

THE SHAPE OF HISTORY:
LITERARY FORM AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation argues that the literature of the First World War takes account of the epistemological crisis affecting historiographic discourse in the early twentieth century through experiments with literary form. Despite a lack of temporal distance, First World War writers understood themselves as witnesses to a crucial event and conceived of their work as both literature and history. These aspirations, however, were complicated by the fact that the writing of history in the early years of the twentieth century took place in the shadow of the crisis of historicism, the late-nineteenth-century debate between positivist (or objective) and relativist (or subjective) conceptions of historical knowledge. First World War literature reflects a complex historical sensibility that is always aware of the problematic nature of historical writing.

The first part of my dissertation, which considers war novels and autobiographies, proposes that the crisis in historicism, intensified by the war, propelled a search for forms that legitimize subjective and partial historical representations of the war. The first chapter considers Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, R.H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*, Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs.*

Dalloway, and argues that the manipulation of perspective in the novel emphasizes the partial and subjective quality of both fictional and emerging historical representations of the war. The second chapter proposes that the autobiographical writing of the First World War adopts a failed conversion narrative that makes visible the difficulty of narrating personal and national history simultaneously. The latter two chapters of the dissertation explore works that renovate traditional literary forms to accommodate historiographic uncertainty. Thus, the third chapter evaluates the revisions of the implicit historical framework of allegory, whether Christian or cyclical, in Vernon Lee's closet drama *Satan the Waster*, David Jones's long poem *In Parenthesis*, and ee cummings's *The Enormous Room*. The final chapter traces the emergence of a self-conscious strain in Louis Napoleon Parker's wartime pageantry that eventually manifests itself in Noël Coward's *Cavalcade* and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*. In each of these instances, formal innovation, whether distinctly modern or visibly indebted to literary tradition, enables the writing of history.

Dedication

For Bobby

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Table of Contents

Abstract of the Dissertation	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	viii
List of illustrations	ix
Introduction: The Writer as Historian	1
Chapter 1: Historiography, Perspective, and the First World War Novel	33
Chapter 2: Autobiographies of War and Narratives of Conversion	103
Chapter 3: Figures of History: Allegory in the Literature of the First World War	165
Chapter 4: Performing History: Forms of Distance in the Wartime Pageant	208
Coda: The First World War Remembered	268
Appendix	273
Works Cited	275
Curriculum Vita	291

List of illustrations

Figure 1: <i>The Ballet of the Nations</i> , page 3	273
Figure 2: <i>The Ballet of the Nations</i> , page 4	274

Introduction: The Writer as Historian

Between 1918 and 1933, Vera Brittain recounted her experience of the First World War in at least five different forms. The thousands of letters Brittain wrote during the war and the many volumes of her diary were initially transformed into a novel in 1919, which went through two drafts.¹ In 1924, she submitted an abridged compilation of diary entries to a competition. It was only in 1929 that she began to write an autobiography that would also tell the story of her generation. That work, *Testament of Youth*, was published in 1933.

To summarize the genesis of *Testament of Youth* in this fashion does not do justice to Brittain's endless search for a form. But what it does suggest is the extent of her struggle to find the appropriate literary mode for the writing and publication of her story. Her experience was not unique. Like Brittain, Robert Graves initially wrote his war story as a novel, only to rewrite it as autobiography in *Good-bye to All That* (1929). Vernon Lee was sufficiently dissatisfied with *The Ballet of the Nations*, a short illustrated, allegorical narrative that she published in 1915, that she transformed the text into a play and surrounded the new work, in turn, with hundreds of pages of notes. The revised text was published in 1920 as *Satan the Waster*. Finally, the artist David Jones began what would become the long poem *In Parenthesis* (1937) as a series of illustrations with text, but eventually discarded the illustrations entirely, transforming himself in this process from a visual artist to a poet.

There are, of course, many such tales of writers searching for years for an adequate form for the telling of a particular story. But in each of the above cases, the

¹ Brittain's diary, letters, and manuscripts for the novel, titled first *The Pawn of Fate* and then *Folly's Vineyard* and the edited diary are held in the William Ready Division of Special Collections at McMaster University.

story to be told was the story of the First World War. An intense awareness of watching history unfold and, more often than not, participating in history pervades the literature of the First World War. Jones writes extensively about how fighting in the war made him feel that he was suddenly in touch with the past and a participant in history. On the stage, professional and amateur wartime productions sought to dramatize the events of the war and the form that they often adopted, the pageant, re-enacts history to make the spectator feel that s/he, too, is part of history, not only a witness to a great historical event, but a historical actor as well.

Despite a lack of temporal distance, First World War writers understood themselves as witnesses to an event of great historical significance and consequently conceived of their work as both literature and historiography, or the writing of history. As Ford Madox Ford wrote of his tetralogy *Parade's End* – a work that depicts a novelist writing a history of the war – “I wanted the Novelist in fact to appear in his really proud position as historian of his own time” (*It Was the Nightingale* 199). In the first paragraph of his “Introductory Note” to *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T.E. Lawrence writes, “It seemed to me historically needful to reproduce the tale, as perhaps no one but myself in Feisal’s army had thought of writing down at the time what we felt, what we hoped, what we tried” (21). These aspirations, however, were complicated by the fact that the writing of history in the early years of the twentieth century took place in the shadow of the crisis of historicism, the late-nineteenth-century debate between positivist (or objective) and relativist (or subjective) conceptions of historical knowledge. First World War literature thus reflects a complex historical sensibility that is always aware of the problematic nature of historical writing. Investigating the intersection of form and history in the

literature of the First World War, this dissertation argues that the literature of the First World War comes to terms with the epistemological crisis affecting historiographic discourse in the early twentieth century through experiments with literary form.

By examining a variety of genres, including novels, autobiographies, poetry, closet drama, and pageant-plays, I show that British and American literary representations of the war produced between 1914 and 1945 are preoccupied with both the methods of history and the persona of the historian. These works stage and respond to the crisis of historicism, participating in the ongoing reassessment of the assumptions, methods, and values of historical discourse, and working in diverse modes to reimagine how history might be written. My dissertation identifies two distinct phenomena. The first part of my dissertation, which considers the war novel and autobiography, argues that the epistemological crisis in historicism, intensified by the war, propelled a search for forms that legitimize subjective and partial historical representations of the war. In contrast, the second part, which consists of chapters on allegorical narratives and pageant-plays, discusses the rehabilitation of shared understandings of the past through the modification of existing literary forms to accommodate historiographic uncertainty and the construction of self-conscious and self-questioning historical narratives. In both instances, formal innovation, whether distinctly modernist or visibly indebted to literary tradition, enables the writing of history at a moment of crisis.

The evolution of historical thought and the crisis of historicism

First World War writers subject the writing of history to relentless scrutiny. But to understand what Ford, Jones, or Woolf meant by “history” in the first half of the

twentieth century, it is necessary to look back to the nineteenth century. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment focus on reason had led to what R.G. Collingwood calls the “rise of scientific history.” In the nineteenth century, the work of the historian rested upon the epistemological assumption that it is possible to know the past with certainty. Leopold von Ranke, the foremost German historian of the nineteenth century, explained that his task as a historian was to describe “*wie es eigentlich gewesen,*” or, “how it actually has been.” This knowledge of the past was to be achieved by means of documentary evidence compiled and interpreted by the historian. Prior to this time, the historian relied heavily upon existing works of history and eyewitness records. In fact, the document-centered practice of history that remains central to contemporary historiography dates only to the early nineteenth century. In his 1895 lecture at Cambridge, published as *A Lecture on the Study of History*, Lord Acton, the foremost British historian of his era, dates the rise of the archive to 1830, when the “documentary age” began with the opening of records, first the archives of the papacy, and then those different European governments. In two regards, Acton claims, the documentary age fundamentally altered the role of the historian: the work of the historian was now “the estimate of authority, the weighing of testimony” (42), but this task is complicated by the fact that “a lifetime spent in the largest collection of printed books would not suffice to train a real master of modern history” (39).

The rise of scientific and document-based history was at least in part responsible for the obsession with history and historicity that gripped the nineteenth century. With great fervour, virtually all fields of inquiry expressed a profound interest in the past and adopted a historical approach. In literature, there was a marked turn toward the past,

perhaps best exemplified by the historical fiction of Walter Scott. In philosophy, Hegel argued that history was the manifestation of spirit in concrete reality. Even science was subordinated to historical inquiry; Darwin's argument in the *Origin of Species*, for instance, demonstrated that nature itself had a history. This tendency to see all facets of reality in historical terms came to be known as historicism, defined by Maurice Mandelbaum as "the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of anything and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained by considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of development" (392).

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, historicist thinking had yielded two distinct historical methods. As Carolyn Williams has written, historicist thinking "mentally [replaces] an object under the conditions of its own time and place" and thus "initially, the strategy yields a sharper sense of historicity, an intensified awareness of the object's particular reality, a feel for historical difference. Allied to empirical observation in any other scientific field, contextual researches of this sort express one aim of history-as-science" (*Transfigured World* 54). But, as Williams argues, historicist thinking can also entail the formulation of general laws: "the other aim of a science of history is to achieve in its way the standard of repeatability, to discover, by generalizing from its data, the laws that govern historical development" (54). Leading to both thickened historical description and the search for historical laws, historicism eventually gave rise to two conflicting impulses.² On the one hand, historicists sought to historicize the historical

² Collingwood, in *The Idea of History*, makes a similar distinction, albeit with a slightly different emphasis. He isolates two competing historical methods in the nineteenth century. One is the positivist search for laws, as described by Williams, which led many historians on a quest to amass facts, and a few to formulate laws. The other, practiced primarily in Germany, was philological criticism: "This essentially consisted of two operations: first, the analysis of sources (which still meant literary or narrative sources) into their component parts, distinguishing earlier and later elements in them and thus enabling the historian to discriminate between the more and the less trustworthy parts, showing how the author's point of view

object – that is, to situate it within its historical context – and on the other, they sought to generalize about history, understanding history as a positivist search for the laws of history and for historical patterns.

Positivist, Christian, and even Marxist theorists of history found themselves unlikely allies in this search for these laws and patterns of history. As Peter Allen Dale notes in *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History*, “Regardless of the philosophical basis from which the nineteenth-century thinker approached history for the keys to knowledge, he was likely to find in history a logical pattern or law and an overall goal that gave it the same gratifying intelligibility that scientists and philosophers of an earlier century imagined they had found in nature” (5). In the course of this study, in particular throughout Chapter 3, I will explore some of these conjunctions, examining, for instance, the jostling of Christian teleology and positivist thought in Vernon Lee’s strange and remarkable *Satan the Waster*.

The evolution of the phrase “philosophy of history” offers a glimpse of the rapid shifts in historical thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As R.G. Collingwood explains, the term was coined by Voltaire in the eighteenth century to describe “no more than critical or scientific history, a type of historical thinking in which the historian made up his mind for himself instead of repeating whatever stories he had found in old books” (1). Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Hegel and other philosophers employed “philosophy of history” to refer to universal history – that is, the history of the world. But by the nineteenth century, positivists had adopted the term to mean “the discovery of general laws governing the course of the events which it was

affected his statement of the facts, and so enabling the historian to make allowance for the distortions thus produced” (Collingwood 130).

history's business to recount" (1). In less than two hundred years, the term shifted from referring to new attempts to treat existing works of historiography with skepticism, through a metaphysical interest in the meaning of history, to a quasi-scientific attempt to identify the laws of history.³

But by the mid-1890s, these positivist attempts had been largely discredited. The second strand of historicist thought, in which the emphasis on history had led to a belief in the subjectivity of the historical project, gained traction as many social scientists, historians, and philosophers had come to believe that all knowledge was "colored by human subjectivity" (Iggers *German Conception of History* 124-5). Nietzsche, in his essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1873) offered a vigorous critique of nineteenth-century historicism, arguing that the purported objectivity of history was an illusion. He was one of several philosophers to take this stance against positivist history; other thinkers closely associated with the rejection of history were the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey and the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce.

Dilthey draws a distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences that rests upon whether the subject is known from the outside, as is the case in the natural sciences, or from the inside, as is the case in the human sciences. He explains:

We are able to control the physical world by studying its laws. These can only be discovered if the way we experience nature, our involvement in it, and the living feeling with which we enjoy it, recedes behind the abstract apprehension of the world in terms of space, time, mass and motion. All these factors combine to make man efface himself so that, from his impressions, he can map out this great object, nature, as a structure governed by laws. (*Selected Writings* 172)

³ Dale, drawing on Collingwood's analysis, suggests philosophical thinking about history shifted in the late nineteenth century "toward its present epistemological concern with the nature of historical knowledge and away from its traditional metaphysical concern with the meaning of historical process itself" (195). Dale further explains that "Traditional philosophy of history has essentially two ways of treating the meaning of history, what may be called an intrinsic and an extrinsic way. The first asks whether the events of history form a pattern and if so, what sort of pattern; the second asks what the meaning of history is for life in general, what it says about the nature of the universe and the destiny of mankind" (196).

