiated way to one's own Dasein, but it *lays claim* on it as something *individual*. The nonrelational character of death, understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself" (252). Thus, death is radically individualizing, it holds the potential for authentically experiencing a mode of being that is entirely one's own. In terms of the former, being-toward-death is literally a mode of "being toward a possibility" and specifically an imminent possibility. Death discloses or unveils the possibility for *Dasein* to experience itself authentically as a whole. Anticipation intersects with these concepts in that "Anticipation shows itself as the possibility of understanding one's *ownmost* and extreme potentiality-of-being, that is, as the possibility of *authentic existence*" (252).¹⁵

The last piece of Heidegger's ontology of death that I will bring to bear on Woolf is the concept of the "they," or "das Man." For Heidegger, *Dasein* is entangled [*Verfallen*] in the

¹⁴ This is one of the major points that later philosophers and critics take issue with, particularly Levinas and his theories of the other and sacrifice. See Derrida on this topic in *Demeure* and the above discussion of Blanchot's narrative in which the Frenchman escapes only to find three farmers have been executed *in his place*. Heidegger is clear in *Being and Time* that Dasein cannot experience death through substitution or representation. Watching someone else die is experienced as loss but not for the one who dies but for those who remain behind. He states that "We do not experience the dying of others in a genuine sense; we are at best always just 'near by' [*dabei*]" (230). As a result, neither attempting to die for another (as in sacrifice) nor experiencing death vicariously through another allow Dasein access to the existential experience of death.

¹⁵ Possibility is a key feature of *Dasein* throughout *Being and Time*, not just in the sections on death. Crucially, possibility is central to the concept of *Dasein*'s thrownness—the fact that *Dasein* is thrown into existence, into the world. To this end, Heidegger argues that *Dasein* fundamentally "understands itself in terms of possibilities and, thus understanding itself, is thrown being" (273).

everyday world that does not fully realize the ontological possibility of authentically existing *Dasein*. “The they” is not merely the other people and beings with whom *Dasein* exists in the world but is also the larger cultural and historically situated world surrounding *Dasein*. *Dasein* is a being that exists (or dwells) alongside the world and “the they” characterize the everydayness of that world. “The they” conceals, covers over, and obscures authentic *Dasein* and particularly the authentic potentiality-of-being found in being-toward-death. In making statements such as “everyone dies” and insisting that the individual stoically accept this reality that will happen “one day,” “the they” normalizes death, making it into an objective fact. But this fact is perpetually deferred from *Dasein* itself, “the they” providing “a *constant tranquillization about death*” (243). Through such clichés and truisms of the everyday, “[t]he entangled everydayness of *Dasein* knows about the certainty of death, and yet avoids *being-certain*” and *Dasein*’s they-self evades death but “this evasion itself bears witness phenomenally to the fact that death must be grasped as the ownmost, nonrelational, insuperable, *certain possibility*” (247). In other words, due to the tranquilization toward death caused by “the they,” *Dasein* perpetually evades the certainty of her own death, an evasion that highlights (“bears witness”) the highly individual (“ownmost”) and “nonrelational” nature of one’s own death. Furthermore, “the they covers over what is peculiar to the certainty of death, *that is possible in every moment*” (247). The path to authenticity is constantly obscured by this inauthentic approach that “the they” takes toward death.¹⁶ Heidegger’s notion of “the they” is united with the above terms in the following:

¹⁶ In addition to normalizing death through clichés and believing that one can experience death through the deaths of others, “the they” takes an inauthentic attitude toward death in the form of fear. Thus, “Anxiety, made ambiguous as fear, is moreover taken as a weakness which no self-assured *Dasein* is permitted to know. What is ‘proper’ according to the silent decree of the they is the indifferent calm as to the ‘fact’ that one dies. The cultivation of such a ‘superior’ indifference *estranges [entfremdet]* *Dasein* from its ownmost nonrelational potentiality-of-being” (244). In short, for Heidegger, anticipation and anxiety are the proper attitudes *Dasein* should adopt in being-toward-death, not fear.

What is characteristic about authentic, existentially projected being-toward-death can thus be summarized as follows: *anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern that takes care, but to be itself in passionate, anxious freedom toward death, which is free of the illusions of the they, factual, and certain of itself.* (255)

Thus, authenticity for *Dasein* is this characteristic of “Passionate, anxious freedom toward death.” When achieving such authentic being-toward-death, *Dasein* is free to embrace the possibilities in a life where death could be possible at any moment but has not yet occurred. For Heidegger, *Dasein* holds itself open to the possibility of authentic existence only when it frees itself from its entanglement in “the they” (its “lostness” in the “they-self”) and the normalization of death that refuses to recognize death’s exemplarity and singularity.

Significantly, Heidegger does not stress *impossibility* in the above passages. The few occurrences of impossibility that appear in the context of death relate to the impossibility of *Dasein* actually experiencing the end or experiencing death itself. Since experiencing death is an impossibility (the equivalent of the autobiographical “I am dead”), *Dasein* instead anticipates death through the mode of being that is directed *toward* this end (being-toward-the-end). Death highlights “*the possibility of the impossibility of existence [Existenz] in general*” (251), impossibility here referring to the fact that once death has occurred *Dasein* is no longer.¹⁷ Knowing it is inevitable, death must always be experienced in terms of possibility, the not yet of being-toward-death. Anxiety becomes coupled with anticipation in such an attitude since Heidegger states that “Being-toward-death is essentially anxiety” (254).¹⁸ The attitude *Dasein*

¹⁷ This formulation recurs throughout *Being and Time*, for example, in the statement: “We conceived of death existentially as what we characterized as the possibility of the *impossibility* of existence, that is, as the absolute nothingness of Dasein” (293).

¹⁸ Heidegger’s ontology in *Being and Time* frequently echoes Søren Kierkegaard’s work, particularly *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844). In that text, Kierkegaard extensively discusses anxiety, anticipation, and possibility in strikingly similar terms. In relation to possibility, Kierkegaard argues that humanity (like the vulgarities of “the they”) co-opts possibility in exclusively optimistic and positive terms, as in anticipating future wealth, opportunity, and happiness. In contrast to this, Kierkegaard argues for a more complex notion of possibility that encompasses negativity (such as

takes toward its end is thus one of anxious and concerned waiting since death is always imminent on the horizon of its existence, possible at every moment. Thus, Heidegger writes, “In anxiety, *Dasein* finds itself *faced* with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence” (254). Here, “impossibility” refers to phenomenological existence—it is possible for *Dasein* to anxiously await this imminent nothingness of death but it is impossible for *Dasein* to ever experience such nothingness (since existence will have ceased).

In contrast to Heidegger’s repeated focus on possibility and potentiality, Derrida emphasizes impossibility when theorizing death. In *Aporias* (1993), his extended deconstruction of Heidegger’s theses on death, Derrida becomes preoccupied with the impossibility attached to death and specifically the impossibility of testifying to the moment of death. Derrida deconstructs the limits and hierarchies Heidegger establishes throughout the sections on death in *Being and Time* in order to illustrate how death is the ultimate impasse, the aporia signifying the most extreme limit point (passing into death becomes the uncrossable border par excellence). This argument unfolds by repeatedly pairing Heidegger’s concepts with the issue of testimony. For example, Derrida deconstructs the passage cited in the previous paragraph by immediately demanding “How does one testify to it?” (68)—how does one testify to the nothingness of existence upon the moment of death. Similarly, Derrida dissects Heidegger’s arguments about proper or authentic death by putting them in direct juxtaposition with testimony, stating:

At stake for me here is approaching a certain enigmatic relation among dying, testifying, and surviving. We can already foresee it: if the attestation of this “properly dying” or if the property of this death proper to *Dasein* was compromised in its rigorous limits, then the entire apparatus of these edges would become problematic, and along with it the very

the negativity of illness, death, and annihilation): “in possibility all things are equally possible, and whoever has truly been brought up by possibility has grasped the terrible as well as the joyful” (*Concept of Anxiety* 156). Similarly, he argues that “the terrible, perdition, and annihilation live next door to every man, and when he has thoroughly learned that every anxiety about which he was anxious came upon him in the moment” (156-7). Although a more extended discussion of Heidegger’s use of Kierkegaard is beyond the purview of this chapter, such a correlation is a significant one for critical theory.

project of an analysis of *Dasein*, as well as everything that, with its professed methodology, the analysis legitimately [*en droit*] conditions. (30)

In such passages Derrida explicitly moves Heidegger's ontological analysis of dying and being-toward-death into the realm of testimony—the “certain enigmatic relation among dying, testifying, and surviving.” Derrida's central preoccupation is how Heidegger's “properly dying” can be formulated in the language of testimony, a project that he views as questioning Heidegger's entire existential methodology (compromising “its rigorous limits”). Instead of reinforcing such rigid hierarchies, Derrida highlights the aporia fundamental to the experience of death since at “the threshold of death, we are engaged [...] toward a certain possibility of the impossible” (11). Death becomes a “certain possibility of the impossible” for many reasons. Like Blanchot, Derrida repeatedly poses the question “Is my death possible?” (i.e. can one experience it and put it into language—the impossible statement “I am dead”). Or, does death ultimately escape comprehension, language, and experience? Furthermore, by translating Heidegger's concerns into the statement “my death” Derrida raises classic poststructuralist concerns, arguing that the radical mineness of *Dasein*'s death, when formulated as “my death” becomes citational and thus substitutable, no longer exemplary (22). Thus, for Derrida, the formulation “my death” becomes the ultimate aporia, a concept entirely defined by impossibility: “the impossible, the impossibility, as what cannot pass [*passer*] or come to pass [*se passer*]: it is not even the *non-pas*, the not-step, but rather the deprivation of the pas (the privative form would be a kind of *a-pas*)” (23).

Such a focus on aporia and impossibility, and particularly the impossibility of testifying to “my death,” becomes an issue of language rather than phenomenological experience, as it is in *Being and Time*. Derrida performs this leap from Heidegger's ontology of death to language in the following passage:

Heidegger never stopped modulating this affirmation according to which the mortal is whoever experiences death *as such*, as death. Since he links the possibility of the ‘as such’ (as well as the possibility of death as such) to the possibility of speech, he thereby concludes that the animal, the living thing as such, is not properly mortal: the animal does not relate to death as such. The animal can come to an end, that is, perish (*verenden*), it always ends up kicking the bucket [*crever*]. But it can never properly die. (35)

Derrida not only questions Heidegger’s hierarchies between perishing, demising, and dying, but he also links the very possibility of authentic death to speech, speech being the only differentiator between animal and human according to his interpretation of Heidegger.¹⁹ For Derrida, then, an authentic experience of death (properly dying) is defined by the ability of *Dasein* to experience death “as such,” a possibility that is contingent upon language and *Dasein*’s ability to speak. Derrida’s interest in testimony literalizes this connection between death “as such” and language. He admits how central possibility is to Heidegger’s formulation of *Dasein*’s authentic mode of being, stating that “death is possibility par excellence” (63). But he quickly shifts the focus back to testimony, stating that because death is a constantly imminent possibility, “it must be assumed; one can and one must testify to it; and the testimony is not a mere constative report: the statements of the existential analysis are originally prescriptive or normative” (64). The pressure Derrida places on the urgency with which one *must* testify to the possibility of death pushes Heidegger into poststructuralist territory with its fixation on language, speech acts, and the moment of death, eventually reaching the familiar endpoint of testimony as a certain impossible possibility. Even in moments where he acknowledges the importance of possibility in Heidegger’s work on death, Derrida insists on language and testimony’s relevance to the moment of death, thus eclipsing being-toward-death almost entirely.

¹⁹ In another passage, Derrida makes this link explicit, stating that Heidegger juxtaposes two statements: a) animals cannot speak and b) animals cannot experience death as such. This juxtaposition cuts to the heart of Derrida’s concerns and he spends the majority of *Aporias* pursuing the consequences of this pairing, stating, “These two remarks are deliberately juxtaposed, without, however, Heidegger feeling authorized to go any further than indicating something like a flash in the sky concerning a link between the *as such* of death and language” (36).

In turning to Woolf, I reformulate Derrida's questions about the relationship between death "as such," the instant of death, and language to the question of being-toward-death and language. I do not dispute Derrida's eloquent arguments about the instant of death as an aporia and the impossibility of articulating such an experience. After all, Heidegger too admits that the experience of death itself is impossible since *Dasein* cannot experience the moment at which it ceases to be. Rather than focus exclusively on impossibility, however, Heidegger turns *Dasein* back toward its possibilities, death remaining an imminent and inevitable possibility that *Dasein* experiences through an attitude of being-toward-death. In returning to this thesis from *Being and Time* and moving to Woolf, the question becomes: can being-toward-death be expressed in language and if so, does this reframe the issue of representing the instant of death?

Such a discussion of death, trauma, and Woolf's work is inseparable from her biography and suicide. The topic has a long critical history, culminating in Suzette Henke and David Eberly's collection *Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts* (2007). In fact, trauma could be said to permeate Woolf studies as a whole, a field dominated by what Madelyn Detloff calls a "troubling either/or [...] that Woolf was either primarily a trauma survivor (with her subsequent breakdowns stemming from abuse) or primarily mentally ill, and only incidentally, or coincidentally, a survivor of abuse" (25). Lousie DeSalvo's canonical work encapsulates the former, DeSalvo emphatically declaring from the outset: "Virginia Woolf was a sexually abused child; she was an incest survivor" (1). DeSalvo and critics following her interpret Woolf's life, death, and literary works in terms of her traumatic past, ultimately emphasizing her heroism and courage despite, what such critics see as, the effects of trauma on her sexuality, marriage, physical well-being, and mental health. The latter originates in Leonard's frequent references to Virginia's "madness" and Quentin Bell's infamous portrayal of her as "mad" in his biography.

Of course, the simplistic and reductive term “madness” has been thoroughly questioned and largely abandoned in subsequent criticism. Nevertheless, the desire to diagnose Woolf according to current medical vocabulary persists, the consensus being that she was bipolar or manic-depressive, as evident in Thomas Caramagno’s *The Flight of the Mind* (1992), which meticulously documents the psychobiological history and context of Woolf’s illness, treatment, and genetic predisposition.²⁰ Added to these two categories of criticism, a third, more recent trend, embraces both positions to argue that trauma in Woolf’s work and biography should be seen as the result of a cluster of causes that culminate in her suicide. Detloff herself occupies this middle ground, arguing for Woolf’s resilience in the face of the multiple traumatic experiences she suffered, a standpoint that allows us to see her mental illness “as a resource *as well as* a disability that she managed, more or less successfully, for much of her life” (26).

Not surprisingly, all three critical stances on trauma in Woolf’s work and biography hinge on interpretations of her suicide. In analyses focusing on Woolf as trauma survivor, her late reading of Freud in 1939 is cited as one of the primary causes precipitating her suicide since it dredged up this traumatic past, particularly the sexual abuse at the hands of the Duckworths, and challenged her previous strategies of coping.²¹ Those studies diagnosing her as mentally ill emphasize the narrative of her treatment by her last doctor, Octavia Wilberforce, who is faulted

²⁰ A large part of Caramagno’s book is a reaction against psychoanalytic interpretations of Woolf’s illness, a stance further distancing him from critics like DeSalvo who rely of Freud’s definitions of trauma and working through.

²¹ Woolf started reading Freud intensely for the first time in 1939 (despite her obvious exposure to psychoanalysis throughout the 1920s and 30s in the form of her brother, Adrian, who was a practicing psychoanalyst, and the Hogarth Press’s publication of Freud’s work in English). This immersion in Freud along with the process of writing her memoirs, notably “22 Hyde Park Gate” and “Sketch of the Past,” recalled the sexually traumatic experiences of being molested by her half brothers. See DeSalvo for an extended analysis of how the intersection between reading Freud, writing her memoirs, and reading her father’s letters precipitated her suicide, particularly for the ways in which these events forced her to question the accuracy of her memory. Hermione Lee argues that her reading of Freud, particularly his ideas that the individual “may not be able to avoid regression into mental illness or self-destruction” just as civilization cannot avoid regression, may have caused the fear “which made her stop writing her autobiography shortly before her suicide” (714).

for missing the severity of Woolf's depression, dismissing her fears that she could no longer write "as merely fanciful, thus ignoring Virginia's very real fear that she would never again enter the visionary state in which she had written *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*" (Marder 340). Julia Briggs cautions against taking either of these readings too far, however, emphasizing the multiple causes that precipitated Woolf's final breakdown and proposing that Woolf's death can be linked to the war "in some mysterious way" since "mass murder, hatred and cruelty create a palpable psychic atmosphere that presses upon the sensitive, driving them towards those darker aspects of outer or inner life that we normally resist or dismiss" (398).²² Similarly, several critics emphasize how the war, while not the sole cause of Woolf's suicide, contributed to the feeling of losing her audience and thus her reason for writing, a feeling that was hastened by a variety of causes including the hostile reaction of her male friends and family to her feminism in *Three Guineas*, her feeling of being detached from the younger generation of poets, the absence of fellow pacifists who had instead turned toward war due to fascism's unprecedented threat, and her isolation at Monk's House from the literary and social life in London. In light of the profusion of interpretations of Woolf's suicide, and particularly in response to those that take poetic license when close reading, Suzette Henke warns against romanticizing her death, pointing out, "The reality of her drowning must have been otherwise. The water of the River Ouse would have been frigidly cold in March; the sludge of the riverbank viscous and muddy; the stones, desperately gathered, solid anchors to oblivion" ("Afterword" 274).²³ Likewise,

²² Mark Spilka interprets Woolf's suicide as due to the war instead of exclusively being due to her mental illness, positing that we can "with some justification...think of her as a civilian casualty of World War II" (123). Hermione Lee's comment at the end of her biography, however, should be remembered: the official obituary in the newspapers and in the coroner's report list Woolf explicitly as "a war casualty," something Lee disputes through her rich and complex portrait of Woolf's final years (754).

²³ Such a cautionary statement of romanticizing trauma in the figurative language of academic criticism echoes Patricia Yaegar's similar warning to trauma scholars. In "Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," Yaegar questions the consumption and reproduction of traumatic texts, especially memoir and

Christine Froula proposes that Woolf's suicide is ultimately a "profoundly illegible event" and cautions against interpreting the novels, particularly *Between the Acts*, exclusively in retrospective terms (289).

Phenomenology has been one of the primary methodologies for interpreting this complex relationship between trauma, suicide, and Woolf's oeuvre. Such studies date back to Roger Poole's important work *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (1978), which intervenes in the debate over Woolf's madness by focusing on phenomenological embodiment in terms of how the physical body is "perceived and experienced by the subject" (xiv). Poole cites Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Husserl in his phenomenological portrait of Woolf but does not perform an extended critical employment of their terminology, preferring to use phenomenology loosely as a methodology for analyzing "embodied subjectivity" in the sense that Woolf's "novels were written to master people and states of mind and states of embodiment which had previously mastered her" (3). He interprets her suicide as a choice between the terrifying death by a man-made bomb and the maternal force of water, writing, "The water was her friend, and had been her friend ever since she was a child in Cornwall. The water could be trusted. The water was peace. The water would receive her with the dignity that she felt she needed, and indeed, deserved" (279). Henke and Eberly's collection on trauma takes Poole's phenomenological approach as its starting point and translates it to contemporary trauma theory, stating that the essays in the collection "are grounded in the understanding that literary texts reflect, in some way, the author's own historically embodied consciousness" (8). Using Poole's work and Henke's term "scriptotherapy," a term adapted from her earlier work on women's autobiographical fiction, they argue that "Woolf, throughout her life, made use of fiction as a

testimony, by critics who do not sufficiently acknowledge their debt to the dead whom they propose to understand without a self-reflexive awareness of their position—advice that is particularly necessary when such critics take too much pleasure in their own interpretive figurative language at the expense of their responsibility to the deceased.

means of re-scripting and mastering traumatic experiences by means of a therapeutic process of narrative reformulation” (5). Henke and Eberly’s collection does not discuss phenomenological texts at any length; instead they cite Poole’s work as precedent for their theoretical framework and then move to a more detailed analysis of Woolf in conjunction with trauma theory.

The following analysis echoes these recent trends in Woolf studies by interpreting the suicide as not reducible to a single cause but rather the result of a constellation of forces—historical, personal, and biological. Instead of conflating *Between the Acts* with Woolf’s suicide or becoming fixated on the moment of her death, I argue for an interpretation of the novel that is grounded in Woolf’s attitude toward death throughout the late 1930s and into the war. The phenomenological analyses lay the foundation for this argument but with the crucial addition of the particularities of Heidegger’s work. Instead of loosely invoking phenomenology as a catch-all for embodiment or broadly translating that framework to contemporary trauma theory, turning directly to Heidegger presents us with a more rigorous vocabulary with which we can interpret *Between the Acts* and Woolf’s autobiographical writing on death.²⁴ The remainder of the chapter, by employing such a vocabulary, will answer the question posed above in the affirmative: yes, being-toward-death can and is formulated in language, specifically in the language of Woolf’s unique aesthetic.

“life, life, life”: Affirmation in *Between the Acts*

Virginia Woolf began composing *Pointz Hall* in 1938, as a change of pace from the “drudgery” of writing Roger Fry’s biography. The novel was finished on 25 February 1941 when

²⁴ Other than Poole’s invocations of Heidegger in his general phenomenological methodology, Heidi Storl is the only other critic to date who presents an analysis of Woolf in relation to Heidegger. Her article, “Heidegger in Woolf’s Clothing” uses *To the Lighthouse* to illustrate Heidegger’s basic conceptions of *Dasein*, being-in-the-world, and care in order to argue that both authors provide insights on what it means to be human. Storl does not comment on Woolf’s late fiction nor does she analyze Heidegger’s conception of death. Although not discussing Heidegger, see Ann Banfield’s *The Phantom Table* for an extended and thorough analysis of Woolf’s philosophical influences in her contemporaries G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell.

she gave the re-named *Between the Acts* to Leonard to read (Lee 743). Although both Leonard and John Lehmann, the Hogarth Press's editor, insisted on the quality of the new novel, Woolf responded that she did not want it published since, in the midst of depression, it now looked "too silly and trivial" (*Letters* VI 486). After her suicide in March 1941, Leonard published the novel on 17 July of the same year, noting as a foreword, "She would not, I believe, have made any large or material alterations in it, though she would probably have made a good many small corrections or revisions." Alongside this well-known history of the novel's composition and posthumous publication, it is frequently remarked that *Between the Acts* is entirely steeped in the context of the Second World War. Maria DiBattista calls it a "war book" (195) and Hermione Lee interprets the "conflict of voices" in the novel as "act[ing] out the battle for supremacy between the voices on her air-waves: Roger Fry's—Freud's—Hitler's—the BBC's—scraps of poetry—all interrupting each other" (723). Despite this cacophony and atmosphere of anxiety and fear throughout 1938-41, Woolf ultimately refuses fatalism and sheer pessimism in her final work. In conjunction with Geoffrey Hartman's appraisal that "the novels of Virginia Woolf say 'It must be affirmative'" ("Virginia's Web" 30), Woolf resists becoming fixated on trauma and death in *Between the Acts* and instead attempts to translate the war into an opportunity for renewed creativity. Such renewal encapsulates Woolf's version of being-toward-death: an emphasis on the potential for future thinking and artistic creation even in the midst of the Second World War.

One of her primary strategies for persistence in the face of overwhelming pessimism is her commitment to using thinking and writing as weapons against fascism and the overwhelming wartime rhetoric of patriotism. She frequently mentions airplane propellers in this context, the propeller being both a symbol of modernity (one of the iconic technologies of the Second World

War) and also a metonym for death in the form of bombs in air raids and the Blitz. In 1938 Woolf observes, “When one reads the mind is like an aeroplane propeller invisibly quick and unconscious—a state seldom achieved” (*Diary V* 151). Here, Woolf collapses reading and the mental processes of thinking with the propellers’ quick, seemingly invisible spinning. Later, in April 1939, she enlarges the comparison, stating, “I should, if it weren’t for the war—glide my way up & up in to that exciting layer so rarely lived in: where my mind works so quick it seems asleep; like the aeroplane propellers” (214). In the latter, Woolf refers to the general state of “war” that blocks the rapid working of the mind, a blockage further emphasized by the dash that separates the war from “that exciting layer so rarely lived in.” The rarity, in both examples, of this state of rapid thinking and creativity mirrors the newness of the technology—it was still a relatively rare occurrence to ride in an airplane in the late 1930s, Woolf herself never having done it. Additionally, the rarity of this creative state indicates the difficulty of rising above an everyday engagement with language, thinking, and the world around the writer. Instead of an ordinary working of the mind, Woolf expresses here that infrequent and sought after state of creativity in which she writes her greatest novels and glimpses a new layer, beyond the quotidian world of “the they,” to use Heidegger’s terminology.

These instances of metaphorically linking the propeller and the creative mind echo Woolf’s unpublished essay “Flying over London.”²⁵ Woolf’s narrator describes the experience of flying up into the clouds and then seeing a bird’s eye view of the city below and how small and insignificant it seems, particularly class divisions. The narrator realizes that habit fixes us into a certain view of our place in the world and upon rising above that perspective, we become “conscious of being a little mammal, hot-blooded, hard boned, with a clot of red blood in one’s

²⁵ The exact date of composition is unknown but thought to be sometime during November 1928 (*Essays VI*).

body, trespassing up here in a fine air” (445). After descending toward the city and seeing civilization again emerge, the pilot turns the plane back up into the clouds and the narrator begins to think not of life but of death. She calls it “a moment of renunciation” in which they “prefer the other” realm of “Wraiths and sand dunes and mist; imagination; this we prefer to the mutton and the entrails” of the everyday world below (446). Just as the plane propellers in the diary entry are equated with the workings of the creative mind, here the clouds represent the destination of such propellers: the realm of the imagination. Upon ascending into this world, “It was the idea of death that now suggested itself; not being received and welcomed; not immortality but extinction” (446). Instead of the common association between clouds and the heavens, they make the narrator see the pilot as Charon, the ferryman of Hades:

Charon, the mind prayed to the back of Flight-Lieutenant Hopgood, carry me on; thrust me deep, deep; till every glimmer of light in me, of heat of knowledge, even the tingling I feel in my toes is dulled; after all this living, all this scratching and tingling of sensation, that too—darkness, dullness, and black wet—will be also a sensation. And such is the incurable vanity of the human mind that the cloud, the wet sponge that was to extinguish, became, now that one thought of a contact with one’s own mind, a furnace in which we roared up, and our death was a fire; brandished at the summit of life, many tongued, blood red, visible over land and sea. Extinction! The word is consummation. (447)²⁶

Such a “consummation” between life and death achieved through the experience of flying high above London illustrates *Dasein*’s authenticity as revealed through being-toward-death. Just as *Dasein* metaphorically enters a clearing [*lichtung*] in the forest when it achieves an authentic state of being, Woolf’s narrator rises above the everyday, literally, into the clouds and beyond to achieve a similar perspective. Furthermore, *lichtung* in Heidegger’s work also carries connotations of the German *licht*, or light. The *lichtung* in which *Dasein* achieves an authentic state of being is both a clearing away of the density and distraction of the everyday (e.g. the

²⁶ In a diary entry from November 1933, Woolf equates flying with a similar encounter with death, writing that as she watched an aeroplane flying high above her, the propellers disappeared and “simply evaporated: then the aeroplane takes a slow run, circles & rises. This is death I said, feeling how the human contact was completely severed. Up they went with a sublime air & disappeared like a person dying, the soul going” (*Diary IV* 187).

clearing in the woods, or the clearing of the clouds in Woolf's essay) and a form of lightening or enlightenment (e.g. the rising above the clouds into the sunlight and the fire metaphors of one's mind being set ablaze in Woolf).

The narrator's awareness of mortality, not the earlier thoughts of immortality, produces such an experience of rapturous exclamation—everything becomes pure sensation, even the “black wet” of death. Death is represented in phenomenological terms; it is another sensation just as that of life, knowledge, and even “the tingling I feel in my toes.” Instead of dampening sensation, wetting it down, extinction is realized at “the summit of life” and lights the narrator's mind ablaze. When the plane continues its ascent and breaks through the clouds, it runs into a hailstorm that makes the narrator fear for her life, further heightening the fire of the summit of life upon approaching death. When the hail stops, the narrator compares the clear air above the clouds to the following:

just as one comes to the end of an avenue of trees and finds a pond with ducks on it, and nothing but lead-coloured water, so we came through the avenue of hail and out into a pool so still, so quiet, with haze above and cloud below it, so that we seemed to float as a duck floats on a pond. (448)

In this calm environment, again recalling Heidegger's clearing, the earlier fire is transformed: it is not a wet sponge that “effaced us” but instead “Nothingness was poured down upon us like a mound of white sand” (448). This is not the nothingness of nihilism or indifference but rather a sense of calm indicative of an authenticity in which the narrator is detached from the everydayness of “the they” and gains a vision of wholeness precipitated by an anxiety toward death.

Ultimately, however, such a state is not sustainable since the pilot must return to earth, the concrete reality of civilization reasserting itself in the form of houses, neighborhoods, and cars on the streets. Such a deflation is quickened when the coda reveals that they never took off

at all, the pilot having found a defect in the plane. The reader realizes that the entire episode occurred in the narrator's imagination. Avrom Fleishman interprets this narrative twist as the narrator rejecting the imaginative flight of fancy in favor of returning to earth and the representational form associated with it, "renouncing one trait of her art but affirming another" (219). Yet it is not a choice for the narrator; instead, the flight illustrates how an authentic state of being can also be a possibility on the ground, in the materiality of the everyday. After the plane lands, the narrator still believes that "Everything had changed its values seen from the air" (449). Such a perspectival shift causes one to want to return to the materiality of the body, "to animate the heart, the legs, the arms," but in harmony with the abstraction found when flying through the air (449). Rather than rejecting the flight of fancy, the denouement reasserts the primacy of the imagination—it is the imagination that works like the plane propellers to carry the narrator up into the clouds of her mind and disclose this state of being achieved through a sensation of one's mortality. For Woolf, in this essay and the diary, the imagination is inextricable from the authentic state of being that Heidegger theorizes, particularly when that authenticity is achieved in being-toward-death.

Woolf translates such parallels between airplane propellers, creativity, and being-toward-death directly into the context of the Second World War in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940). Death in the essay is much nearer than in the previous examples, vividly rendered by air raid sirens, the sawing of the propellers overhead, and the process of counting the seconds while waiting for a bomb to drop on her roof. However, Woolf's depiction of the threatening propellers and the menacing sawing do not become instruments of destruction but rather a positive force for peace; thought is her weapon and the only effective force against fascism. She states, "during those seconds of suspense all thinking stopped. All feeling, save one dull dread, ceased. A nail

fixed the whole being to one hard board. The emotion of fear and of hate is therefore sterile, unfertile” (244). Instead of hate and fear, the narrator turns to the creativity that emanates from such a brush with death and the renewed sense of possibility stretching out before her.

Directly that fear passes, the mind reaches out and instinctively revives itself by trying to create. Since the room is dark it can create only from memory. It reaches out to the memory of other Augusts—in Bayreuth, listening to Wagner; in Rome, walking over the Campagna; in London. Friends’ voices come back. Scraps of poetry return. Each of those thoughts, even in memory, was far more positive, reviving, healing and creative than the dull dread made of fear and hate. (244-5)

Significantly, the first memory that the narrator turns to is of Wagner, a refusal to malign German culture due to the current regime’s crimes. Rather than become fatalistic in the face of constant air raids and the threat of invasion, the narrator turns to memory and “scraps of poetry” as a “positive, reviving, healing and creative” force that triumphs over fear and hate.²⁷ The past becomes a catalyst for future creation—memory being the link to a healing and reviving force in the midst of an air raid and the current war. Just as Heidegger does not view time as a linear progression but rather sees being-toward-death as an attitude encapsulating past and future,²⁸ here, Woolf imagines a similar phenomenon that unifies past and future creation.

In addition to echoing Heidegger’s non-linear conception of time, the attitude Woolf reaches in the essay, in which as soon as fear passes “the mind reaches out and instinctively

²⁷ Woolf’s pacifist strategy of employing thinking as a non-violent weapon against war can easily be dismissed as impractical and naïve in the face of fascism and Hitler’s aggression. As Rebecca Walkowitz argues, however, Woolf’s aim in this essay is not to be practical or comforting but rather to “show and resist the kind of ‘thinking’ that is encouraged by ‘fighting’ by appropriating the strategies of war” (99). Walkowitz continues, showing how Woolf successfully uses a rhetorical strategy of “entanglement,” a means of “displaying self-consciously, perhaps aggressively, topics that will seem inconsequential alongside those that, traditionally, are thought more significant” (100). With the benefit of hindsight, particularly considering the full scale of Nazi atrocities in the Holocaust, it can be argued today that Woolf was on the wrong side of history in maintaining her pacifist stance. Yet her rhetorical strategy of using the instruments of war to resist the logic of aggression, blind patriotism, and nationalism through critical thinking stands the test of time as a necessary political stance.

²⁸ Rather than a series of linear now points, authentic time for *Dasein* (as opposed to “vulgar” concepts of time in the everyday sense) is a unification of past, present, and future, all realized on the horizon of being. Thus, the “present arises from its authentic future and having-been, so that it lets *Dasein* come to authentic existence only by taking a detour through that present. The origin of the ‘arising’ of the present, that is, of being entangled in lostness, is the primordial, authentic temporality itself that makes possible thrown being-toward-death” (332).

revives itself by trying to create,” is another rendition of Woolfian being-toward-death in the form of increased creativity and sharpened thinking. Instead of becoming blocked by the instruments of war as in the diary entries, the narrator is able to transform this obstruction into an opportunity for action and a statement of her political argument. Although the actual moment of death may be impossible to represent in language, here we see the attitude of being-toward-death represented in the figurative language of the artist. Such a representation coincides with Heidegger’s thesis that language is a fundamental trait of *Dasein* that both sets it apart from other beings and is one of the primary modes through which authenticity can be realized. Indeed, in Heidegger’s later works, language becomes “the house of Being in which man ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of Being, guarding it” (“Letter on Humanism” 237). Instead of merely being a mode of communication, “language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time” (“Origin” 73). Thus, language is what brings man into the clearing of authentic being, just as Woolf’s narrator is able to rise through the clouds in her imagination in “Flying over London” and continue writing during an air raid. In both, being-toward-death is depicted by the narrator as a phenomenon intimately tied to language, the imagination, and the possibilities for future creation they hold.

Yet this relationship between airplanes and propellers as catalysts for the creative life force is not directly transcribed in *Between the Acts*. Instead, airplanes and their propellers become synonymous with the characters’ stasis and inability to act. For example, Isa, who is an author-figure along with the director La Trobe, echoes Woolf’s diary entries when she attempts to write poetry upon recalling her flirtation with Haines the previous night:

“In love,” she must be; since the presence of his body in the room last night could so affect her; since the words he said, handing her a teacup, handing her a tennis racquet, could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating—she groped, in the depths of the looking-glass, for a word to

fit the infinitely quick vibrations of the aeroplane propeller that she had seen once at dawn at Croydon. Faster, faster, faster, it whizzed, whirred, buzzed, till all the flails became one flail and up soared the plane away and away.... (15)

This passage explicitly links Eros, in the form of her sensation of being “in love” with Haines, to the act of artistic creation in her search for the right word—the propellers become a metaphor for the “tingling, tangling, vibrating” wire of her desire. After interrupting her composition with a call about the main course for lunch, she concludes, “The words weren’t worth writing in the book bound like an account book in case Giles suspected. ‘Abortive,’ was the word that expressed her” (15). Instead of the propeller being linked to the quickness of reading and the creative mind, the propeller becomes an image of Isa’s “abortive” creativity and the futile relationship with Haines.²⁹ Isa does not reach the same endpoint that Woolf achieves in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid.” Her attempts at writing remain abortive throughout the novel. Isa remains stuck, unable to compose, despite her many attempts and her rich description of the propeller, which is filled with alliteration and repetition to mirror the smoothly working machine.

Her husband Giles, from whom she hides her poetry, also struggles with an inability to get his mind to work with the rapidity of the propeller in an analogous reflection. Upon having tea with the rest of the family while overlooking the view from Pointz Hall, Giles contemplates the disconnect between his city life and seeming isolation in the country:

²⁹ Notably, “abortive” was not added until the later typescript of the novel—the link between thwarted biological reproduction and creative blockage made even more explicit in the published version than the earliest typescripts. Interestingly, Woolf downplays Isa’s desire for Haines in the final version. Instead of the cliché “in love,” the earlier typescript depicts her desire as “Mr. Haines could pierce her with fiery arrows; since the proximity of that body could affect hers; since the words he said could suddenly attach themselves to a burning spot in her, and lie between them like a wire” (*Pointz Hall* 47). The typescript explicitly attaches the moment of composition with the later interruption of the cows bellowing during the pageant, described as “Lashing their tails, blobbed like pokers, they tossed their heads high, plunged and bellowed, as if Eros had planted his dart in their flanks and goaded them to fury” (*Acts* 140). The vision of Eros piercing both the cows and Isa is removed from the composition scene in the later typescripts, the cliché “in love” being inserted in the fifth typescript (*Pointz* 269-70). Such changes indicate that in the final version, although Eros and the possibility of creation are still glimpsed, the final emphasis is on Isa’s abortive creative stagnation.

Giles nicked his chair into position with a jerk. Thus only could he show his irritation, his rage with old fogies who sat and looked at views over coffee and cream when the whole of Europe—over there—was bristling like... He had no command of metaphor. Only the ineffective word ‘hedgehog’ illustrated his vision of Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens and blast the Folly. He, too, loved the view. And blamed Aunt Lucy, looking at views, instead of—doing what? (53)

Just as Isa cannot find the correct language to express the propeller, here Giles admits his lack of “command” over metaphor and admittedly fails to discover an expression for the coming war, resorting to the “ineffective” hedgehog. This small animal that passively bristles into a ball of self-defense rather than attacking its enemies stands at odds with the blatant aggression of European guns and planes poised to invade Britain. Unlike Woolf’s appropriation of the propeller as a spur to creativity, here the planes lack any metaphorical depth, only appearing as literal instruments of destruction that “splinter” and “blast” and carry guns that “would rake that land into furrows.” Just as Isa is “abortive” in her attempts to write—the only viable form of action, along with thinking, available to the pacifist—Giles is similarly ineffective and paralyzed in the face of the bristling hedgehog just “over there,” across the Channel.

The novel opens with a similar reflection on planes and the landscape when Bart, Giles’s father, discussing a cesspool with the other villagers, notes that it is located on the old Roman road. This observation prompts the following: “From an aeroplane, [Bart] said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars” (4). The modern technology of the airplane provides this perspective of history spatially marked on the pastoral English landscape. Such an observation also clearly sets the stage for the coming pageant that will move the audience through various periods of British history, a script interspersed with Lucy’s mental images of mastodons and other pre-historic beasts that roamed

across the view before recorded history. Furthermore, this progression from the Britons to the Romans to the plough echoes Marlow's famous ruminations in *Heart of Darkness* that London seen from the Thames also "has been one of the dark places of the earth" (5), a correlation that is repeated in Woolf's use of Conrad's title in the final scene of *Between the Acts*. In contrast to Giles's association of the plane with the violent furrow that will again scar the land in the coming war, Bart views the plane as producing an image of the past as palimpsest, written on the land but constantly being overwritten as time progresses. If not productive in the same way that the propeller is in Woolf's essays and diary, Bart's palimpsestic version of the past can be associated with an authentic state of being in the world in which one exists alongside the world. Just as authentic *Dasein* does not impose an anthropomorphic framework onto the world, the palimpsestic view of the British countryside from the plane is not reducible to the act of a single individual. Of course, Bart is restricted by his narrowly rational worldview typical of nineteenth-century patriarchal society, which is mirrored by Lucy's Christianity. Therefore he does not achieve this authentic conception of being. Instead, he views the landscape exclusively in terms of nation-states and historical events in mankind's history from the Napoleonic wars to the Elizabethan manor house (a version of anthropomorphizing the world which Heidegger strongly rejects). Nevertheless, the image of time as palimpsestic is prompted by the view from the plane—we glimpse an authentic form of being in this episode even though it is ultimately aborted, just like Giles and Isa's attempts at action.

These repeated instances of aborted creativity and vision have led some critics to view the novel as expressing the pessimism and fatalism of British society on the brink of an unavoidable Second World War. Instead of creating something new and entering the visionary state Lily Briscoe achieves in *To the Lighthouse*, the characters in *Between the Acts* are

interpreted as superficial types who are static, merely repeating clichés as their society slides into a repetition of 1914. For instance, Roger Poole views the novel as depicting a vision of the future that “will be bleak, savage, and terrible, without light, without comfort. The last two pages of the novel are entirely bereft of hope” (“Irreversible Wisdom” 93).³⁰ Similarly, Nancy Topping Bazin and Jane Hamovit Lauter interpret the final scene of the novel as a “dystopian vision of the future of humanity—a future in which art and personal relationships have been destroyed by war and the brutal laws of nature preside” (39). Finally, Daniel Ferrer interprets the ending as inseparable from Woolf’s suicide, pessimistically asserting that the curtain “rises on nothing—it rises on the unnameable, madness, death” (106). Contrary to this reading, Mark Hussey cautions that “Woolf’s suicide, and her belief that *Between the Acts* should not be published, might be taken as controverting that work’s generally affirmative character” (xx). Similarly, several critics focus on her efforts to establish a communal voice in the novel and in her last manuscript, “Anon,” that will outlive the individual author and regenerate culture after the current period of darkness.³¹ J. Hillis Miller, emphasizing the affirmative nature of the act of writing, proposes that *Between the Acts* exhibits “a creative power in the mind which thrusts itself forward, in spite of obstacles and hesitations,” an “energy” that “pushes out to fill in gaps and pauses, to weave a web which ties this to that, one thing to another, in the assertion of a continuous power of production” (213). In conjunction with this more hopeful critical trend, being-toward-death

³⁰ Poole makes passing reference to Heidegger in this article and again invokes a broad concept of phenomenology, arguing that almost all of Woolf’s novels from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *To the Lighthouse* “[seem] to obey the Heideggerian pattern of ‘Thrownness.’ Everything is thrown down, the family, the house, sanity, speech, relationships” (91-2). Poole also makes reference to the “idle talk” of the they and how gossip and people’s callousness after World War I embody such an attitude (88).

³¹ See Melba Cuddy-Keane for an excellent analysis of the chorus as it relates to an affirmative life force. See Avrom Fleishman for an interpretation of the audience as eventually realizing a type of collective unconscious, the pageant establishing “a growing identification with the historical community which lies behind it” (210). In contrast to these optimistic interpretations, Sallie Sears interprets La Trobe’s efforts to establish a community through the audience as a failure, viewing her efforts as valiant but ultimately seeing her as a Cassandra figure who “tries to redeem the present, to rescue it from the scene about to open” but “nobody listens” (230).

further qualifies the type of affirmation Woolf writes, one that is not optimistic about the future and definitely not utopic, at least remains attuned to the possibilities of life. By deliberately setting the novel in the summer of 1939, before the start of war, Woolf does not focus on the moment of death but rather highlights possibility as a condition of being that is always on the horizon, for both the individual and civilization. Although the majority of the characters remain unable to express themselves imaginatively or linguistically, “abortive” in Isa’s opinion, the novel maintains the possibility that they will eventually achieve the authenticity of being-toward-death.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf avoids representing the instant of death and therefore steers clear of the later critical quandary in trauma theory over the impossibility of such a representation by refusing to depict any human deaths. Instead, death is displaced onto newspaper reports, deaths of animals, and the symbolic death of the author. The most literal representation of death occurs in the now canonical image of the snake choking on a toad, a horrifying mass that Giles smashes with his white tennis shoes. During an interval in the pageant, Giles performs a child’s game by kicking a stone and equating each kick with the sins of his fellow audience members (Manresa as lust, Dodge as perversion, and himself as coward). As he moves through the lawn, he encounters the following:

There, crouched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round—a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes. (99)

Unlike the earlier frustration over his inability to come up with a metaphor to describe the coming war, here he aggressively acts out such frustrations. The image is shocking precisely because death and violence are kept on the margins and sublimated throughout a novel that is

seemingly an escapist denial of the reality of the coming war. The image of “birth the wrong way round” and the utterly hopeless deadlock between the snake and toad has long been interpreted as a symbol of the inevitability of the mutual destruction wrought by another world war, Julia Briggs observing that the image “must surely suggest Hitler’s greed to swallow Europe, as well as the moral and political impasse that his greed would lead to” (“The Novels” 86).³² While such an image powerfully captures the inability of Giles to act in a meaningful way and the violence of war that Woolf so abhorred, the death of the snake and toad remain in the realm of the animal. They are symbolic of warring cultures and civilizations but they are not capable of the same awareness of death reserved for *Dasein* and therefore can never achieve an attitude of being-toward-death.

Any glimpses of human death in the novel occur in the margins; they are relegated to newspaper stories and paraphrased by the characters. Thus, in another chilling example of violence lying under the seemingly peaceful countryside at Pointz Hall, Isa reads about the rape of a woman by the guards at Whitehall:

For her generation the newspaper was a book; and, as her father-in-law had dropped the *Times*, she took it and read: “A horse with a green tail...” which was fantastic. Next, “The guard at Whitehall...” which was romantic and then, building word upon word, she read: “The troopers told her the horse had a green tail; but she found it just an ordinary horse. And they dragged her up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed.

³² Interpretations of this image abound in the criticism on *Between the Acts*. See Lee and Marder for accounts of the image’s genesis in Woolf’s diary, particularly a passage in which she describes happening upon a snake and toad in her garden in this predicament followed by a dream of men drowning. In addition to Briggs’s above observation of its relevance for the politics of the war, it has been seen as depicting the fate of Germany, the “snake attempting to swallow England as toad, but biting off more than it could chew” (Kahane 243). Rachel Bowlby views it as “a primitive, perverse type of miscegenation, a union across the boundaries of the species. It is one of a number of images in the novel where love and hate, aggressivity and desire, seem indistinguishable, or coexist, or rapidly succeed one another” (154). Madelyn Detloff brilliantly interprets the image and Giles’s subsequent violence as representative of attitudes toward “queer abjection,” particularly as the image coincides with Giles’s distaste for William Dodge’s homosexuality (48). See Elizabeth Abel for a psychoanalytic reading, particularly of the maternal anxieties in characters like Giles and Bart upon encountering the “monstrous inversion.” See Maria DiBattista for an interpretation of the snake and toad in conjunction with Dante’s depiction of Satan. See Marina Mackay for a reading of Giles’s blood-stained shoes as indicative of the “fall from innocence” enacted by society and Woolf’s own fall from favor after proposing her outsider’s society in *Three Guineas* (239).

Then one of the troopers removed part of her clothing, and she screamed and hit him about the face. ...”

That was real; so real that on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall; through the Arch the barrack room; in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him about the face, when the door (for in fact it was a door) opened and in came Mrs. Swithin carrying a hammer. (20)

Such a description concisely captures Woolf’s arguments in *Three Guineas* about the correlation between military violence, patriarchal society, and sexual politics.³³ Isa’s gradual awareness, which moves from fantastic to romantic to the horrible reality of the story, illustrates the dawning realization of the aggression that permeates her society. Such a violent reality even reaches the country manor house since Lucy’s hammer for hanging the pageant’s sign could so quickly become an instrument of violence. The story of the rape “was real” to Isa, so real that it transforms her surroundings. As Christine Froula observes, “Like the ‘real’ swallows, rain, cows, and planes that traverse La Trobe’s pageant, this news item about a rape of an English girl by English soldiers tears through the novel’s illusion, linking Isa’s ‘toothache’ with ‘real’—and real—violence against women at the core of so-called civilization” (293). Yet the day quickly returns to its familiar shape, Lucy using the hammer not for violence but for the routine of hanging the sign as she asks the usual question of what they will do if it rains. Isa thus glimpses death and its power to transform her attitude toward the world but this awareness slips through her consciousness, remaining on the margins.

The newspaper is also used throughout to ominously allude to the deaths occurring across the English Channel. For example, upon arriving at Pointz Hall from London, the “ghost of

³³ This episode is frequently read in conjunction with George’s (Isa’s son) traumatic encounter with his grandfather in which he scares the child with a newspaper wrapped into a beak around his mouth. See Claire Kahane for such a reading that also discusses the allusions to the rape of Philomela. See Jane Marcus for an extended discussion of the rape as it relates to Philomela and Woolf’s larger feminist politics in the novel. Sallie Sears also observes that the newspaper story “...haunts Isa throughout the day and restages the brutal lovemaking between herself and Giles and the novel’s conclusion—a scene that both initiates and symbolizes the work’s vision of a collective return to the savagery of the past” (215).

convention rose to the surface” and compels Giles to change his clothes so that he enters the dining room “looking like a cricketer” despite the fact that “he was enraged” (46). He asks himself, “Had he not read, in the morning paper, in the train, that sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent?” (46). Despite the mounting violence occurring in Europe due to fascism, he changes into the uniform of leisure at the country estate. The violence of war is again displaced, not even quoted here but paraphrased. The audience further fragments such news of the rising violence across the Channel during the pageant’s interval, in which nameless members of the group all contribute to a disjointed conversation about current affairs. Woolf depicts the conversation as follows:

“No, I don’t go by politicians. I’ve a friend who’s been to Russia. He says... And my daughter, just back from Rome, she says the common people, in the cafes, hate Dictators... Well, different people say different things...”

“Did you see it in the papers—the case about the dog? D’you believe dogs can’t have puppies?... And Queen Mary and the Duke of Windsor on the south coast?... D’you believe what’s in the papers? I ask the butcher or the grocer... That’s Mr. Streatfield, carrying a hurdle.... The good clergyman, I say, does more work for less pay than all the lot... It’s the wives that make the trouble”

“And what about the Jews? The refugees...the Jews... People like ourselves, beginning life again... But it’s always been the same.... My old mother, who’s over eighty, can remember... Yes, she still reads without glasses.... How amazing!” (121)³⁴

Unlike Giles who clearly recognizes the threat of fascism, attempting to articulate it with his feeble hedgehog metaphor, the nameless audience here jumbles the violence reported in the papers with the mundane facts of daily life such as news about the Royals, one’s mother’s eyesight, domestic gossip, and the status of the clergy. The reader is teased with tidbits of the coming war but as soon as someone asks if one has read the paper, it is only to hear of a story

³⁴ This episode is considerably shortened from the original version in the typescript. Woolf removes both village gossip but also more pessimistic and direct references to the previous and coming wars, including a reference to the escapism of art: “‘These days, that’s what one wants. Something to make one forget.... Or should I say, remember?... Half the time, [though I wouldn’t say it in public,] we worry about what doesn’t matter.... People saying the end of the world has come. But it hasn’t....’” (*Pointz Hall* 354).

about dogs.³⁵ When Mussolini is alluded to, it is not from a newspaper story but through gossip from someone's daughter who was in Rome. Most telling of all, the issue of the persecution of the Jews in Europe is raised but quickly deflected, first by equating them with refugees in general and then sliding into a comment on "ourselves" and how "it's" always the same. The fragmentary and faceless nature of the conversation prevents any concrete interpretation of these pronouns: does "ourselves" refer to a Jewish audience member or is it an offensive equation of the situation of the British with that of the Jews? Does "it's" refer to anti-Semitism in Europe or the general and seemingly universal situation of "beginning life again"? In this instance, death is totally removed from the concrete reality of events occurring in 1939 in continental Europe, and instead is not even an event articulated by the amorphous audience.

In these examples of death or violence, the characters understand death in what Heidegger would call the "vulgar" mode of "the they." Death is not something that is imagined as occurring to oneself, an imminent possibility that is always on the horizon for each person in a radically individual way, but rather a continually deferred experience that always happens to someone else. This is how death becomes routine and everyday, rather than an experience that opens up the possibility of authenticity. Since *Dasein* has language, "when *Dasein* maintains itself in idle talk, it is, as being-in-the-world, cut off from the primary and primordially genuine relations of being toward the world, toward *Dasein*-with, toward being-in-itself" (*Being and Time* 164). Thus, for both Woolf and Heidegger it is not simply language that presents access to an authentic mode of being-toward-death but rather a specific type of language or imagination

³⁵ A similar effect is achieved in a later episode in the interval after the cows' bellowing interrupts the pageant. In that case, each speaker is given a separate line and each person's speech is clearly demarcated by quotation marks. La Trobe observes that the conversation reaches her as if "feeling invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices" (151). Significantly, in the earlier typescript, direct references to WWI are removed in favor of focusing on the Germans more generally. Thus, in the earlier typescript, Woolf writes "'It all looks very black' [a voice said.] 'In 1914 at least...' 'No one wants it...<This time.>'" (*Pointz Hall* 371). In the final version this episode appears as: "'It all looks very black.' 'No one wants it—save those damned Germans'" (151).

separate from such “idle talk.” The audience’s nameless, faceless conversation and the newspaper stories that marginalize death are representative of the “idle talk” of “the they” that obscures an authentic attitude toward death. Rather than recognize the imminent possibility of their own deaths, characters like Isa, Giles, and the audience approach death as something that occurs “over there,” across the channel or in the barracks of Whitehall.

If such characters in *Between the Acts* never achieve an authentic attitude of being-toward-death, how does it end up being embodied in the novel? The answer, of course, lies with the character most closely aligned with Woolf herself: the playwright La Trobe. La Trobe also comes in contact with death but, like the other characters, one that is metaphorical rather than literal—the death of the illusion she creates during the pageant. On two separate occasions La Trobe fears that the illusion slips and she has lost her audience, something she experiences as a death. Thus, in the first case, the wind takes away the sound of the villagers’ song and the audience stares at them in dumb ignorance of the message, causing La Trobe to lean “against the tree, paralyzed. Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. ‘This is death,’ she murmured, ‘death’” (140). In the second instance, she stops all the music and action on stage to let the audience experience “present time” but reality proves to be too strong as the audience fidgets and becomes restless, causing La Trobe to “[damn] the audience. Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails. Unable to lift her hand, she stood facing the audience” (180). In both cases the death of the author seems imminent. Yet in both scenes the natural world steps in to save the work of art and assert the primacy of life over death. Thus, in the former quotation, just at the moment La Trobe is paralyzed, a cow, having lost her calf, “in the very nick of time...lifted her great moon-eyed head and bellowed,” filling the world “with

dumb yearning” (140). Soon, the entire herd joins in and, “[l]ashing their tails, blobbed like pokers, they tossed their heads high, plunged and bellowed, as if Eros had planted his dart in their flanks and goaded them to fury” (140). In the latter, immediately after La Trobe’s second expression of despair, a rain shower falls “sudden, profuse,” causing her to revise her statement of “death, death, death” to “Tears. Tears. Tears” and imagine that the rain is “like all the people in the world weeping” (180). Just as the cows express Eros over Thanatos, here this weeping is not one of despair but rather leads to renewed life, the brief shower ending and leaving the grass with “a fresh earthy smell” (180) that foreshadows the fertile mud in which La Trobe’s new play will be composed at the end of the novel.³⁶

Death is not the final emphasis in either example but rather becomes an opportunity for a renewed sense of life—Eros triumphing over Thanatos in the case of the cows and the rain renewing the soil and preparing the ground for future life, or future artistic creation as the case may be.³⁷ As Mark Hussey observes:

Again and again everything seems about to grind to a halt and vacancy to prevail, but each time something rescues the scene—a lowing cow, a shower of rain, an old man’s brash cry of “Bravo!”—and life lurches on. The novel is a testament of hope created in the face of despair. (135)

In conjunction with this argument for the affirmative power of nature, I would like to suggest that being-toward-death is finally articulated in these moments. Like being-toward-death in Woolf’s essays, here it is firmly linked to the capacity of the mind to continue creating the present work and to imagine future art. Instead of the fatalism of the instant of death, being-

³⁶ Just as with the image of the snake choking on the toad and the newspaper story about the rape at Whitehall, these two scenes are frequently discussed in *Between the Acts* criticism. See DiBattista for an interpretation that reads these moments of *deus ex machina* as comic. See Cuddy-Keane for an excellent reading of such scenes as comic and particularly for how La Trobe escapes being a dictator through her willingness to allow such chance events to enter her production.

³⁷ See Howard Harper for an analysis of the rain in relation to the modernist waste land motif.

toward-death is inextricable from natural forces in the world off-stage that assert an affirmative life force. Unlike Bart's anthropomorphic view of history and the world as seen from the window of an airplane, the world here exists *alongside* La Trobe and her creation. Rather than imposing her vision onto the natural world, the natural world intersects with the pageant and changes it. In this way, Woolf displays how an attitude of being-toward-death is one that is both performative and unpredictable. It is not achieved through consciousness or rationally ordering the world (the Cartesian argument that Heidegger repeatedly rejects) but rather by existing alongside the world and holding oneself open to the possibilities that can occur within it.

Such an attitude of being-toward-death is not limited, however, to the pageant. Refusing to grant meaning to the play or interact with the audience, La Trobe waits until everyone has entirely dispersed before she comes out of her hiding place behind the tree. She feels a momentary sense of triumph at her success but quickly despairs, the fears of the death of her art returning. She "groaned" that the play had been "A failure" (209). As soon as she utters these words, however, nature again intervenes and rescues her from another metaphorical death in the form of a flock of starlings attacking the tree above her:

The whole tree hummed with the whizz they made, as if each bird plucked a wire. A whizz, a buzz rose from the bird-buzzing, bird-vibrant, bird-blackened tree. The tree became a rhapsody, a quivering cacophony, a whizz and vibrant rapture, branches, leaves, birds syllabbling discordantly life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree. Then up! Then off! (209)

The "death, death, death" of her previous despair during the pageant is definitively transformed into the call "life, life, life," a call emanating from the natural world that asserts itself alongside human experience. The description of the starlings, with the repeated consonance of "whizzing" and "buzzing" and the vivid imagery of their flight, directly echoes Isa's attempts to describe the movement of the plane propeller that "whizzed, whirred, buzzed" (15) as it flies through the air.

Whereas Isa's attempts to capture a manmade flight are abortive, La Trobe's witnessing of this natural whizzing and buzzing renews her faith in her artistic power and spurs her to new creation. From here, she heads to the pub, where the collective voice of the villagers creates the beginnings of her new artistic endeavor. Thus, as she drinks, "Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning—wonderful words" (212). The villagers here represent "the they" of everyday society and are aligned with the "dumb oxen" just as they earlier mimicked the cows when they return to grazing and their programs, respectively. Unlike La Trobe, who achieves a state in which "the mud became fertile" for a new artistic creation, "the they" of the audience and the family of Pointz Hall remain trapped in their everyday existence, unable to achieve an authentic state of being. Yet, the possibility for such an attitude is never foreclosed. Indeed, it is from the babble of the villagers that La Trobe's next artistic vision will arise. She comes close to achieving it in the pageant and ultimately the artist herself embodies an attitude of being-toward-death through her sheer effort to continue creating in the face of failure and the frequent inability of the audience to follow her vision.³⁸

Yet the novel does not end with La Trobe in the pub. Instead we return to Pointz Hall to find Bart and Giles reading the evening paper, Lucy resuming her history of the island, and Isa and Giles preparing to speak to each other for the first time that day. This final scene has been interpreted as the first act in La Trobe's new work, a reading supported by the final line, "Then

³⁸ Despite the turn to "life, life, life," Daniel Ferrer interprets this passage as only a temporary respite from the bleakness of death, arguing that "The symbolic cannot loosen its hold for long, and 'life' cannot triumph over the limits...for there is death" (123). Most critics, however, cite this passage as evidence of the affirmative nature of Woolf's last novel (e.g. Hartman, Kenney). See Mitchell Leaska's introduction to the *Pointz Hall* typescripts for a brilliant reading of how "life, life, life" in Greek translates as "Vita, Vita, Vita" and how the passage repeats passages in *Orlando* that were later adapted in a poem by Vita Sackville-West after Woolf's death.

the curtain rose. They spoke” (219). Rachel Bowlby links this self-reflexive ending with the earlier image of the snake and toad, arguing that the final line “points to something to come after, something next” but a future that is currently “unrecognizable and strange” since “[w]hat departs from the present scheme is inconceivable within it, and so can only look now like a monster” (159). Echoing this gesture toward the future but without the bleak emphasis on the monstrous snake and toad, I would like to focus on how this final episode gives us a glimpse of an affirmative future for the Oliver family, one in which they can realize an authentic attitude of being-toward-death on the eve of the Second World War. Lucy and her history of Britain provide the first indication of such an emerging awareness. She reads aloud to the family that “Prehistoric man [...] half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones” (218). This description crucially emphasizes building and creating civilization, not destroying it through acts of violence. As others have observed, Woolf revised this passage from the typescript of *Pointz Hall*. The original quotation from Lucy’s book depicts prehistoric man as “half-human, half monster, rose from his semi-crouching position and fashioned a weapon” rather than stones (*Pointz* 439). Upon reading this fact, Lucy “tiptoed out of the room as if she were telling herself the last words of the [chapter] <story>” (439). Significantly, Woolf does not just change “weapon” to “stones” but she also revises “half-monster” to “half-ape” to emphasize our ability to evolve, as opposed to recalling the monstrous inversion of the snake and toad symbolizing the impasse within human history over our recurring turn to violence and warfare. Additionally, in the published version, after reading this passage Lucy again tiptoes out of the room but merely rises and “smiles”—she does not tell herself that these are the last words of the story, as is the case with prehistoric man’s weapons. Instead, in the final version, the book continues, it does not end with raising stones or weapons but rather the

future remains full of possibilities for mankind. Although it would have been easy for Woolf to end on a note of despair at the seeming inability of humankind to do anything other than wage war, such revisions indicate Woolf's final emphasis on affirmation and the possibility of society to recover and sustain itself.