But when humans study themselves, they tend to

relegate the physical side of events to the role of conditions and means of comprehension. This is the turn towards reflection, the movement of understanding from the external to the internal. This tendency makes use of every expression of life in order to understand the mental content from which it arises...what is inaccessible to the sense and can only be experienced inwardly; this is inherent in the outer events which originate from it and, in its turn, is affected by them. (172)

In this schema, history is a human science because it is a discipline that requires the historian to engage in a process of mental reflection rather than “abstract apprehension” of the external world. The task of the historian is to begin by understanding himself or herself and eventually to transcend the limitations of his or her own mind. For Dilthey, “understanding is a rediscovery of the I in the Thou.” He explains that “the mind rediscovers itself at ever higher levels of complex involvement: this identity of the mind in the I and the Thou, in every subject of the community, in every system of a culture and finally, in the totality of the mind and universal history, makes successful co-operation between different processes in the human studies possible” (208). That is to say, at each of the levels that Dilthey identifies, we understand what we encounter by first understanding ourselves. It is by transposing the understanding of one’s own life onto the world around us that one can understand the actions and expressions of others.

Like Dilthey, Benedetto Croce seeks to understand historical study by classifying different branches of knowledge. For Croce, history is an art, not a science. In *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General* (first published in Italy in 1901), Croce elaborates a schema in which intuition is understood to precede conceptualization. In response to stimuli, Croce explains, we formulate a representation, and it is only after these representations have been created that it is possible to

extrapolate a general conceptualization. As “one cannot give a concept of an individual, but only a representation of it” Croce argues that historical knowledge is fundamentally aesthetic or intuitive knowledge (30). For Croce, as for Dilthey and later for Collingwood, as we shall see, the work of history takes place in the mind of the historian. In one of his many subsequent essays on history, “History, Chronicle, and Pseudo-History,” published in 1937, Croce proclaims that “all true history is contemporary history” (498). He writes that “contemporary history springs directly out of life, but ‘non-contemporary’ history also springs directly out of life. For evidently it is only some previous concern of present life that can spur us to enquire into a past fact, and such a fact, when identified with some concern of present life, is a present and not a past concern” (498). Croce’s work emphasizes the extent to which history is the product of a subjective impression, one irrevocably shaped by the mind and the situation of the historian.

What we have come to call the “crisis of historicism” was a divisive philosophical and methodological conflict between the historians who affirmed the value of their method and accepted the conclusion that all knowledge – including historical knowledge – is always subjective, and the positivists who insisted that objective historical knowledge was possible.⁴ In James Longenbach’s formulation, “What we now refer to as the late nineteenth-century ‘crisis of historicism’ was itself generated by rapidly proliferating ways of interpreting history: how could the past ‘as it was’ have any meaning when each person interpreted it differently?” (*Modernist Poetics of History* 8). Accordingly, Georg Iggers defines the crisis of historicism as the “deep uncertainty

⁴ Note that there are differing interpretations of the crisis of historicism. See Allan Megill’s “Why Was There a Crisis of Historicism?” in which Megill argues that the roots of the conflict were religious and theological, rather than philosophical and methodological.

regarding the value of Western historical traditions and the possibility of objective historical knowledge” (“Historicism” 457). I refer to this understanding of the crisis of historicism when I use the phrase throughout this study.

The crisis of historicism was a late-nineteenth European phenomenon, with great impact on German historiography in particular. British historiography remained isolated from these debates until well into the twentieth century. But, in England, aspects of the crisis of historicism had been widely discussed in the context of a debate on the subject of the relativity of human knowledge in the mid-nineteenth century. As Dale explains, this debate addressed the “fundamental epistemological question of the human mind’s capacity to achieve objective, that is, real or nonrelative, knowledge of things and ideas outside its own subjective existence” (175). But the implications of this debate did not register for nineteenth-century British historiography. In fact, the lone British thinker to take part in the debates surrounding the crisis of historicism prior to the twentieth century was Walter Pater. Dale explains that Pater, long before many other British thinkers, embraced the implications of historicism. By century’s end, historicism “has assumed the belief that no value or knowledge exists outside the process of history, outside mankind’s constant positing or creation of cultural systems...Pater, it seems to me, has very definitely passed this particular intellectual threshold, and in this he is virtually unique among his fellow mid and late Victorians.”⁵ But Pater, as Dale stresses, was an

⁵ Dale continues: “He has been propelled toward his conclusions by essentially three intellectual forces, the same forces which, in fact, are at work in Dilthey, Croce, and Collingwood. There is, first of all, a fundamental scepticism over the validity of traditional metaphysical idealism, a scepticism induced at once by the critical side of Kant’s thought and the revitalization of the empiricist concern with the relativity of knowledge. Second, there is a resistance, as much temperamental as intellectual, to the comprehensive claims of the scientific method and a desire to insist upon the distinctly human, subjective imagination as a primary means of knowing. Finally, there is the belief, the logical outcome of the century’s preoccupation with history, that the human mind finds its highest expression in the weaving of a vast and continuous system of human culture through time and that the meaning of man in the present can be no more or less

anomaly, and his ideas did not influence the direction of British historiography in his time.⁶

It was the First World War that brought the crisis of historicism to Britain. As James Longenbach argues in his *Modernist Poetics of History*, the First World War was responsible for making the stakes in the crisis of historicism apparent to British historians. He explains that “The experience of the First World War gave a more concrete reality to what had previously been purely theoretical problems, however; and during the war many British intellectuals began a passionate investigation of the nature of historical knowledge” (8-9). R.G. Collingwood is the best known British historian to have engaged with the epistemological problems of the crisis of historicism. It is in *The Idea of History*, first published in 1946, that Collingwood published his understanding of the nature of history, though he begins to develop these ideas in lectures given in 1926-1928.⁷ Collingwood argues, building on the insights previously developed by Dilthey and Croce, that the activity of the historian is primarily mental. Distinguishing between the natural sciences and the study of history, Collingwood explains that “[t]he processes of nature can...be properly described as sequences of mere events, but those of history cannot. They are not processes of mere events but the processes of actions, which have an inner side, consisting of processes of thought; and what the historian is looking for is these processes of thought. All history is the history of thought” (215). The task of the historian, therefore, is to discover or recover these processes of thought. For

than as a participant in that historical culture” (204). For a detailed discussion of Pater’s aesthetic historicism, see Carolyn Williams’ *Transfigured World*.

⁶ An exception, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, is the work of the historian Vernon Lee, who arguably embraced Pater’s aesthetic historicism in her early works of history.

⁷ See the revised edition of *The Idea of History*, edited by Jan van der Dussen, for the full text of these lectures, in which Collingwood first articulates his understanding of history as re-enactment.

Collingwood, “There is only one way in which it can be done: by re-thinking them in his mind.... The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian’s own mind” (215). Accordingly, the events of history “are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own” (218). For Collingwood, history depends upon what he calls the “re-enactment” of the past.

The intersection of modernist literature and ideas about history is the subject of James Longenbach’s *Modernist Poetics of History* (1987), a book-length examination of the idea of history in the work of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. He argues that Pound and Eliot “were occupied not only with the actual recollection of the past but with the process and methodology of that recollection. Their work forced them to think strenuously about the ontological status of history and the nature of historical understanding” (12). In Longenbach’s account, Pound and Eliot were both skeptics who rejected positivism, yet embraced a visionary or mystical idea of history, which they felt obliged to conceal (23). Longenbach’s account of the repercussions of the crisis of historicism for modernist thought informs my study throughout. However, my study does not attempt to articulate a modernist poetics of history, as Longenbach’s does. Many of the texts that I study are not “modernist” in the sense of high modernism, as Longenbach, writing in 1987, employs the term. While some of the texts are canonical texts of high modernism, many are works contemporary with high modernism that do not share the aesthetic and ideological principles that characterize Pound and Eliot’s work.

More recently, in *Modernism and the Ideology of History*, Louise Blakeney Williams argued that a number of key figures in British modernism were preoccupied with tracing distinct patterns in history. She writes that although a theory of “linear progress was very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially among the general public, it was not the most common pattern of history among artists and thinkers. In fact, the philosophy of history that gained most adherents in the nineteenth century combined linear advance with cyclic regression or repetition to create a spiral pattern” (7). Blakeney argues that figures as diverse as Yeats, Pound, Hulme, Ford, and Lawrence came to believe in the existence of what she terms a “sinusoidal” philosophy of history in the years preceding the First World War. For these thinkers, history was shaped by an ongoing alternation between two distinct sets of traditions or principles. (This is distinct from a “cycloid” understanding of history, such as that of Oswald Spengler, in which a certain pattern of growth and decline is understood to characterize first one civilization, then another). She concludes that “The Modernists’ discovery, or imaginative invention, of a theory that history moves in cycles undoubtedly helped them provide meaning, order, and a fundamental connection with the past that alleviated their fears about the direction of historical change and their uncertainty about the future” (207).

While Blakeney’s thorough study sheds much light on understandings of history among key figures in modernism prior to the war, the war, as Longenbach and I argue, introduces new ideas about history into Britain. Thus, what Blakeney’s work does illustrate, with great force, is the extent to which ideas about history in the English-speaking world lagged behind those on the continent which, by the early twentieth-

century, no longer ascribed a specific pattern to history. Blakeney's work does, however, inform my own study as in this work I will draw on her terminology to describe philosophies of history that propose particular patterns or shapes for history. Williams offers a clear discussion of the basic approaches to philosophy of history: she suggests that the three models are cyclic, progressive, and chaotic (6). As she explains, the cyclic and progressive models allow for speculative theories of history, while the chaotic model does not.

It bears explaining, at this juncture, that when I employ the term "history" in this study, it can refer to either the events of the past (history as events) or the story of the past (history as a narrative). In most cases, which of these two meanings I intend is clear; where it is not, I have made every attempt to indicate whether I mean history as events or as a narrative. Along similar lines, when I employ the historiography rather than history (or historiographic rather than historical), it is my intention to stress the dimension of a text that explores how history is written.

While Longenbach and Williams have written extensive studies of modernist ideas of history, my work differs from theirs in its scope and implications. Rather than focusing strictly on figures who were central to the development of modernist thought and closely linked to the academic world, my work examines the work of writers with varying degrees of access to new ideas (at least for Britain and the English-speaking world) about history. I argue that recurring strategies for the literary representation of history reflect a deep, if sometimes unconscious, engagement with ideas about history that was spurred by the war. This is true not only for British historians and philosophers and poets such as Pound and Eliot with strong ties to the academy, but also for writers of

community wartime pageants, writers such as Virginia Woolf or Rebecca West who had access only to the periphery of the university.⁸

By thinking of their work as history and themselves as historians, the writers of the First World War were necessarily subject to the transformations of consciousness occasioned by the act of writing history. In his analysis of Hegel in *Metahistory*, Hayden White writes that “it would seem that, for Hegel, the reason for writing history is to be sought in the transformations of consciousness which the attempt to do so effects in the minds of historians themselves” (100). In White’s assessment, Hegel understands the work of the historian to require “that the historian’s imagination must strain in two directions simultaneously: *critically*, in such a way as to permit him to decide what can be left out of an account (though he cannot invent or add to the facts known); and *poetically*, in such a way as to depict, in its vitality and individuality, the medley of events as if they were present to the sight of the reader” (91-92). Writing history, or thinking about the past, forces the historian to engage in a self-reflexive practice which in turn transforms the consciousness of the historian.

Other twentieth-century histories of history have drawn similar conclusions about the transformative effect of writing history, albeit from a slightly different premise. In his series of lectures published as *What is History?*, E.H. Carr attributes the intensification of man’s self-consciousness and its implications for the study of history to Freudian thought because the advent of psycho-analysis has forced the historian to adopt a more self-aware stance. The historian, Carr writes, is now forced “to examine himself

⁸ Though Longenbach emphasizes that there is no clear evidence that Dilthey or Croce exerted a direct influence on Pound or Eliot, they were directly influenced by key figures in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century historiography. Longenbach explains that it is clear that Pound was influenced by Burckhardt and Eliot by F.H. Bradley (*Modernist Poetics of History* xi).

and his own position in history, the motives - perhaps hidden motives - which have guided his choice of theme or period and his selection and interpretation of the facts, the national and social background which has determined his angle of vision, the conception of the future which shapes his conception of the past” (139). In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern adopts a similar line of argumentation, suggesting that as nineteenth-century historicism recedes, the belief in history is replaced by a belief in the personal past and the study of the self, in particular in the form of psycho-analysis (61). In the early twentieth century, as I shall suggest in Chapter 2, the belief in the subjectivity of history was reflected in the intertwining of personal and national history.