In a similar depiction of affirmation, the novel's final paragraph turns to Isa and Giles.

Before the curtain rises on the new drama, Woolf depicts them as follows:

Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night. (219)

Here, as in Ford Madox Ford's representation of the dual forces characterizing the trauma of the First World War, the eternal battle between Eros and Thanatos is again waged on the eve of the Second World War. Significantly, it is the "embrace" that ends the sequence of fighting, signaling a form of being-toward-life which is possible through reproduction. Woolf departs from dystopian novelistic convention by holding out this possibility of "another life." Of course, such a possibility is not guaranteed, given the characters' position on the brink of another "heart of darkness." Yet, the crucial point is that in the final scene of her last novel Woolf emphasizes possibility, not impossibility. As Susan Kenney has observed, Woolf struggled with this ending, the earlier typescript of *Pointz Hall* diverging significantly from the published ending. In the earlier version, the novel concludes with Isa's unanswered questions: "Is the play a failure [...] if we don't know the meaning? Who had written it? And what's the meaning? Why are we forced to act our parts?" (*Pointz* 188). As Kenney argues, Woolf's revision from the questions to the curtains rising as Giles and Isa speak indicates "an affirmation of a kind of negative capability, the ability of art to act and create even if the dream of life's significance is torn to pieces before our eyes" (281). Life and art become one in this revised ending; speaking finally becomes a

viable action that fuses linguistic and biological production, a union that was thwarted in Isa's earlier "abortive" creative attempts. Although Kenney does not discuss it, in fact, the questions do not end the earlier typescript. Instead, Woolf ends the novel with the line: "She looked out & he too; then as if someone had murmured the first words, they began simultaneously the inevitable fight" (*Pointz* 188-9). Significantly, the published version ends with "spoke" rather than "fight." Such a revision echoes the earlier change in Lucy's book from prehistoric man picking up a weapon rather than raising stones. Furthermore, in the published version it is "they," Giles and Isa, who speak, not the faceless "someone" who murmurs in the typescript. The emphasis in the final version is on a persistent will to speak, to act through thinking and speaking rather than succumb solely to aggression and a destructive fight. Although Isa never becomes a writer like La Trobe or Woolf and Giles never finds a way to productively escape his paralysis in the face of the coming war, the emphasis in this final passage is on the potentiality that each character holds between them. Out of the darkness at the end of the day, new life can emerge alongside a realization of an authentic mode of being, one realized specifically through an awareness of the Thanatos of the pending war or the death permeating everyday life. Such an attitude, glimpsed in this final scene, is focused on potentialities rather than fixated solely on the instant of death.

Coda: "scraps, orts, and fragments"

Just as locating a more affirmative vein within Ford and Barker's representations of the trauma of the First World War must be qualified in light of the difficulty of remembrance and representation, the pull toward a fatalistic interpretation of the novel continues to lurk under the surface of *Between the Acts*, particularly given Woolf's suicide. As John Whittier-Ferguson notes, although he himself has also promoted an affirmative interpretation, he admits that he has

“grown less sure that its heroic-utopian orientation effectively counterbalances the nightmares of history, and [he is] convinced that it only occasionally comforted Woolf” (244). Despite the consensus among the majority of contemporary critics that *Between the Acts* can now be read as affirmative, Woolf is far from didactic or definitive in the novel. Along with her fellow modernists, she prefers ambiguity in the final scene rather than neat and definitive narrative closure. Thus, the final theatrical flourish of “the curtain rose” gestures to a text beyond the current one, a future that is undefined and that we will not see staged in the pages of the novel. Similarly, we are meant to gently mock the characters’ attempts to grant meaning and narrative closure to the pageant, particularly Rev. Streatfield’s hesitant interpretation of the pageant’s distressing mirror scene. In his efforts to sum up, the village clergyman interprets the “scraps, orts, and fragments” refrain of the pageant as follows: “To me at least it was indicated that we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole,” concluding with the plea “Surely, we should unite?” (192). As Melba Cuddy-Keane observes, although Streatfield’s synopsis is ridiculous and reductive if considered as absolute truth, it is nevertheless redeemed by functioning “As yet another of our constant but imperfect attempts to achieve understanding” (277). In the face of the war and the fragmentation of modern society, Streatfield tentatively proposes unification as the best bet for preserving culture and also defending against the imminent threats of invasion.

Streatfield’s speech does not end on this note of unification, however. Instead, he concludes with an entreaty for donations to purchase new electric lights for the village church, the pageant being a fundraising opportunity. Woolf narrates the appeal as follows:

“But there is still a defecit” (he consulted his paper) “of one hundred and seventy-five pounds odd. So that each of us who has enjoyed this pageant has still an opp...” The word was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a

flight of wild duck came overhead. That was the music. The audience gaped; the audience gazed. Then zoom became drone. The planes had passed. (193)

Such an interruption, at the moment the clergyman is about to grant the pageant its economic meaning, is perhaps the most striking allusion to the coming war. Unlike the starlings and bellowing cows whose natural calls turn La Trobe away from death toward renewed creative possibilities, the planes are a mechanized reminder of mankind's dominance over nature. They are only "*like* a flight of wild duck"; they do not hold the same status as an actual flock of ducks that could create a vision and experience of being alongside the world. Rather, they are an image of the coming war and an echo of Bart's anthropomorphic view of the landscape. Just as planes express Isa's "abortive" attempts to write and block Woolf's own creative thought when they are tied to war, here they abruptly cut Streatfield off and forestall easy meaning being granted to the pageant and, by extension, the novel itself.

The fragmentation of Streatfield's final interpretation speaks to the larger issue of fragmentation versus unification in the novel.³⁹ Of course, the dark side of unification is that it can lead to dictators, fascist states, and war. It remains an open question whether or not the "scraps, orts and fragments" come together in the end or if they remain fragments. Yet such ambiguity written into Woolf's last novel is not necessarily indicative of the aporetic or melancholic aesthetic forms favored by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic trauma theorists, respectively. Instead, we can interpret such ambiguity as representative of the potentiality inherent in the creative acts of writing and interpretation. Although Streatfield's interpretation is interrupted by the airplanes that signal the coming war and Isa's attempts at writing poetry remain abortive, they both hold the possibility of achieving an authentic attitude of being-

³⁹ Fragmentation, of course, is a familiar aesthetic device within modernism, from Cubist collage to Eliot's famous "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" in *The Waste Land*. The ambiguity in *Between the Acts* over whether or not the "scraps, orts and fragments" cohere into a unified whole or remain disparate pieces firmly situates Woolf's last novel within this modernist tradition so frequently celebrated by contemporary trauma theory.

toward-death through their attempts at creation. In her final novel, Woolf embodies such an attitude, the composition history of *Between the Acts* insisting on the starlings' mantra "life, life, life." Such an utterance and manifestation of being-toward-death in language is only possible, however, against the backdrop of death, both in the war and in relation to Woolf's suicide. Being-toward-death, instead of being a simplistic denial of death or attitude of escape (as is the attitude taken by "the they" toward death), is an authentic state of being revealed because of death's imminence. Similarly, rather than write an escapist, provincial denial of contemporary political events, Woolf achieves her affirmative representation precisely through the imminence of death looming on the horizon. Ultimately, *Between the Acts* reveals an affirmative attitude of being-toward-death that is neither fatalist nor fixated on the impossibility of writing the instant of death.

Of course, locating an affirmative concept of being-toward-death in language does not solve the impasse within trauma theory over the instant of death. The mantra "life, life, life" occurs in the context of the symbolic death of the author. Similarly, the planes flying over Streatfield and the audience are not the bombers Woolf fears in her diary entry that opens this chapter. Although Woolf presents an embodiment of being-toward-death in fictional form, she shies away from representing the instant of death in *Between the Acts*. Thus, being-at-the-end, or the instant of death, remains the fraught, necessary, yet largely impossible literary enterprise Blanchot and Derrida describe. Despite this, Woolf presents us with a representation of being-toward-death that can be mobilized within trauma theory as a model of an affirmative attitude toward trauma. Such an attitude does not disregard the impossibility of ever fully capturing the traumatic event in language but rather emphasizes both the possibility inherent in language and the capacity of the imagination to express an authentic mode of being in time.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Literary Examined Life: *Atonement* and Second World War Legacies

Ian McEwan published two responses to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in *The Guardian*, the first on September 12 and the second three days later. Both articles contain meditations on the imagination and specifically the role it plays in the representation and transmission of traumatic events. In the first, McEwan opens with a reflection on how Hollywood has been imagining these events “in the worst of its movies” for decades and yet “American reality always outstrips the imagination” (12 Sept 2001). Yet even though “we had seen this before, with giant budgets and special effects, [...] so badly rehearsed,” he concludes that “[n]othing could have prepared us” for the actualization of such horrors. Despite the overwhelmingly visual nature of the event, unfolding globally in a manner “[o]nly television could bring us,” the scenes that occurred off-screen in the imagination were the most terrible. Thus, McEwan states, “We were watching death on an unbelievable scale, but we saw no one die. The nightmare was in this gulf of imagining. The horror was in the distance.” In his article from September 15, he again focuses on the imagination, describing the inability of those fervently watching their television screens to comprehend the magnitude of the event. McEwan recounts the numerous stories of victims calling their families to tell them they loved them, noting that in the past we used literature to help us understand death but “these last words spoken down mobile phones, reported to us by the bereaved, are both more haunting and true” (15 Sept 2001). In the wake of such incomprehensible violence, “There is only love, and then oblivion. Love was all they had to set against the hatred of their murderers.” McEwan concludes with a reflection on empathy, observing how the last words of the victims, “compel us to imagine

ourselves into that moment. What would we say? Now we know.” Ultimately, he conflates the possibility of such violence with a failure of imagination:

If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim. Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.

McEwan thus interprets the “crime” of the terrorists as a “failure of imagination” and the “snatched and anguished assertions of love” as the victims’ defiance. Whereas his initial response first indicts Hollywood’s fictional representations of violence only to conclude that the true nightmare during an actual televised traumatic event lies in the “gulf of imagining,” his response in the days after September 11 celebrates the imagination as the means that makes morality and compassion possible, setting the victims and the global audience of witnesses apart from the perpetrators. The imagination thus appears to be a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it is a source of empathy and morality that defies such acts of terror; yet, on the other, the gulf it opens produces nightmares and has the capacity to create offensive, big-budget representations of such traumatic events.

In a markedly different context—and obviously on a completely different scale—McEwan also portrays Briony’s crime in terms of the imagination. When discussing *Atonement*, interviewers repeatedly ask him about whether or not Briony is let off too easily since she is granted long life and professional success. McEwan continually defends his character, asserting that he prefers “error” to “crime” and pointing out that Paul and Lola Marshall are the true villains since they never atone for their crimes but rather go on to great wealth and success without looking back.¹ According to McEwan, “what redeems Briony in *Atonement* is precisely

¹ McEwan makes comments to this effect in an interview with Adam Begley. He justifies the fate of the Marshalls by stating, “Psychological realism demands that sometimes the wicked prosper” (105).

the fact that she *has* led an examined life. Her great misdeed pursues her through the years. She will not let herself forget—and this is her atonement” (Groes 129). He elaborates in another interview:

I was hoping that the reader, by the end of *Atonement*, would feel some kind of uplift, even if things have not turned out well. That by the time Briony says “there’s no atonement for God and novelists” at the end of this book, I feel that we’ve made a journey with her that has its own satisfactions. [...] She’s lived an examined life, to borrow that phrase. She committed a great error—I don’t think of it as a crime but many readers do. She’s committed a great error and she has spent many decades examining it. And finally, to have a moral conscience, to live an examined life, to be as aware in your thoughts as you possibly can, with the gift of consciousness you have, is my sense of, you know, asserting what it is to be on the side of life. (BBC World Book Club Interview, 28 March 2005)

Although critics frequently emphasize how Briony’s atonement fails, as evidenced by her confession to the reader that Robbie and Cecilia died during the war without meeting again and reconciling with her,² McEwan stresses not failure but “some kind of uplift,” however qualified it might be by the fact that “things have not turned out well.” McEwan’s notion of the “uplift” and satisfaction that readers should feel at the end of the novel, although not the same as a happy ending, is a form of affirmation in the wake of traumatic events, an example of being “on the side of life.” Such affirmation stems from Briony’s enactment of the examined life, a self-reflexive, written examination in which she is constantly “aware in [her] thoughts” through the “gift of consciousness.”

I take these two moments as my starting point because both are responses to collective traumatic events that define the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: World War II and September 11. *Atonement*, with its 2001 publication date, eerily looks back at one of the defining

² Dominic Head makes precisely this argument, observing that “The lifetime task of rewriting the novel, as a substitute atonement for that which cannot be undone (as the lovers are ‘really’ dead), finally reveals the authority of writing to be incompatible with atonement on a personal level” (171). Similarly, Alistair Cormack argues that, in the end, “[f]iction is presented as a lie—a lie that, if believed, comforts, distorts and finally produces unethical action. There is no atonement and fiction is necessarily a failure because Briony knows what is true” (81).

traumas of the previous century just as another collective traumatic event is about to set the course for the new century.³ In his reflections on empathy and the examined life, McEwan presents us with a compelling model for how imaginative fiction can intervene in the critical conversation about remembering trauma, that might, in turn, present strategies for coping with the traumatic events of a new era. These two moments also illustrate McEwan's attitude toward the imagination, empathy, and violence. Unlike Briony's "error," the terrorists commit a crime, specifically a crime of the imagination, in their inability to empathize with their victims. Briony, on the other hand, suffers from too much imagination, her error resulting from her self-created narrative of the reality of that momentous night in 1935. In the wake of her error, Briony leads an "examined life" in the form of a literary atonement. She rewrites her novel over a dozen times in an effort to imagine the lives of those whom she has irreparably damaged through her actions. For Briony, therefore, the imagination is both the motive at the root of her crime and the medium of her atonement. In the context of 9/11, the imagination is the means to combat acts of terror, but it also breeds nightmares that spring from the gulf between the televised event and the imagined horrors of what happened inside the towers. For McEwan, the examined life is synonymous with Briony's act of atonement; it is a life firmly grounded in the empathetic capacity of human beings to imagine the lives of others. If the "essence of compassion" and the "beginning of morality" start with the ability to empathize, the examined life as a mode of atonement stems from a similar capacity to imagine.

³ As Dominic Head observes, reviews of *Atonement* appeared in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 alongside McEwan's own published responses to the attacks, both the novel and McEwan's articles commenting on authorial ethics and the role of the novelist as a moralist (161). Clearly *Atonement* is not a response to 9/11—the novel was composed well before the events of that year and the publication date of 2001 is a coincidence with the terrorist attacks on the WTC. *Saturday*, of course, is McEwan's novelistic response to 9/11, with its opening images of a terrorist attack over London in the early hours of that momentous Saturday in Henry Perowne's life.

McEwan borrows the concept of the examined life from *The Apology*, which, along with the *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, narrates the last days of Socrates's life.⁴ In the text, Socrates describes the type of life he has led as a philosopher and how his only claim to wisdom comes from acknowledging the limits of his knowledge through constant questioning. In response to arguments from his disciples that he should flee into exile to avoid a death sentence, he insists that giving up such a philosophical life is impossible, regardless of his location:

“Someone will probably say, ‘But, Socrates, can’t you live in exile without talking, just keeping our peace? Surely you can do that?’ To convince some of you about this is the most difficult thing of all. If I say ‘That would be to disobey the god; how can I keep my peace, then?’, you’ll not believe me because you’ll think I’m dissembling; if on the other hand I say that it actually is the greatest good for a human being to get into discussion, every day, about the goodness and the other subjects you hear me talking and examining myself and others about, and that for a human being a life without examination is actually not worth living—if I say that, you’ll be even less convinced. But that’s how I say it is, Athenians; it’s just not easy to convince you.” (57)

This passage encapsulates Socrates's famous argument throughout *The Apology*: the unexamined life is not worth living. Contrary to the charges against him, he does not think himself better than the gods and other men but rather only acknowledges that he must continually search for the truth of the world around him through philosophical reflection. Death and the examined life are conceptually intertwined, not only because Socrates eloquently defends his philosophical methods in the speech he gives when facing a death sentence, but also because philosophical examination mimics death. In *Phaedo*, Socrates explains to his disciples how “those occupied correctly in philosophy really do practise dying, and death is less frightening to them than for anyone else” (100). Correctly practiced philosophy is a rehearsal for dying since it is an effort to

⁴ Plato's texts can be read as a testimony to Socrates's death, particularly *Phaedo*, which contains repeated references to Phaedo's status as a privileged witness to the last hours of the philosopher's life. Rather than an eyewitness account, *The Apology* takes the form of Socrates's direct speech during his defense against the charges—a literal testimony in that it is a legal defense made before his sentencing. *The Apology* thus can be read alongside other testimonial narratives delivered in the face of death, particularly Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death* and Sartre's *The Wall*.

separate the soul from the body. As Socrates contends, the philosopher comes closest to truth when he has as little to do with the body as possible. If death is the separation of the soul from the body, philosophy also strives for a similar separation, one that is only truly achieved in death.

Of course, Socrates, as presented to us by Plato in *Phaedo* and *The Republic*, is notoriously dismissive of poetry as an appropriate medium for philosophical inquiry and gaining access to truth. As a result, the examined life discussed in *The Apology* is exclusive to philosophical examination—it is not an examined life in the realm of literature. Alternatively, McEwan's version of the examined life is explicitly tied to the imagination and its fiction-making capacities: Briony enacts her self-examination on the pages of her successive drafts depicting that summer day in 1935, a rewriting that blurs the boundaries between testimony and fiction. This literary examination shares many affinities with Socrates's philosophical concept, particularly in its emphasis on the continued effort to speak in the face of death—Socrates refuses to flee but rather keeps practicing Socratic dialogue and Briony resolutely continues to write in the face of the imminent loss of her memory and her inevitable death. Rather than admit the impossibility of language in such circumstances, both Socrates and Briony persist in their examinations, in speech or writing, up to the moment of death.

My contention in this chapter is that *Atonement* presents us with what I will call the literary examined life. Such a term translates Socrates's examined life from philosophy to literature in order to acknowledge the emphasis McEwan places on the imagination to engage critically with the past, notably in the context of violence and its aftermath. The literary examined life, in fusing philosophical and literary discourse, speaks in a self-reflexive, dualistic language, voicing a critical examination of the intersections between fiction-making and the truth-claims of testimony. This tension between fiction and testimony is evident both in the coda

of *Atonement* when Briony testifies to what “really happened” to Robbie and Cecilia and in McEwan’s 9/11 articles when he admits that the testaments of love spoken down mobile phones are both “more haunting and true” than literary depictions of death. Such statements reveal McEwan’s acute awareness of fiction’s limitations when encountering historical and contemporary traumatic events. Furthermore, the duality of the literary examined life reflects McEwan’s conception of the imagination as the source of crime and atonement, nightmare and empathy. As Dominic Head argues, McEwan’s entire oeuvre is concerned with questions of morality and, particularly in *Atonement* and his responses to 9/11, the novelist appears to have “a privileged place” in “the process of moral thinking” (161). Rather than an instrument of morality that presents us with a resolution or a clear-cut judgment on the crimes of the past, I argue that the literary examined life highlights the limitations of ever fully atoning for the past, in both fiction and testimony. Yet, instead of ending on a note of failure and impossibility, the literary examined life insists on persistence and continued examination, even when confronted with a past for which atonement will never be complete or possible.

The literary examined life, therefore, functions alongside Heidegger’s being-toward-death, as a mode of being that presents more affirmative strategies for continued existence in the face of death and trauma. If Virginia Woolf embodies an attitude of being-toward-death in her last novel, McEwan presents a meditation on such an attitude from the vantage of the beginning of the twenty-first century. Unlike being-toward-death in literary form, which occurs against the backdrop of imminent death and trauma, the examined life takes the form of critical remembrance. Thus, Briony self-reflexively examines her past and its grave consequences from the perspective of the end of the century, just as McEwan self-reflexively examines both the legacy of the war and also the modernist literary tradition he inherits, particularly from an author

like Woolf. Although critics frequently interpret *Atonement* in conjunction with Woolf, they largely focus on her early novels, primarily *To the Lighthouse*.⁵ While such comparisons are compelling, I make the case for *Between the Acts* as a key intertext for *Atonement*, given both novels' context of the Second World War and the emphasis on an embodiment of being-toward-death and the examined life, respectively.

In the following pages, I begin by analyzing two figures who enact a version of the examined life through the medium of the gaze: Friedrich Nietzsche's upward looking Zarathustra and the backward stare of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History. While at first glance such a comparison seems far removed from McEwan's novel, this theoretical framework highlights the limitations of finding affirmation within trauma theory, particularly in the context of the Second World War. Additionally, this framework presents an important opportunity to examine the dissertation's own limitations, particularly when considering Heidegger's Nazism, which presents a serious obstacle to grounding a theory of affirmation in his ontology of death given the centrality of the Holocaust to trauma theory. Furthermore, the anti-Semitic comments Virginia Woolf occasionally wrote in her diary, letters, and short story "The Duchess and the Jeweller" pose a complication to the previous chapter's interpretation of her writing during the Second World War. McEwan has been forthcoming with his own opinions upon the limitations of modernism as a political aesthetic. On the one hand, he characterizes *Atonement* as indebted to authors like Woolf but, on the other, he rejects modernism as an appropriate style for

⁵ Richard Pedot is the only other critic to date to mention *Between the Acts* in the context of *Atonement* in the course of his argument that McEwan is atoning for and rewriting his own early, morally unsettling work while he is also rewriting modernism (Woolf and *Acts* do not figure in the article as more than a placeholder for "modernism" broadly). Richard Robinson notes that "the most conspicuous strain of modernism in *Atonement* is Woolfian" (477) and goes on to mention *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* as the most dominant influences, although the majority of his article devotes more time to explicating the allusions to Rosamond Lehmann and Henry James's *What Maise Knew*. See Laura Marcus for a reading of temporality in McEwan's work, with particular attention to his debt to Woolfian experimentations in this area, specifically *To the Lighthouse*. See Barbara Apstein for a catalogue of Woolfian techniques in *Atonement*, with particular emphasis on *Mrs. Dalloway*.

representing the Front and the London air raids in the second half of the novel. Rather than dismiss either Woolf or modernism, I emphasize the shortsightedness of McEwan's one-dimensional characterization of the aesthetic through an extended comparison of *Between the Acts* and *Atonement*. Ultimately, I argue that Briony's literary examined life operates as a dynamic mode of seeing, one that is capable of both critically remembering the past and also envisioning the possibility of an affirmative future, even if it can only be realized in the pages of fiction.

The Historical Gaze: Zarathustra and The *Angelus Novus*

To frame the analysis of McEwan's critical remembrance in *Atonement*, I begin with two figures, both of which are characterized by how they approach the past and by the metaphor of the gaze. The first is Nietzsche's Zarathustra who, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), undertakes a journey to address the problem of how to live a fulfilling life after the death of God. Zarathustra's quest is one of self-overcoming, as illustrated through a series of motifs that proliferate the text: sailing over turbulent seas, climbing mountains, traveling through forests, swimming in the current of the river of life, and crossing a bridge or a rope. Through these images, Zarathustra maintains a forward and upward looking gaze, in contrast to the nihilists "who have neither rest nor repose except when they see the world from *abaft*, the after-worldly" (204). In response, Zarathustra says "to their faces" that the world "is like man in having a backside *abaft*; that much is true. There is much filth in the world [...] But that does not make the world itself a filthy monster" (205). Those who cannot overcome the past and who remain transfixed by it, looking backward or from the vantage of the afterlife, are those who only see the world as a "filthy monster." Instead of a backward-looking journey, Zarathustra's is one of

moving forward between two peaks or two points on a rope. As he explains to the people before him:

“Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

“What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a *going under*.” (15)

Both looking back and “shuddering and stopping” are dangerous options in this metaphor of traversing a rope or bridge stretched across an abyss.⁶ Although the journey is dangerous, Nietzsche stresses the necessity of crossing, of continuing “on-the-way,” and striving to become the overman. As Walter Kaufmann argues, the image of man as a rope depicts “man’s ‘ontological predicament’: he lives, as it were, between two worlds and reaches out for ideals he cannot attain short of crossing an apparently insuperable abyss” (310). The *über* in both *Übermensch* and in going-over, going-under, and overcoming all imply that the true self, one’s ideal self, lies neither within oneself nor in the soul but rather is something above or beyond, something toward which one strives.⁷ As part of this upward striving and struggling, Zarathustra

⁶ The image of crossing an abyss, specifically between two mountain peaks, recurs in the climactic third part. Zarathustra is there depicted as “a soothsayer” who wanders “like a heavy cloud between past and future,” “pregnant with lightning bolts that say Yes and laugh Yes” (228). The lightning bolt becomes a symbol of the creativity that the will to power inspires. Creativity is essential to Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power and its process of self-overcoming—creation in terms of the literal birth of future generations but also the creations of the artist and philosopher who smash the values and traditions of the past in order to give birth to the lightning bolt that will rekindle the present. The affirmative “redemptive flash” (228) that says “Yes” as it bursts through the clouds is not a divine inspiration from the heavens. Instead, this Yes-saying flash is a spirit pregnant with Zarathustra’s irreverent laughter that parodies the Gospels in order to clear the ground for an earthly self-overcoming in this life.

⁷ Citing Klages, Kaufmann argues that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is essentially a book about *über*, with all its connotations of over-fullness, over-goodness, over-time, over-kind, over-wealth, over-words. As Kaufmann states, “The *Übermensch* at any rate cannot be dissociated from the conception of *Überwindung*, of overcoming, ‘Man is something that should be overcome’—and the man who has overcome himself has become an overman” (309).

employs the will to power, which is to say an affirmative life force that seeks what lies beyond, not behind.⁸

The overcoming symbolized by climbing one's summit and not looking back with despair over what was conforms to Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence in which one accepts and embraces all of life, including past suffering. One of Nietzsche's clearest statements of this attitude occurs in *Ecce Homo*:

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it. (258)

Amor fati, or loving one's fate, means embracing life as it is, rather than regretting what-might-have-been or imagining what-might-be. As an autobiographical summation of his philosophy written at the end of his life, *Ecce Homo* echoes Socrates's *Apology*. Indeed, Kaufmann states, "*Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's *Apology*" (408).⁹ Just as Socrates values the examined life above all, even if one cannot answer all questions or obtain final truth, Nietzsche stresses that wisdom stems from the realization of one's limits. Unlike Socrates, however, Nietzsche insists on the constant striving to overcome such limitations and love one's fate. Furthermore, a significant difference lies in the manner of Socrates's death: "In his own historical situation, Socrates acted

⁸ As Kaufmann states, "the will to power is essentially a creative force. *The powerful man is the creative man; but the creator is not likely to abide by previously established laws. A genuinely creative act contains its own norms, and every creation is a creation of new norms.* The great artist does not stick to any established code; yet his work is not lawless but has structure and form" (250). Furthermore, "*Great power reveals itself in great self-mastery*" (251) and self-discipline, Nietzsche famously praising ascetic artists and philosophers as coming closest to becoming overmen.

⁹ Nietzsche's admiration for Socrates is most evident in *The Gay Science*, although Kaufmann argues that Socrates is essential for understanding Nietzsche's entire oeuvre, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (402). Although Socrates represents "the very embodiment of Nietzsche's highest ideal: the passionate man who can control his passions" (399), Nietzsche nevertheless maintains that "we must overcome even the Greeks" (401), particularly Socrates's dying statement that life is an affliction. Bernard Reginster also argues for Socrates's importance to Nietzsche, characterizing the good life for Socrates as the search, not the attainment, of knowledge: "Socrates appears to value less the knowledge that successful examination would eventually produce than the activity of examining itself" (239), a view "similar to the Nietzschean ideal of a life animated by the desire for overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of knowledge" (240).

as wisely and courageously as was then possible; but [in *The Gay Science*] Nietzsche claims that Socrates was a pessimist who ‘suffered life’ as a disease” (Kaufmann 401). According to Nietzsche, instead of merely “bearing” one’s fate and suffering life as a disease, one should love it, as evident in the assertion of the eternal recurrence and *amor fati*. This sentiment is consistent with Nietzsche’s yes-saying Zarathustra whose dancing, laughter, and exuberance for life, including its woes and sufferings, embodies such an attitude.

When invoking Nietzsche in the context of trauma theory, especially the Second World War, the limitations of both his vision and my own reliance on it here and in my introductory genealogy of trauma emerge.¹⁰ The suicides of Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin, both occurring in the midst of the war, clearly underscore the limits of self-overcoming and loving one’s fate.¹¹ Furthermore, the impossibility of “bearing” one’s fate is tragically apparent in the context of the Holocaust and what Cathy Caruth calls the “crisis of survival” (*Unclaimed 7*), to which the suicides of Paul Celan and Primo Levi testify. Instead of Zarathustra’s upward and forward-looking gaze, the backward stare of Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History presents a more appropriate metaphor for discussing these deaths and the challenge atrocity poses to theorizing affirmation. Benjamin famously describes Klee’s *Angelus Novus* as:

¹⁰ It is important to note that such limitations do not originate in Nietzsche’s biography or German heritage. The fact that the Reich gave copies of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to all German soldiers during the First World War and Nietzsche’s later appropriation by the Nazis cannot be taken as evidence of complicity with German nationalism. Nietzsche died in 1900 and he declared in 1885 that he was so disgusted with nationalism—in which “the Germans of today are no thinkers any longer”—that he “wished [he] had not written my *Zarathustra* in German” (*Will to Power* xxiii). Furthermore, as Kaufmann abundantly shows in discussing concepts like the Overman (the superman), “it was perfectly clear that Nietzsche looked to art, religion, and philosophy—and not to race—to elevate man above the beasts, and some men above the mass of mankind” (285). Thus, neither the history of Nietzsche’s reception nor his personal biography are grounds for barring an application of his philosophy to trauma theory or the context of the Second World War.

¹¹ See Lecia Rosenthal and Madelyn Detloff for alternative interpretations that compare Benjamin and Woolf’s suicides. Detloff, in particular, performs an important analysis of the gendered dynamics at work in current critical and literary theory taking up these suicides: “The male death symbolizes a tragic, yet defiant agency, an engaged interaction with politics and culture, while the female death represents closure, individual pathology, singularity in retreat from politics and culture” (156).

looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257-8)

The Angel of History remains fixated on the past, “staring” with open mouth and unable to turn to face the future, his gaze permanently frozen on the wreckage of the catastrophe that we call progress. Despite the angel’s desire to “make whole what has been smashed” and redeem the past by “awakening the dead,” he is inexorably “hurled” and “propelled” forward through time, the storm violently catching his wings so that he “can no longer close them” or turn to see where the storm is blowing him. Nietzschean self-overcoming is impossible here—the angel is “irresistibly” hurled through time, unable to halt, slow down, or change direction, no matter how strong his will is. Such a vision of the past as catastrophe coincides with Benjamin’s historical materialist approach, one that theorizes the past in terms of barbarism and violent subjection of the oppressed—“There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (256). Written in 1940, this essay is, of course, the last he would compose before tragically taking his life while fleeing from the Nazis. In such dark times and under such circumstances, history and progress overwhelmingly appear as catastrophe, leading Benjamin to argue that the “tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (257). As Richard Wolin observes, “[a]s the nightmare of German fascism threatened to efface all remnants of tradition from the face of the earth, [Benjamin’s] task became more urgent and his tone all the more exhortatory—culminating in the apocalyptic pitch of the ‘*Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen*’” (262). Benjamin’s characterization

of history as catastrophe epitomizes the later melancholic vein within trauma theory, especially for Giorgio Agamben who echoes Benjamin in asserting that the concentration camp is the *telos* of modernity and that the state of exception has become the norm.

Despite the “apocalyptic pitch” of the “Theses” and the horrified stare of the Angel of History, Benjamin is not a nihilist. Instead, he weds theology with his historical materialist methodology to maintain the possibility for revolutionary change in the form of the Messianic. Benjamin states that a “historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop” (262). Such a pause in the current of time is where the historical materialist stands, writing his account of history. This standstill in the flow of history becomes “a configuration pregnant with tensions” that “crystallizes into a monad” (262). Yet such a crystallization of time is not a Nietzschean storm cloud pregnant with the lightning of the creative will to power, but instead represents “the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (263). Such a configuration maintains the tension between Benjamin’s Marxist historical materialism (the “revolutionary chance”) and his theological leanings (a sign of the “Messianic”). For the Angel of History, who remains transfixed, unable to look away from the past and the catastrophe of history, the future would be experienced as a bursting forth of the Messianic, a force that would halt history and stop the storm that “hurls” the angel through time. The task of the historical materialist is to establish “a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time” (263). Such “chips of Messianic time” preserve the hope that “every second of time was a strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (264). It is with this final image of the Messiah bursting forth through the strait gate at the end of history that Benjamin ends the “Theses,” not with the image of the Angel of History

transfixed by catastrophe. As Wolin states, unlike the postmodernist disillusionment with grand narratives of history and the sense that “all attempts to actualize elements of the past for the sake of an emancipated future are a priori consigned to failure,” Benjamin “at least tried to uphold a vision of utopian possibility that resides beyond the fallen and desolate landscape of the historical present” (xxii).

Benjamin’s Angel of History stands as a testament to the, at times, unavoidable interpretation of the twentieth century as a history of catastrophe, one that piles wreckage ever higher as we are hurled forward through later traumatic events including genocide in Rwanda, 9/11, wars in the Mideast, and other ongoing global conflicts. Although the Messianic holds the potential for the angel to “make whole what has been smashed,” as Lecia Rosenthal argues, this potential ultimately is transformed into an “impossible, unrealized, even altogether wrecked ideal” (76), the angel being a symbol that “figures the very possibility of seeing as superhuman anamorphosis, but his vision is impotent given the force of another catastrophe, the storm of what we call progress” (76). Similarly, the Messianic, while looking forward to a peaceful time to come at the end of history, would appear to Nietzsche as a nihilistic, life-denying philosophy in that it looks forward to a life after death, after the end of history. In other words, the Messianic is an apocalyptic force rooted in disaster rather than an affirmation of *this* life on earth, in this time. While Nietzsche’s mode of affirmation has its limits when approaching the Holocaust, Benjamin’s Angel of History is not the only other point of view for critically examining the past. When writing from the vantage of the early twenty-first century, like McEwan does, we, perhaps, need a modified, more dynamic perspective that looks both forward and backward. When theorizing trauma around the site of the Second World War, the question becomes whether or not

it is possible to glimpse affirmation without resorting to the Messianic and conceptions of history as catastrophe.

I argue that McEwan presents us with a third option, a figure of the gaze that is neither Zarathustra's forward and upward looking one nor the Angel of History's backward stare but rather a point of view that allows us to analyze this legacy without foreclosing the possibility of affirmation. Briony's gaze, that instrument of perception that is her talent and downfall, her crime and means of atonement, looks backward and forward through the medium of literature. Within the space of literature,¹² she enacts a literary examined life and places her hope in future generations, both the grandchildren surrounding her during the present-day performance of *The Trials of Arabella* and the readers she posthumously addresses (since the novel cannot be published until the Marshalls and she have died). Any hope for her own atonement is aware of its limitations and the probable impossibility of its realization, Briony admitting that reconciliation and redemption are impossible for the novelist. Yet her effort to be "on the side of life" persists and, rather than view this as denial or a willful naiveté, Briony's examined life testifies to a desire, however difficult, to reconcile with the past with an eye to the future. Briony's version of the gaze does not resort to Benjamin's Messianism by situating affirmation outside history and mortal life. Additionally, it tempers Nietzsche's emphatic insistence on *amor fati*, a doctrine that,

¹² In using this term, I consciously allude to Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature*, particularly the essay "Orpheus's Gaze." For Blanchot, the space of literature is akin to death in being an absence, an empty space that constantly eludes the desire to capture it. Orpheus becomes Blanchot's figure for theorizing this space in that as soon as Orpheus turns back to look at the object of his desire, Eurydice, she disappears back into the Underworld, into the realm of death. As Marc Redfield puts it: "To write is to submit to an inexhaustible exhaustion, an endless dissolution of the 'I' that cannot even be known as such: the writer betrays the literary experience in remaining true to it, producing an oeuvre by remaining blind to its necessary failure. The oeuvre, similarly, dissimulates as aesthetic unity its essential specificity, contingency, and incompleteness" (*Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory*, "Maurice Blanchot"). Blanchot's Orpheus, with his backward gaze, echoes Benjamin's Angel of History but explicitly in the context of literature. Furthermore, Blanchot's work is very much in conversation with Heidegger's ontology of death, primarily in his rejection of affirmative and authentic modes of being-toward-death in favor of models of impossibility, absence, and failure. A full engagement that would do justice to Blanchot's significant work in the context of Heidegger and these broader issues within trauma theory is beyond the scope of this chapter. For our current purposes, even though Blanchot argues for the importance of literature to theory in the wake of the disaster, he falls within what I have been calling the bleak, melancholic point of view within contemporary trauma theory.

when retrospectively considering the horrors of the Holocaust, is blind to a form of suffering far exceeding mere personal afflictions and what Nietzsche could imagine. Briony's version of the examined life falls closer to a Socratic vision of life, not as an affliction, but rather as one that is burdened by the past and requires critical remembrance and perpetual examination.

Examined Legacies

By briefly looking back at the previous chapter with an eye toward the current one, the critical gaze represented by Briony's literary examined life can be employed to investigate issues that arise when reading Heideggerian concepts into Woolf's fiction against the backdrop of the Second World War. Any discussion of the Second World War in the context of trauma theory necessitates an acknowledgement of the Holocaust. Such an analysis does not appear in the previous chapter because Woolf commits suicide in early 1941, before the full scale of Nazi atrocities were realized, and Heidegger publishes *Being and Time* in 1927, before the Nazis came to power. The current chapter, however, which considers national and literary histories from the 1930s and 40s inherited by McEwan, provides an occasion for a critical examination of the legacies of Heidegger's Nazism and Woolf's occasional anti-Semitic comments. Although vastly different in scale and significance, I will briefly contextualize both of these events from the vantage of contemporary criticism, which is fully aware of the nature and extent of the Holocaust. I then move to McEwan's specific relationship with the modernist legacy he inherits, particularly as it applies to his adoption and then abandonment of Woolf's style.

Heidegger's Nazism is well documented, dating back to 1933 when he joined the Nazi party and was elected Rector of Freiburg University (a position from which he resigned the following year). The debate over the significance of his Nazism was reignited in 1987 with the publication of Victor Farías's *Heidegger et le nazisme*, a text that appeared contemporaneously

with the posthumous revelation in 1987 of Paul de Man's complicity with Nazism. These two events caused a furor in the academy and a renewed defense of Heidegger's philosophy, notably by French poststructuralists. Critics seeking to discredit Heidegger's work argue that his party membership inherently taints his philosophy with the tenets of Nazi ideology, frequently citing his inaugural rectoral address from 1933 in which terminology from *Being and Time* accompanies explicit references to Hitler's political project. Rather than dismiss Heidegger's philosophy wholesale, the majority of contemporary critics argue for a separation between the man and his work when analyzing the immense significance of Heidegger's oeuvre to Western philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. As Jürgen Habermas states, although Heidegger's biography casts a large shadow over his work, "it is simply foolish to think that the substance of the work could be discredited, more than five decades later, by political assessments of Heidegger's fascist commitments" (435). Similarly, while we must acknowledge Heidegger's past since it would be irresponsible to ignore his Nazism, as Julian Young persuasively argues, "neither the early philosophy of *Being and Time*, nor the later, post-war philosophy, nor even the philosophy of the mid-1930s [...] stand in any essential connection to Nazism" (5). In other words, Heidegger's philosophy, particularly as expressed in the pre-war *Being and Time*, should not be dismissed on the grounds that it is inherently fascistic due to Heidegger's later political affiliation.

Apart from Heidegger's explicit involvement with the Nazi party, the more problematic and ultimately unforgivable issue for later poststructuralist critics is Heidegger's silence after the war about the consequences of Nazism, primarily the Holocaust. As Arnold Davidson observes in his introduction to a symposium in *Critical Inquiry* on the topic of Heidegger and Nazism, "For Lacoue-Labarthe, as for Blanchot and Levinas, Heidegger's silence concerning the Final

Solution, his failure to pronounce the name of the Jews, is what remains beyond pardon” (424).¹³ According to Lacoue-Labarthe, “the only sentence to [his] knowledge” in which Heidegger mentions the Holocaust occurs in a lecture from 1949 on technology in which he equates the gas chambers to the mechanized agricultural industry (34). Lacoue-Labarthe labels the sentence “scandalously inadequate” because Heidegger refuses to name the Jews but rather generalizes about mass extermination and neglects to examine critically the event that is paramount to understanding modern technology in the West (34-5). Levinas, also referring to this passage, states, “This stylistic turn of phrase, this analogy, this progression, are beyond commentary” (487). Ultimately, Heidegger’s true crime, according to such critics, is his silence in the wake of the revelation of Nazi atrocities and the inadequacy of his response in the brief allusions to the camps that he did make. In response, poststructuralism, which relies heavily on Heidegger’s philosophy, self-reflexively deconstructs his texts, continually enacting its own version of the examined life in coming to terms with such a troubled legacy that both speaks to and maintains its silences about the past.¹⁴

A second complication that arises from this and the previous chapters’ context of the Second World War is the case of Virginia Woolf’s anti-Semitic comments—a vastly different issue in terms of scale and implications. Although not at all comparable to Heidegger’s case, the

¹³ Indeed, Maurice Blanchot calls Heidegger’s silence an “irreparable fault,” particularly egregious in the context of Paul Celan’s meeting with the philosopher in which Heidegger’s “refusal, when confronted by Paul Celan, to ask forgiveness for the unforgivable, was a denial that plunged Celan into despair and made him ill, for Celan knew that the Shoah was the revelation of the essence of the West” (479).

¹⁴ Derrida, as a leading Jewish intellectual who is a trauma theorist in his own right, responded to Heidegger’s collaboration in a fashion consistent with deconstruction: we should closely read and re-read the author’s entire oeuvre. Thus, in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1989), Derrida wrestles with the issue of Heidegger’s Nazism via a meditation on the figure of *Geist* in his work. The question named in the title, of course, is that of the Jews and the Final Solution. Derrida opens with the statement: “I shall speak of ghost [*revenant*], of flame, and of ashes. And of what, for Heidegger, *avoiding* means” (1). He conducts an extended and careful analysis of *Geist*, asking why the concept shows up much more prominently during Heidegger’s explicit affiliation with the Nazi party. As Simon Critchley argues, Derrida’s text is “an almost ‘classical’ example of a deconstructive reading—the strictest and most rigorous determination of figures of oscillation and undecidability in a text—which shows how the thought of responsibility emerges in such a reading” (195).

anti-Semitic comments Woolf occasionally made remain an uncomfortable fact inscribed on the margins of the portrait of a political Woolf that must be acknowledged when discussing affirmative trauma theory in the context of the Second World War. Frequently, Woolf's anti-Semitic comments in her diaries and letters are attributed to the culturally pervasive anti-Semitism in the society of her time.¹⁵ Beyond this cultural context as it appears throughout her diaries, Julia Briggs observes that "it was not until 1937-38 that she published work with an explicitly anti-Semitic content—at exactly the same moment as she was attacking fascist activity in Germany and Italy" ("Inner Life" 305). This contradiction is glaringly visible in the juxtaposition of two texts from 1938: the overtly political *Three Guineas* and the short story "The Duchess and the Jeweller." The latter was rejected initially by *The Atlantic* due to its blatant anti-Semitism and only accepted after revisions and Leonard's intervention on his wife's behalf.¹⁶ Hermione Lee, attempting to navigate this thorny issue, admits that Woolf's explicit anti-Semitism in her diaries and letters often reads as "offensive caricature," but her willingness to reflect and write such impressions down at all separates her "from the habitual, half-conscious anti-Semitism of her circle" (669). Lee concludes that, at best, Woolf "spells out her complicity in bigotry and offensiveness by way of self-accusation and social critique" (669). Yet Woolf's anti-Semitic statements from the 1930s in *The Years* and "The Duchess and the Jeweller," both coming on the heels of Leonard's and her trip to Germany in 1935 in which they frequently came across swastikas and even drove through a "hysterical crowd" in a town with banners "stretched across the street" reading "'The Jew is our enemy'" (*Diary* IV 311), remain baffling. Although

¹⁵ See Hermione Lee and Julia Briggs for comments to this effect on the cultural context of anti-Semitism in Woolf's social class, Briggs pointing out, "Woolf's anti-Semitism is characteristic of her class and her moment—casual, unsystematic, and apparently thoughtless. It was as invisible to her as sexism was to the rest of Bloomsbury" (310).

¹⁶ See Briggs for an analysis of the anti-Semitism in this story and *The Years* along with a discussion of the now infamous comparison in *Three Guineas* between the state of women in patriarchal societies and the plight of the Jews in fascist Germany (a comparison that admittedly occurs before the extent of the consequences of Hitler's regime were known, the text being published in 1938).

married to a Jew and highly committed in her political opposition to fascism, Woolf's anti-Semitic statements remain an inexplicable feature of her biography, particularly given our knowledge of the atrocities Hitler's regime would commit after Woolf's suicide in 1941.

McEwan approaches the traumatic history of the twentieth century and the troubled legacy of the Second World War by way of modernism, specifically the work of Woolf. McEwan mentions modernism repeatedly in interviews about *Atonement*, frequently citing Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Rosamond Lehmann as sources for the style of the novel's first part.¹⁷ In these statements, he tends to typecast modernism starkly against, what he calls, a version of nineteenth-century realism dominated by character, plot, and suspense. Thus, modernism frequently appears one-dimensional, the modernist being characterized by McEwan as "a sort of severe high priest who belonged to a small elite and was not going to ever have his pages dirtied and grubbed by the hoi polloi" (Lynn 49). Similarly, McEwan argues, "[w]riters like Virginia Woolf, saying 'character is now dead,' helped push the novel down some very fruitless impasses" (49). He views his novels' plots as defying the "dead hand of modernism" (Zalewski) and goes on to characterize *Atonement*'s initial use of a modernist style only to shift to a realist narrative mode in the second half as an "attempt to discuss where we stand" since "[w]e can't retreat to the nineteenth century" but we also "have a narrative self-awareness that we can never escape" (Zalewski). As David James points out, although McEwan's formal style in *Atonement* reveals his indebtedness to a modernist English literary tradition, at the level of

¹⁷ For example, in an interview with Adam Begley, McEwan describes Briony and, by extension, the first half of *Atonement*, as "a sort of Elizabeth Bowen of *The Heat of the Day* with a dash of Rosamond Lehmann of *Dusty Answer* and, in her first attempts, a sprinkling of Virginia Woolf" (105). Similarly, he states that *Atonement* is "a novel full of other writers—not only Briony of course, who's stalked, haunted by the figures of Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann, but Robbie too has a relationship, a deep relationship with writing and storytelling" (Noakes 85). See also the BBC Book Club Interview and Silverblatt for similar citations of these three authors as influences. In mentions such as these, he does not single out a particular text of Woolf's as an influence. However, Briony mentions reading *The Waves* "three times" and thinking "that a great transformation was being worked in human nature itself" and that only "a new kind of fiction" "could capture the essence of the change" (*Atonement* 265).

content the novel simultaneously “adopts a combative stance on where the ethical capacities of impressionism potentially fall short” (145). Similarly, Alistair Cormack argues that McEwan’s comments reveal how he “is [...] not using his novel to challenge the ideological functions of a novelistic discourse assaying verisimilitude, but rather to attack static, morally disengaged, plotless modernism” (77).

Indeed, the line McEwan draws between nineteenth-century realism and modernism’s formal experiments allows him to define his own literary innovations against his version of modernism, particularly evident in his understanding of modernism as allegedly apolitical or “morally disengaged.” McEwan extends his comments on modernism precisely in this direction when commenting on Cyril Connolly’s rejection of Briony’s story “Two Figures by a Fountain,” observing that he “was wanting to enter into a conversation with modernism and its dereliction of duty” (Silverblatt). McEwan goes on to state that modernism’s “dereliction of duty,” in the context of *Atonement*, refers to the eschewal of plot in Briony’s story in her attempt to “drown her guilt in a stream—three streams!—of consciousness” (*Atonement* 302). Yet McEwan’s remark on the relationship between guilt, dereliction of duty, and form implicates modernism itself. According to McEwan’s version of modernism, if Briony is guilty of drowning responsibility for her actions in her mimicry of modernists like Woolf, modernism too is guilty of sacrificing political responsibility for purely aesthetic concerns.¹⁸ As Richard Robinson suggests, echoing McEwan, Briony’s story “evades the moral responsibility of telling stories—Briony’s whole story, Britain’s social and political history” and the absence of the complete short story in the novel is an excision that “indicts modernism as a whole,” with McEwan’s

¹⁸ Richard Pedot, interpreting the rejection of Briony’s story that drowns her guilt in stream of consciousness, goes so far as to suggest, “allegorically speaking, the unpleasant implication is that modernism has committed a terrible, but unstated crime, which it remained unable or even unwilling to atone for” (151).

implied argument being that, “unlike ‘Two Fountains,’ *Atonement* has backbone and does its historical duty” (473).

McEwan’s characterization of modernism’s “dereliction of duty” in favor of formal experimentation is reductive and shortsighted, both in terms of a nineteenth-century character and plot driven realism and also the implied comment on modernism’s shirking of political responsibility. Indeed, it could be said that McEwan wears blinders that narrow his perception of modernism just as Briony’s limited point of view prevents her from seeing the full significance of her actions. Viewing modernism as in need of atonement for supposed sins committed under the aegis of *l’art pour l’art* reductively consigns the aesthetic to a binary opposition against politically committed art, much like Sartre’s argument for political art that Adorno thoroughly negates in his defense of modernism as exemplifying committed art after Auschwitz. Furthermore, McEwan’s one-dimensional portrait of modernism ignores the immensely political nature of modernist activity during the Second World War, including that of Beckett, Camus, and Woolf. As discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary Woolf scholars have persuasively argued against the interpretation of Woolf as the sheltered, provincial female voice of Bloomsbury in favor of a version of Woolf as politically engaged, particularly with questions of gender but also with the war in *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*. Indeed, as Richard Robinson observes, McEwan’s characterization of modernism ignores the abundant conversations in the 1930s about politics and the responsibility of the artist, to the point that “the modernism that [*Atonement*] consequently constructs is a straw figure: ethically neutered, disengaged from history, lacking in pragmatic morality” (492).

Ultimately, the political issues specific to both modernism and Woolf’s biography and oeuvre are much more complex than McEwan allows in his shortsighted portrait of modernism’s

supposed “dereliction of duty.” Instead of McEwan’s perspective on modernism’s legacy, we can look to his own invocation of the examined life as a more comprehensive method for evaluating modernist and contemporary representations of the Second World War. Just as he corrects readers who narrowly interpret Briony as a villain, we should not view modernists like Woolf solely as elitist, apolitical, and in need of atonement. It is a different issue to be dissatisfied with what Marina Mackay calls “the belatedness of Woolf’s war awakening” (30), which leads her to make, in retrospect, the offensive and inaccurate comparison in *Three Guineas* between the plight of the Jews in Germany and women in patriarchal society.¹⁹ As Mackay argues, *Between the Acts* highlights “Woolf’s own fall from innocence in accepting that it was no longer possible to be an Outsider, as she had advocated in *Three Guineas*, attacking patriarchal instincts and institutions from the radical margins” (31). Rather than shape her last novel in the overtly political mold of *Three Guineas*, therefore, in *Between the Acts*, “her social interests are only articulated in that imprecise formulation of ‘rebuilding civilisation’” which speaks to a seeming “refusal [...] to engage question of social class” (33). Mackay concludes that the “ruining of the home might come, if not from Nazi bombs, from the accelerated social change that would follow a military victory” (39), a new form of community that would “mean rebuilding England in a more literal sense than Woolf could bring herself to face” (34). Mackay raises a legitimate

¹⁹ In drawing a parallel between feminists fighting patriarchy and the fight against fascism, Woolf writes the following: “And abroad the monster has come more openly to the surface. There is no mistaking him there. He has widened his scope. He is interfering now with your liberty; he is dictating how you shall live; he is making distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races. You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women. Now you are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion. [...] The whole iniquity of dictatorship, whether in Oxford or Cambridge, in Whitehall or Downing Street, against Jews or against women, in England, or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain is now apparent to you” (*Three Guineas* 122). In retrospect, this comparison between the plight of women in patriarchal society and of Jews in fascist Germany is reductive and inaccurate, given that Hitler’s atrocities constitute a genocide. This is not to say, however, that Woolf’s larger argument about how the seeds of fascism lie in patriarchal society is less valid—it is merely to point out that her war-awakening was belated and she was blind to the scale of atrocities perpetrated against Jews under Nazism. This passage is frequently mentioned in Woolf criticism but see Briggs, Marder, Mackay, and Lee for full analyses.

critique of Woolf's politics during the Second World War, voicing a dissatisfaction with the belatedness of Woolf's realization of the implications of Nazism for the Jews and her avoidance of pressing class issues. Furthermore, one can be disappointed by the vagueness of her emphasis in *Between the Acts* on Eros, rebuilding civilization through man "lifting stones" instead of weapons, and the possibility for Giles and Isa to create new life after the current period of fighting. Just as Mackay stresses the practical limitations of Woolf's vision for a future post-war society, Woolf's affirmative aesthetic of being-toward-death in *Between the Acts* also has its limits when employed in the context of the Holocaust, the extent of which she did not live to witness.

When confronted with this complicated legacy of the Second World War and a catastrophe like the Holocaust that defies understanding, one must necessarily look backward in an act of critical remembrance that seeks, not to explain the event, but rather to examine the past with an eye toward the future and not letting it happen again or be forgotten. The work of memory as an attitude toward the past is fundamental to Socrates's examined life, Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and Benjamin's Angel of History. Briony's literary examined life intervenes as an attitude of critical remembrance that unifies key features of these precursors. Additionally, her dynamic gaze provides a more nuanced perspective on Woolf's legacy and the literary history McEwan inherits. Briony's self-reflexive preoccupation with perception throughout *Atonement* illustrates how her literary examined life enacts a mode of visualizing both the limitations and the possibilities of locating affirmation in a critical remembrance of the historical and literary past.

Briony's Gaze

After witnessing her sister and Robbie's interaction by the fountain in which a vase that is a family heirloom breaks and Cecilia goes into the water after it, Briony records the following:

When the young girl went back to the window and looked down, the damp patch on the gravel had evaporated. Now there was nothing left of the dumb show by the fountain beyond what survived in memory, in three separate and overlapping memories. The truth had become as ghostly as invention. (39)

This passage comes to encapsulate what will become Briony's aesthetic, characterized by a preoccupation with point of view, that she later adopts in both the story "Two Figures by a Fountain" and the novel that we're currently reading. Yet Briony's observation that the "truth had become as ghostly as invention" also echoes Derrida's claim that testimony "must [...] allow itself to be haunted" by "the *possibility*, at least, of literature" (*Demeure* 29-30). Despite the chapter structure that grants the illusion of reading several characters' perspectives, Briony's status as privileged witness dramatizes poststructuralist trauma theory's concern over language's ability to capture the event—in Briony's case, an event that is not necessarily traumatic but that nonetheless leads to tragic consequences played out against the backdrop of the collective traumatic experience of the Second World War. By the end, after Briony admits to having written the entire novel, there truly is "nothing left of the dumb show" of events but her written version and what survives in her rapidly deteriorating memory. *Atonement* ultimately becomes Briony's effort to capture the events that happened to her and her family immediately before and during the war before they evaporate, a project that muddles the distinctions between testimony, fiction, "forensic memoir" (349), and "historical record" (349). Since the novel can only be published once all the people depicted have died, including Briony, they "will only exist as [her] inventions," crossing over from historical personages to literary characters who "will be as much of a fantasy" as the fictional happy ending she gives Robbie and Cecilia (350). The emphasis in

Atonement on questions surrounding the generic distinctions between truth, invention, historical, and legal record exemplify the self-reflexivity fundamental to Briony's literary examined life.

As is the case with Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, interpretations of *Atonement* in terms of trauma theory and the question of testimony largely conform to a psychoanalytic conception of belatedness, as established by Caruth and Felman. For example, Paul Crosthwaite argues that "the novel is structured in such a way as to stage the missing, the belated registration of events" (59), particularly those events that occur during the battle scenes of the second part. Similarly, Peter Mathews argues that *Atonement* "is a meditation on the act of testimony" (147) but he interprets the book as putting an onus on the reader to moralize and judge Briony's actions.²⁰ Rather than discuss the passages explicitly depicting the Front or the way in which the novel demands a moral judgment of Briony's actions, I primarily analyze the first part and the coda in order to highlight how McEwan performs an extended examination of the aesthetic forms he inherits for representing a traumatic past. Testimony becomes a central genre McEwan investigates, not only due to the belatedness that is a defining trait of the genre, but also through the explicit emphasis on the gap between the act of witnessing and Briony's attempts to collapse events with the words she uses to describe them, or, to use poststructuralist terminology, between the signified and the signifier. Such duality mirrors the nature of the imagination that is, in Briony's case, the source of both her crime and atonement. McEwan's self-reflexive examination of the act of witnessing also stresses the limits of perception, both at the level of Briony's retrospective narrative and McEwan's critical distance from the Second World War.

²⁰ In addition to Crosthwaite and Mathews, see Georges Letissier for a reading of *Atonement* as "a testimonial novel" (223) that conforms to psychoanalytic trauma theory, particularly that of Caruth and Felman. He interprets the novel as "about how the belated effects of culpability are given some means of expression through writing" (211). Although not referencing trauma theory, see James Phelan for an extended discussion of the issue of narrative judgment in *Atonement*.

In addition to examining the relationship between witnessing and testimonial representation, I contend that Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* is a crucial intertext for *Atonement*, despite McEwan's efforts to distance his aesthetic from modernism. Although McEwan never cites *Acts* as an influence, both novels prominently feature a playwright whose vision fails (Briony) or almost fails (La Trobe). Taking center stage are characters who struggle to express their perception in language or art, be it Briony's struggles to find an aesthetic that would capture the events at the fountain between her sister and Robbie, Isa's abortive attempts to write poetry, or La Trobe's effort to show "present time" to her audience. Both novels are also intensely preoccupied with history: La Trobe's play attempts to cover the entire history of the British empire from the Renaissance to the present and McEwan departs from his usual style to write a "period piece" that evokes both the literary style of the early twentieth century and the wartime experience of veterans like his father.²¹ Similarly, both novels are set immediately before the Second World War and the action occurs squarely in the domestic sphere of the country estate, at least in the first half of *Atonement*. Briony's novel ends up being both a *Künstlerroman* and a narrative of a period in her family's history, drawn in conjunction with the nation's collective experience of a war that hit the home front, and particularly London, much more heavily than the First World War. La Trobe's play recounts the nation's history, which is juxtaposed with the familial history of the Oliver family at Pointz Hall, both playing out while military planes whirr overhead in preparation for war. Finally, both novels end with what critics of *Atonement* call a "postmodern twist" that is actually a thoroughly modernist device: Briony reveals what "really happened" and admits that the novel was entirely her creation and Woolf

²¹ McEwan has said that instead of citing period details such as what songs were playing on the gramophone at the time, he realized he could "evoke the period best by writing in the style of the period" (Sliverblatt). He discusses the second part of *Atonement*, particularly the Dunkirk scenes, as "a tribute to my father, who was there" (Remnick 171).

breaks the fourth wall, as it were, by ending with the theatrical beginning of “Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (219). Both endings break the frame and reveal a self-reflexive awareness of the text’s constructedness. By analyzing these and the other key points of intersection we can arrive at a fuller conception of how McEwan grapples with modernism’s legacy and the traumatic history of the twentieth century.