Literary Form and the Representation of History

I have argued thus far that the war intensified the individual’s sense of his or her self as a historical actor and a witness to history and that this burst of interest in writing history coincided with a period of vigorous debate about historical epistemology and historical debate. It is in this intellectual context that the writers of the First World War explored the possibilities of different literary forms for writing history. As discussed briefly above, my study of the significance of literary form in the literature of the First World War is organized around specific formal strategies: the co-existence of multiple perspectives in the novel; the conversion narrative in autobiographies; the use of allegory to interpret and represent history in drama, autobiography, and poetry; and finally, the revival of pageantry in wartime and post-war theatre. By structuring my work in this fashion, I group texts that might not otherwise be discussed within the same study – a relatively obscure play by Vernon Lee, for instance, and ee cummings’s memoir of

wartime imprisonment. This framework allows me to explore unexpected formal affinities in the literature of the war and to develop an understanding of how shared formal strategies signal shared historiographic concerns.

In this study of the recurring forms that represent history, my analysis is informed by Hayden White's work on form and history in his groundbreaking work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) and subsequent essays on history, literature, and narrative. White is the foremost proponent of what has been called the "linguistic turn" in twentieth-century historiography, as Georg Iggers explains in *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Iggers argues that a dominant strand in the last century's thinking about historiography has been the belief that "language shapes reality but does not refer to it" (9). Though this view of history draws extensively from the linguistic and literary theory of the twentieth century, Iggers observes (as White himself indicates) that it has its roots in Nietzsche's critique of history. Nietzsche attacks and rejects the study of history because it is shaped by the biases and interests of the historian and because it presupposes, erroneously, that an objective reality exists outside the subjective reality of the individual (*Historiography in the Twentieth Century* 8). The assumption in the nineteenth century was that a narrative simply presented "history" (in the sense of historical events); there was no sense that a work of history was only a representation of history. For White, however, historical narratives are "verbal fictions, the contents of which are more *invented* than *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" ("The Historical

Text as Literary Artifact” 82). In this respect, the selectivity of the novelist is analogous to the emplotment of history.

White draws on literary theory, especially the work of Northrop Frye, to propose that the plots of histories are predetermined. He argues that “histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of *mere* chronicles; and stories in turn are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have...called ‘emplotment.’ And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures” (“Historical Text as Literary Artifact” 83). White’s claim introduced a new paradigm into twentieth-century historiography: moving well beyond the crisis of historicism’s critique of “objective” history, White proposes that any historical narrative, whether conceived of as an art or a science, can only take one of a predetermined number of forms. In *Metahistory*, he argues that these emplotments are romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire.

In “Historicism, History, and the Imagination,” White goes so far as to suggest that whether history is understood as an art or a science (as history is understood by what I have been calling positivism, and what White identifies as historicism), a specific philosophy of history always lurks behind the work of the historian. He writes:

every ‘historical’ representation – however particularizing, narratavist, self-consciously perspectival, and fixated on its own subject matter ‘for its own sake’ – contains most of what conventional theory calls ‘historicism’...in the very *language* that the historian uses to describe his object of study, prior to any effort he may make formally to explain or interpret it, he subjects that object of study to

the kind of distortion that historicists impose upon their materials in a more explicit and formal way. (102)

In White's account, even the historical works that acknowledge their own limitations (those that recognize the inescapable subjectivity of history) fall prey to the problems of historicism because the historian "prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain 'what was *really* happening' in it" (*Metahistory* x). This can be conscious, as in the case of positivism, or unconscious, but in either case, the historian gives shape to history by narrating historical events.

The notion that historical narratives are a transparent rendering of historical events – the legacy of which lies in the dual senses of the word "history" – was shattered by the crisis of historicism. White's work from the 1970s builds on this idea, which had great currency in the late nineteenth century in Europe and the early twentieth century in Britain. The texts that I consider across the four chapters share this premise and explore how literature might respond to this new uncertainty. White's late twentieth-century claim that all history proposes an implicit philosophy of history is, however, a conclusion that is certainly not shared by all the texts in this study, though many of them do represent the work of the historian in manner that anticipates this idea. For instance, in Chapter 3, I propose that Vernon Lee and ee cummings's allegorical representations of the war simultaneously critique allegory on the grounds that it proposes an implicit philosophy of history (a "shape" to history) and despair of representing history in non-allegorical terms. In Lee and cummings's work, all history is, as Hayden White argues, an allegorical reading practice.

Though the literature of the First World War anticipates late twentieth-century ideas about history, I am not, in this dissertation, claiming that these writers were the first to do so. Ann Rigney's *Imperfect Histories*, for instance, offers a compelling case that the legacy of romantic historicism is the knowledge that historical representation is always inadequate. She traces the roots of what is now called postmodern historiography back to the Romantic period and proposes that what she calls the historical sublime, by which she means an awareness of the infinitude of history and the impossibility of ever grasping its full measure – is the central aesthetic effect of romantic historical writing. In Rigney's work, it is apparent that the intense awareness of the implications of writing history in literature of the romantic period coincides with a period of historical turmoil, namely the French Revolution. The extent to which her analysis of romantic historiography has parallels in my analysis of First World War literature gestures toward the possibility that the convergence of literary and historiographic concerns that I identify in the literature of the First World War also arises at other points in history, though a fuller consideration of this hypothesis is beyond the scope of this work.

The First World War in Literary Criticism

This study seeks to offer a new perspective on the literature of the First World War by drawing on ideas about form and history to cast the existing debate about the significance of form in the literature of the war in new terms. The question of literary form animated much of the early criticism on the literature of the First World War, beginning with Paul Fussell's seminal work of First World War literary criticism, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Fussell's analysis of a series of texts written by

combatants in the First World War leads him to conclude that the First World War gave rise to modern culture and what we have come to understand as modern literature.

Fussell argued that the ironies inherent in the experience of the First World War necessitated a modern, ironic style. While he concedes that all wars are ironic because the means are always disproportionate to the ends, he argues that “the Great War was more ironic than any before or since. It was a hideous embarrassment to the prevailing Meliorist myth which had dominated the public consciousness for a century. It reversed the Idea of Progress” (8). This ironic style, in turn, determined both how the First World War and subsequent modern wars were to be remembered and gave rise to literary modernism.

Samuel Hynes’s *A War Imagined* (1990) builds on Fussell’s work. In his remarkably thorough chronological study of the literary representation of the First World War, Hynes traces the development in this body of work of what he calls the “myth of the war”:

[I]nnocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance. (x)

In Hynes’s account, the myth of the war is responsible for creating “a sense of radical discontinuity of present from past,” a sense of rupture that manifests itself in the literary style adopted to represent the war. Rather than positing, as Fussell does, that the war marked the beginning of a new, modern era, Hynes argues that it was the interpretation of the events of the war that was responsible for creating the historical narrative in which

the First World War marks the start of the modern era. While modernism was consistently met with hostility in the pre-war years and the early years of the war, Hynes argues that in 1917, by which time that disillusionment with the war had set in, the public was prepared to embrace modernism. Taking the war art of C.R.W. Nevinson as a central example of this phenomenon, Hynes demonstrates that the public and critics alike took Nevinson's futurist abstractions to be the most suitable mode for representing the experience of the war. The animosity that had once greeted the fragmented, dissonant, violent, and rebellious experiments of modernism was forgotten. The war, in Hynes's account, gave birth to an anti-rhetorical style and legitimized the previously controversial modernist style.⁹

These accounts of the First World War as a pivotal moment in the development of modernism have been disputed, perhaps most effectively by the cultural historian Jay Winter. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Winter's stated objective is "to go beyond the cultural history of the Great War as a phase in the onward ascent of modernism" (3). He explains that the "identification of the 'modern' positively with abstraction, symbolic representation, and an architectural exploration of the logical foundations of art, and negatively through its opposition to figurative, representational, 'illusionist', naturalistic, romantic, or descriptive styles in painting or sculpture, is so much a part of cultural history, that it is almost impious to question it" (3). Nevertheless,

⁹ Modris Eksteins's *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* adduces a similar argument. Eksteins argues that in pre-war Britain, the threat of change came to be associated with Germany and with the modernist cultural production that expressed a desire to overthrow the established order. But, much like Hynes, Eksteins argues that the reality of the war lent credibility and authority to the aesthetic of modernism: "They [war poets, musicians, and painters] connected the sights and sounds of war with art. Art became, in fact, the only available correlative of this war; naturally not an art following previous rules, but an art in which the rules of composition were abandoned, in which provocation became the goal, and in which art became an event, an experience. As the war lost external meaning, it became above all an experience. In the process, life and art moved together" (214).

Winter argues forcefully for the continuity of wartime and post-war commemorative art with traditional aesthetics and values. Where Fussell argues for the war as the moment of the creation of modern memory, and Hynes for the mutual reinforcement of the myth of the war and modernism, Winter suggests that the “modernist” imagining of the war overstates the degree of rupture. He argues instead:

[T]he enduring appeal of many traditional motifs – defined as an eclectic set of classical, romantic, or religious images and ideas – is directly related to the universality of bereavement in the Europe of the Great War and its aftermath. The strength of what may be termed ‘traditional’ forms in social and cultural life, in art, poetry, and ritual, lay in their power to mediate bereavement. The cutting edge of ‘modern memory’, its multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox, and the ironic, could express anger and despair, and did so in enduring ways; it was melancholic, but it could not heal. Traditional modes of seeing the war, while at times less challenging intellectually or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind. (5)

Winter’s argument has been highly influential, as many literary critics and historians have since agreed with Winter that the war did not produce a complete rupture with the past.

Like Fussell, Hynes, and Winter, I am interested in thinking about formal strategies as a response to the First World War. But my study deliberately avoids classifying works of literature as “modernist” or “traditional.” Instead, I propose that we can better understand the rationale for and implications of specific formal strategies not as an allegiance to a particular aesthetic movement or ideological program, but as a means of grappling with the problems inherent in writing history. This concern, as the ensuing discussions will demonstrate, cuts across the wide range of works that sought to represent the First World War.

My study, like recent studies that I will discuss shortly, attempts to bridge the divides in the existing criticism on the literature of the First World War that have led to studying in isolation the work of combatants and non-combatants, the work of writers deemed modernist and non-modernist, and the work of British and American writers. There is now sufficient breadth to the criticism of First World War literature that it is helpful to attempt an analysis that brings together a wide array of texts. By highlighting how First World War writers understood their work as an attempt to write history, I propose that the historiographic debates contemporaneous with the First World War led to a shared investment in specific literary forms.

In the past twenty years, much of the work that has most forcefully challenged established literary-historical narratives about the war has focused on the work of women writers. Studies that examined war literature written by women were the first works to resist the deeply entrenched categorizations that tend to define the study of war literature, especially the tendency to consider only the writing of combatants as war literature.¹⁰ Claire Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (1990) was one of the first works to systematically survey women's literary imaginings of the war. Tylee argues that women's access to the reality of war was severely curtailed by social and cultural barriers; the chivalric and mythical conceptualization of the war, in particular, cast women in the role of passive bystanders. Tylee shows that much of the women's war literature is written from women in this position, while the women who managed to take

¹⁰ Claire Buck's contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (2005) surveys this work, identifying the seminal work such as Catherine Reilly's anthology, *Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (1981), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *No Man's Land* (1987), and Claire Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (1990). Since the publication of Buck's essay, a number of important works which deal extensively with women's war experience and writing have been published, among them Santanu Das's *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2006), and Potter's *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (2005), discussed in the introduction.

an active role in the war struggle to express their experience in terms other than those of the dominant discourse of heroism. Tylee's work, and that of other feminist scholars, has brought important insights to bear on the literary and cultural history of the war. My project builds on this work as it attempts to understand how women and men's writing, the work of civilians, non-combatants and combatants, share a number of concerns.

A further divide in the criticism, between modernist and non-modernist works, is the legacy of an earlier period in literary criticism. When modernism was more narrowly construed in literary criticism to refer to the highly experimental work of figures such as Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Ford, and perhaps Woolf, reading First World War literature as a dimension of the modernist movement was an effective means of incorporating these texts into the canon. More recent work has, in keeping with new interest in works of popular literature, studied works of war literature that had long since been forgotten. Jane Potter's *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War, 1914-1918* offers a new perspective on women's literary production. Potter reads texts as varied as weekly girls' papers, pageant-plays, romance novels, and memoirs, studying how these works "reflected, reinforced, and reiterated the values of the majority of the population of Britain" (8). As such, Potter's work sheds light on texts that have been excluded in studies that focus on the better-known works of women's war literature, which tend to be modernist and/or protest-oriented. I will refer to Potter's work at several junctures in this study; her study of fascinating but unknown works has enabled me to pursue my work on the shared formal concerns of high modernist work and works that do not have strong ties to high modernism.