Briony’s version of the events at the fountain—the first instance of Briony as a privileged witness—crystallizes the above issues concerning fiction and testimony, modernism and contemporary literature, and perception and memory. Before looking out the window, we find her debating the merits of fiction over theatre, questioning the subjectivity of other people, and wondering how the immense diversity of the world could ever be captured in literature. From where she sits at her bedroom window, “[u]nseen, from two stories up, with the benefit of unambiguous sunlight” (37), she quickly attempts to fit the events between Robbie and Cecilia into a familiar storyline, wondering why the sequence doesn’t logically fit into the narrative of the fairy-tale marriage proposal. She experiences “her first, weak intimation” that, from now on, she could no longer focus on “fairy-castles and princesses, but the strangeness of the here and now, of what passed between people, the ordinary people that she knew, and what power one could have over the other, and how easy it was to get everything wrong, completely wrong” (37). The events at the fountain provide the first glimpse of what will eventually become a monumental shift in Briony’s perception of the world around her, a shift demanding a corresponding aesthetic reevaluation. Briony’s artistic evolution mirrors the modernists’ own response to the “the strangeness of the here and now” at the start of the century, as epitomized by Woolf’s famous observation that human character changed on or about 1910. Even closer to Briony’s own historical moment, her comments echo Woolf’s manuscript title for *The Years*

which she changed from *The Pargiters* to “Here and Now” in 1933 (*Diary* IV 176)—the novel intended to “take in everything, sex education, life &c [...] from 1880 to here & now” (129).²² Despite the enthusiasm with which Briony begins to experiment with a new aesthetic, she nevertheless realizes that she could still “get everything wrong, completely wrong,” clearly foreshadowing the remainder of the novel in which she tragically comes between Robbie and Cecilia through an act of witnessing. Yet Briony persists in attempting to gain power over the here and now by putting it into a narrative framework, reveling in her power to “write the scene three times over, from three points of view” and excited by “the prospect of freedom” from the constraints of the fairy tale’s clear-cut binaries of good and evil (38).

The scene at the fountain becomes the central vehicle for interrogating issues of perception and witnessing due to Briony’s immediately apparent status as an unreliable witness. The chapter preceding Briony’s reflections on genre is narrated from Cecilia’s perspective and presents the reader with an entirely different account of the circumstances behind the broken vase. Things are further complicated when Robbie narrates his version of events five chapters later. Briony’s reliability as a witness is further questioned in three other variations on this initial scene: her story “Two Figures by a Fountain” as summarized in Cyril Connolly’s rejection letter, Cecilia’s farewell to Robbie in handcuffs at the fountain as witnessed by Briony from her window, and the present-day Briony looking out at the fountain before she goes to bed at the end of the novel. All of these iterations emphasize Briony as witness, observing events at the fountain through the frame of her bedroom window that limits her vision and holds the possibility that she could get everything “completely wrong.” Of course, by the end of the novel, the reader knows that Briony indeed has gotten this initial scene terribly wrong and is the author

²² Herbert Marder suggests that the change in title mirrors “the novel’s dual aims: to combine an overview of the years leading up to the modern age with close-ups of present-day rooms and their inhabitants or, as she put it, ‘the press of daily normal life continuing’” (132).

of all the perspectives. We are thus left with Briony's multiple versions without McEwan privileging any of them as the "true" context behind the broken vase. The revelation contained in the coda is alluded to in Briony's initial representation of the scene since she comments on how "six decades later," as an accomplished author, she would cite this moment as when she "discovered for herself, one special morning during a heat wave in 1935" the "impartial psychological realism" that would come to characterize her fiction (38). This generic distinction of "impartial psychological realism" notably does not characterize Briony as a modernist of the Woolfian variety; instead, the term more closely describes McEwan's own, early twenty-first century aesthetic. Despite his disavowal of modernism, such a blurring between McEwan and Briony's aesthetic innovations echoes Woolf's own doubling between herself and her playwright La Trobe—Woolf self-reflexively writing her own limitations at getting the reader to see "ourselves" into La Trobe's artistic failures.

Testimony and witnessing appear even more explicitly when Briony testifies to the police about having witnessed Lola's rapist. Like the initial scene of Briony witnessing the encounter by the fountain, the entire episode depicting Lola and her attacker is presented in highly self-reflexive terms. Again, Briony's act of witnessing is prefaced by reflections on her prowess as a writer and how "there was nothing she could not describe" (146). She imagines how she will describe the bodies of the twins if they are found floating in the swimming pool, the nighttime impression of the grounds, and "the gentle pad of the maniac's tread moving sinuously along the drive" (146). In contrast to the "unambiguous sunlight" that shines on the exchange between Robbie and Cecilia at the fountain, the encounter with Lola and Paul is characterized by darkness, to the point that "[e]ven a man standing in front of a tree trunk would not be visible to her" (152). Just as the sunlight does not fully illuminate the encounter by the fountain, the

darkness presents multiple impressions to Briony, the man initially appearing to be a bush then transforming into a shadowy vertical figure only to finally settle into the “certainty” that it is Robbie, “the maniac” (157). Thus, as the figure retreats up the bank toward the house, Briony realizes that “[s]he had no doubt. She could describe him. There was nothing she could not describe” (155). This certainty leads Briony to name Robbie as the attacker before Lola can, her excitement at her own powers of narration transforming Lola’s traumatic experience into Briony’s “own discovery. It was her story, the one that was writing itself around her” (156).

The lines between witnessing and fictional creation blur even further when the police interrogate her. Initially, the inspector “was careful not to oppress the young girl with probing questions,” establishing a “sensitively created space” that Briony uses “to build and shape her narrative in her own words,” establishing the “facts” such as “there was just sufficient light for her to recognize a familiar face; when he shrank away from her and circled the clearing, his movements and height were familiar to her as well” (169). Briony’s legal testimony to the police thus quickly becomes a “narrative” that she crafts around the inspector’s questions and the objective facts necessary to prove Robbie’s guilt. Notably, the actual testimony Briony gives in the courtroom is not included in the pages of the text—it remains an absence, what Georges Letissier interprets as a “traumatic erasure” (220). Instead, we only glimpse the present day Briony’s guilt over her legal testimony when she admits:

She would never be able to console herself that she was pressured or bullied. She never was. She trapped herself, she marched into the labyrinth of her own construction, and was too young, too awestruck, too keen to please, to insist on making her own way back. (160)

She constructs a labyrinth out of her false testimony, through which she attempts to order her impressions into a coherent narrative using her powers of description. Briony’s guilt is inscribed in her fiction-making, the imagination being the origin of her crime but also the source of her

eventual atonement. The limits to her powers of witnessing are further highlighted by the immediate consequences of her testimony: Robbie's arrest and departure in handcuffs. Like the scene at the fountain, she also observes this event from her bedroom window, not in the unambiguous sunlight of earlier in the day but through "the mist [that] was still there, but it was brighter, as though illuminated from within, and she half closed her eyes while they adjusted to the glare" (172). The impeded perception through the mist and glare of sunlight mirrors the opacity of the darkness that prevents her from actually seeing Lola's attacker. McEwan's repeated emphasis on witnessing, but particularly the obstructions to perception, emphasize not only the difficulty of testimonial speech but also the amount of storytelling necessary to interpret our impressions.

Just as *Atonement* questions and ultimately insists on the importance of the boundaries between fiction and testimony, it also disrupts neat boundaries of periodization. Criticism of the novel is characterized by debates over which British literary traditions McEwan adopts, rejects, and ultimately conforms to, from nineteenth-century realism to modernism to postmodernism.²³ As David James suggests, rather than become preoccupied with staking out the boundaries of influence in the novel, we can interpret McEwan as "restarting discussions that circulated at the heart of modernism's own attempts to describe the relation of aesthetics to politics" (144). Similarly, Laura Marcus proposes that McEwan "acknowledges the debt even as he calls attention to the necessary and inevitable distance between his own time and that of the modernist novel" (85). For James, McEwan typifies a "contemporary modernism that is 'suspended

²³ The criticism of the novel circles around questions of periodization: the ending frequently read as a form of postmodernism that breaks from and critiques the largely modernist first part (de la Concha, Cormack) or an appraisal of postmodernism and a critical examination of all fiction-making through a modernist aesthetic (Finney). See Albers and Caeners for a reading of *Atonement* as fitting into a "classic realist" tradition. See D'Angelo for allusions to the eighteenth-century novel, specifically *Clarissa*. See David James and Laura Marcus for extended discussions of the modernist elements in the novel. See Dominic Head for a reading of how McEwan creates a "complex fusion of these 'competing' styles" (158).

between direct political engagement and an aesthetic autonomy that remains vital for the imagining of a radically alternative future” (159-60). Woolf’s late work exemplifies this tension between aesthetic autonomy and political engagement. By comparing *Acts* and *Atonement*, the ending of the latter can be read not as “postmodern” but rather in terms of a 1930s modernism that is highly self-reflexive and politically engaged with questions of responsibility and the efficacy of art when confronted with fascism and a looming world war.

One of the primary points of intersection between *Atonement* and *Between the Acts* is Briony and La Trobe as playwrights worrying over the efficacy of their illusions and their authorial control. Although Briony ultimately becomes a renowned novelist, *Atonement* is bookended by her attempt at theatre, *The Trials of Arabella*. Alongside her meditation on the distinctions between fairy-tale romance and her emerging aesthetic of impartial psychological realism, the first chapter also introduces Briony debating the differences between fiction and theatre. We find her experiencing artistic frustration after seeing the Quincey children’s destructive rendition of her play, a frustration exacerbated by her dictatorial desire for control.²⁴ She is characterized as “one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so” (4) with a “taste for the miniature” (5). Her bedroom was “a shrine to her controlling demon” and she arranged her toys into ranks suggestive of “a citizen’s army awaiting orders” (5). She writes the play in a “two-day tempest of composition” (3) and revels in the pleasure of how the “pages of a recently finished story seemed to vibrate in her hand with all the life they contained. Her passion for tidiness was also satisfied, for an unruly world could be made just so” (7). The Quinceys clutter this tidiness as soon as rehearsals begin, Briony quickly realizing that the “self-contained world she had drawn with clear and perfect lines had been defaced with the scribble of

²⁴ Peter Mathews interprets Briony in terms of fascism, arguing that the novel is “an account of Briony’s lifelong struggle with her internal attraction to fascism [...] with its external patterns of order and symmetry” (154).

other minds, other needs” (34). La Trobe is also characterized by a constantly confounded desire for control: the villagers call her “bossy” (63) behind her back and she is described as having “the look of a commander pacing his deck” (62) while she prepares the pageant. She alienates the cast of villagers with her “abrupt manner and stocky figure; her thick ankles and sturdy shoes; her rapid decisions barked out in guttural accents—all this ‘got their goat.’ No one liked to be ordered about singly. But in little troops they appealed to her. Someone must lead” (63). Such dictatorial tendencies exhibited by Briony and La Trobe are defused, however, by their comic portrayal. For example, after the first rehearsal Briony throws a temper tantrum, ripping up the poster for her play and then mispronouncing “genre” in her attempt to explain to Cecilia why she is upset (42). Similarly, La Trobe is comically portrayed as repeatedly cursing both her audience and cast for their inability to appreciate her creation, such as before the interval when she exclaims “‘Curse! Blast! Damn ‘em!’” and then “in her rage stubbed her toe against a root” (94) or later when she “gnashed her teeth” and “crushed the manuscript” in frustration (122).

Yet La Trobe eventually relinquishes control and embraces the chance elements from the natural world that intersect with her production, thus allowing for those luminous scenes discussed in the previous chapter in which Eros triumphs over the death of the author. Similarly, although she does not specify what her new creation will be, La Trobe begins a new text at the end of the novel, one that is inspired by the very cast of villagers she was cursing earlier in the day. Unlike La Trobe’s ability to eventually embrace the unpredictability of performance, Briony ultimately rejects drama and turns to fiction since it grants her the control she desires.²⁵

Regretting her choice of a play over a story, she enters into an extended reverie on fiction:

²⁵ Other critics interpret Briony’s inability to embrace the unpredictability of theatre more harshly. Dominic Head argues, for example, that Briony’s mistake “stems from an inadequate respect for the contingent; from, that is, a desire to impose order on that which she cannot fully imagine” (159). Elsa Cavali also argues for the centrality of Briony’s desire for control to her later atonement, suggesting that “Briony’s atonement consists in abandoning her

The title lettering, the illustrated cover, the pages *bound*—in that word alone she felt the attraction of the neat, limited and controllable form she had left behind when she decided to write a play. A story was direct and simple, allowing nothing to come between herself and the reader—no intermediaries with their private ambitions or incompetence, no pressures of time, no limits on resources. [...] It seemed so obvious now that it was too late: a story was a form of telepathy. By means of inking symbols onto a page, she was able to send thoughts and feelings from her mind to her reader's. It was a magical process, so commonplace that no one stopped to wonder at it. Reading a sentence and understanding it were the same thing; as with the crooking of a finger, nothing lay between them. There was no gap during which the symbols were unraveled. (35)

Briony believes that her attraction to the literal and metaphorically bound nature of fiction in which the reader is captured in a telepathic relationship to the author is impossible in theatre. Unlike the captivating performance of La Trobe's play complete with its interruptions, Briony becomes fixated upon the magical process by which signifier and signified, the word and the concept, collapse into one. She wants to "ink" the symbols onto the page, marking her reader directly with her thoughts. Rather than embrace the contingency and chance that characterize the relationship between sign and meaning, as poststructuralist criticism has abundantly shown, Briony pursues a bound world in which there is no gap where such a play of signification can occur.

Briony's testimony against Robbie originates in the same desire for a "neat, limited, and controllable form" that results in a magical equation between what she witnesses and the spoken word. In order to inscribe Lola's attacker into the emerging narrative of Robbie as a maniac, she provides Lola with Robbie's name immediately after the attack, wanting her to say his name, "[t]o seal the crime, frame it with the victim's curse, close his fate with the magic of naming" (155). Naming Robbie becomes a magical process akin to the magic of the telepathy Briony seeks with her reader. She wants to name and thus order and control the events she only dimly

'controlling demon', accepting Otherness as fascinatingly uncontrollable and ungraspable" (133). In such a process, the reader's desire for control is also thwarted, instead McEwan offering "an enthralling textual maze in which to get lost, again and again" (133).

understands just as she does on the pages of her stories. Even though there is an enormous gap between what she sees that night and the certainty of her testimony—“Less like seeing, more like knowing” (159)—she attempts to abolish her doubts repeatedly: “Her eyes confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced. The truth was in the symmetry, which was to say, it was founded in common sense. The truth instructed her eyes” (158-9). In her desire to make the events of that night conform to the narrative arc she crafts with all its symmetry and clear-cut victims and villains, Briony collapses distinctions between the event and its representation, attempting to make her testimony as neatly bound as her stories.

Not only does Briony wish to enter into a telepathic relationship with the reader in which she believes she can control the process of signification, she also seeks a form of immunity in fiction that would protect her from the attacks and opinions of both her cast and audience.

Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends so it resembled, at least in this one respect, every other finished story in the world, could she feel immune, and ready to punch holes in the margins, bind the chapters with pieces of string, paint or draw the cover, and take the finished work to show her mother, or her father, when he was home. (6)

Clearly, the theatre does not lend itself to this materially bound immunity. Briony’s desire to finish the text and then proudly show it to her parents echoes not La Trobe’s creative process but Woolf’s routine of showing her manuscripts to Leonard for reassurance and approval, although not always with pride but often with trepidation. In her diaries, Woolf repeatedly expresses wariness toward the criticism of her reviewers, the hostility of her male colleagues to her feminism, and the threats to her ability to write from the world around and within herself. Eventually, in the 1930s, she formulates her relationship between her work and the outside world as a desire for immunity. In 1932 Woolf defines such immunity in terms of creative inspiration:

its a holy, calm, satisfactory flawless feeling—To be immune, means to exist apart from rubs, shocks, suffering; to be beyond the range of darts; to have enough to live on without

courting flattery, success; not to need to accept invitations; not to mind other people being praised; to feel This—to sit & breathe behind my screen, alone, is enough; to be strong; content [...] to be mistress of my hours; to feel detached from all sayings about me; & claims on me; to be glad of lunching alone with Leonard; to have a spare time this afternoon; to read Coleridge's letters. Immunity is an exalted calm desirable state, & one I could reach much oftener than I do. (*Diary IV* 117).

Immunity for Woolf, above all, means protection and “an exalted calm,” to be immune to the “shocks” and “suffering” that characterize both her personal life and the world around her. As Hermione Lee points out, although the term is “troublingly close in its meaning to ‘indifference,’ or ‘elitism,’ or ‘privacy,’” it also describes “anonymity” and an effort to “above all be truthful and detached,” particularly in her writing throughout the last decade of her life on women’s professional lives, the here and now, and art and politics (625). On one hand, Woolf’s immunity can be interpreted alongside the society of outsiders she calls for in *Three Guineas* as a form of evasion or naïve denial of the responsibility of the artist, particularly under the threat of fascism. Such a reading would support McEwan’s one-sided depiction of modernism and its dereliction of duty when it supposedly elevates form over character and political commitment.²⁶ Yet Woolf’s immunity resists such a simplistic reading, particularly in the context of the World Wars. As Karen Levenback argues, the Great War left a tremendous mark on Woolf’s work and she grappled with the realization that “the sense of immunity from effects of the war—shared by much of the civilian population—was an illusion” (10), a realization articulated almost twenty years later in *The Years*. With the rise of fascism, Woolf admits that such a desire for immunity is increasingly impossible. In the essay “Why Art Today Follows Politics” (1936), she writes that during peacetime the artist’s work depends upon “freedom of mind, security of person, and immunity from practical affairs” (76), a stance that becomes increasingly untenable the larger the

²⁶ Of course, privilege does not equate to political indifference. McEwan enjoys a relatively privileged economic position within British society (not to mention his international literary fame and six Booker Prize nominations, including a win for *Amsterdam*). His own multi-story flat in the heart of Bloomsbury in central London also serves as the model for the home of the wealthy, neurosurgeon Henry Perowne in *Saturday*.

threat of war looms. Hermione Lee observes that the position on immunity that Woolf adopted increasingly in the second half of the 1930s was “a complicated version of non-resistance or pacifism” (682-3) that was not passive but rather a “form of inner resistance” to the threats of fascism and a call to remain outside, as she proposes in *Three Guineas* (683). Ultimately, once the war began, Woolf recognized “that there was no chance any more for her, or for anyone, to be immune” (Lee 708).

Briony’s immunity is vastly different from Woolf’s in that she uses fiction as a naïve means to be impervious to the vulnerability of “pretending in words” since once the book is finished and “sealed off at both ends” she could stop worrying about the “self-exposure” that comes with depicting characters’ emotions (6). Fiction presents a form of immunity that seals her off from the unpredictable elements of theatre, an immunity that she translates to the events around her with tragic results. In the context of her testimony against Robbie, she achieves a different type of immunity. Instead of binding her testimony between the covers of a book, after Robbie was sentenced, her immunity takes the form of “a ruthless youthful forgetting, a willful erasing, [that] protected her well into her teens” (160). Rather than qualify her immunity as Woolf does in the context of the war or as La Trobe does in allowing the natural world to intersect with her pageant, Briony stubbornly persists in making herself immune to the chaos of the world around her by turning it into an easily bound and recognizable narrative. Only after it is too late does she realize the dangers of such immunity, both in the context of her own crime but also in the legal sense; her testimony and the subsequent marriage between Lola and Paul Marshall make the true rapist “‘immune’” to further prosecution, as Cecilia points out in Briony’s imagined scene of reconciliation with Robbie (328).

Another form of immunity that is metaphorically on trial throughout *Atonement* is a version of Woolfian modernism as domestic and elitist. Thus, McEwan frequently describes the genesis of the novel as a realization that he would need to “impersonate, not only a 13 year old girl, but a 77 year old woman recalling a 13 year old girl,” a performance that “oddly enough” granted him a “fantastic freedom” to describe things that he wouldn’t otherwise “bother with” like the weather in the “slow psychological unfolding with a rather typical English emphasis on place and setting” (BBC Interview). In another variation on this process of becoming Briony, he notes that he “put on the clothes of a 77 year old lady and thought that this would be a kind of confinement, tottering around in her high heels” but it ended up being “a liberation” that allowed him “to do things that [he] normally wouldn’t do and indulge [himself] in a kind of, slightly mannered prose, slightly held in, a little formal, a tiny bit archaic” (Silverblatt). This indulgence in Briony’s style abruptly ends with the “sharp jump cut” to a realist style in the second part when the action moves to the Front (BBC Interview). Such a shift to a “starker, simpler, stripped down English prose” that mimics the rhythm of a drumbeat and a march (Silverblatt) heightens the contrast with the “rather typical English” style of the first part that McEwan explicitly codes as feminine given his metaphorical cross-dressing and citation of Lehmann, Woolf, and Bowen as influences. In her review of the novel, Hermione Lee characterizes *Atonement* as “androgynous,” observing that it “is a novel written by a man acting the part of a woman writing a ‘male’ subject, and there’s nothing to distinguish between them” (*Guardian*). Lee interprets this androgyny as McEwan’s answer to the question of what the contemporary novelist inherits from the past—an androgynous merging of the past and present, in this case the supposedly “feminine” style of Woolf, Bowen, and Lehmann with McEwan’s own sparse, stripped down

aesthetic on display in the depictions of warfare.²⁷ Despite Lee's reading that favors androgynous continuity, McEwan's emphasis on the "jump cut" insists on a stark contrast between styles—the passages at the Front blowing open the densely detailed domestic world of the first part and moving the action across the Channel into the warzone and tightly regimented hospital ward.

Yet glimpses of the war break into the domesticity of the Tallis estate that dominates the first part, just as they do in the seemingly tranquil, bucolic setting of *Between the Acts*. Jack Tallis, the family patriarch who works for the British government and is attuned to the political winds blowing fascism toward England, is a catalyst for the collision between public and private events. The most literal reference to the coming war occurs when Emily Tallis, who is homebound due to her migraine headaches, reads part of an internal memo on her husband's desk where he has fallen asleep:

On one page she saw a list of headings: exchange controls, rationing, the mass evacuation of large towns, the conscription of labor. The facing page was handwritten. A series of arithmetical calculations was interspersed by blocks of text. Jack's straight-backed, brown-ink copperplate told her to assume a multiplier of fifty. For every one ton of explosive dropped, assume fifty casualties. Assume 100,000 tons of bombs dropped in two weeks. Result: five million casualties. She had not yet woken him and his soft, whistling exhalations blended with winter birdsong that came from somewhere beyond the lawn. (140)

Jack's calculations foreshadow the horror of the approximately sixty million deaths that would occur in the Second World War—his estimate of five million casualties appearing highly conservative in retrospect considering the final death toll of the war. The imagined tons of explosives resound dissonantly with Jack's "whistling," gentle snoring and the peaceful birdsong from across the house's grounds. Emily Tallis's reaction that these numbers were "extravagant," "silly," and "surely a form of self-aggrandizement, and reckless to the point of irresponsibility"

²⁷ Of course, McEwan's comments on tottering around in Briony's high heels and Lee's interpretation of *Atonement's* stylistic androgyny inevitably, and intentionally on Lee's part, echo Woolf's famous call for authorial androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*.

(140-1) stems from her refusal to see Jack as anything but “the household’s protector, its guarantor of tranquility” who was depended upon to “take the long view” (141). Emily’s denial about the coming war parallels the attitude of the majority of the characters in *Between the Acts* who, to Giles’s fury, “sat and looked at views over coffee and cream” (53). Furthermore, the dissonance between the imagined explosives and the peaceful birdsong echoes the contrast throughout *Acts* between the whirring of the airplane propellers and the birdsong of the starlings.

Paul Marshall and his “Army Amo” chocolate bars that are intended to be part of the soldiers’ standard ration packs also signal the coming war—peacetime society fostering the capitalist who will easily transition into war-profiteer “if Mr. Hitler did not pipe down” (46). The Quincey twins’ first encounter with Marshall further collapses the distance between their family’s domestic strife and the conflicts in the world at large. The twins have the following reaction when Marshall tells them that he knows of their parents from the newspaper:

The boys stared at him as they absorbed this and could not speak, for they knew that the business of newspapers was momentous: earthquakes and train crashes, what the government and nations did from day to day, and whether more money should be spent on guns in case Hitler attacked England. They were awed, but not completely surprised, that their own disaster should rank with these godly affairs. (56)

The twins’ dim awareness of the events of nations and particularly Britain’s precautions against a Nazi invasion conflates “their own disaster” with world events. Briony even notes this relationship between public and private in characterizing the Quincey children as “refugees from a bitter domestic civil war” (8) when she first meets them. As discussed in the previous chapter, the newspaper functions in a similar way in *Between the Acts*, collapsing the public and private spheres through an impending sense of violence lying at the heart of English patriarchal society. Giles, as a London stockbroker who is equally concerned with the effect war will have on profits and international trade, recalls reading on his morning commute “that sixteen men had been shot,

others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent” (46). The newspaper also affects children in Woolf’s novel, not causing the same awe that the Quincey twins experience, but rather traumatizing Isa’s son George, who falls down sobbing after his grandfather jumps out of the bushes saying ““Good morning, sir”” in a voice that “boomed at him from a beak of paper” (12). The same newspaper that communicates the stories of the men killed across the Channel terrifies the child when it becomes a trumpet wielded by the old military commander who disdainfully turns away from his crying grandson and yells at his dog “as if he were commanding a regiment” (12).

Despite such correlations between *Atonement* and *Between the Acts*, the former’s coda is frequently interpreted in terms of a “postmodern” narrative turn that, along with the second part depicting the Front, seems to disavow any modernist influences.²⁸ Yet the ending of *Between the Acts* presents another crucial point of intersection between the two novels that emphasizes continuity across period distinctions rather than stark division. Woolf’s novel ends with two juxtaposed scenes: La Trobe starting her new creation amidst the babble of the villagers in the pub where the “mud became fertile” (212) and the confrontation between Giles and Isa at Pointz Hall. Whether or not this final scene between the couple constitutes the first pages of La Trobe’s new creation is left ambiguous; the novel’s final line—“Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (219)—is frequently interpreted as the beginning of La Trobe’s new text. It could also be argued that this ending constitutes a shock similar to *Atonement*’s coda in that the drama happening

²⁸ As Paul Crosthwaite observes, the “novel’s epilogue makes what appears to be a quintessentially postmodernist move” (62). He goes on to argue that the coda induces a shock akin to traumatic shock in the reader. Thus, he posits that the ending resists assimilation and rather “instills a compulsion to repeat, to reread, until the full enormity of the information imparted becomes apparent” (63). Rather than a belated reconstitution of the traumatic past, however, I interpret the literary examined life as appearing *throughout* the novel, even on a first reading, as evident in Briony’s explicitly self-reflexive meditations on genre and the deliberate muddling of fiction and testimony, modernist and contemporary literature. Briony’s acknowledgement that she knows what “was required of her” in the form of “a new draft, an atonement” followed by the signature “BT London, 1999” (330), signals a move toward a heightened self-reflexivity but one that is firmly grounded in modernist precursors such as *Between the Acts* and the metafictional style that characterizes *Atonement*.

offstage amongst the Oliver family was in fact staged the entire time, the curtain rising on Isa and Giles's domestic dispute that has largely been consigned to the space between the acts of the villagers' pageant. Briony's equivalent of lifting the curtain at the end of her novel occurs with her signature, "BT London, 1999" (330), followed by the coda. The signature ushers in a new iteration of the play that opens the novel, *The Trials of Arabella* now performed by the grandchildren at the Quincey/Tallis family reunion. Later that evening, Briony temporally collapses the distance between the two productions:

There was a crime. But there were also lovers. Lovers and their happy ends have been on my mind all night long. As into the sunset we sail. An unhappy inversion. It occurs to me that I have not traveled so very far after all, since I wrote my little play. Or rather, I've made a huge digression and doubled back to my starting place. It is only in this last version that my lovers end well, standing side by side on a South London pavement as I walk away. All the preceding drafts were pitiless. (349-50)

The inversion of the clichéd happy ending of the lovers sailing into the sunset echoes the ending of *Acts* in which the Oliver family contemplates the pageant one last time before bed when this year's pageant "would be beneath the horizon, gone to join the other plays" (Woolf 213).

Although Briony admits that there was a crime, the final emphasis is on the lovers, just as Woolf ends her novel with Giles and Isa who "must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace" (219). Furthermore, while Briony struggles with granting a happy ending to Robbie and Cecilia, we saw in the previous chapter how Woolf also struggled, as the manuscripts show, with the ending—oscillating between Lucy's prehistoric men crafting weapons or, in the final version, raising "great stones" in a testament to the triumph of mankind's will to progress over the destruction of warfare (218). Similarly, Woolf's revision from the manuscript's final emphasis on the beginning of the "inevitable fight" (*Pointz Hall* 189) to "they spoke" asserts a parallel faith in the affirmative view of civilization rather than an overwhelming fatalism.

Yet Briony's final concession to a happy ending is a highly qualified one: her confession about the true fate of Robbie and Cecilia, who both die during the war, immediately follows the above quotation about the lovers standing side by side on a South London pavement. After the second staging of *The Trials of Arabella*, Briony lies sleepless and interrogates the motives behind her novel's fictional happy ending as opposed to the reality of the lovers' fate:

How could that constitute an ending? What sense of hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? I couldn't do it to them. I'm too old, too frightened, too much in love with the shred of life I have remaining. I face an incoming tide of forgetting, and then oblivion. I no longer possess the courage of my pessimism. (350)

Whereas Woolf's affirmative ending speaks to her resilience and persistence amidst the threat of an imminent Nazi invasion, Briony berates herself for turning to a happy ending out of age, fear, and a love of "the shred of life" remaining to her. While such an ending sounds like denial and cowardice in that Briony lacks the courage to present "what really happened" and satisfy the requirements of both testimony and "the bleakest realism," it also acts as a final instance of the examined life. Up to the end, Briony examines her desire to write her own atonement and grant the lovers a happy ending. Notably, such a happy ending does not constitute forgiveness for her crimes. As she famously admits, there is "[n]o atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists" (351). Rather than end with this bleak statement on the futile nature of her undertaking, however, this oft-cited line continues with Briony's conclusion that "[i]t was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all" (351). Instead of failure and impossibility, Briony emphasizes the attempt. Just as trauma demands a representation, even if it will never capture the event entirely, it is the attempt that matters. From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, although there can be no forgiveness for the past and it is impossible to recapture such events fully in fiction, it is the attempt to represent them that

matters. Whereas collective traumatic events like the World Wars ultimately must submit to the requirements of historical documentation, Briony's literary examined life occurs in the realm of fiction. She can thus present both endings within the pages of her novel: the "true" story and the fictional happy ending stand side by side, a final juxtaposition of the two genres of testimony and fiction that are never mutually exclusive.