My study also incorporates select texts by American authors. There is, of course, a radically different tradition of war literature in America that dates from the American Civil War. The American experience of the First World War was also radically different from the British in ways that I need only briefly enumerate; for many American writers, the war was initially a geographically remote European war, and there existed a powerful belief in non-interventionism. Nevertheless, many Americans were directly implicated in the war, and this study treats two works by Americans who volunteered in France, Gertrude Stein and ee cummings, and considers the phenomenon of American wartime pageantry. This work, in many respects, shares a formal and historiographic sensibility with the work of the British authors that I treat. A systematic comparative study of British and American war texts is, however, beyond the scope of this work.

Recent works of criticism on the literature of the First World War study, as I do, a wide range of texts under the rubric of First World War literature. Trudi Tate's *Modernism, History and the First World War* (1998) studies "writings by women and men; pro- and anti-war writers; civilians, combatants, and a civilian who pretended to have been in combat" (5). Tate reads some of the same texts that interest me in the context of the political, military, and cultural history of the First World War, producing rich New Historical readings that position *Mrs. Dalloway* in the context of the Armenian question, for example, and *Parade's End* against the backdrop of the wild rumours that circulated during the war. Tate's work also situates the literature of the First World War in dialogue with theories of trauma.¹¹

¹¹ Although the work of various trauma theorists informs my study, it is not a central rubric for my analysis. The texts that I treat in this study are deeply invested in writing history, however problematic the enterprise might be. This has meant that they are less conducive to an analysis that foregrounds the silences and absences produced by traumatic events.

Much of the criticism that has successfully moved across these divides, however, has tended to study the literature of the war through a thematic lens. In recent studies, for instance, the formal qualities of the work are often secondary to the text's importance for the political situation, as in Vincent Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003), for understandings of gender and sexuality, as in Sarah Cole's *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (2003), or for the body, as in Santanu Das's *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2003). This is important work, especially given the centrality of literary work to recent historical studies of the Great War, but formal issues, once central to criticism on the literature of the First World War, has been relegated to the sidelines.¹²

In my focus on form, I have attempted to draw the texts for my analysis from a range of traditions; they are, as much as possible, representative of the tremendous variety of literary responses to the war. There are works that have long been part of the canon of war literature – autobiographies by Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden – and works that are slowly or rapidly fading from the canon, such as Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* and Ralph Hodges Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy*, respectively. I have taken care to include works from the newly formed canon of women's war literature, which includes Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Enid Bagnold's *A Diary Without Dates*. But, by virtue of the pioneering work of Jane Potter and other critics interested in seeking out virtually unread and hard-to-find works from the period, I have also been able to include more obscure works, such as Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations* or Gladys Davidson's *Britannia's Revue*.

¹² Gerard DeGroot's reliance on literary sources in *Blighty* is typical of this trend.

Where my study fails to be representative, however, is in its tendency to exclude poetry. While much of the war literature written between 1914 and 1918 was, in fact, poetry, these are lyric poems that tend to render war in all its immediacy.¹³ Though these poems may employ a narrative frame (as is often the case in the poems of Siegfried Sassoon), they are nevertheless primarily the expression of a single interior state at a particular moment. The framing device, though important, is not on the same scale as the narrative in David Jones's *In Parenthesis*, for example, which is included in this study. Concerned as it is with history, my study necessarily privileges genres that incorporate retrospection and can accommodate historical reflection: the novel, autobiography, allegorical narratives in all genres, and historical drama.

I have drawn the historical parameters for my study as 1914-1945. These boundaries allow me to study both the early wartime pageants in Britain and Gertrude Stein's reflections on war – especially the First World War – written while she lived in Vichy France. With the exception of the final chapter, however, my study does not advance a diachronic argument. Instead, my dissertation proposes that the emergence of the crisis of historicism informs both wartime and postwar writing. At various moments in the text, I offer an analysis of particular instances where a literary work responds to particular ideas about history. For instance, in Chapter 1, in which I discuss the significance of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in Ford's *Parade's End*, or Chapter 3, in which I discuss the influence of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* on David Jones's *In Parenthesis*. But for the most part, I do not propose specific correlations between particular works of history or historiography and specific literary texts. Rather, the

¹³ For a fascinating discussion of how the criticism of the literature of the First World War initially privileged works in which the war was rendered in its immediacy, see James Campbell's "Interpreting the War" in the *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (264).

analysis in this work rests on the assumption that the implications of the crisis of historicism, as discussed above, reverberated throughout the English-speaking world during the First World War and in the post-war years.

The Shape of History

Rather than situating war literature in a narrative of the development of modernism, as many critics do, or insisting upon the traditional elements of war literature, this dissertation moves beyond this binary to consider the place of war literature in intellectual history. By reading the diverse body of First World War literature against the crisis of historicism, I offer an alternative context for interpreting formal strategies that are more often understood through the opposing rubrics of modernism and tradition. The sustained attention of my study to literary form directs attention to the mutually constitutive relationship of literary production, history, and historiography.

In the first chapter, “Historiography, Perspective, and the First World War Novel,” I contend that the early twentieth-century debates surrounding historiography in Britain inform the treatment of point of view in the war novel. I argue that the war novel’s emphasis on the partial and subjective nature of its representation of the war is consistent with an understanding of historical knowledge as inherently subjective or perspectival. Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* (1924-1928) addresses the crisis of historicism through the lens of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; in the novel, shifting attitudes to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* are an index for the rise of a new understanding of history. By virtue of its interest in history and the historian, *Parade’s End* brings together central concerns of other First World War novels: the difficulty inherent in

reconciling different impressions of the war, as explored in R.H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* (1924-26); the anxiety about women assuming control of historical narratives that underpins Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918); and, in the wake of the First World War and the crisis of historicism, the imagining of a new form of history in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

While Chapter 1 shows how the war novels emphasize the restrictions implicit in a single perspective, the autobiographies studied in the second chapter, "Autobiographies of War and Narratives of Conversion," validate a single, limited perspective by deploying it as the lens for a simultaneous consideration of both personal and national history. This chapter draws on a wide range of autobiographies, including Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse Enid Bagnold's *A Diary Without Dates* (1918), T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), and Gertrude Stein's *Wars I Have Seen* (1945). Grouping these texts on the basis of formal affinity, rather than by the author's gender, or status as a civilian or combatant, I consider these autobiographical narratives in the context of the Edwardian discourse that envisioned war as a force for the regeneration of society and suggest that the rhetoric of transformation that initially informs this discourse is transposed into postwar autobiographical writing. These autobiographical texts consistently express a desire for narrative coherence by attempting to write a narrative in which personal transformation is congruent with narratives of cultural transformation. But the trope of conversion fails as an organizing principle; it reveals the incommensurability of the subject's personal history and the history of the war and the limitations of the trope for combining the two narratives.

“Figures of History: Allegory in the Literature of the First World War,” the third chapter, explores the logic of allegory in a diverse set of First World War texts. The appeal of allegory, I suggest, lies in its inevitable, if problematic, engagement with a specific philosophy of history, whether a belief in historical repetition, as is implied by historical allegory, or teleological Christian historiography. Of the texts considered in this chapter, Vernon Lee’s closet dramas *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) and *Satan the Waster* (1920) employ the former, and David Jones’s long poem *In Parenthesis* (1937) and ee cummings’s autobiography *The Enormous Room* (1922), the latter. This chapter understands allegorical narrative not as a formal strategy designed to authorize a highly subjective history, as do the previous chapters, but as a literary device that insists upon a shared frame of reference for making sense of history while incorporating a critique of this framework into the development of the narrative.

The fourth and final chapter, “Performing History: Forms of Distance in the Wartime Pageant,” examines the phenomenon of wartime pageantry in Britain. While critics have long associated the Edwardian revival of pageantry with nostalgia and an ahistorical treatment of the past, I argue that the public performance of history in wartime pageantry rehabilitates history and historical narratives through an insistence on critical historical consciousness. Situating my work in conversation with the growing body of work on historical reenactment, I argue that wartime pageants – and the inheritors of this tradition – manipulate historical distance so as alternately to produce affective proximity and cognitive distance. The chapter begins by considering the wartime pageants of Louis Napoleon Parker, which have not to date received scholarly attention. It contends that Parker establishes a paradigm for the public performance of history that is neither facile

nor crudely propagandistic. Instead, these public performances of history foreground self-conscious and critical examinations of history. This tendency is visible throughout amateur productions of pageants during the war and, in the post-war years, in two seminal works: Noël Coward's play *Cavalcade* (1930) and Virginia Woolf's novel *Between the Acts* (1941). The chapter establishes an alternative genealogy of pageantry and suggests that twentieth-century historical pageants simultaneously produce historical narratives and, as critics have not acknowledged, question the process by which these historical narratives are generated.

In the conclusion to this work, I touch briefly on a work from the late twentieth century, Canadian author Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977). Casting its narrator as a historian, Findley's work examines how one man's experience in the First World War might be reconstructed close to sixty years after the war's end. While this dissertation proposes that the intersection of problems of historical knowledge and formal experiment characterizes the literature of the First World War, my reading of *The Wars* suggests that problems of form and history continue to define the First World War in late twentieth-century literature.

Chapter 1: Historiography, Perspective, and the First World War Novel

In Ford Madox Ford's series of war novels known collectively as *Parade's End*, Christopher Tietjens is introduced as an exceptionally brilliant member of the government's Department of Statistics, where he is admired in particular for his encyclopedic mind. On the fifth page of the novel, the narrator informs us that Tietjens is known by the head of the Department as a "perfect encyclopaedia of exact material knowledge" (5). Such praise is quite literal, as the narrator subsequently informs the reader that during his separation from his wife, Sylvia, Tietjens has "employed himself in tabulating from memory the errors in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, of which a new edition had lately appeared" (10). This is the first of several small but significant appearances that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* makes in *Parade's End*. The second part of *Some Do Not* opens in 1917, five years later. Tietjens has been serving in France, and the experience has left him with shell shock. In Tietjens's case, shell shock has inflicted severe memory loss. Unable to remember dates, names, and ideas, he has resorted to reading the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in order to fill in the gaps in his knowledge. The extent to which Tietjens has fallen is made plain when Sylvia, Tietjens' wife, sardonically observes, "You read that Encyclopaedia; it's pitiful. You used to despise it so" (170). But read the *Encyclopaedia* Tietjens must: "His knowledge of history was still practically negligible: he knew nothing whatever of the humaner letters and, what was far worse, nothing at all of the higher and more sensuous phases of mathematics. And the coming back of these things was much slower than he had confessed to Sylvia" (179).

Tietjens' reading of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for his re-education signals the decline of British civilization, or at least so it would seem. In the space of five years,

Tietjens has gone from feats of astounding erudition to a humbling dependency upon what he once called the “encyclopaedia of misinformation” (417). Tietjens’s shifting relationship to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is an instance of Ford’s dark humour that encapsulates the novels’ narrative of the decline of Christopher Tietjens, the “last English Tory,” and the end of an era in British history. Yet, tracing the significance of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* throughout *Parade’s End* leads into a complex web of competing conceptions of history in Ford’s work, both within this novel and elsewhere in his nonfiction prose, and across the many novels from the period of 1918 to 1928 that take the upheavals of the war as their subject. In these works, the epistemological problems of history – if we can know the past, how we know the past, and what constitutes the subject matter of “history” – become the subject of fiction and merge with the formal concerns of the novelist.

This chapter explores how competing understandings of historical inquiry influence point-of-view in the First World War novel. While the novel evolved in search of new and better means of representing the vicissitudes of perception over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the circumstances of the war, coupled with the intensification of the crisis of historicism in the English-speaking world, lent new urgency to the pursuit of narrative strategies that could adequately represent the limitations of any single perspective on the war. In Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* (1924-28), R.H. Mottram’s *Spanish Farm Trilogy* (1924-27), Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and, briefly, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), how a character or a narrator perceives the war has implications that extend into the realm of historiography. In *Parade’s End* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the

presence of a historian or a work of history makes the connection between narrative technique and historiography explicit. Staging the writing of history within a novel that represents the recent history of the war invites us to read the manner in which the writing of history is represented as a comment upon the writing of the novel, and vice versa. In *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* and *The Return of the Soldier*, the connection is implicit and it is by virtue of shared thematic and formal concerns with other novels from the same period that the novels' submerged historiographic concerns come to light.

Each of these novels engages, directly or indirectly, with the legacy of the crisis of historicism. Though debates about the possibility of objective knowledge occurred in the mid-nineteenth century in England, and debates specifically about the possibility of objective historical knowledge in the late nineteenth-century in Europe, the crisis of historicism in British historiographical discourse largely coincided with the First World War, as discussed in the introduction. Building on my argument that representing the First World War in literature engenders questions about historiography, this chapter seeks to illuminate how various First World War novels of the war participated explicitly and implicitly in historiographic debates and disseminated ideas about the writing of history to a broad audience by experimenting with point-of-view and focalization.