This is not the final ending, however, since Briony imagines a third ending for her lovers as she again stares out at the fountain and the driveway down which Robbie was taken after that momentous night in 1935. The present-day Briony has been "standing at the window" contemplating her literary atonement just as she debated the merits of fiction over theatre in the opening chapter of the novel (351). Yet, as Briony watches "the first gray light bring into view the park and the bridges over the vanished lake" (351), a third possible ending dawns in her imagination. While she had to squint as she watched the true farewell between Robbie and Cecilia, in which "the mist was still there, but it was brighter, as though illuminated from within" (172), the emerging morning light in the present day illuminates both the landscape and this final scene. As she stares out the bedroom window, the final imagined ending takes on the full weight of her examined life:

I like to think that it isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end. I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me. Not quite, not yet. If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration...Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at *The Trials of Arabella*? It's not impossible.
But now I must sleep. (351)

Whereas her first story composed upon observing her sister and her lover at the fountain is an awakening to her powers as a novelist and the dawning of her new aesthetic, this final imagined scene in which Cecilia and Robbie are part of her audience emphasizes the limits of her authorial

powers of perception. While it is not impossible to imagine Robbie and Cecilia coming into focus in the grey light of dawn, smiling as they watch her play, she admits this vision depends on a large “if” regarding her power to “conjure” them in this way. Whereas the ending that occurs before the coda can be interpreted as “weakness or evasion,” this third happy ending is merely a possibility in the imagination. Much like Woolf’s resilience and her final emphasis on possibility when the curtain rises at the end of *Acts*, Briony’s final interpretation highlights how both happy endings are “act[s] of kindness,” “a stand against oblivion and despair.” Unlike the Angel of History’s backward stare at the catastrophe, which is only interrupted by a Messianic cessation of history, *Between the Acts* concludes with the beginning of a new composition in the fertile mud of the villagers’ conversation and *Atonement* ends with the dawning of a new day for Briony in this life. Ultimately, Briony’s literary examined life allows for the possibility of these alternate endings precisely because the limitations of her vision are explicitly foregrounded. The reader knows what “really happened” to Robbie and Cecilia, just as the reader knows that the scene of Robbie and Cecilia attending Briony’s play at her birthday celebration is a fiction. Any affirmation to be found in the point of view granted by Briony’s literary examined life exists in the realm of fiction, in the space of literature.

Coda: Critical Remembrance

Just as Briony examines her life-defining mistake up until her last moments, when the oblivion and forgetting of dementia will inevitably erase her memory of the past, Socrates too embodied the examined life up until the end. Plato presents the final moments of Socrates’s life through Phaedo’s eye-witness testimony:

Well it was now pretty well the parts round the abdomen that were getting cold, when he uncovered his face—because he had it covered—and spoke—these were the last words

he uttered: “Crito,” he said, “we owe a cock to Asclepius; pay our debt, and no forgetting.” (169)

Socrates owes Asclepius, the god of healing, a rooster in payment for treatment for the illness of life. Death, therefore, is the cure for life in that the freedom of the soul from the body is finally achieved. Above all, there can be “no forgetting” of this fundamental aspect of the Socratic examined life, which relies on a concept of the soul. As Socrates argues in *The Apology*, death mirrors the pure state the philosopher seeks through the examined life: an uninterrupted reflection on the nature of truth, unencumbered by the distractions of the body. Nietzsche contests Socrates’s final pronouncement that life is an affliction in *The Gay Science*, wishing that “he had remained taciturn also at the last moment of his life” (272). He calls Socrates’s last words “ridiculous and terrible” in their meaning that ““O Crito, *life is a disease*”” (272). Nietzsche, who rejects a concept of the soul in favor of the body, is dismayed by such a pronouncement and asks:

Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in the sight of everyone, should have been a pessimist? He had merely kept a cheerful mien while concealing all his life long his ultimate judgment, his inmost feeling. Socrates, Socrates *suffered life!* (272)

Socrates’s final words appear to Nietzsche as a betrayal of his doctrine of the examined life, and thus he declares that “Alas, my friends, we must overcome even the Greeks!” (272). In place of Socrates, Nietzsche, of course, will substitute Zarathustra and his will to power and doctrine of eternal recurrence in which one not only bears his fate, suffering life, but rather loves it.

Briony’s literary examined life ends on a different note: at the age of 77 she faces death but first will undergo the oblivion of forgetting, the “somewhat benign” experience, not of being unhappy or suffering but of being “just a dim old biddy in a chair, knowing nothing, expecting nothing” (334). Like Socrates’s last words, Briony’s desire for atonement through rewriting the

past would also disappoint Nietzsche. Although she does not love her fate since she still wishes things had turned out differently, she has accepted it by living an examined life and preserving the possibility for multiple endings to her story. For Socrates, death is the achievement of the purest form of the examined life—when nothing stands between the philosopher and the truth he seeks. Alternatively, for Briony, death signals the end of her own literary atonement and the conclusion of her literary examined life, but without absolution or the realization of a greater metaphysical truth. Yet the final draft occurs neither at the instant of death nor at the moment when she loses her memory. Instead, she writes before she enters a state of forgetting; she chooses a happy ending, a form of forgetting, while she can still remember the true ending to her life's story. Rather than death being the cure to life, the death of Briony's memory is the only form of absolution possible for her. Dementia proves to be a middle ground between life and death since she writes under the pressure of a rapidly approaching forgetting that will obliterate the distinctions between history and invention, eternally blurring the lines between testimony and fiction. But the coda preserves the “true story” within the pages of *Atonement*. McEwan insists on the power of the literary examined life to hold such binaries in suspension—Briony's writing at the onset of her dementia emanates from this middle ground between life and death, memory and forgetting. While the image of Briony as a “dim old biddy in a chair” does not present a terribly affirmative outlook,²⁹ the novel she writes before succumbing to this fate testifies to the

²⁹ This image also eerily echoes Nietzsche's own fate after his mental breakdown in which he experienced apathy in his final days and gradually stopped speaking. Yet this is not the “benign” experience that awaits Briony since, as Julian Young notes, “It would be a mercy to think that [Nietzsche] experienced at least a kind of vegetative contentment, but this seems not to have been the case. He suffered from his life-long curse of insomnia, and visitors downstairs were often disturbed by groans and howls coming from the upstairs bedroom” (553). As Kaufmann points out, Nietzsche's “emphasis on suffering was not due to any *fin de siècle* infatuation with the sordid” but rather stems from his own personal and lifelong experience of physical and mental anguish that reinforced for him “the terrors and ‘cruelty’ of life” (143). His philosophy of self-overcoming is as much an autobiographical statement of his own will as it is a testament to the importance of philosophically overcoming metaphysical systems that constrict thought.

importance of remembrance and critically examining the past for future readers, made all the more poignant given her diagnosis.

In a 2005 interview with Zadie Smith, McEwan reflects on the trajectory of his career. He responds to her question about why he has moved away from the violent and grotesque stories that characterize his early writing as follows:

Because I think death anxiety or numbers-of-days-left anxiety make me keen to make sense of the human, rather than to distort it. I think there's a wonderful recklessness you have in your twenties and thirties as a writer, you can do terrible things because although intellectually you know your time will end, you don't yet feel it in your blood, in your gut. It's a recklessness I think one should really enjoy, relax into it, spread out. As you get older you feel the need to make yourself clear. [...] There are a couple of things. One is you have children and as you age, there's some growing sense of wanting the human project to succeed. Not fail. Or you no longer wish to dwell quite so much on the possibility of it all going wonderfully, horribly wrong. You begin to wish it would go right. (131-2)

Such comments reveal an affinity with Briony's sentiments at the end of *Atonement*. Her desire for a happy ending, however qualified by the impossibility of her literary atonement, speaks to a similar attitude at the end of life, a "number-of-days-left anxiety" that makes one feel his or her mortality "in your blood, in your gut." Furthermore, McEwan's emphasis on how, toward the end of one's life, "you begin to wish [the human project] would go right" voices an affirmation akin to Woolf's. Although traumatic experiences continue to occur, both on a personal and collective scale, McEwan here emphasizes the desire to see "the human project" succeed, much as Woolf asserts in her representation of prehistoric man raising stones instead of weapons. In the end, the impossible possibility of a successful literary atonement testifies to the limitations of ever fully capturing the past in language. Nevertheless, the literary examined life, as evident in *Atonement*, preserves the attempt to atone precisely through its self-reflexive emphasis on the limited possibilities for Briony's imagination to invent a new future out of the fictions of the past.

CHAPTER FIVE

“One can live”: Biopolitics, Colonialism, and J.M. Coetzee’s Bodies

In response to David Attwell’s question of what the significance of the body is in his work, J.M. Coetzee responds:

If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not “that which is not,” and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. (One can get away with such crudeness in fiction; one can’t in philosophy, I’m sure.)

[...] Let me put it baldly: in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. It is not possible, not for logical reasons, not for ethical reasons (I would not assert the ethical superiority of pain over pleasure), but for political reasons, for reasons of power. And let me again be unambiguous: it is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable.

(Let me add, entirely parenthetically, that I, as a person, as a personality, am overwhelmed, that my thinking is thrown into confusion and helplessness, by the fact of suffering in the world, and not only human suffering. These fictional constructions of mine are paltry, ludicrous defenses against that being-overwhelmed, and, to me, transparently so.) (*Doubling the Point* 248)

Coetzee thus defines the body’s reality by “the pain it feels,” a pain that counters doubt and insists on its power. In contrast to the common critical complaint in the anti-apartheid 1980s and 1990s that Coetzee’s work is too allegorical, too removed and aloof from the urgent political situation, his identification of the body’s suffering brings his work down to the tangible and corporeal, the realm of “suffering in the world.” Thus, the body is not “that which is not” and becomes a concrete “standard” across Coetzee’s oeuvre. Although he suggests that this standard is undeniable given his position in South Africa, his parenthetical afterthought insists on the universality of this condition—both human and animal suffering, regardless of sociohistorical context, throw the subject into “confusion and helplessness.” Against this “undeniable” power of the body in pain, a body that “*takes*” authority, fiction’s linguistic representations look like “paltry, ludicrous defenses” against being overwhelmed. The suffering body thus presents a

problem encompassing concerns as broad as colonialism, apartheid, and historical trauma; a problem that, as Coetzee acknowledges, will inevitably fail to be fully resolved in fiction but which, nonetheless, must be attempted.

Coetzee's emphasis on how physical suffering resists rationalization and throws representation into a position of inadequacy can and has been taken as a prompt to read his work in terms of trauma theory, specifically a branch focusing on the body and the unspeakability of pain. Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) is foundational to this subset within trauma theory. She argues that representations of the body in pain necessarily conform to the structure of metaphor since all descriptions of pain are approximations due to pain's fundamental unsharability (4),¹ an echo of poststructuralist trauma theory's contention that trauma is unspeakable.² Thus, according to Scarry, "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) famously comes to embody such a state when he is tortured and releases a "mournful dry bellow, like the pouring of gravel," a sound that he lets out "again and again, there is nothing [he] can do to stop it, the noise comes out of a body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair and roars its fright" (139).³ Upon hearing the Magistrate's

¹ See Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* for another foundational discussion of how pain and illness conform to the structure of metaphor, both at a literary and cultural level—metaphors that shape how illnesses such as cancer, tuberculosis, and AIDS are understood, treated, and stigmatized.

² The area of trauma theory that is concerned with pain and corporeality (as established by Scarry's work) dovetails with poststructuralist trauma theory's preoccupation with the impossible possibility of capturing the traumatic event in language. Coetzee's narrator Elizabeth Curren in *Age of Iron* (1990), a novel which consists of a letter to her daughter that is written in full knowledge of her terminal cancer and will only be read posthumously, can be interpreted in terms of the questions analyzed in Chapter 3 regarding writing the instant of death.

³ See Wenzel and Eckstein for readings of *Waiting for the Barbarians* through the framework of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. See Martin Woessner for an adept reading of the body in pain in *Barbarians* as representative of Coetzee's critique of the Cartesian *cogito* (the embodiment in pain confounding reason and the rational subject).

bellows, Colonel Joll's guards joke that the sounds are the "barbarian language," a literalization of the colonial division between the body of the Other and supposed "white" writing and rationality (139). In "Into the Dark Chamber," Coetzee contends that when confronted with the problem of representing torture, the "true challenge" for the South African writer is "how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (*Doubling* 364). *Waiting for the Barbarians* stands as a testament to the difficulty of imagining torture on one's own terms, and the Magistrate's inability to penetrate the barbarian girl's reticence translates Scarry's thesis about pain's unsharability to a colonial context. Beyond torture, critics frequently interpret the silence of the barbarian girl and Friday in *Foe* as embodiments of trauma's resistance to language, specifically the colonial Other's trauma. Such readings view the pain and violence of colonialism as written on the bodies of characters like Friday with his mutilated tongue or the barbarian girl's scars. Teresa Dovey, performing this type of reading of *Foe*, observes that "If Susan Barton's feminine discourse, along with its strategic silences, represents the attempt to speak as Other, to evade masculine discourse, Friday's tongueless, castrated body is testimony to this novel's resolve not to speak *for the other*" ("Middle Voice" 26). As Dovey's interpretation suggests, such writing resists attempts to read it and insists on its unsharability, particularly when confronted with white, colonial writers/readers like the Magistrate and Barton.⁴ Ultimately, trauma and the body in pain

⁴ For such readings, see Sam Durrant's interpretations of *Michael K*, *Foe*, and *Barbarians* as representative of works of "inconsolable mourning" in which characters like K, Friday, and the barbarian girl "embody precisely that material history of suffering that the narrative is unable to *represent*" (26). See Benita Parry's essay for a reevaluation of how silence is analyzed in Coetzee, particularly for a critique of Coetzee's readiness to speak for women such as Magda and Susan Barton but his refusal to speak for the colonial Other. See Richard Begam's article on *Foe* in which he illustrates how Coetzee interrogates the speech/writing binary through a dramatization of how white writing is always racially motivated and ultimately, when encountering Friday's "wordless speech...the unassimilable otherness of his mut(e)lation), white writing is compelled to acknowledge, perhaps for the first time in its long and melancholy history, that there might be a form of writing, a form of speaking, a form of being, different from itself" (126). See Michael Valdez Moses for a thorough interpretation of torture in *Barbarians*, specifically the

in Coetzee's work testify to the difficulty of translating suffering, especially the suffering of the colonial Other, into language; or, as Brian May asserts, "Coetzee's body is such that the bottom falls out of it—it expresses nothing more than the power to evade or frustrate the expressive metaphors by which we try to know it" (410).

While such interpretations of bodily suffering and Coetzee's work are persuasive and necessary, I will pursue a different yet complementary line of inquiry through biopolitics. Biopolitics shifts the focus away from the impossibility of expressing corporeality in language and the unsharability of pain to instead emphasize how life itself, at the level of both individual bodies and global populations, is regulated and normalized by power/knowledge technologies. In other words, biopolitics takes as its subject not just the individual suffering body but also the mass of bodies constituting nation-states and empires—a focus uniquely suited to respond to colonial and postcolonial concerns of universal and particular, center and periphery. As such, it echoes Coetzee's above comments on how "the authority of suffering and therefore of the body" is "undeniable" in apartheid South Africa where the social body is highly disciplined, segregated, and tightly controlled. The suffering of the population is undeniable in this context and asserts a power that encompasses the subjugation of individual bodies exercised in torture. Biopolitics provides a vocabulary by which such a correspondence between individual bodies in pain and suffering on a national scale can be understood, allowing us to further theorize how Coetzee's novels attempt to represent trauma but "not play the game by the rules of the state." I argue that such resistance finds expression in the individual suffering body but also the biopolitical body within the apartheid state. It is this biopolitical body that the following chapter seeks to explicate in an effort to advance the ongoing critical discussion about Coetzee's bodies.

point that "the barbarian *Other* generally appears in the novel as a blank slip onto which the Empire engraves itself; that is, the Empire gives itself form by writing on its subjects" ("Mark of Empire" 120).

Initially theorized by Michel Foucault in his 1970s lectures at the Collège de France as a social and political power over life that dovetails with disciplinarity, biopolitics has since evolved alongside trauma theory. Although originally defined as the state's power to make live and let die, the atrocities of the twentieth century eventually led Foucault to a bleak emphasis on the latter. The two fields of trauma theory and biopolitics frequently intersect at the recurring citation of the Nazi Final Solution as the epitome of a negative manifestation of biopolitics—thanatopolitics. Foucault, in one of the foundational texts for the later field of biopolitics, posits, “no State could have more disciplinary power than the Nazi regime. Nor was there any other State in which the biological was so tightly, so insistently regulated” (*Society Must Be Defended* 259). Ultimately, for Foucault, the Nazi state and the Final Solution exemplify “a society which has generalized biopower in an absolute sense, but which has also generalized the sovereign right to kill” (260). Picking up this thread, Giorgio Agamben's work presents the most prominent interweaving of trauma theory and biopolitics, as evidenced by the centrality of the Holocaust to his philosophy and his famous conclusion that the concentration camp “is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West” (*Homo Sacer* 181). Thus, for Agamben, the Holocaust represents an intensification of the biopolitical paradigm to the point that biopolitics, the power to make live, transforms into thanatopolitics, the systematic and normalized slaughter of a segment of the population. In the wake of the Holocaust, according to Agamben, the thanatopolitical has become the norm, eclipsing biopolitics entirely such that “the possibility of differentiating between our biological body and our political body – between what is incommunicable and mute and what is communicable and sayable – was taken from us forever” (188).

Countering Agamben's overwhelming emphasis on a negative biopolitics and returning to Foucault, Roberto Esposito's *Bíos* (2008) puts forward one of the first affirmative interpretations of life over death within twentieth-century biopolitics. Esposito's primary question is how life itself can become a force for resistance rather than one subjected to disciplinary power and death. Like Agamben, the concentration camp is at the center of Esposito's argument but he attempts to locate resistance and life in the heart of what is commonly thought of as the nadir of Western civilization. By tracing the central *dispositifs* of Nazism, Esposito attempts to profile "the admittedly approximate and provisional contours of an affirmative biopolitics that is capable of overturning the Nazi politics of death in a politics that is no longer over life but *of* life" (11).⁵ For Esposito, such an affirmative biopolitics emerges through what he labels the paradigm of immunization: a concept that unifies *bios* and *nomos*, or life and law, as "two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole that assumes meaning from their interrelation" and expresses not only the interrelation that joins life to power but also holds "the power to preserve life" (46). To frame this debate in the terms of the previous chapters, Esposito's affirmative biopolitics is to Agamben's thanatopolitics what Heidegger's possibility is to Derrida's aporetic theorizations of testimony. In other words, Esposito's affirmative biopolitics paves an alternate route around the impasse within trauma theory

⁵ The three Nazi *dispositifs* Esposito traces include: the normativization of life (particularly in regard how the law becomes subject to biology, and vice versa), the double enclosure of the body (e.g. the biologization of the spirit or soul), and the anticipatory suppression of birth (11). Esposito first establishes how each of these becomes central to Nazi thanatopolitics and then returns to them in order to chart a divergent affirmative biopolitics in post-Nazi philosophy. As a brief example, he attempts to refocus the third *dispositif* regarding birth into an affirmative emphasis on *bios* by analyzing how birth mobilizes a series of terms regarding the individual and the collective, or the subject and the nation. Thus, looking to Arendt's writings on totalitarianism, he states "Just as Nazism made birth the biopolitical mechanism for leading every form of life back to bare life, in the same way Arendt sought in it the ontopolitical key for giving life a form that coincides with the same condition of existence" (178-9). He goes on to argue that "life and birth are both the contrary to death" and the way for life to "defer death isn't to preserve it as such [...] but rather to be reborn continually in different guises" (179). In other words, a biopolitical subject can be born out of the same tensions that Nazism mobilized between *bios* and *zoē* but with the different aim of establishing an affirmative community. See Esposito for a full analysis of these three *dispositifs*.

regarding pain's unspeakability and initiates a new conceptualization of the biopolitical body that bypasses an insistence on silence and aporia.

In the following pages, I adapt Esposito's compelling interpretation of Foucauldian biopolitics to Coetzee's fictional bodies in pain, arguing that Coetzee presents us with a glimpse of the affirmative biopolitics Esposito theorizes.⁶ In the guise of Coetzee's self-reflexive aesthetic, literature gives shape to the "approximate and provisional contours" of the affirmative biopolitics Esposito traces (*Bíos* 11). Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) searches for such an affirmative form of life grounded in the body in her attempt to resist systems of colonialism and patriarchy. Whereas Magda ultimately remains trapped in language, a "prisoner" within her "stony monologue" (12), Coetzee's protagonist in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) presents a further stage in the process of attempting to embody an affirmative biopolitics. Although K's fasting continually threatens to kill him—in the same way that biopolitics has been subsumed by thanatopolitics—in the end Coetzee emphasizes the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics even if it cannot yet be realized during a time of civil war, in the novel, or during apartheid. As Neil Lazarus observes about white South African writers like Coetzee during the 1980s, "hope for them is a massively problematic instance. It involves the acceptance of a paradox: the future for which one works is to be entrusted only to others—in manichean language, in fact, to *the Other*" (148). Therefore, the hope expressed in the ending of *Michael K* can be read as illustrative of Coetzee's status as a white writer who leaves the writing of the revolution to others and instead writes against apartheid and toward a future that can barely start

⁶ Coetzee acknowledges a familiarity with Foucault's work in *Doubling the Point*, although he doesn't explicitly mention biopolitics. Responding to Attwell's observation that Foucauldian themes are prominent in his fiction, Coetzee admits that "Foucault's shadow lies quite heavily over my essays about colonial South Africa," particularly in *White Writing*, but do not play a role in his literary essays (247). He limits his answer to discussing language and notes that he finds "what Foucault has to say about forms of writing whose bearing on, or use by, *power* is immediate" (247) more helpful than Foucault's other writings on literary form.

to be glimpsed in the pages of his fiction. The tentative affirmation K achieves is further qualified by Coetzee's sensitivity to "the fact of suffering in the world" and the overwhelming awareness of and authority commanded by colonial bodies in pain. Ultimately, Coetzee inscribes the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics, even if its realization can only be imagined in literature and ultimately held in suspense, reserved for a time to come, after the era of apartheid and in a more humane time and place.

It must be noted that although colonial and postcolonial concerns are not particularly central in the field of biopolitics, racism is fundamental to the theories of Foucault, Agamben, and Esposito. For Foucault, racism is the force that allows biopower, whose objective is to make live at the level of population, to transform into a letting die. In other words, racism allows the human species to be divided into subspecies, which establishes the rationale that the death of the racial Other will ensure the life of the rest of the population, making the majority supposedly healthier and purer. Clearly, Foucault applies this directly to the Nazi state's infamous treatment of the Jewish population. Such a model of racism's crucial role within a biopolitical system equally applies to colonialism. Indeed, as Hannah Arendt famously argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, colonialism is one of the primary precursors of and templates for totalitarianism's control of populations and exclusion of certain races and ethnic groups from the body politic. South African colonialism, in particular, provides "the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite" (206).⁷ Unlike the prevalence of studies combining trauma theory and biopolitics, scholarship merging colonial and postcolonial studies with biopolitics is a relatively recent development, with Achille Mbembe's pioneering work in

⁷ For Arendt, South Africa exemplifies how imperialism used race as a political device that was later adopted by totalitarian regimes like Nazism. Thus, African colonialism violently and vividly displayed "how peoples could be converted into races and how, simply by taking the initiative in this process, one might push one's own people into the position of the master race" (206).

“Necropolitics” being the most prominent. In the essay, he argues that biopower is inadequate when confronted with the colonial and postcolonial situation. Mbembe calls for a theorization of what he calls “necropower,” the “subjugation of life to the power of death” which, on the contemporary global stage, has “profoundly reconfigure[d] the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror” (39). As evident in his substitution of “necro” for “bios,” Mbembe is much more aligned with the thanatopolitical, and, as a result, I turn instead to Esposito in an effort to articulate the possibility for affirmation in the colonial and postcolonial scene. Ultimately, this chapter presents an effort to bring trauma theory, colonialism, and biopolitics together via the body in Coetzee’s fiction. By locating the possibility of an affirmative biopower in Michael K and Magda, who are on the margins of or outsiders to the patriarchal colonial order, Coetzee interrogates racism’s role at the heart of a biopolitical system, particularly one that continually threatens to become thanatopolitics.

Biopolitical Bodies

As discussed above, Michel Foucault is widely considered the father of contemporary biopolitics. His lectures at the Collège de France in the 1970s, particularly *Society Must Be Defended* (1975-6) and the final section of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978), provide the foundational texts for subsequent biopolitical thinkers. For Foucault, biopolitics is defined as social and political power over life as exercised through biopower, a “new technology of power” that emerges in the second half of the eighteenth century alongside disciplinary (*Society* 242). Thus, “[u]nlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new nondisciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being” (242). Foucault elaborates the relationship between discipline and biopolitics as follows:

I would say that discipline tries to rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished. And that the new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, population, illness, and so on. So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualizing but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species. (242-3)

Thus, biopolitics is concerned with the social body, the population as “a global mass,” and man-as-species rather than with the individual body that is the subject of disciplinary knowledge-power. Discipline and biopolitics work in tandem: discipline subjugating docile bodies followed by a “second seizure of power” that massifies to a global level. One of the most significant changes from an earlier model of sovereignty in which the sovereign has the power to take life (e.g. executions) or let live, is the biopolitical state’s “power to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die” (241). The primary examples Foucault cites of this power to “make” live concern mechanisms designed to ensure and maintain the growth of populations: public health, insurance, birth rates, morbidity, and mortality rates, to name just a few. Biopolitics is a way of “taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined but regularized” (246-7). Thus, the norm becomes one of the crucial instruments within this new system since it “can be applied to both a body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to regularize” (253). Whereas the panopticon epitomizes the disciplinary system, the norm is the exemplary biopolitical instrument.⁸

⁸ Although Foucault is clear in the above quotations from *Society Must Be Defended* that biopolitics co-exists with disciplinarity, this is a point of divergence among later biopolitical thinkers. Agamben, in particular, insists on the presence of sovereignty in the modern era alongside biopolitics—indeed it is the collapsing of sovereignty into biopower that produces the state in which the camp becomes the *nomos* of modernity. For him, the sovereign is fundamentally opposed to *homo sacer*, a binary that he goes on to trace through states of exception. For Esposito, the problem is not between sovereignty, discipline, and biopower but that Foucault does not definitively choose between a thanatopolitical or affirmative interpretation of modernity.

One of the key questions for Foucault, a question later picked up by Agamben and Esposito, is the following: “Given [that biopower’s] objective is essentially to make live, how can it let die?” (*Society* 254). Within a biopolitical system, death is no longer a public display of sovereign power nor is it exclusively part of a disciplinary production of docile bodies. Rather, it now becomes a force that is “beyond the reach of power” since biopower only has control over death in a vague, statistical sense. As a result, Foucault locates a subversive potential within death since death is “the moment when the individual escapes all power, falls back on himself and retreats, so to speak, into his own privacy. Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death” (248). Yet power finds a way to rein in death and turn its imperative to “make live” into “let die” through racism. As mentioned above, racism segregates the population into subspecies and thus allows certain segments of the population to die in an effort to ensure the health of other segments. In a biopolitical system, racism is biological, relying on the discourse of evolution and invoking natural selection to argue for the elimination of an enemy race in order to “regenerate one’s own race” (257) and make “one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or population, insofar as one is an element in a unitary living plurality” (258). Thus, according to Foucault, “killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race” (256). Such a genealogy culminates in the Nazi state and the Final Solution, in which “[e]xposing the entire population to universal death was the only way it could truly constitute itself as a superior race and bring about its definitive regeneration once other races have been either exterminated or enslaved forever” (260).

Yet despite the thanatopolitical emphasis that comes with Nazism, Foucault does not foreclose the possibility of subversion. If biopower literally ignores death and can only control it

abstractly in the form of mortality rates, death holds the potential of escaping the system, of ensuring a form of “privacy” that one can always fall back on (*Society* 248). While suicide does not appear to be a very affirmative form of resistance,⁹ life, particularly the body and its pleasure, also retains the power to contest biopower. As Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality*, although biopower is defined as “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (143), biopower does not mean that “life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; [life] constantly escapes them” (143). In addition to chance events (e.g. famines, natural disasters) that thwart the biopolitical state’s efforts to make live at the level of the population, the body and its pleasure is a life force that holds the potential to escape the grip of biopower. Foucault argues that “It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance” (157). In other words, sex is a construct of discourse just as much as sexuality, and in order to resist the biopower controlling sexuality and sex we must turn to the body and pleasure as the “rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality” (157). Such a potential for resistance through the body explains the intense focus on sexuality within power-knowledge systems since sexuality is one of the most prominent “means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species” (146).¹⁰ The body and its

⁹ Foucault cites suicide explicitly in *The History of Sexuality* as a primary focus of sociological study in the nineteenth century due to its resistance to power-knowledge systems, both under sovereign and disciplinarian forms of power. Thus suicide “testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life” (139). With the emergence of biopolitics, suicide “was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life” (139).

¹⁰ Foucault argues “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” (*Sexuality* 147). Sex and sexuality are able to mobilize both disciplinary and biopolitical forms of knowledge-power simultaneously: “On the one hand

pleasures hold the potential for breaking out of the biopolitical paradigm, much in the same way Eros provides an alternative to the melancholic emphasis on Thanatos in the previous chapters. To this end, as Cary Wolfe points out, it is important to remember that power for Foucault is not simply a negative relationship of domination between objects, institutions, and bodies but rather a positive relation among “virtual forces” (32). Such forces are derived, to a large degree, from bodies, specifically bodies that “are enfolded via biopower in struggle and resistance, and because those forces of resistance are thereby produced in specifically articulated forms, through particular *dispositifs*, there is a chance [...] for life to burst through power’s systematic operation in ways that are more and more difficult to anticipate” (Wolfe 32-3). Thus, the forces that are at play between and within bodies in a biopolitical system are fundamentally unpredictable and contingent and hold the potential to trump the domination and control exercised by biopower.

Although Foucault raises the possibility for life to resist biopower, he never set forth a program that might subvert the seemingly limitless capacity of biopower to control life and death. Foucault’s analysis of biopolitics (which was, to a certain degree, still incomplete at the time of his death) “ends at an impasse, caught between an essentially affirmative view of the biopolitical and a thanatological one” (Wolfe 38). In terms of contemporary biopolitical thinkers, Esposito has become representative of the former and Agamben of the latter. For Agamben, bare life, or *zōē*, can be considered a version of Eros or the life force. In *Homo Sacer*, he reformulates Foucault’s definition of biopolitics as “the entry of *zōē* into the sphere of the *polis* – the politicization of bare life as such – [which] constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought” (4).

[sexuality] was tied to the disciplines of bodies: the harnessing, intensification, and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies. On the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity” (145).

While this echoes Foucault's notion of biopolitics as the emergence of life into politics,

Agamben repeatedly opposes *zoē* to *bios* in a relationship of exclusion and exception such that:

The Foucauldian thesis will then have to be corrected or, at least, completed, in the sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of *zoē* in the *polis* – which is, in itself, absolutely ancient – nor simply the fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of State power. Instead the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. (9)

Bios vs. *zoē*, political life vs. bare life, inclusion vs. exclusion, and sovereign vs. *homo sacer* (the one who can be killed but not sacrificed) are the binary oppositions that permeate Agamben's biopolitical writings. The camp, and the state of exception more generally, collapses binaries, making the lines between “*zoē* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city” indistinguishable (186). Rather than being a rupture with earlier forms of power-knowledge, biopolitics intensifies in the twentieth century and eventually transforms into thanatopolitics when the Jews become “a flagrant case of a *homo sacer*” (114).¹¹ According to Agamben, the concentration camp has become the biopolitical paradigm for modernity due to its status as a state of exception that is now the norm in which citizens are confused with *homo sacer* and political life becomes indistinguishable from bare life. Whereas Foucault retains the possibility for life to escape such biopolitical mechanisms of power, for Agamben the camp and the “unsacrificeable life that has nevertheless become capable of being killed to an unprecedented

¹¹ Agamben elaborates, stating that the killing of the Jews “constitutes, as we will see, neither capital punishment nor a sacrifice, but simply the actualization of a mere ‘capacity to be killed’ inherent in the condition of the Jew as such. The truth – which is difficult for the victims to face, but which we must have the courage not to cover with sacrificial veils – is that the Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, ‘as lice,’ which is to say, as bare life. The dimension in which the extermination took place is neither religion nor law, but biopolitics” (114).

degree” (114) epitomize both the Final Solution and the contemporary moment. Thus, just as the concentration camp becomes the biopolitical paradigm of modernity in such a thanatopolitics, Agamben states, “we are all virtually *homines sacri*” (115).¹²

Franz Kafka’s *The Hunger Artist* (1924) presents an emblematic thanatopolitical scenario that both illustrates Agamben’s argument and is directly applicable to our later discussion of *Life & Times of Michael K*. The story tells the tale of a famous hunger artist who routinely starves himself for forty days after which his manager forces him to eat in front of an enthusiastic crowd. The artist tours throughout Europe to increasing fanfare despite his frustration at the forty-day limit which “rob[s] him of the glory of continuing to starve” and thus “becoming the greatest starvation artist of all time” (89). At the height of his popularity, a “shift” in fashion occurs and the crowds develop “practically an aversion to public displays of starving” (91). The hunger artist fires his manager and joins a circus where he initially revels in his freedom to starve himself without the forty-day limit. The circus puts his cage at the entrance to the menagerie of exotic animals and as a result the crowds rush past him on their way to see the animals, ignorant of his accomplishments in fasting and eventually to his presence entirely. He is forgotten until one day a supervisor notices the cage “full of rotting straw” and asks why it has not been cleaned out. Upon discovering the hunger artist buried in the straw and barely alive, they ask him why he starves himself and the artist summons his remaining strength to utter the last words: “I could

¹² The primary critiques of Agamben’s argument focus on this expansion of the camp as the paradigm for modernity. For example, Jacques Rancière cautions against Agamben’s flattening out of difference through his reliance on stark binary oppositions, to the point that any resistance would “from the very outset” be trapped in the binary of bare life vs. state of exception to the point that such polarities appear “as a sort of ontological destiny: each of us would be in the situation of the refugee in a camp” (301). Furthermore, when the camp is extended beyond the Final Solution to the level of the “nomos of modernity,” Agamben “subsumes” refugee camps, illegal migrants, the Nazi death camps, and other contemporary sites such as Guantanamo under one notion, irrespective of historical particularities (301). Cary Wolfe similarly critiques Agamben’s “characteristically apocalyptic” endpoints (26), pointing out that what gets lost in his analysis is “our ability to think a highly differentiated and nuanced biopolitical field, and to understand as well that the exercise of violence on the terrain of biopower is not always, or even often, one of highly symbolic and sacrificial ritual in some timeless political theater” (27).

not find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I would not have caused a sensation, and I would have stuffed myself just like you and all the others” (94). After cleaning up the “mess” of straw and the wasted body of the artist, the cage becomes home to a “young panther” who did not seem to resent his captivity but rather becomes a marvel to circus-goers for how his “noble body, equipped just short of bursting with everything it needed, seemed to carry its freedom around with it; it seemed to lodge somewhere in the jaws; and the joy of life sprang from its maw in such a blaze of fire that it was not easy for the spectators to withstand it” (94).

Kafka’s story can be interpreted as a parable invoking many themes including the decline of religious significance in modernity (i.e. the emptiness of the artist’s fasting), the dangers of pride, and the alienation of modernity in which “suffering has been progressively desacralized, desocialized, and starved of sense” (67), as Maud Ellmann proposes. The story also exemplifies the biopolitical, particularly Agamben’s thanatopolitics. The hunger artist exists at the intersection between the biological body and the political body; his emaciated body is a testament to his individual corporeal identity while the public spectacle of such a body exhibits the complex mechanisms of power at play in preventing such bodies from starving at both the individual and collective scale. The artist attempts to resist, or at least resents, the biopolitical and disciplinary mechanisms inflicted upon him: first the forty-day limit that the manager imposes to guarantee the greatest possible profit from the performance followed by the literal cage in which the artist lives at the circus as a spectacle for paying spectators. In both cases, the resistance he performs through his body and the art of fasting cannot counter the economic and political forces that control him by making him live. When the audience loses interest in feats of starvation, the hunger artist becomes a docile body that can be killed, not through homicidal physical force as displayed in a sacrificial ritual or execution, but by disinterest and neglect. In

other words, the hunger artist becomes *homo sacer* and the spectators' indifference can be interpreted as the widespread complacency within a biopolitical system that Agamben fears. The hunger artist's inability to "find food that he liked" and his subsequent act of resistance through fasting indicate that the only escape from such a system is death. The panther that replaces the artist is a manifestation of pure *zōē* and the bars of the cage seem to reestablish the threshold separating *bios* (political life, the body politic) from *zōē*. But the spectators' inability to look away from the animal's intoxicating "joy of life" testifies to their own entrapment in a biopolitical paradigm between *zōē* and *bios*. Although the bars of the cage give the illusion that the panther is separate from their own politicized life as citizens, Agamben would argue that the space between them is collapsed into a zone of indistinction since all are capable of being killed within thanatopolitical modernity.

In contrast to Agamben's negative biopolitics and the bleakness of Kafka's parable, Esposito attempts to recover the affirmative force of life within Foucauldian biopolitics.

According to Esposito, the primary question left unanswered by Foucault is:

if life is stronger than the power that besieges it, if its resistance doesn't allow it to bow to the pressure of power, then how do we account for the outcome obtained in modernity of the mass production of death? How do we explain that the culmination of a politics of life generated a lethal power that contradicts the productive impulse? (39)

To answer this question Esposito formulates what he calls the immunitary paradigm in order to think life and politics together, against both Agamben's rigid dichotomies and also Foucault's genealogy that insists they do not merge until the modern biopolitical state. Thus, "in the immunitary paradigm, *bios* and *nomos*, life and politics, emerge as the two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole that assumes meaning from their interrelation" (45). As in the medical practice of vaccination, the immunization of the political body functions by way of

“introducing within it a fragment of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself, by blocking and contradicting natural development” (46). Or, in other words:

It is as if to save someone’s life it is necessary to have him or her in some way sample death, injecting the same disease [*male*] which one wants to safeguard the patient from. In addition the Greek term *pharmakon* contains within it, as Derrida’s classic study shows, the double meaning of “cure” and “poison” (*Diacritics* 51).¹³

Immunization thus attempts to resolve the binary oppositions in biopolitics between life and politics, making live and letting die, by unifying them in this form of a protection of life through exposure to what threatens it. Esposito’s work mirrors this movement by focusing on the Final Solution as central to an affirmative biopolitics. As Timothy Campbell states, “if Nazi thanatopolitics is the most radically negative expression of immunization, then inverting the terms, or changing the negative to a positive, might offer contemporary thought a series of possibilities for thinking bios, a qualified form of life, as the communal form of life” (*Bíos* xxix). Since immunization depends on this turning a negative into a positive, it provides Esposito with a ductile metaphor that he goes on to apply to communities, societies, and populations. For example, birth exemplifies the relationship between *bios* and *zoē* at play in the Nazi suppression of birth (turning every life into bare life), which Esposito reframes in order to argue that the birth of the political subject holds the key to the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics, precisely due to those same tensions between *bios* and *zoē*.¹⁴

For our purposes, Esposito’s immunitary paradigm provides a model for thinking beyond what he calls “the bifurcation that runs between the two principle declinations of the biopolitical

¹³ Of course, Derrida in *Rogues* (2005) also discusses immunity in the form of autoimmunity. See Esposito in *Diacritics* for an extended discussion of how his version differs from Derrida’s more negative use of the term.

¹⁴ Esposito turns to Arendt to theorize such an affirmative possibility, arguing, “biopolitics can be confronted only from within, across a threshold that separates it from itself and which pushes it beyond itself. Birth is precisely this threshold” since it is the space “in which *bios* is placed the maximum distance from *zoē* or in which life is given form in a modality that is drastically distant from its own biologically bareness” (178).

paradigm: one affirmative and productive and the other negative and lethal” (*Bíos* 46). He admits that *Bíos* only begins to trace the “contours” of such an affirmative biopolitics in which he attempts to “open life to the point at which something emerges which had until today remained out of view because it is held tightly in the grip of its opposite” (12). This “something” which Esposito attempts to articulate remains on the horizon, the first outlines just beginning to be sketched in his current work.¹⁵ The nebulous quality of Esposito’s affirmative biopolitics echoes the ambiguity in Coetzee’s work regarding the time to come after apartheid. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson, seeking to explain this ambiguity, argue that “Coetzee has become South African literature’s ‘elsewhere’, producing a body of work which seeks to define, as in all deeply imaginative work, a place which might not exist, for which there is as yet no recognised definition, but which remains, for all that, an indispensable human need” (4). Sam Durrant also observes Coetzee’s effort to articulate an uncertain future, noting that Coetzee is “[a]cutely aware that, like Dante, he is no more than a tourist in an underworld of suffering, [he] nevertheless strives to affirm the ground of a certain solidarity, an affirmation that would look forward to the day when reconciliation would truly be possible” (24). Against popular interpretations of Coetzee’s vision of the future as nihilistic, Susan VanZanten Gallagher emphasizes how although “he dramatically depicts the nightmare of the constraints of history, he does not rule out the possibility of change or transcendence” (47). Such arguments for an undefined time to come in which change will occur or reconciliation will be possible remain possibilities on the horizon, the contours of such a futurity only glimpsed in Coetzee’s work.

¹⁵ To articulate this “something,” Esposito turns to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of the flesh since it allows him to articulate how the body can be a disruptive force. The idea of flesh “is the body that doesn’t coincide completely with itself [...], that isn’t unified beforehand in an organic form, and that is not led by a head [...]. No. Flesh is constitutively plural, multiple, and deformed” (*Diacritics* 52). Such a notion of the flesh is a way of “thinking a notion of biopolitics that was in some way positive” (52) and allows Esposito to take the first step toward a politics of life instead of one of death. Rather than delving into the specifics of phenomenology and Esposito’s use of the flesh, I propose that literature can also provide such an imagined vision of an affirmative biopolitics.

Biopolitics presents a new vocabulary to express what David Attwell calls the “muted affirmation of textual freedom” (102) in Coetzee’s work. Like Esposito’s project of turning the “negative sign [of biopolitics] into a different, positive sense” (*Bíos* 12), Coetzee uncovers the possibility of an affirmative form of life from within the heart of apartheid. Although such a project is seemingly impossible and continually threatens to turn to death as the only form of resistance available within a biopolitical paradigm, Coetzee nevertheless presents it as a possibility attempted by his characters.

Coetzee’s Bodies

One of the first descriptions Magda provides of herself in *In the Heart of the Country* is the following: “I live, I suffer, I am here. With cunning and treachery, if necessary, I fight against becoming one of the forgotten ones of history. I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness but I am more than that too” (3). Critics of the novel have interpreted Magda and her fight against becoming “one of the forgotten ones of history” in a variety of ways. Susan VanZanten Gallagher argues that the numbered sections are “segments of her thoughts, or meditations” (82) through which she writes a “feminine history” that “attempts to break out of the patriarchal hierarchies on which traditional Afrikaner identity is based” (84). Establishing a psychoanalytic interpretation of the novel, Teresa Dovey interprets Magda as “trapped in her stony monologue, unable to make her speech achieve the condition of dialogue” in a “mode of writing which remains locked in the Oedipal struggle” (*Novels* 158).¹⁶ Mike Marais performs a poststructuralist reading of the novel, contending, “Magda’s dissatisfaction with her life stems from her sense that she is entrapped in the house of language”

¹⁶ Similarly, Laura Wright views Magda as “the symbolic manifestation of white female desire in South Africa, ignored and self-negating, complicit with and critical of apartheid, a motherless daughter in a political framework that would prefer her to be a son” (*Writing* 60).

(19). Similarly, noting affinities with French poststructuralists, Paul Cantor states, “Magda may live in the veld, but it seems that her life was scripted in Paris’ (93).¹⁷ Magda’s equation between living, suffering, and being “here” echoes Coetzee’s own reflections on how suffering holds an undeniable authority: it is not that which is not but rather, in its intense materiality, insists on its power. Her insistence that she is “more than” simply a “spinster with a locked diary” and “an uneasy consciousness” reflects this emphasis on the reality of her suffering. Furthermore, her statement and her suffering display how she exceeds both psychoanalytic and poststructuralist interpretations. Magda is not explained entirely by psychoanalytic interpretations of her “uneasy consciousness,” with its Oedipal desires that pack the pages of the novel. She is more than that. Similarly, she is not reducible to her “locked diary” that, in being locked, symbolizes the inability of language to fully write apartheid, subjectivity, or trauma. She is more than that too. On one hand, biopolitics appears as simply another theoretical framework that attempts to make meaning of Magda. On the other, however, I argue that it can reveal this “more than” that Magda strives to become, a mode of being not limited to the mind and language but grounded in the suffering body, a body that is stubbornly not that which is not.

Within the genre of the *plaasroman* that she adopts for her narrative, the unique form of life Magda strives to embody repeatedly expresses itself as an affinity with insects.¹⁸ For

¹⁷ Several critics interpret Magda in terms of Irigaray’s *écriture féminine*, Jane Poyner, for example, observing that authorship itself connotes mastery and Magda “struggles to free herself from writing and being written since, as Irigaray’s speculations reveal, the act of writing makes her both complicit with yet subjected by phallogocentrism” (43). See Gallagher for references to Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva (107). Also, see Caroline Rody for a reading of Magda’s “subversive *écriture féminine*” (165).

¹⁸ Clearly Coetzee’s use of insect imagery invokes Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (see quotation below from “The Novel Today”). Of course, there are other natural images that Magda refers to in her narrative, including stones and animals. Insects, however, dominate the narrative and are also native to the desert setting so central to the South African *plaasroman* tradition, particularly as Coetzee adapts it from Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm*. Although a posthuman, animal studies argument could be made using the insect imagery analyzed above, I remain focused on the biopolitical as it applies to trauma theory and Coetzee’s work. See Cary Wolfe for an illuminating analysis of how the biopolitical inflects animal studies, with particular attention to the dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*.

example, Magda describes the farm where she lives as “a theatre of stone and sun fenced in with miles of wire” in which her existence consists of “spinning my trail from room to room, looming over the servants, the grim widow-daughter of the dark father” (3). After stating that she loves the life of insects, “the scurrying purposeful life that goes on around each ball of dung and under every stone” (6), she further literalizes this correlation between herself and insects such as the black widow spider by launching into a story about her childhood with “weave, weave!” (6). Storytelling becomes her version of the purposeful life of insects and she also admires them for their existence outside the colonial and patriarchal hierarchy. Unlike the farm’s property boundaries signifying colonial inheritance passed down through the generations, Magda insists that “No one is ancestral to the stone desert, no one but the insects, among whom myself, a thin black beetle with dummy wings who lays no eggs and blinks in the sun, a real puzzle to entomology” (18). The land does not belong exclusively to an unbroken line of colonial ancestors; the insects are the only true ancestors of the desert, ancestors who express their familial lines of descent solely through reproduction, not domination and colonization. Magda equates herself directly with such insects, although she admittedly presents a “puzzle to entomology” due to her inability to lay eggs and reproduce and thus become one of the ancestors to the desert. Indeed, she admits that she would “have been far happier” if she could participate in this genealogy, if she lived “under a bush” and was “born in a parcel of eggs, bursting my shell in unison with a thousand sisters and invading the world in an army of chopping mandibles” (39). Notably, it is a family of sisters, not brothers or sons, who are the true ancestors of the stony desert. Similarly, she observes that “the land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history, blue as roaches in our ancestral homes, keeping a high shine on the copperware and laying in jam” (3). She and the other spinsters are like roaches in their persistence and

endurance despite the harsh conditions of the desert, scurrying about in their mindless domestic tasks in the home, longing for and envious of the “purposeful” life of their insect sisters, the true ancestors of this now colonized land.

While the insect imagery in the above cases speaks to Magda’s desire to escape anthropomorphic patriarchal and colonial culture as embodied by her position within the farmhouse, it also expresses her desire to realize a state of being grounded in the body, something “more than” the consciousness and language which trap her in the very society she seeks to escape.¹⁹ Thus, she questions:

Perhaps if I talked less and gave myself more to sensation I would know more of ecstasy. Perhaps, on the other hand, if I stopped talking I would fall into panic, losing my hold on the world I know best. It strikes me that I am faced with a choice that flies do not have to make. (78)

Magda’s question leads to the common critical interpretation that she is purely discourse without a real-world corollary, or as Cantor observes, she “virtually admits that she is not a real person but only a stream of words on page after page in a novel” (92). Unlike flies, Magda fears that her entire subjectivity is constituted by language; ceasing to speak will cause her to lose her grip on the world defined by colonial and patriarchal domination that she “knows best” (78). She cannot let go of rationality and discourse and enter into a world of sensation to experience “ecstasy.” Significantly, this reflection on insect ecstasy is prompted by the sight of the flies that have come “from miles around” to the room in which her father lies mortally wounded from the bullet wound she gave him the night before (78). As she watches the flies seething over his body, she contemplates the lives of insects:

¹⁹ See Teresa Dovey for a Lacanian interpretation of the insects as indicative of Magda not having gained access to the Symbolic since her speech is “instinct-driven in the same manner as the blindly compulsive activities of the lowest forms of life, in which the instincts are minimally displaced into drives, and persist in their most elementary form” (*Novels* 164).

Perhaps their lives from cradle to grave, so to speak, are one long ecstasy, which I mistake. Perhaps the lives of animals too are one long ecstasy interrupted only at the moment when they know with full knowledge that the knife has found their secret and they will never again see the goodly sun which even at this instant goes black before them. (78)

It is the disruption to and decomposition of the patriarchal order that feeds such insect ecstasy and signals a return to the ancestral order of insects that predates colonialism. Instead of the lives of animals being equated with the suffering of the body, the suffering body of the patriarch leads to ecstasy, a realm of pure sensation that provides Magda a glimpse of a mode of life outside of the existing order. Even when such ecstasy is “interrupted” by death, the flies are not plagued by language but rather their death occurs as a darkness that accompanies their acceptance of the fact that they won’t see the sun again.

After her father’s death, Magda continues to identify with insects and seems to be closer to embodying such a form of life now that she has literally destroyed the patriarch who ruled over her. His burial becomes an ordeal causing the farmhand Hendrik to recoil when she tries to wedge the body, which has become unmaneuverable due to rigor mortis, into a porcupine hole she finds in the graveyard:

The bundle, hauled out again, lies like a great grey larva at the graveside, and I, its tireless mother, instinct-driven, set again about stowing it in the safe place I have chosen, though for what hibernation, with what cell-food, toward what metamorphosis I do not know, unless it be as a great grey moth creaking through the dusk toward the lamplit farmhouse, blundering through the fleeing bats, sawing the air with its pinions, the death’s-head burning bright in the fur between its shoulders, its mandibles, if moths have mandibles, opened wide for its prey. (92-3)

Only when her father has died, becoming an object, a “bundle,” can the patriarch be affiliated with the insect life Magda envies. She crawls into the grave with the corpse, the daughter now acting as the “instinct-driven” “tireless mother” who effectively buries herself in order to be reborn into a world devoid of her father’s control. She imagines that this “great grey larva” will

be resurrected as a “great grey moth” that preys on other insects while blundering, creaking, and sawing through the night air. Unlike this vision of her father’s possible metamorphosis into a giant, rapacious moth, Magda imagines her own death as a more humble reincarnation into the insect world. She prays “not for the first time, that I would die tranquil and not begrudge myself to the earth, but look forward to life as a flower or as the merest speck in the gut of a worm, unknowing” (79-80). Thus Magda desires something akin to the ecstasy of the insects in their world of pure sensation without the incessant pull to language and rationality in the bliss of “unknowing” that she would experience as a speck in the gut of a worm. She is certainly not a giant, predatory moth who “saws” his way back to the farmhouse. Not even granting herself the status of the fly, moth, or worm, she aspires to become a fragment in the digestive system of one of the lowest forms of life. Similarly, the flower she envisions is also outside the world of sentient animals, a plant that, like the speck, is food for animals, great and small. Magda’s status as outsider to the reproductive economy of the patriarchal and colonial system (she repeatedly notes her inability to reproduce and her sexlessness), finds expression in her desire to literally become food for life, to generate life through her own decomposition.

Although Magda’s insect imagery can at times be repellant and alien, particularly to the other characters, it ultimately provides her a means to express a form of life outside the violence of colonialism. In “The Novel Today,” Coetzee uses the image of the cockroach to tell a parable about storytelling in South Africa.²⁰ The passage is worth citing in full since it indicates how the biopolitical can operate through such insect imagery:

²⁰ This essay was originally a speech given in 1987 at an event for Book Week in Cape Town and has only been published in the South African journal *Upstream*. Critics frequently cite the essay due to the distinction Coetzee draws between history and fiction. He argues that in times of ideological upheaval, like during apartheid, the novel’s only options are either supplementing history or rivaling it (3). See Gallagher, Attwell, and Head, among others, for a discussion of how the essay relates to the representation of politics in Coetzee’s oeuvre and his rejection of realism.

Storytelling (let me repeat myself at the risk of boring you) is not a way of making messages more—as they say—“effective”. Storytelling is another, an other mode of thinking. It is more venerable than history, as ancient as the cockroach. Nor is this primitiveness the only way in which stories resemble cockroaches. Like cockroaches, stories can be consumed. All you need to do is tear off the wings and sprinkle a little salt on them. They are nourishing, to a degree, though if you are truly looking for nourishment you would probably look elsewhere. Cockroaches can also be colonised. You can capture them in a cockroach trap, breed them (quite easily), herd them together in cockroach farms. You can put pins through them and mount them in cases, with labels. You can use their wings to cover lampshades with. You can do minute dissections of their respiratory systems, and stain them, and photograph them, and frame them, and hang them on the wall. You can, if you wish, dry them and powder them and mix them with high explosives and make bombs of them. You can even make up stories about them, as Kafka did, although this is quite hard. One of the things you cannot—apparently—do is eradicate them. They breed, as the figure has it, like flies, and under the harshest circumstances. It is not known for what reason they are on the earth, which would probably be a nicer place—certainly an easier place to understand—without them. It is said that they will still be around when we and all our artefacts have disappeared.

This is called a parable, a mode favoured by marginal groups—groups that don’t have a place in the mainstream, in the main plot of history—because it is hard to pin down unequivocally what the point is.

In the end there is still a difference between a cockroach and a story, and the difference remains everything. (4)

The parable Coetzee crafts about storytelling and the cockroach, as he readily admits, can mean many different things, the meaning being “hard to pin down unequivocally.” As such, the parable reflects Coetzee’s aesthetic and the constant effort by his protagonists to resist meaning and interpretation, such as Magda’s attempts to get outside discourse or Michael K’s ability to escape all camps. In full acknowledgement of this difficulty of interpretation, I propose that the parable of the cockroach speaks to, yet is not entirely explained by, a biopolitical paradigm. Human beings in a biopolitical state are put into camps, disciplined, regulated, and categorized as a species, just as one can “herd,” “breed,” “colonise,” “dissect,” and categorize the cockroach. But cockroaches ultimately resist such efforts—they cannot be “eradicated.” Similarly, life constantly breaks through the efforts to control it and discipline it, subverting the drift toward thanatopolitics. Through their inability to be eradicated, the cockroach refuses to be entirely

subsumed within a thanatopolitical paradigm and thus presents a possible model for an affirmative form of life. Granted, such affirmation comes from one of the lowest life forms, cockroaches being considered pests without which the earth “would probably be a nicer place—certainly an easier place to understand.” While Agamben would interpret this parable in terms of bare life (*zōē*), with the cockroach signifying the life that can be killed but not sacrificed, Coetzee insists on the perseverance of these supposed “pests.” Resisting incorporation into the body politic through the state of exception, the cockroach “cannot” be “eradicated” and instead persists alongside higher forms of life. Thus, unlike *homo sacer*, or the concentration camp victim, the cockroach can neither be killed nor sacrificed but instead stubbornly resists both attempts at eradication and meaning. Affirmation in this case is not a booming, optimistic declaration of the power of life over death, but rather a quiet, stubborn perseverance that largely goes unnoticed by higher forms of life. The cockroach that can somehow breed “under the harshest circumstances” and that simply refuses to be eradicated expresses a form of life that is affirmative in a lowly and quite unremarkable fashion.

By repeatedly aligning herself with such a form of life, Magda attempts to subvert the controlling discourses of patriarchy and colonialism, discourses that can be interpreted as biopolitical in that they both control the female body as a vehicle through which they reproduce and ensure the continuation of the existing colonial and patriarchal population. Ultimately, however, Magda’s attempts to embody the form of life signified by the cockroach are unsuccessful; she remains trapped on the farm, in the discourse of the pastoral genre that she nostalgically cannot give up and fruitlessly tries to rewrite. She admits that “Though I may ache to abdicate the throne of consciousness and enter the mode of being practised by goats and stones,” an ache she does “not find intolerable,” the medium of language restricts her ability to

commune with an ontology aligned with the world of animals and insentient beings (26).

Adopting a position that mimics the one Descartes takes when he sits in his closet and produces his famous “*cogito ergo sum*” dictum, Magda states, “Seated here I hold the goats and stones, the entire farm and even its environs, as far as I know them, suspended in this cool, alienating medium of mine, exchanging them item by item for my word-counters” (26). She elaborates, observing, “Words are coin. Words alienate. Language is no medium for desire” (26). Despite her desire to commune with the animal world, a world she defines as pure sensation free of consciousness and language, she remains trapped by discourse. Her “word-counters” clearly alienate her from the world she seeks to join by naming it and categorizing it within existing frameworks. Unlike Magda, whose subjectivity is completely dependent on language, the desert landscape was “made for insects who eat sand and lay eggs in each other’s corpses and have no voices with which to scream when they die” (108). While not excluding the suffering of such insects upon death, the observation highlights the absence of a gap between speech and the expression of pain and trauma. Just as she earlier thinks of death for insects as an “interruption” in the ecstasy of their lives, here death is silent, not without pain but also not plagued by a gap between language and experience. Unlike the immense energy expended by human beings when attempting to write the moment of death or inscribe it in consciousness in an effort to understand it, Magda envies this type of death that is natural to the desert and part of the reproductive function of a species that will lay eggs in the corpses of their kin.

In the end, Magda fails to achieve an alternate form of life since she is constrained by her monologue and consciousness but also her desire for a community based in dialogue. She states:

I need more than merely pebbles to permute, rooms to clean, furniture to polish around: I need people to talk to, brothers and sisters or fathers and mothers, I need a history and a culture, I need hopes and aspirations, I need a moral sense and a teleology before I will be happy, not to mention food and drink. (120)

Recalling Molloy's famous stone sucking passage, Magda acknowledges that she cannot embrace the pure contingency of postfoundationalism that Beckett demonstrates through the infinite permutations of the stones. Rather, Magda remains tied to a conception of the world that is anthropomorphic—she needs people and the civilization they construct in the form of history, culture, and morality, not to mention the bodily needs of food and drink. This desire for the companionship of humanity and society leads Magda to attempt to communicate with the “sky-gods” overhead in a language of “pure meanings such as might be dreamed of by the philosophers” (126). Yet such communication surrenders to the “word-counters” she previously tried to escape. As Jane Poyner points out, she is forced to communicate with the sky-gods “*through writing*, and thus to bend to the Law of the Father having failed to realize a feminine symbolic” (50). Her corporeality reassures her that she has not gone mad and that she is “real”: “This is my hand, bone and flesh, the same hand every day. I stamp my foot: this is the earth, as real to the core as I. Therefore the words must allude to a time yet to come” (127). Such a time to come will occur when the words of the sky-gods, words of “pure meanings,” can be understood. Yet such a time to come also refers to a time when Magda will be able to escape the prison of language and consciousness and affirm her being outside such a biopolitical discourse, which subjects her body to the power-knowledge systems of colonialism and patriarchy. Despite Magda's attempts to embody such a form of life, she remains locked within her monologue and the attempted dialogue with the sky-gods in which the words “come from nowhere and go nowhere, they have no past or future, they whistle across the flats in a desolate eternal present, feeding no one” (115).

Although Magda initially sets out to articulate the something “more than” being a spinster with a locked diary, she ends up remaining trapped in the discourse of colonialism and

patriarchy. At the end of the novel, she reconciles herself to her failure, stating “I have chosen at every moment my own destiny, which is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father’s bones, in a space echoing with hymns I could have written but did not because (I thought) it was too easy” (139). Like her “stony monologue” Magda’s garden is “petrified,” her words feeding no one as they blow across the ossified ground. She fails to get outside a Cartesian split between mind and body, outside the patriarchal order, ultimately failing to embody an affirmative form of life within the biopolitical system in which she finds herself. Critics frequently comment on Magda’s failure, Brian May observing that the novel can be analyzed in terms of “high modernism” since Coetzee writes “an epistemological tragedy dramatizing an inevitable failure of knowing, and one in which the body does not figure prominently, being too weak to save the mind from itself” (400). As Dick Penner points out, the tone accompanying this failure of knowing at the end of the novel can be described as “inertia, stalemate, deadlock, cul-de-sac, entropy—conditions common to modern and postmodern literature since Kafka’s cockroach first limped on the scene” (72).²¹ In addition to an epistemological failure, Magda’s failed attempt to commune with the animal world and her final nostalgia for hymns to nature that she could have written reflect what Timothy Wright calls, the “dual valence of the pastoral—where the head condemns while the heart cannot let go” (58).²² Despite Magda’s attempts to escape and rewrite the discourses constraining her, she cannot let go of her attachment to the farm, the *plaasroman*, and the civilization she knows. Ultimately,

²¹ Complementing the critics discussed above who emphasize a time to come in Coetzee’s work, Penner ultimately settles for “waiting” as the correct tone for both the end of the novel and South Africa during apartheid—“waiting for the median, waiting for equality, waiting for Mandela: waiting, perhaps, for Godot, or for the barbarians” (73).