Today, it is a commonplace that the historian shares the novelist's interest in the craft of narrative, including point-of-view. In *Metahistory*, however, Hayden White reminds us that in the late nineteenth century, the idea that the historian and the novelist might share common concerns was virtually unthinkable. White's work not only illuminates the plots employed in important nineteenth-century works of history, but it also historicizes our understanding of the historical imagination:

The notion that the historian himself emplotted the events found in the documents was only vaguely glimpsed by thinkers sensitive to the poetic element in every effort at narrative description – by a historian like J.G. Droysen, for example, and by philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche, but by few others. To have suggested that the historian emplotted his stories would have offended most nineteenth-century historians. That different ‘points of view’ might be brought to bear upon the past was not denied, but these ‘points of view’ were regarded more as biases to be suppressed than poetic perspectives that might illuminate as much as they obscured. The idea was to “tell the story” about “what had happened” without significant conceptual residue or ideological preformation of the materials. If the story were rightly told, the explanation of what had happened would figure itself forth from the narrative, in the same way that the structure of a landscape would be figured by a properly drawn map. (142)

This passage evokes the assumptions that governed nineteenth-century historical writing, assumptions that would be contested by the crisis of historicism. As discussed in the introduction, a fundamental premise for nineteenth-century European historiography was the notion that the goal of writing history is to describe an objective historical reality, but by the century’s end, the very notion that the historian could know “what had happened” had been challenged. Some philosophers argued that the subject could never perceive objective reality, while others claimed that an objective reality could not exist. Moreover, even if it were possible to ascertain with certainty “what had happened,” it would be impossible to render this objective reality without the historian incorporating his or her perspective, whether this is construed positively, as an illuminating poetic perspective, or negatively, as a bias to be minimized. History, White argues, is always a narrative and, as such, emplotted. As Scholes and Kellogg argue in *The Nature of Narrative*, “plot requires...a beginning, a middle, and an end. In historical narrative, this means that a subject must be discerned in the past and cut off from the irrelevant matters with which it has only a temporal connection” (211).

Responses to the First World War also considered the problem of perspective. . . . Prior to the First World War, Ortega y Gasset was a particularly influential thinker in regards to perception and perspective. As Stephen Kern explains, while the rationalists “argue that there is one and only one truth that can be grasped by factoring out the errors that arise from viewing things from subjective points of view,” Ortega y Gasset develops what he calls “perspectivism” directly in opposition to the rationalist position (Kern 151). In Ortega y Gasset’s 1910 essay “Adám en el Paraíso,” he writes, “this supposed immutable and unique reality does not exist: there are as many realities as points of view.”¹ In 1916, in a manifesto published in *El espectador*, Ortega y Gasset argued that war was “brought about by a narrow-mindedness among nations that failed to see the larger context of their actions” (Kern 151). In his wartime work, he explicitly connects a failure to acknowledge the multiplicity of perspectives with the outbreak of war.

This chapter does not posit a direct causal relation between perspective and war in Ortega y Gasset’s manner. Rather, setting aside the Gordian knot of the causes of the First World War, it begins from the proposition that the war heightened awareness of the existence of divergences of perspective. As the first total war, the First World War was a singular focus for not only military, but also civilian life between 1914 and 1918. But this singular focus did not preclude radically different experiences of war. The war, one might say, was proof of Ortega y Gasset’s claim that as many realities exist as points of view.

¹ See Kern 151. In *the Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, the cultural historian Stephen Kern is particularly interested in philosopher Ortega y Gasset’s writings on perspective. Curiously, he does not discuss Ortega y Gasset in relation to his chapter on the First World War, discussed below. As Ortega y Gasset’s work has received fairly minimal attention in English, I have cited Kern’s translations.

The criticism that considers perspective in the literature of the First World War tends to focus on the unique conditions of warfare. Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* includes a detailed analysis of what soldiers could see from the trenches. Throughout the work, Fussell emphasizes that small details shape the memory of the war, rather than large-scale events (31). In the chapter entitled "The Troglodyte World," Fussell emphasizes the omnipresence of the sky in the literature of the war as the sky, and the changing light of the sky, was all that was visible to the men who spent days at a time huddled in trenches at the front. Fussell writes that the "exploitation of moments of waxing or waning half-light is one of the distinct hallmarks of Great War rhetoric. It signals a constant reaching out towards traditional significance, very much like the system of "high" diction which dominated the early stages of the war. It reveals an attempt to make some sense of the war in relation to inherited tradition" (57). From their vantage point in the trenches, what little of the war that could be seen became the source of recurring motifs.

Eric Leed's psycho-history of the war, *No Man's Land* (1979), connects the experience of trench warfare to specific psychological states and, eventually, distinctive literary expressions. Leed builds on Fussell's work to suggest that there is a link between the noise of bombardment and the altered state of consciousness described by combatants, as well as the mythic, magical mentality seen by Fussell as an effect of the war. The constriction of vision eliminated most of those signs that allow individuals to collectively order their experience in terms of problems to be solved in some kind of rational sequence... Naturally, this chaotic world was judged entirely on the basis of the individual's own perspective, a perspective

that mobilized deeply layered anxieties, animistic images, and surprising and unbidden associations. (131)

In Leed's account, the strict limits on what any given person could see of the war led to intensely subjective interpretations of the war in which individual psychology played a substantial role.

Finally, in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, the cultural historian Stephen Kern concludes his study with a chapter entitled "The Cubist War." Kern argues that the First World War "embodied most of the transformations in time and space of the prewar period" and was characterized by disjointed perspective characteristic of cubism (288). Though tacticians aspired to use new communications technology to relay reports to the commanding officers, in reality it proved impossible. Information was disjointed and multiple fronts produced multiple perspectives (300, 301).

This chapter responds to the work of these critics by shifting the focus on perspective in the literature of the First World War away from the experience of trench warfare. Evidently, the experience of the trenches produced distinctive forms of cultural expression, but the impact of the war extended far beyond the devastation on the front lines. In the novels that I consider in this chapter, trench warfare is as important as the experience of war on the home front.

Nowhere is the divergence of perspective more clearly illustrated than in the rapidly-shifting dynamics of the relationship between men and women. As much recent historical work on the First World War has demonstrated, the war engendered a complex series of political, economic, and social changes. In this chapter, I focus on gender, a particular dimension of wartime and post-war social changes, in order to ground my

analysis of differences of perspective in a recurring thematic concern of much of the literature of the war. In the two decades prior to the First World War, questions of sex and gender reached fever pitch in Britain. Even in the months leading up to the war, the spectre of conflict was linked as much to the violent protests of the suffragettes as it was to the political events on the continent.² But with the outbreak of war, the suffrage and feminist movements reformulated their ideology. Though some of the first-wave feminists aligned themselves with pacifism – in *Parade's End*, Valentine Wannop is one such suffragette – the vast majority redirected their energy to the war. Numerous historians and literary critics have written of the contemporary attitudes toward women's role in the war, which ranged from blame and hostility to ignorance. For instance, historian Nicoletta Gullace argues that women's distribution of white feathers to men in civilian clothes – a coercive gesture designed to shame men into enlisting in the years prior to the enactment of conscription – provided veterans of the war with “a concise rhetorical trope with which to remember gendered patriotism during the Great War” (182).

The literature of the war also reveals the complex, and often fraught, position of women in relation to the war. In her recent work on trauma narratives written by non-combatants at the front, Margaret Higonnet contests the idea voiced by reviewers of the time that women's autobiographical writing privileged art over authenticity, suggesting that it was the product of a bias toward the perspective of the combatant. Higonnet rejects the “polarity between authenticity and artifice – an opposition that (in the context

² See Susan Kingsley Kent's *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* for an analysis of, first, how gender, sex, and the relationship between the sexes was used as a metaphor for resolving issues of power and, second, how the culture understood sexuality and war as inextricably linked (140).

of war literature) has been aligned with the opposition between combatant and noncombatant, between male and female” (104). James Longenbach’s “The Women and Men of 1914,” for instance, contains an extended analysis of gender in Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* and *Parade’s End*; he argues that the latter elaborates upon the theme developed in *The Good Soldier*, where the sexual intrigues “‘caused’ the war, and that the war was the ‘source’ of all the sexual confusion in the novel...Ford went on to make this interpretation of the war’s relationship to sexual politics explicit in *Parade’s End*.” (107). In his account, “Before the war, Ford tried to obliterate sexual difference; after visiting the trenches, he was overwhelmed by difference to such an extent that generalization was no longer possible. The direct experience of war made the already complicated issue of sexual difference intractable” (112). While I agree in principle with this interpretation of the representation of gender in the novel, I find Longenbach’s description of post-war sexual difference as an impasse for Ford too bleak an interpretation of the novel. I would suggest instead that Ford figures the intractability of sexual difference as the motivation for a reformulation of the methods of the historian, and so my reading of *Parade’s End* will return to the question of gender in conjunction with the figure of the historian. What Longenbach’s reading does suggest, however, is the full extent of postwar animosity toward women, and the pervasiveness of this sentiment in the literature of the war.

Jean Gallagher’s *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (1998) addresses, as do I, the intersection of gender and perspective in First World War writing. Though Gallagher is primarily interested in visuality, and consequently does not discuss any of the same texts as I do, her argument intersects at times with mine. Gallagher argues that

the wartime subject position of women writers (especially as witnesses rather than combatants) necessitates various strategies to respond to questions of authority. In her account, various texts written by women who witnessed the First and Second World Wars attempt to preserve ideological, sexual, or racial difference by “constructing their wartime female observers through failures, gaps, or blockages in vision” (6). Gallagher’s emphasis on visual perception confirms my sense that the literature of the period is acutely aware of the need to represent the existence of conflicting perspectives, but I would insist that the problems of perception and a heightened awareness of gender in wartime are not restricted to women’s writing. As my analysis of Ford’s *Parade’s End* will suggest, the anxiety surrounding gender is found in male and female-authored texts, and figures a larger question about the arrogation of power entailed in representing war and writing a historical narrative, even a fictional one.

Beginning with Ford’s *Parade’s End* and the significance of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* allows me to explicate the crisis of historicism as it manifested itself in Edwardian Britain and to situate Ford’s novel in relation to the discourse about historical objectivity. The pattern of references to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in Ford’s novel is paradigmatic of a series of interrelated concerns surrounding the project of history shared with the other novels considered in this chapter: the impossibility of overcoming differences in perspective that leads to an anxiety surrounding women assuming control of history, and the ensuing emergence of new forms of history. These concerns manifest themselves explicitly in the plot of the novel as well as implicitly in the reliance on the narrative strategy of fragmentation, a hallmark of modernist fiction that takes on new implications with respect to history in these war novels. For in each of these novels, an

implicit or explicit concern is the representation and recording of the war that in turn assumes the status of writing history.

Following the discussion of *Parade's End*, I explore how other novels from the period adumbrate the same concerns. The second section of this chapter examines R.H. Mottram's prize-winning and best-selling series of novels known collectively as *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*. The novels as a whole take the form of a *roman-fleuve*, or interrelated novels that explore the same milieu or epoch, and tend to share the same cast of characters. Telling and re-telling the story of the First World War as it affected the inhabitants of the Spanish Farm, a small farm in Belgium, reveals the limits of subjective narration, specifically the inextricable connection between focalization (who sees) and what is seen. The third section turns to Rebecca West's novella *The Return of the Soldier* in order to explore the war's dislocations of gender norms, arguing that the novella evokes an analogy between a narrator's unreliable narration and the disproportionate influence of historians who control the historical record and historical memory. Finally, the fourth section in this chapter reads Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* as war novels that propose alternative forms for history.

New Forms of History: The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Women's History, and *Parade's End*

Over the course of the four novels that comprise *Parade's End*, Ford chronicles the life of Christopher Tietjens, the second son of the landed Tietjens family. Spanning the years between 1912 and 1919, the novel follows Tietjens from his position in the government's Department of Statistics, through his wartime service in the British army,

to his postwar existence as an antiques dealer. In his private life, Tietjens first encounters the suffragette and schoolteacher Valentine Wannop, his future mistress, in 1912.

Between 1912 and 1918, he suffers through the tribulations of repeated estrangements and reconciliations with his wife, Sylvia Tietjens. It is in 1918, at the moment of the Armistice, that he finally parts with Sylvia and begins a new life with Valentine.

This summary might seem to belie the complexity of Ford's novel, which is both long and difficult, but the plot of *Parade's End* is in fact relatively straightforward. What makes the novel so long and so difficult are the narrative strategies that Ford employs. One of the foremost practitioners of the modernist stream-of-consciousness technique, Ford relays the thoughts of his characters (not only Tietjens, but also Tietjens's wife, mistress, brother, and other characters) in painstaking detail. The reader, accordingly, must struggle to piece together a chronology from a narrative that moves rapidly backwards and forwards in time, to decipher idiosyncratic and cryptic references, and to discern the argument of the novel despite the novel's ambiguity and indirection.