²² There are, of course, critics who interpret the ending of *In the Heart of the Country* more optimistically, although they all admit that Magda ultimately fails to achieve the pure meaning of the sky-gods or get outside discourse. See Gallagher for one such interpretation, particularly her emphasis on how Magda’s monologue, as an example of *écriture féminine*, resists patriarchal authority simply by being written. Yet, in the end, “The natural world exists only as being; she exists as consciousness” (97).

Magda chooses a death of her own making, within the confines of the African farm, next to her father's remains, having failed to achieve the form of life that would subvert the biopolitical structures controlling her. Despite this failure, she does succeed in writing the possibility of such a form of life. Even if she cannot achieve it herself, she can imagine a mode of being that might exist in another time, a future moment that could occur beyond the walls of her petrified garden.

Whereas Magda fails to embody a form of life that would subvert the trend of biopolitics toward Thanatos, Coetzee's Michael K comes closer to realizing such a mode of being in *Life & Times of Michael K*. In many ways, Coetzee's Booker-prize winning novel can be interpreted as a model of Foucault's disciplinary and biopolitical society. Coetzee's protagonist is a product of the state-run institutions that seek to discipline him: from the orphanage where he grows up after being left there by his mother due to his disfiguring harelip, to his job in the "Parks and Gardens division of the municipal services of the City of Cape Town as Gardener, grade 3(b)" (4), to his internment in a camp for refugees on the outskirts of a town in the country, to the hospital where he comes close to being force fed by a medical officer who desperately attempts to understand his extreme fasting. Michael K's race is only mentioned once in the novel, in the note on his identity card designating him as "CM," or colored male (70).²³ His treatment throughout the novel, his mother's position as a servant in Cape Town, and the nature of the internment camp also reiterate that he is not a member of the ruling, white Afrikaner class.²⁴ As discussed above, race allows the shift within a biopolitical system from "making live" to "letting die" and justifies

²³ Susan VanZanten Gallagher points out that this abbreviation for "Colored Male" was a common official designation during apartheid (144).

²⁴ Nadine Gordimer, in her famous review of the novel, explicitly labels K as part of the "colored" class, insisting that his name "probably stands for Kotze or Koekemoer and has no reference, nor need it have, to Kafka" and that due to his mother's position as a servant "he is a so-called coloured" (3). Dick Penner cites an interview he conducted with the author in which Coetzee states, "'Other people in the book can think of him what they want. The important thing is that he doesn't,'" resulting in, what Penner calls, a downplaying of the "racial issue" that leads to a reading of K "more in terms of his individuality than as a representative of any group" (91).

segregating the population, as occurred in apartheid South Africa. The institutional entities that Michael K moves through in the novel work together, at a national level, to control, quantify, discipline, and ensure the health of the ruling population, in the case of South Africa, the white Afrikaner population. As David Babcock points out, governmentality in late-apartheid South Africa took the form of “a welfare-security state,” a system that Foucaudian biopolitics is uniquely suited to interpret (893).²⁵ Babcock goes on to analyze how Michael K engages with the biopolitical through the trope of professionalism, arguing that he “inhabits” his profession of gardening and thus “can glimpse a life beyond and beneath the biopolitical structures that initially conditioned him” (901). In tandem with Babcock’s valuable interpretation of the novel, I argue that Michael K’s subverts such biopolitical structures not exclusively through his profession and a discourse of labor but also through embodying the form of life Magda strove for, one aligned with nature and animal life. Thus, rather than interpret K’s gardening exclusively as a reclamation of an identity category grounded in his profession, his desire to return to the country becomes a model of an affirmative biopolitics from within a time of civil war and a thanatopolitical state. As such, Michael K presents a further evolution in the attempt to articulate an affirmative biopolitics, K coming closer to embodying the mode of being Magda sought in Coetzee’s earlier novel. In the end, however, he remains constrained by the limits of the body and the need to wait for a time to come when such an ontology can be fully realized.

One of the primary ways in which Michael K comes to embody such an affirmative biopolitics is through his resistance to efforts to control, define, and normalize him. The medical officer’s narrative presents the most extended of such efforts. By the time he is consigned to the

²⁵ Babcock’s essay presents one of the only other extended discussions of Coetzee’s fiction and biopolitics. See Duncan McColl Chesney for an analysis of the novel in relation to Agamben’s concept of bare life for another biopolitical interpretation. Chesney largely conforms to Agamben’s thanatopolitical tone, arguing for Michael K as a figure of aporia in his silence that stages the complex relationship between ethical responsibility and political action.

medical officer's care three quarters of the way through the novel, Michael K has already broken through the military lines preventing the population from leaving Cape Town and has escaped an internment camp, only to be captured again and sent to the hospital when his emaciated figure and fainting spells during forced labor necessitate medical attention. Upon first encountering K, who the medical officer mistakenly calls "Michaels," he uses medical discourse to officially diagnose him and situate him within the disciplinary system of the clinic. Thus, we read that K exhibits "evidence of prolonged malnutrition: cracks in his skin, sores on his hands and feet, bleeding gums" (129), and his harelip is also medically catalogued as a "simple incomplete cleft, with some displacement of the septum. The palate intact" (130). Such objective descriptions of K's body and cleft lip stand in marked contrast to the free indirect discourse of the previous sections. Furthermore, by diagnosing K's condition, which had previously set him apart from the majority of the population,²⁶ the medical officer inscribes K's difference within the official discourse of the clinic. The medical officer even offers to surgically correct the harelip, noting that "he would find it easier to get along if he could talk like everyone else" (130-1), but K responds, "'I am what I am'" (130).

This desire to remain what he is combined with his fasting confound the medical officer's attempts to fit K into the existing biopolitical paradigm, and he therefore sets out to make meaning of what he perceives as Michael K's resistance to the system. The medical officer first attempts to turn K's situation into a story, a crude fable echoing that of the city and country mouse. Asking who is "Michaels but one of a multitude of the second class?" he goes on to characterize him as a "mouse who quit an overcrowded, floundering ship. Only, being a city mouse, he did not know how to live off the land and began to grow very hungry indeed. And

²⁶ See Laura Wright for an interpretation of the harelip as aligning Michael K with the barbarian girl and Friday, Michael's trauma differing in that it is "inadvertent" but a trauma nevertheless that becomes part of his status as an outsider (*Writing* 84).

then he was lucky enough to be sighted and hauled aboard again. What has he to be so piqued about?" (136-7). Such a tale inverts the original Aesopian fable in which the country mouse chooses to return to his home with its peace and safety after realizing that life in the city is one of perpetual fear. Although Michael K had "grow[n] very hungry indeed" while he was living in the country, contrary to the medical officer's assumptions, he had found a way to live off the land and took immense pleasure in such sustenance, experiencing "tears of joy in his eyes" when he first tastes the pumpkins he grows (113). The medical officer does not realize the irony of his description of K as being "lucky enough" to be "sighted and hauled" back into the biopolitical system of camps and disciplinary regimes. Not satisfied with this tale, the medical officer seeks other metaphors to understand K, notably more images that categorize him outside the human species. Thus, K is imagined as follows:

He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand. A hard little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life. He passes through these institutions and camps and hospitals and God knows what else like a stone. Through the intestines of the war. An unbearing, unborn creature. I cannot really think of him as a man, though he is older than me by most reckonings. (135)

The officer acknowledges K's stony resistance to meaning, his refusal to be shaped by the "institutions and camps and hospitals" through which he passes. Rather than interpreting such hardness as willful, active resistance, the medical officer views him as a passive, inanimate pebble, "tossed randomly" around, a "creature" who he cannot conceive as part of the human species, as "a man" like himself. The medical officer's analogy between Michael K and the stone echoes the form of life that Magda sought. Whereas she attempted to become one with the desert landscape, in all its barren and stony beauty, she was unable to let go of her desire for human dialogue and community. Michael K presents just the opposite problem—in the medical officer's

eyes he is so good at achieving this form of inanimate being that he confounds attempts to make meaning of him within a patriarchal, biopolitical discourse. Yet the medical officer's interpretation does not express what Michael K actually desires. Unlike Magda's insistent, claustrophobic interior monologue that we never get outside of, the medical officer's narrative never succeeds in accessing K's interiority and consciousness. The medical officer's narrative throws K's impenetrability into relief, highlighting how even in the previous sections K's impressions are filtered through the narrator's indirect discourse.

Just as Magda attempts to articulate a subjectivity "more than" psychoanalytic and poststructuralist ones, the medical officer applies such frameworks to Michael K in an attempt to make sense of his fasting. In a crude psychoanalytic interpretation, he observes:

Then as I watched you day after day I slowly began to understand the truth: that you were crying secretly, unknown to your conscious self (forgive the term), for a different kind of food, food that no camp could supply. Your will remained pliant but your body was crying to be fed on its own food, and only that. (163-4)

Of course, the medical officer's interpretation anticipates critical readings that attribute K's fasting to his desire for freedom, symbolized by eating only the food that he has made himself. Such a reading also echoes Kafka's hunger artist who admits on his deathbed that he simply could not find the food he liked. In the medical officer's version, K will die just as the hunger artist does: alone and forgotten. The medical officer's analysis also provides a simplistic psychoanalytic interpretation of the novel: that the unconscious desire for freedom in K manifests itself through a lack expressed in the physical symptoms of severe emaciation and malnutrition. Similarly, the medical officer proposes an Oedipal interpretation of Michael K, blaming his mother for K's troubles and imagining her "sitting on your shoulders, eating out your brains, glaring about triumphantly, the very embodiment of Mother Death" (150). Such an image is echoed in more sophisticated psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel, particularly

Dovey's argument that K has not been admitted into the Symbolic since the absence of a father leaves him "subjected to the mother's desire" (*Novels* 297) and since his harelip prevents him from breastfeeding, "the organic need is not eroticized via the first object of instinct, the breast: it is thus not transformed into a sexual drive, but persists at the most basic level as the most radical lack" (298).

Not satisfied with such psychoanalytic interpretations, the medical officer next explains Michael K in terms of signification, coming close to the reading favored by later poststructuralist critics. After K escapes from the hospital, the medical officer imagines finding him in order to solve the mystery of why K fasts. He imagines calling out the following as he chases K:

"Your stay in the camp was merely an allegory, if you know that word. It was an allegory—speaking at the highest level—of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it. Did you notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away? I noticed." (166)

The medical officer's narrative concludes with this reading of Michael K, although it is never definitively presented as the "correct" answer to the enigma of K since the section ends with the officer pleading with him to raise his right hand if he has "understood" (167). This interpretation is cited repeatedly in the criticism of the novel, taken as evidence of everything from Derridean *différance* to Coetzee's politics of radical resistance.²⁷ Thus, adopting the medical officer's final interpretation and citing Spivak's preface to *Dissemination*, Attwell argues that K's gardening can be read as "the seed that neither inseminates nor is recovered by the father, but is scattered

²⁷ In addition to Attwell, for poststructuralist inflected interpretations of the novel, see Head ("the elusiveness of K is a grand-scale enactment of the poststructuralist idea of infinitely deferred meaning" (4)) and Laura Wright ("Michael K, like the term 'barbarian,' becomes a floating signifier, present within the text but devoid of any fixed meaning" (*Writing* 86)).

abroad” (99) since “K’s meaning will never arrive, for his story is constituted in the play of identity and difference that defines textuality” (99).²⁸

Despite the persuasiveness of such readings, Michael K seems to exceed psychoanalytic and poststructuralist frameworks, recalling Magda’s statement that she is “more than” consciousness and language. As David Babcock points out, “while Michael K does creatively resist certain forms of authority, it is difficult to read him as a figure of absolute resistance” (900). According to Babcock, “Such a reading adopts too uncritically the interpretation articulated by the medical officer, for whom K is a figure of radical otherness, whereas the novel encourages us to view the medical officer as an unreliable speaker” (900). In line with Babcock’s salient point, I propose that rather than exclusively interpret K as representative of radical political resistance to a biopolitical paradigm, his “life and times” can also be read as an ontological narrative corresponding to an affirmative biopolitics that is just barely glimpsed in the novel. Coetzee himself characterizes K in such terms, pointing out that the novel “didn’t turn out to be a book about *becoming* (which might have required that K have the ability to adapt, more of what we usually call intelligence) but a book about *being*, which merely entailed that K go on being himself, despite everything” (Morphet 455). The being that K comes to embody in the country is not one of radical resistance, but rather a tentative one, qualified by K’s evasion of all interpretive frameworks. Indeed, resistance within a biopolitical system takes on such a tentative quality, echoing the emphasis on a time to come we saw in Magda’s case. Walter Benn

²⁸ Attwell, in his interview with Coetzee, cites this passage by the medical officer as holding “a good deal of truth” but admits that the “trap” of the novel “consists in the fact that my reading of K is already encoded, and to an extent undermined, in the medical officer’s attempts to contain K” (*Doubling the Point* 204). He nevertheless goes on to propose a reading of the novel echoing the one above, one that Coetzee does not explicitly endorse in the interview, preferring to align himself with K since both attempt to evade efforts to make meaning of them and thus “put a stranglehold” on the novel and interpretations of it (206).

Michaels's comments on what resistance in a biopolitical system would look like are relevant here:

if political conflict may be imagined as conflict between two competing commitments to what's right, biopolitical conflict appears as conflict between what is and what isn't, or (in its more forward-looking mode) between what is and what will be [...]. In ideological struggles, victory is imagined as the triumph of one political and economic system over another; no new bodies are required. In ontological struggles, victory is the defeat of one body by another. In the ontological struggle not against some other body but against what is (hence against even one's own body), victory will be change—the destruction of what is and its replacement by something new. (108-9)

In the context of South African apartheid, this coming of something new that destroys the existing order through forces of change is imagined in *Life & Times of Michael K* as both an ideological and ontological struggle. The concrete references to Cape Town and an imagined civil war in which the apartheid government enacts martial law in an attempt to retain control over the population are indicative of the former. The latter speaks to Michael K's being throughout the novel. A figure like Michael K embodies such an ontological change, signaling an affirmative biopolitics that has the potential to overthrow a thanatopolitical system. Yet this affirmative biopolitics is not yet fully realized, the “something new” that will replace “what is” cannot realistically survive in the existing system, as evident by Michael K's increasingly emaciated figure. Rather than interpret K as a figure of radical resistance, in the ideological and political sense of the word, as the medical officer does, I argue in the remaining pages that Michael K comes to embody a form of life that indicates the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics, which will be fully realized only in a time to come. As such, he picks up where Magda fails and presents a further step toward such coming change.

The closest Michael K comes to achieving such an affirmative form of life occurs when he lives in his burrow on the abandoned Visage family farm growing his pumpkin patch. While living off this land, which he believes is where his mother was born, he is compared repeatedly

to insect life. After planting his seeds and while he watches the pumpkins growing, “[h]e thought of himself as a termite boring its way through a rock. There seemed to be nothing to do but live” (66).²⁹ He realizes that he can live outside the disciplinary regimens of the city here, since before “there had usually been someone to tell him what to do next; now there was no one” and so he waits (67). Such an existence slowly changes him into “a different kind of man,” one who increasingly becomes insect-like, turning “smaller and harder and drier every day” (67). He stops eating and spends the day sleeping or in a stupor at the mouth of his cave, wondering “if he were living in what was known as bliss” (68). Michael K’s transformation in the country is clearly not a loud-spoken declaration of the will to life that we would expect. Rather it takes the form of an immensely humble, quiet transformation to a mode of being distinct from that of the institutions and systems that have shaped him thus far. This form of life seems to be merely the simplest way to be, there “seemed to be nothing to do but live” (66). Thus, Michael K appears like a termite and, like the cockroach in Coetzee’s parable, becomes harder and drier as he increasingly shrinks to this humble way of life that does not change the existing political order or actively resist it, but merely exists alongside it.

When he is captured and taken away from the farm to the Jakkalsdrif camp, his incarceration exemplifies the contrast between his previous way of life and that within a thanatopolitical system, even when he is on the margins of such a system in what Agamben would call a state of exception. While in the camp, he observes, “I am like an ant that does not know where its hole is” followed by digging “his hands into the sand and let[ting] it pour

²⁹ The insect imagery, given Michael K’s name, is even more strongly connected to Kafka in this novel, *The Metamorphosis* being the most obvious connection. K’s dwelling also echoes Kafka’s short story “The Burrow,” whose protagonist is not explicitly an insect but an animal of some kind. See Coetzee’s essay, reprinted in *Doubling the Point*, on the story. He primarily focuses on Kafka’s depiction of narrative time, noting that Kafka is able to capture a unique “time-sense” in which “one moment does not flow into the next—on the contrary, each moment has the threat or promise of becoming (not becoming) a timeless forever, unconnected to, ungenerated by, the past” (203). Such an expression of time can be fruitfully linked to the undefined time to come identified throughout the chapter and represented by the mode of life K comes to embody.

through his fingers over and over again” (83). This futile gesture does not bore into the ground as the termite does in order to carve a new burrow, but rather expresses his homelessness and his inability to achieve the previous state resembling bliss. He imagines the guards wanting the entire population to be buried, not in burrows of their own making but in a mass grave. This realization began to “unfold itself in his head, like a plant growing” but one that, in its explicitly political nature, seems to have been planted by his fellow inmate Robert rather than springing from his own consciousness. He thinks:

if they really wanted to forget us forever, they would have to give us picks and spades and command us to dig; then, when we had exhausted ourselves digging, and had dug a great hole in the middle of the camp, they would have to order us to climb in and lay ourselves down; and when we were lying there, all of us, they would have to break down the huts and tents and tear down the fence and throw the huts and fence and the tents as well as every last thing we had owned upon us, and cover us with earth, and flatten the earth. *Then*, perhaps, they might begin to forget about us. (94)

Often taken as the most explicit reference in the novel to the Nazi concentration camps and the mass extermination of the Jews,³⁰ the passage clearly contrasts this digging in the service of thanatopolitics with the termite-like digging K performs when constructing his burrow and the purposeful plowing he does in his garden. Notably, this passage comes on the heels of Michael K’s dawning awareness of the purpose of the camp and why it is hidden from sight since the ruling classes prefer to have the suffering they inflict hidden from view, echoing Coetzee’s own observations in “Into the Dark Chamber” about how torture occurs in the center of cities like Cape Town, invisible to the population that simply goes about its daily routine. The repetition in listing the items the inmates would have to tear down and bury echoes Kafka’s formal circling back and recurring patterns throughout “The Burrow.” In responding to questions about Kafka’s

³⁰ The only explicit mention of the Holocaust occurs during the medical officer’s section. His boss observes K’s emaciated state and states ““He was living by himself on that farm of his free as a bird, eating the bread of freedom, yet he arrived here looking like a skeleton. He looked like someone out of Dachau”” (146). See Zoë Norridge for a full analysis of Holocaust allusions in the novel.

influence on his work, Coetzee comments on how he performs a similar repetition, a form of “writing-in-the-tracks” (*Doubling the Point* 199) in an effort to guide him through “Kafka’s verb-labyrinth” (199). Coetzee places emphasis on how Kafka “pushes the limits of language” and how he “hints that it is possible, for snatches, however brief, to think outside one’s own language, perhaps to report back on what it is like to think outside language itself” (198). By imitating Kafka’s language in his depiction of a mass burial of the camp inmates, Coetzee asserts this will to get outside language, to assert an alternative from within the heart of the camp. K embodies that alternative to thanatopolitics through his escape and return to gardening. As Gallagher observes, “[p]ublished during a time when South Africans and the world were wondering if the end was at hand, *Life & Times of Michael K* proposes the garden as a millennial alternative to the cataclysm of the camps” (156).

When Michael K finally escapes the camp and journeys back to his pumpkin patch, he slowly recovers the mode of life he had achieved previously. He reconstructs his burrow and resumes the tending of his garden. He continues in such a state, only disturbed occasionally by reminders of the outside world and the civil war in the form of jet fighters “whistl[ing] high overhead” (116). For the most part, however, “he was living beyond the reach of calendar and clock in a blessedly neglected corner, half awake, half asleep. Like a parasite dozing in the gut, he thought; like a lizard under a stone” (116). He again aligns himself with insect life since it exists outside the temporal discipline imposed by society and apart from the biopolitical control of censuses and reproductive imperatives. His contentment in being like a parasite in the gut achieves what Magda can only desire in vain when she wants to be reborn as a speck in the gut of a worm. Similarly, when guerilla fighters appear on the farm, instead of joining them, “[l]ike a worm he began to slither toward his hole, thinking only: Let darkness fall soon, let the earth

swallow me up and protect me” (107). K’s desire to be like the earthworm rather than join the resistance is the source of much criticism in reviews of the novel, one reviewer in the *African Communist* complaining that Coetzee does not provide a model for resistance to apartheid: “we are dealing not with a human spirit but an amoeba, from whose life we can draw neither example nor warning because it is too far removed from the norm, unnatural, almost inhuman” (qtd. in Attwell 92).³¹ Yet the form of life associated with the amoeba, earthworms, parasites, and termites is what is needed when attempting to resist a biopolitical system increasingly drifting toward thanatopolitics. The fact that such insects are “too far removed from the norm, unnatural, almost inhuman” is precisely the point—they resist the biopolitical imperative to “make live” through segmenting the population into subspecies, norms, and statistics simply by being beneath the consideration of such systems, appearing as mere pests that are easily overlooked.

The mode of life embodied by Michael K in the country leaves no record of itself, no data to be collected and compared to a norm: “He thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind it, but if anything as a speck upon the surface of an earth too deeply asleep to notice the scratch of ant-feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust” (97). Similarly, upon returning to his burrow on the farm and fortifying it while maintaining its “careless, makeshift” nature (101), he “felt a deep joy in his physical being” as he moves about the field where he grows his pumpkins (102). He thinks that “it seemed possible to fly; it seemed possible to be both body and spirit” (102). Such a state of being undermines the Cartesian split between mind and body, K achieving the union between them that Magda repeatedly strove for but failed to achieve, always brought back to earth by her overburdened consciousness. Such lightness is

³¹ Gordimer’s review famously echoes such critiques of the seemingly apolitical depiction of apartheid South Africa, observing that Coetzee’s work leaves nothing unsaid regarding “what human beings do to fellow human beings in South Africa; but he does not recognize what the victims, seeing themselves as victims no longer, have done, are doing, and believe they must do for themselves” (3).

imagined as a speck of dust or the impossibly light “scratch of ant-feet” or the “rasp of butterfly teeth.” Rather than mimicking and envying the termites, flies, and roaches, as Magda does, Michael K does not even reach so high but rather likens himself to even more immaterial, lowly, and humble entities.

Inevitably, the lightness and immateriality that Michael K strives for reaches a limit in his corporeal body as it becomes increasingly emaciated. As the medical officer so frequently stresses, K cannot survive if he continues to starve himself and he will end up like Kafka’s hunger artist, wasting away and forgotten. Similarly, the form of life that Michael K shares with insects is limited by its expression in language and mediation through the narrator. Just as Magda is constituted by language and thus prevented from ever achieving a communion with the natural world that would allow her to escape anthropomorphism and patriarchy, all of the articulations of K’s mode of life are filtered through similes: he is “like an earthworm”, thinks of himself “as a speck” on the surface of the earth, and so on. These forms of life are ultimately products of language and cannot achieve their full realization since they are necessarily mediated by discourse. The medical officer’s narrative calls attention to this construction when he appropriates K’s similes, observing:

You are like a stick insect, Michaels, whose sole defence against a universe of predators is its bizarre shape. You are like a stick insect that has landed, God knows how, in the middle of a great wide flat bare concrete plain. You raise your slow fragile stick-legs one at a time, you inch about looking for something to merge with, and there is nothing. Why did you ever leave the bushes, Michaels? You should have stayed all your life clinging to a nondescript bush in a quiet corner of an obscure garden in a peaceful suburb, doing whatever it is that stick insects do to maintain life, nibbling a leaf here and there, eating the odd aphid, drinking dew. (149-50)

The medical officer’s observation hits closer to home than he realizes, Michael K’s only desire at the end of the novel being to return to his previous mode of life. Because the narrator can only express Michael K’s life in the country through language, the medical officer can also

appropriate the similes K himself uses and enfold them into existing biopolitical discourse. Yet the medical officer still cannot explain K entirely through his observation. He knows it would have been better for K if he could have remained “in a quiet corner of an obscure garden,” never leaving “the bushes.” But he gets Michael K’s story wrong in thinking that he had raised his “slow fragile stick-legs one at a time” in order to look “for something to merge with.” Unlike Magda, who does just this when she reaches out to the sky-gods and reconciles with the fact that she needs community and dialogue rather than the life of a solitary insect, Michael K never raised his stick legs seeking to merge with something else. Instead, he sought the protection of the earth swallowing him up like it does termites and earthworms, an inhabitation of the earth standing in marked contrast to the mass burial offered by the camp and the interpretations composed by the medical officer.

In the end, even though Michael K is slowly dying of starvation, he prefers this life to the one in the hospital under the medical officer’s care, evidenced by the packet of pumpkin seeds he still carries when he escapes the hospital to try again to return to the country. Such a journey back to his burrow on the farm will most likely be impossible, K being far too weak and emaciated to attempt it. In the final section of the novel, he goes to the beach and lies in the sun, experiencing the sense that “something inside him had let go or was letting go” (177). He cannot identify exactly what “it was letting go of [...] but he also had a feeling that what he had previously thought of in himself as rope-like was becoming soggy and fibrous, and the two feelings seemed to be connected” (177). Unlike his previous metamorphosis into something drier, harder, and smaller resembling the termite or other insects, on the beach he becomes “soggy and fibrous,” letting go of his ability to achieve that previous form of life. He returns to his mother’s apartment, now abandoned, and there finds excitement in realizing “*the truth about*

me. *‘I am a gardener’*” (181). He immediately qualifies this statement, thinking, “I am more like an earthworm. [...] Which is also a kind of gardener. Or a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because it lives in silence” (182). Instead of solely defining himself by the profession of “gardener,” which recalls the official title given to him by the state in his earlier life, he revises his statement to align himself with the insects and animals that are “a kind of gardener” and exist outside biopolitical structures. With this newfound self-awareness, Michael K imagines joining forces with a little old man and returning to the farm with a teaspoon and his packet of seeds. When he imagines them reaching the well that waters his pumpkins:

He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live. (184)

Such a desire to return to gardening, this time with a companion, expresses the possibility of establishing an affirmative biopolitical community on the margins of a thanatopolitical regime. The emphasis in the final line of the novel on how one “can live” expresses the possibility of such a life, rather than ending on a note of fatalistic impossibility. Despite the reality of K’s probable demise, the ending nevertheless emphasizes possibility and continuation of the form of life he achieved on the farm, however meager and inadequate. Coetzee makes a statement to this effect when he reminds interviewers of the title of the novel, stating that “‘The Life’ implies that the life is over, ‘Life’ does not commit itself” (*Doubling* 91). Such a muted affirmation at the end of the novel does not so much hold up Michael K as a paragon of resistance or even a perfect embodiment of an affirmative form of life. Rather, Coetzee intentionally leaves the ending ambiguous. Unlike Magda, who chooses her death in the ruins of her garden next to her father’s bones, lamenting her failure to achieve an alternative mode of being, Coetzee does not definitively establish K’s death nor does he guarantee his survival. Instead, the ending shows a

glimmer of a possible form of life from within the current thanatopolitical paradigm—a form of life that cannot yet exist but rather waits for a time to come to be fully realized. The final image is one that occurs in K’s imagination: he is dying but not dead, waiting for this time to come when he can return to the country and fully embody the form of life represented by earthworms, termites, and ants.

The final image of Michael K stands in marked contrast to the demise of Kafka’s hunger artist, whose death speaks to the emptiness of his fasting. As Laura Wright states, “Because Michael stops eating as a result of specific circumstances, he may resume eating at some unspecified future moment. Or he may, like the hunger artist, starve to death regardless. However, there still exists the possibility of something other than death for Michael K” (“Minor Literature” 117). Wright goes on to compare the hunger artist and K to female anorexics who starve themselves as “an affront to and a withdrawal from dominant ideological” paradigms, signaling a kind of “interregnum between patriarchy and some undefined future paradigm” (110) or, in the case of K, the interregnum between apartheid and a revolutionary time to come. The different fates of the hunger artist and K also represent the tension in biopolitics between a thanatopolitics *over* life and an affirmative power *of* life. Whereas the hunger artist would have stuffed himself just like everyone else if he had found the food he liked, conforming to the state’s imperative to “make live,” it is not a matter of finding the food that he likes for K. He has found the food and water that he likes and yet he still does not stuff himself like everyone else. Instead, K’s persistence, his stubborn, cockroach-like refusal to be eradicated embodies an alternative to the biopolitical state’s imperatives. Michael K lives and dies on his own terms, however unsustainable that mode of life may be in the current thanatopolitical regime, waiting for a time when one “can live.”

Ultimately, the mode of being that Magda and Michael K attempt to embody does not appear to be terribly affirmative—Magda locked behind the walls of her garden and Michael K slowly wasting away among the vagrants on a beach in Cape Town. Despite his reputation as an ascetic writer with an exceedingly bleak outlook on human nature and civilization, Coetzee nevertheless embeds the possibility of a more optimistic future in his fiction. As David Attwell observes, all of Coetzee’s novels have “projected themselves *beyond* their situation, alerting us to the as yet unrealized promise of freedom” (125). Of course, the beyond Attwell refers to is the beyond after apartheid, with its unrealized promise of freedom finally achieved for millions of subjugated South Africans. The beyond which Coetzee writes is also an ontological one—he strives to articulate a mode of being beyond the conceptual frameworks through which we understand our world and our place in it. Psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, two of the most significant discourses of the twentieth century in which Coetzee is well versed, can and have been fruitfully applied to the colonial suffering depicted in *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life & Times of Michael K*. Yet “something more” remains in both novels that is not captured entirely by such theories. I have made the case in this chapter that biopolitics helps move us closer to identifying this something more. Biopolitics provides a new vocabulary to theorize historical trauma as it is made manifest through the suffering body, particularly within the context of apartheid. Although an affirmative biopolitics, as both Esposito and Coetzee imagine it, remains a promise on the horizon, reserved for a time to come, its possibility resists the, at times, overwhelming urge to interpret the twentieth century and its literature as fatalistic and held in the grip of an apocalyptic thanatopolitics. As Coetzee illustrates, such an affirmative mode of being does not loudly declare itself on the grand stage of national or global politics but rather quietly

persists among the lowest forms of life, their ecstasy and their suffering providing a model from which an affirmative biopolitics can be imagined.

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