Ford is known for his fragmented narratives which employ consistent shifts in perspective. For Sara Haslam, Ford's "kaleidoscope" technique reflects the multiplicity and complexity of wartime psychology (88). Haslam's historical contextualization of Ford's narrative technique is very helpful: her project, like mine, attempts to understand experimental narrative technique in historical context. But what I want to suggest in this section is that Ford's insightful treatment of wartime psychology is a by-product of his recognition that the epistemological shift of the crisis of historicism has changed how the novelist and historian must represent the past. This change is not limited to the psychology of the individual during war.

By incorporating the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* into the world of *Parade's End*, Ford gestures toward the debates surrounding objective historical knowledge. At the risk of over-analyzing an amusing scenario, my discussion of the novel begins by interpreting the references to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in Ford's novel in relation to prewar debates about historical methodology, then considers how these references to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* refract the novel's anxieties surrounding the democratization of education and the rise of women as journalists and historians. The anxiety and uncertainty surrounding historical knowledge gives rise to the distinctive narrative strategies that Ford employs in *Parade's End*: as in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the narrative in *Parade's End* registers the existence of multiple perspectives and, by extension, conflicting or uncertain histories. But, as the novel progresses, the significance of the *Encyclopaedia* as means of writing and recovering history gives way to the new form of the history that the novel envisions: Mrs. Wannop's women's history of the war.

When Tietjens corrects the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1912, the novel refers to the milestone eleventh edition, which was published in 1911. This new edition, the first to be completely rewritten since the work's debut in 1768, exhibited what one historian has called "a strong drift toward popularization" (Kogan 171). While the articles in previous editions had been written as scholarly essays on the most recent developments in the field, the eleventh edition was conceived, in no small part due to the aggressive marketing strategies of its publishers, as a reference aid and a tool for the self-education of the masses. This is evident in the structure of the new edition, which was only 3% longer than the tenth edition, but consisted of forty thousand articles, rather than

the seventeen thousand articles of the previous edition (Kogan 171). The “drift toward popularization” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is part of a larger movement in British historical scholarship toward a fact-based history. For instance, in his introduction to the first volume of the *Cambridge Modern History*, published in 1903, Lord Acton decried the pressures on the historian that “threatened to turn him from a man of letters into the compiler of an encyclopedia” (qtd in Carr 15).

The anxiety that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* provoked about what constitutes historical knowledge and who should control its dissemination lies behind Tietjens’ scorn of the encyclopaedia in *Parade’s End*. Yet, it is not entirely evident what stance the novel itself takes toward the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It is particularly interesting that Tietjens reads *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* at the home of Mrs. Wannop, Valentine Wannop’s mother. Mrs. Wannop is a “woman novelist” who takes up journalism in order to support herself and her daughter after the death of her husband, who was an esteemed classicist, leaves the household impoverished. While the late Professor Wannop stands for the traditional restriction of education and historical knowledge to the sons of the upper classes, Mrs. Wannop’s move into the public sphere as a journalist stands for the modern expansion of education, the popularization of history, and the emancipation of women. But Mrs. Wannop’s journalism and her historical writing are suspect, not only because she is an owner of the encyclopaedia. One of the running jokes of the novel is that Mrs. Wannop relies upon Tietjens for her facts for her yellow journalism. In 1917, Mrs. Wannop asks Tietjens for statistics on “war babies” (the illegitimate children supposedly produced in the fervour surrounding war), and is disappointed to learn from Tietjens that the war baby phenomenon is a fiction. Then, commissioned to write “a

propaganda article about some historical matter connected with the peace after Waterloo” (269) Mrs. Wannop relies on Tietjens for details of the Congress of Vienna, but Tietjens, shell shocked, can’t remember the facts. Yet when he does remember Metternich’s name, he telephones with the information, and Tietjens is quick to massage the statistics about illegitimate births so that Mrs. Wannop can write her story. In his decimated mental state, Tietjens relaxes his objections to new, popular, and even propagandistic, forms of historical writing.³ Tietjens’ manipulation of the war baby statistics for Mrs. Wannop is an unambiguous critique of fact-based history and those historians who believed that objective historical knowledge was possible. Here, and in other moments in the novel which I shall discuss shortly, *Parade’s End* draws the reader’s attention to the subjective nature of historical knowledge and how the war conclusively undermined the very notion of objectivity.

Discussions of the impossibility of objectivity were widespread in the pre-war years, even in relation to the purportedly fact-driven *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Hugh Chisholm, the editor of the eleventh edition, made a series of remarks concerning the impartiality of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that reveal the work’s entanglement in the crisis of historicism. Chisholm wrote in his Preface that “The object of the present work is to furnish accounts of all subjects, which shall really explain their meaning, to those who desire accurate information. Amid the variety of beliefs which are held with sincere conviction by one set of people or another, impartiality does not consist in concealing criticism or withholding knowledge of divergent opinion, but in an attitude of scientific

³ Tate observes that, like Ford himself, who was commissioned to write war books as propaganda, Tietjens is complicit in the manipulation of statistics. Tate reads *Parade’s End*, in which “the ethics of writing propaganda are not confronted” (60), as a text that is only half-aware of the pleasure it takes in propaganda and rumour.

respect which is precise in studying a belief in the terms, and according to the interpretation accepted by those who hold it” (qtd in Kogan 171). Writing here of belief, Chisholm suggests that the work attains impartiality by recognizing “divergent opinion” and adopting a stance of “scientific respect,” and in this manner appears to side with the positivist orientation of many late nineteenth-century historians. This preface did not, however, forestall criticism. In the maelstrom of debate provoked by a priest’s attack on the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for failing to use Catholic writers for Catholic subjects, Chisholm replied: “Such a course in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would be impracticable with any attempt to write history from an impartial but critical standpoint. We did not ask a Buddhist to write on Buddhism, a Mohammedan on Mohammedanism, or a Mormon on the Mormons. We did, however, I believe, take every reasonable precaution by the cooperation of men of all sorts of religious belief, against the misrepresentation of the nature of the doctrines held by different churches and different religions” (qtd in Kogan 176). Once again, Chisholm evokes the idea of impartiality, yet he does so while simultaneously recognizing the existence of incommensurable perspectives and suggesting that a plurality of perspectives mitigates against misrepresentation.

The references to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in *Parade’s End* not only bring the crisis of historicism and the problem of perspective into the world of the novel, but they also propose a solution: the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* itself serves as a formal model for the novel’s narrative strategies devised to contend with differing perspectives on history. In *Parade’s End*, Ford adopts a comparable stance, suggesting, by way of

narrative technique, that multiple perspectives are a partial solution to the intractable problem of subjective accounts of history.

In *Parade's End*, Tietjens repeatedly wonders about the coexistence of more than one perspective on an event. Valentine, for instance, sides with the conscientious objectors, while Tietjens feels obliged to enlist. On one occasion, he says to Valentine:

“Do you know those soap advertisement signs that read differently from several angles? As you come up to them you read ‘Monkey’s Soap’; if you look back when you’ve passed it’s ‘Needs no Rinsing.’ . . . You and I are standing at different angles and though we both look at the same thing we read different messages. Perhaps if we stood side by side we should see yet a third. . .” (234)

And, on another occasion, as Valentine studies the list of casualties pinned to the wall, Tietjens says “I support it [the war] because I have to. Just as you decry it because you have to. They’re two different patterns we see” (221). Tietjens observes, in a similar vein, that the effect of drinking a cup of tea with a small quantity of rum at the front is that “In three or four minutes the whole world changed beneath your eyes. . . You were, in fact, a changed man” (344). This recurring motif troubles the novel’s claim to represent reality. Differences in situation and circumstance lead to radically different perceptions of reality and thus give rise to different perspectives.

I am using the term perspective in two interrelated senses: first, to refer to the novel’s representation of different individuals’ perceptions of the world, by means of variable focalization. (By focalization I mean the selection and restriction of information in the narrative by means of the narrator “seeing” events through the eyes of different characters). I also mean to evoke perspective to refer to the differences in values, beliefs, and perceptions that stem from occupying different subject positions, in which I include the possibility that the same subject will perceive differently at different points in

time. Both of these senses are at play in the crisis of historicism, which can be understood as a fundamental disagreement about whether historians uncover a single, objective history, or write subjective histories that depend upon their own perspective. Ford's desire to be the "historian of his own time" when writing *Parade's End* has both a methodological and formal dimension; he is not simply recounting the events of his time, but exploring how a historian represents the past.

A brief detour to Ford's forays into writing history illuminates his method as a historical novelist. After writing *Parade's End* in the mid-1920s, Ford began to write a work of history in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. *A History of Our Own Time* was intended to be Ford's survey of the history of his own lifetime in three volumes covering the years 1870-1939. Ford only completed the first volume of this work and failed to find a publisher for it; it was not published in his lifetime.

If *Parade's End* asks how history should be written, *A History of Our Own Time* offers an answer. In his preface to the work, Ford explains that the book is "an attempt to supply the ordinary citizen with an account of his own day. The ordinary citizen is one who goes about his businesses and leisures, occasionally votes in an election and lives in a perpetual atmosphere of talk about public affairs" (13). In this respect, the imagined readership for Ford's work is quite like the popular audience envisioned for the eleventh version of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and his comments offer support for my argument that *Parade's End* does not condemn popular history.

I have drawn *A History of Our Own Times* into my discussion because it is strikingly invested in revealing its own biases and, by extension, appears to endorse an understanding of history as a subjective narrative. In his foreword to the work, Gordon

A. Craig draws attention to the fact that Ford “was constantly interrupting his narrative to define his position for his readers” (vii-viii). Ford explains that he writes as a “practicing Roman Catholic and mild believer in the divine right of kings at any rate as... France and my own country are concerned” (80); on another occasion, he explains that his position is a function of “being brought up partly amongst extreme Tories and partly among Free-thinkers and the Extreme Left” (110). But he often accompanies these remarks about his own biases with statements that “the reader must judge” for himself (110).

Just as Ford emphasizes the manner in which an individual’s beliefs and experiences inflect his or her understanding of history in *A History of Our Own Time*, so, too, does *Parade’s End*. Ford’s handling of these differences of perspective mirrors that of the editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Both the novelist and the editor of the encyclopaedia devise a narrative strategy that encompasses such differences, and there are interesting analogies to be drawn between the form of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and that of *Parade’s End*. An initial point of comparison is that both works are non-chronological. In the encyclopaedia, history is not treated as a single narrative, but as a series of topics divided as the editors see fit, and presented in alphabetical order. The ordering principle of the work necessarily fragments knowledge. The same might be said of *Parade’s End*. Though the four novels follow a chronology, each novel is far from chronological, for like much modernist narrative, the narrator employs free indirect discourse, which results in a narrative shaped by associations produced in the minds of the characters and involves leaps through time.

Further fragmentation is produced by the novel’s regular shifts in focalization. The third-person narrator employs a range of focalizers, most notably Christopher

Tietjens, Sylvia Tietjens, and Valentine Wannop. Different novels – and sections of novels – see the world through different eyes, such that the reader encounters multiple perspectives on the same event, but must struggle with the chronological and logical gaps generated by this method. The discarding of chronology as an ordering principle minimizes the appearance of narrative authority, as it appears that the focalizer, rather than the narrator, controls the flow of the narrative. In its overlap and gaps, the fragmented perspective of *Parade's End* is analogous to the series of cross-referenced, cross-cutting sections of the encyclopedia, and the focalization through multiple characters is analogous to the many authors of the encyclopaedia.

In the wartime world of *Parade's End*, perception is irreversibly fragmented. The novel registers the chaos and intensity of the war by way of the narrative techniques of literary impressionism. For the characters in the novel, the war entails experiences so intense and so unexpected that a pattern of disturbance, delay, and gradual cognition is one of the defining features of the narrative. For instance, in *No More Parades*, a prolonged battle scene subjects Tietjens to this very process. Prior to the war, Tietjens exhibited a tremendous mental agility: he was able to grasp the facts and respond with a comment, fact, or calculation virtually simultaneously. On the front, under fire, this is no longer the case. Over the course of the attack, Tietjens realizes only slowly what is happening (307). The narration gives way to an interior monologue which traces the disintegration of reason in Tietjen's mind.

The war disturbs perception both on and off the battlefield. This is not a phenomenon which is restricted to Tietjens, or to the experience of war on the front. Valentine Wannop's unorthodox relationship with Tietjens produces a crisis of similar

intensity, though perhaps of different magnitude. For instance, the unexpected call Valentine receives from a former friend, suggesting that she ought to tend to the seemingly mad Tietjens, produces a moral crisis in Valentine that produces an effect that is perhaps best likened to those experienced by Henry James' protagonists. Valentine goes to Tietjens, believing him to be mad: such is the effect of the shell shock on a civilian population that has come to expect madness. She sees Tietjens, running off to sell his last piece of furniture, and believes that he is suffering from shell shock. It is only much later that Valentine (and the reader) comes to understand that what Valentine sees is not madness, but strange behaviour under extreme stress. By dwelling on the war's disturbance of perception and cognition, the novel emphasizes the limits of a single perspective and proposes that objective reality – if such a thing exists – can never be perceived by the individual subject. Reality is better perceived, or so the narrative form of the novel suggests, if it is seen from multiple perspectives.

Accordingly, just as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* offers Tietjens historical knowledge, however error-ridden the “encyclopaedia of misinformation” may be, the novel focalized through multiple characters offers the novelist a form, however fragmented it may be. These flawed, provisional forms must suffice because the fiction of objective reality has been decimated by the war itself. It is shell shock that forces Tietjens into a new attitude with respect to the *Encyclopaedia*: the man who once corrected the work from memory now learns from it. And it is the war that shifts control of historical narratives to a new kind of historian, Mrs. Wannop, who will write a history that overtly accepts the limitations of its perspective.

Mrs. Wannop, as I demonstrated earlier, serves as a counterpoint to Tietjens.

While Tietjens is in possession of historical knowledge, specifically facts, Mrs. Wannop has little knowledge of history, and thus relies on Tietjens for information for her work as a journalist. Nevertheless, at the moment of the Armistice, Mrs. Wannop is at work on “a woman’s history of the War. A history by a woman for women” (648). Implicit in this description of Mrs. Wannop’s history is the realization that it is no longer possible, or even desirable, to write a history that purports to be written from an objective perspective and for all audiences. For it is not only the subject matter of Mrs. Wannop’s history that is new, but the fact that she is a woman historian; though the idea of a woman’s history might seem commonplace to us today, it was, in the mid-1920s, a revolutionary idea.

Though thus far I have focused on the significance of Mrs. Wannop as a historian, she is also, of course, a novelist and it is therefore through the character of Mrs. Wannop that *Parade’s End* explores the relationship between the novel and history. Like Ford, Mrs. Wannop is a novelist turned historian, but unlike Ford, she makes a sharp distinction between her novel and her history, as do the other characters in the novel. Mrs. Wannop is a highly regarded novelist; in fact, in Tietjens’ eyes, she is the only worthwhile novelist since the eighteenth century. Her turn to journalism, however, occasions a certain amount of skepticism on the part of the narrator and, perhaps, on the part of the reader, who must surely wonder about the value of a journalist who must rely on others for seemingly basic facts. When Mrs. Wannop moves from journalism to history, the novel’s tone continues to be ambivalent. Valentine, for instance, describes to Tietjens how Mrs. Wannop works first on her novel, then on her history, throughout the day and comments, “What a muddle her dear old head must be in!” (649). Valentine’s comment suggests

that working on a history and a novel are not complementary activities, but one might read the text somewhat against the grain and take this comment as Ford's suggestion that Valentine fails to see the connection between the two activities that Ford, who thought of the novelist as "a historian of his own time," found inseparable.

The novel's attitude toward novels can be detected in its fictional intertextual relations. Novels, and passing comments on novels, are scattered throughout the tetralogy. At one point, Tietjens avows that he doesn't read novels, though he does know their contents. Sylvia Tietjens is a reader of novels, but only of the pre-war variety: Tietjens tells Mrs. Wannop that Sylvia "spends nearly all her time in retreat in a convent reading novels of before the war. She can't bear the thought of physical suffering. I can't blame her" (232). We are not told why Tietjens does not read novels, but it would seem that he cannot accommodate the alternate reality of a novel in his own, highly ordered reality; though he might digest the contents of novels, he does not "read" them, or become immersed in their reality. Sylvia, on the other hand, uses novels as a form of escapism, a practice which the novel likens sardonically to religious retreat from the world. If Sylvia and Tietjens represent two kinds of erroneous responses to fiction, what, then, is the value and role of the novel?

To answer this question, I would turn again to the narrative form of *Parade's End*. Ford employs a particular mode of representation and communication which, in its ambiguity, elaborates a particular epistemology and theory of representation for the novel. At the conclusion of *Some Do Not*, the narrator describes Valentine thinking about the turn of events in terms of a novel: it is "as if a novel had been snatched out of her hand so that she would never know the end" (263). Without attempting to paraphrase the

events that occasion this reflection, suffice it to say that it is unclear whether this statement refers to the events in Valentine's life, or those of her mother. It is a metafictional comment on the very method of Ford's novel, namely Ford's use of ambiguity and indirection. The same principle governs the communication between Tietjens and Valentine. In the final pages, Tietjens asks Valentine to forget what he has said and done, to "Cut it out; and join time up...It can be done... You know they do it surgically..." (285). Valentine responds "I will never cut what you said then out of my memory...", but Tietjens knows not "what she would never cut out of her memory" (288). These fragmented sentences, full of ellipses indicating a failure of communication, work in the same manner as the narrative of the novel itself. Something has been said, something understood, but not in its entirety.

The mode of communication adopted is imprecise, perhaps deliberately so. It stands in opposition to the kind of narrative that regulates the war: as one character, Levin, says, "I am a military court of inquiry. It makes it easier for me to report to the general if you say things dully and in the order they happened" (459). Levin, in other words, is looking for a chronological, almost chronicle-like, historical narrative. In the next section, we will see that this passage echoes Mottram's satirical courts of inquiry in *The Crime at Vanderlynden's*: the official response to the war is to demand an orderly and chronological narrative, but this only serves to worsen the confusion. Neither the war nor the bedroom farce of the Tietjens' marriage, and the social disarray which it represents, lend themselves to straightforward narrative. Tietjens is at pains to describe the situation to Levin; his narrative mirrors the form of Ford's novel, which creates a space which allows for the representation of confusion and ambiguity. The events of the

war are to be understood not as a series of facts, nor as a temporary suspension of reality, a kind of escapism in itself, but as a process of confusion, misunderstanding, and the dawning of partial understanding.

In the character of Mrs Wannop, *Parade's End* depicts a novelist-historian who will produce a work along the same lines as Ford. Though Mrs Wannop may lack the grasp of facts and statistics that are one component of historical narrative, she has the command of narrative that enables the writing of history. Mastery of the subject is not Mrs Wannop's aim: she seeks instead to produce an account of the war from a highly specific perspective. Mrs Wannop looks at the war not with the hard-edged gaze of the statistician or the encyclopedist, but with the novelist's diffuse gaze. In the same manner, Ford's novel does not attempt to lay bare the consciousnesses of his characters. There is instead a deliberately opaque treatment of events and of consciousness. To obtain a complete, purportedly transparent narrative is not the desirable end goal.

Over the course of *Parade's End*, the notion of objectivity assumes a gendered valence. In the portion of *Some Do Not* set years before the war, Tietjens thinks: "The exact eye: exact observation; it was a man's work. The only work for a man. Why then, were artists soft, effeminate, not men at all; whilst the army officer, who had the inexact mind of the schoolteacher, was a manly man? Quite a manly man, until he became an old woman!" (127). In this passage, Tietjens is at pains to understand the gendering of the mind. Initially, he equates exactitude with manliness, explicitly identifying the exactitude of the artist and, subsequently, the work of the bureaucrat: "They did men's work: exact observation: return no. 17642 with figures exact. Yet they grew hysterical..." (127) he concludes. But in the passage I quoted a moment ago, Tietjens

wrestles with what he perceives as a disjunction between his own assessment of exactitude and his society's gendering of different activities: for Tietjens, the artist is exact, the army officer inexact, and so he is puzzled that the artist is deemed effeminate and the army officer manly. But, as he points out repeatedly, it would seem that exactitude and manliness both seem to result in effeminacy. Musing in this fashion in 1912, Tietjens anticipates the way that the war, as a result of shell shock, will undermine the manliness of the soldier and, in his own case, the possibility of exactitude. *Parade's End* demonstrates that the war reverses the value of exactitude and objectivity: it is the imprecise and muddled mind of Mrs. Wannop that produces the only history of the war in Ford's sweeping saga.

In 1912, as Tietjens ponders manliness, effeminacy, and exactitude, one of his many passing thoughts is that "Perhaps the future of the world then was to women? Why not?" (128). His idle speculation proves surprisingly accurate. The man who once corrected factual errors in the *Encyclopaedia* has subsequently used the work to acquaint himself with history. By 1919, Tietjens has lost his memory and refused his inheritance; a social outcast, he lives in a cottage and deals in antiques. As a direct result of the war, Mrs. Wannop is now not only a renowned novelist, but also an established journalist at work on a history of the war. Control of the historical record has shifted from Tietjens to Mrs. Wannop because of the circumstances of the war, namely Tietjens's shell shock. But I contend this shift also occurs because Tietjens's brilliant mathematical brain lacks the capacity for narrative description, and this is a capacity that Mrs. Wannop, a prolific novelist and journalist, possesses in abundance. Tietjens, unable to narrate and to invent, now lives among inert historical artifacts – his antiques. At the

war's end, the future lies in the hands of women – or at least on the side of imprecision, inexactitude, and subjectivity.

Parade's End suggests that any representation of the war, literary or historical, will be subjective and partial because the events of the First World War and changing ideas about history have made objective and coherent accounts impossible. In each case, the characters who witness the war, and the novelists who seek to represent it, can produce only partial accounts. Mrs. Wannop's women's history of the war is an account of the war that acknowledges the coexistence of different perspectives on the war, and thus the necessity of a woman's history. *Parade's End* imagines a history of the war that is written by a novelist and characterized by a lack of exactitude and a disregard for the conventional subject matter of history. The same description applies to *Parade's End*, which offers us both a new form for history and a new kind of history.

A Wartime Roman-Fleuve: *The Spanish Farm Trilogy 1914 to 1918*

“...no story and hardly a history book mentioned the fact that to fight, a man must live.... To fight for a few minutes, one must live for weeks.... So, with a great modern War you get cooking, sanitation, transport, and comforts, just as in a great modern Peace. Or, as his nose more briefly describes it, brazier smoke and disinfectant, manure and tobacco” (546). So writes the narrator at the conclusion of R.H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm Trilogy 1914 to 1918*. In the final pages of this vast, sprawling trilogy, the narrator articulates most clearly his understanding of the function of his novels. His work seeks to remedy the oversight that plagues the stories and histories of the war by describing the innumerable details of daily existence during the war.

Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* and Ralph Hale Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy* are alike in scope and size and are virtually contemporaneous. Like *Parade's End*, the novels that comprise *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* explore the social changes wrought by the First World War for a group of related characters. *The Spanish Farm* (1924), *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four!* (1925), and *The Crime at Vanderlynden's* (1926) tell a story of the First World War centered on the inhabitants of the Spanish Farm, a small farm in France. Madeleine Vanderlynden is the protagonist of the first novel, a young Flemish-French peasant who works on the farm alongside her father at the beginning of the war. As the war changes life in the French countryside, Madeleine leaves the farm for a clerical position, first in Armentières, then in Paris. Throughout the war, she attempts to find her lover, Georges d'Archeville, the son of the local baron. In Paris, and unable to find Georges, she has a short affair with a British officer, Geoffrey Skene, whom she met previously when Skene arrived at the Spanish Farm to pay compensation for the damage inflicted on the farm by billeted British troops. Madeleine eventually succeeds in finding Georges, but he subsequently dies in the war, at which point Madeleine returns to the Spanish Farm. The second novel tells the story of the war from the perspective of Skene, a British architect turned officer. The novel describes Skene's life on the front from the moment of his enlistment in 1914 to his demobilization in 1918, with particular attention paid to his brief affair with Madeleine Vanderlynden. The third novel is tangentially related to the first two: *Crime at Vanderlynden's* is the story of a military inquiry conducted by the British Lieutenant Dormer at the Spanish Farm. Misunderstanding and military procedures provide the material for the farcical investigation, in which Lieutenant Dormer is assigned to investigate a claim of a "ruined

virgin” and mistakenly believes himself to be investigating a rape rather than the desecration of a shrine to the Virgin Mary. Though he eventually determines the nature of the crime, he spends the remaining years of the war on a futile pursuit of the unknown soldier who destroyed the shrine in order to provide shelter for his mules. Taken as a whole, the three novels are a study of the war’s effect on daily life in European society, in particular the reconfiguration of class, the evolution of social mores, and the clash of cultures and languages.

The first volume of the trilogy, *The Spanish Farm*, was published in 1924 to great critical acclaim and received the Hawthornden prize, which is awarded annually to the best work of imaginative literature. The works were widely read and, as such, were reissued in 1927 as *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*. While the novels garnered critical interest in earlier years, they have failed in recent years to attract the interest of the new studies of the literature of the war. By including *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* in my study, I hope to suggest that the novels illuminate the significance of perspective in the war novels of the 1920s, in works of both unquestionable high modernist pedigree and those with stronger affinities to the realist tradition. While Ford’s novels offer an exemplary model of modernist narrative technique, Mottram’s *Spanish Farm Trilogy* is rooted in an earlier literary tradition. Decidedly realist, *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* owes its form to John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett’s Edwardian and Georgian experiments with the *roman-fleuve*. Nevertheless, reading *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* alongside *Parade’s End* reveals their shared formal and thematic concerns, namely an interest in the limitations of perspective and the circumstances that give rise to an inability to perceive a single, shared reality.

Generically speaking, *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* is a *roman-fleuve*, a series of interrelated novels that explore different aspects of the same milieu or epoch.⁴ It has its origins in the late nineteenth-century realism and naturalism of Balzac and Zola, and is a particularly popular form in France in the first part of the twentieth century: Romain Rolland is credited with introducing the term, and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* is perhaps the best known modern incarnation of this genre. In England, Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger Family* trilogy (1910-1916) and John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* (1906-1921) are examples of the British realist *roman-fleuve* contemporary with Mottram's. Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915-1938) is an instance of an English-language modernist *roman-fleuve*.

A contradiction in terms lies at the heart of Mottram's *roman-fleuve*, as *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* is a sweeping historical novel that foregrounds the deficiencies in such a panoramic historical perspective. The "he said/she said" formula that governs the first two novels, those with Madeleine Vanderlynden and Geoffrey Skene at their respective centres, reveals the radically different experiences of war in Europe for a French peasant and a British officer. A gulf lies between the stories – the events themselves, language, and the manner in which the characters look at the world – and cannot be overcome in the plot. Nor can the narration of the novel overcome this gulf.

⁴ The most comprehensive treatment of the *roman-fleuve* in English is Lynette Felber's 1995 book *Gender and Genre in Novels Without End: The British Roman-Fleuve*. In this work, Felber adduces the following characteristics of the *roman-fleuve*: "The definition of a subgenre - a slippery both/and kind of endeavor - becomes even more problematic when the species is one as loosely delimited as the novel. Some of the features of the *roman-fleuve* are those of the novel intensified...The abundance of characters, often numbering in the hundreds, ... and the prolonged temporal gaps between the publication of the novels create a reading experience significantly different from that of the serial or long novel. ...Other characteristics of the *roman-fleuve* are unique to the subgenre: it differs from the long novel in its prevalent use of extraneous narrative substructures, extractable narratives within the comprehensive framework of the entire novel. Whereas in the long novel various plot lines and characters eventually converge, in the *roman-fleuve* many are, or seem to be, dispensable" (1-2).

The narrator's failings and limitations, which are self-consciously foregrounded throughout the novels, suggest that it is impossible for a historically and socially individual, whether a narrator or a historian, to transcend the specificity and boundaries of his or her own subjectivity in writing a historical narrative. In the final novel in the trilogy, which is marked by anxiety about the coming wave of social and political change, Mottram's novel registers the impossibility of writing a work of history – whether fiction or non-fiction – that does justice to divergent perspectives.

Though the affair between Madeleine and Skene links the two novels, this affair serves to illustrate the tremendous gulf that lies between the two characters. Madeleine and Skene meet repeatedly while Madeleine is still living on the Spanish Farm and Skene is posted nearby, but it is a chance encounter in Paris that brings them together. Madeleine is mourning the silence and disappearance of her lover; Skene is trying desperately to put his looming return to the front out of his mind. Mottram casts Madeleine and Skene as diametrical opposites: Madeleine is a woman, of the peasant class, French and Flemish speaking, and Catholic, while Skene is a man, of the professional class, a native English speaker, and Anglican. The narrator reminds us relentlessly of their differences. In *The Spanish Farm*, Skene is described, with respect to Madeleine, as a “chance acquaintance - this man of different race, religion and language” (80). *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* reveals the extent to which these differences – sex, culture, religion, and language - shape a given character's experience of the world. A small, but crucial, difference between the novels that illustrates this point is the presentation of Jérôme Vanderlynden, Madeleine's father. A taciturn, if not silent, presence for Madeleine, Vanderlynden proves almost voluble in the presence of Geoffrey

Skene. While Madeleine suspects that her father knows something of her illicit relationship with Georges d'Archeville, the son of the local baron, Jérôme says nothing to her; to Skene, Vanderlynden openly calls Georges Madeleine's "young man." The two portraits of Vanderlynden in the two novels are substantially different, and in this respect, it is fair to say the two distinct perspectives (focalization through Madeleine in the first, Skene in the second) can produce distinct, non-identical plots from the same events.

The most salient difference, however, between Madeleine and Skene is their experience of the war. Though Madeleine lives near and eventually on the front, she remains a non-combatant, while Skene lives through virtually all of the major battles on the Western front. The narrator repeatedly emphasizes that Madeleine lacks knowledge of the full extent of the war. Thus, as Madeleine works in the fields, she sees a human stream of "all those civilians who had been swept within the German lines in the offensives of 1914 or 1918" returning home. "Madeleine, superintending the cleaning of the fields, the weed burning and autumn plowing, saw them come incuriously, not able to realize that even she, who had seen the whole war through, with the trenches only just beyond the sight of her eyes and never out of her hearing, had only now to begin to learn what it really had been" (140). Madeleine's ignorance of the war, which is especially pronounced when she lives in Paris while Skene remains in the trenches, is represented as a further aspect of the insurmountable gulf between the two characters.

The form of the trilogy foregrounds the gulf between Madeleine and Skene. Readers of the work see the meetings between Skene and Madeleine played out twice, but the repetition entails a substantial difference, as in the first novel, *The Spanish Farm*, the external narrator grants us access to Madeleine's thoughts, and in the second, *Sixty*

Four, Ninety Four!, to Skene's thoughts. In the terminology of narratology, the external narrator (external because he is not a character in the story) employs internal focalization, seeing the events of the novel through the eyes of specific characters. In the first novel, this is Madeleine, and in the second, Skene. Taken as a whole, the trilogy employs multiple focalization: the same events are told twice, but through different focalizers. The effect one might expect is that of a radical disconnection between how each character experiences the relationship. To be sure, there is a certain amount of this effect, which often manifests itself as dramatic irony; for instance, Madeleine's sudden disinterest in Skene, the reader knows (but Skene does not), is due to the return of her lover, Georges d'Archeville. Accordingly, though Skene and Madeleine may be an enigma to each other, the reader has access to the minds of both characters. Their final meeting illustrates this most clearly. In *Sixty-Four, Ninety Four!*, Skene returns to the Spanish Farm at the end of the war only to receive a chilly reception. As they speak, Madeleine issues forth an angry tirade about the losses they have incurred from the war – the deaths of her brother, the madness of her father, the destruction of their land, and the looting of their possessions by the Allies. Skene is shocked. He wonders what has occasioned this “unaccustomed vehemence,” and leaves quickly. *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*, in which Madeleine serves as focalizer, offers a more complete picture. The narrator explains that Madeleine is cold and harsh when she sees Skene again because his departure for England “hurt her possessive and domineering instincts” (153). As Skene leaves, the narrator tells us that “for the life of her she could not say if she wanted him to go or stay” (153). Switching between perspectives in this manner affords a more nuanced

understanding of a fraught meeting in which both Madeleine and Skene failed to communicate with the other.

This final scene also reveals the complexity of the narration. In what I have described so far, the failure of communication between Madeleine and Skene is revealed to be the result of the conflicting emotions that Madeleine feels toward Skene rather than the product of their social and cultural differences. Yet, the novel concludes with the narrator offering the following assessment of the situation:

She did not want him, had never wanted him, nor any Englishman, nor anything English. He was just one of the things the War, the cursed War, had brought on her, and now it, and they, were going. Good riddance! Nor was her feeling unreasonable. The only thing she and Skene had in common was the War. The War removed, they had absolutely no means of contact. Their case was not isolated. It was national. (153)

As in other works from the 1920s, a war romance between men and women from different nations ends abruptly.⁵ Equally abrupt in this passage, however, is the shift in the narration. There is a rapid transition from the narrator expressing Madeleine's thoughts by means of free indirect discourse to the narrator interpreting the significance of the scene for the reader. This shift, which occurs between "Good riddance!" and "Nor was her feeling unreasonable," brings into focus the narrator's tendency to make Madeleine and Skene bear the weight of symbolism by standing for all other women and men of their type. A detailed depiction of the rapid succession of Madeleine's emotional states gives way to the narrator's pronouncement that the end of the war has doomed the relationship. Curiously, this is an instance of unreliable narration: the narrator appears to be unable to offer an adequate interpretation of the events that he describes.

⁵ Enid Bagnold's 1920 novel *The Happy Foreigner* is another text which deals explicitly with a relationship between French and English characters. The sexes are reversed: Fanny is a volunteer ambulance driver from England, Julien a captain in the French army. But, in much the same way, their affair ends with the end of the war: demobilization makes the relationship impossible.

Consciously and unconsciously, as in the passage at the end of *The Spanish Farm*, the narrator reveals that any account is shaped by a subject's biases and is, therefore, necessarily subjective. At first glance, the narrator of the novels appears to be a caricature of a provincial Englishman, and in this respect not unlike Mottram himself. For instance, describing Madeleine's physical appearance for the first time, the narrator writes:

She walked with the ease of a person of perfect health who knew what she wanted and where she was going, and who had habitually no time to stroll, no need to think. The clumsiness of a life of hard physical labour had been corrected by a good education, and she might well have passed in her dress that had so evidently been best, and was going to be everyday, for an English girl. Only the boots and the hatless head marked her for a follower of the continental tradition, though her strong ankles and round neck would have well supported the low shoes and simple felt hat or straw of an outdoor Englishwoman. (12)

The manner in which he directs his gaze at Madeleine identifies him clearly, I would argue, as a man; his standards are clearly English. Elsewhere, the narrator compares Madeleine favourably with her English suffragette sisters: "She had none of the definite sex-antagonism of an English suffragist" (17) and "Her mental attitude contained nothing of an English suffragette's logical, theoretical stand upon 'rights'" (59). While the narrator of *The Spanish Farm* is thus sharply distinguished from his protagonist, the French peasant woman, the same cannot be said of the narrator of *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four!*. Geoffrey Skene is an Englishman of the middle class. Even without recourse to biographical criticism, to the knowledge that Mottram was English, of the middle class, and posted to France in the war, the reader cannot help but sense that the narrator identifies with Skene.

Thus, in *The Spanish Farm*, one finds the narrator consistently distinguishing his perspective and perceptions from those of Madeleine. In *The Spanish Farm*, the narrator

offers a lengthy disquisition on the style and significance of the Baroness's sitting room, only to clarify: "But to Madame la Baronne, and Madeleine, no such thoughts occurred. To Madame it was her salon. To Madeleine it was Madame's salon" (28). In *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four!*, focalized through Skene, no such strategy is ever employed, nor is it necessary. But in *The Spanish Farm*, the strategies of identification and dis-identification on the part of the narrator orient the reader to a binary mode of relating to the characters in the novels: to identify with Englishmen, and to "other" those of a different background.

The resolute Englishness of the narrator is a careful narrative strategy. Critics generally lack interest in Mottram's work, dismissing his work as "realist."⁶ John Rignall, for example, has discussed the two distinct perspectives that characterize this novel, but he forecloses the suggestion that Mottram's narration warrants close reading. Rignall writes, "Mottram's narration of the same events from different perspectives could be taken to anticipate the practice of a modernist like Faulkner, but the resemblance is only superficial... there is no sense of deliberate innovation or experimentation and the novel remains innocent of questions of epistemology" (50). Such a reading overlooks the many brief comments that the narrator makes that signal his awareness of the epistemological problems of perception.

⁶ For instance, in his article on Ford and Dos Passos, "The Denuded Place: War and Form in *Parade's End* and *U.S.A.*," Malcolm Bradbury mentions Mottram as a writer who wrote a realistic version of the war epic, but makes no further mention of him. This is not unusual: *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* generally receives only passing attention in literary criticism. Though Mottram was a prolific writer, and his work well known at the time, his work is now generally little known, and infrequently discussed. The work attracts the interest of critics who write on the relationship of the war novel to the pastoral (Christopher Ridgway and Jonathan Bate), or of those interested in the phenomenon of post-war pilgrimages to the battlefields (as in Modris Eksteins's "War, Memory, and the Modern: Pilgrimage and Tourism to the Western Front"). The most comprehensive treatment of the text is John Rignall's essay "Continuity and Rupture in English Novels of the First World War: Frederic Manning and R.H. Mottram."

If the first two novels in *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* illustrate the difficulty of achieving a satisfactory representation of the experience of the First World War, the third and final novel in the trilogy thematizes the dilemma by treating the encounters between cultures occasioned by the war in Europe. In *The Crime at Vanderlynden's*, Jérôme Vanderlynden, Madeleine's father, reports that one of the troops billeted at the farm had "esquinté une vierge chez moi" – to have "ruined a virgin in my house," as a colonel translates the claim. As the French authorities demand that the British military resolves the claim, Lieutenant Stephen Dormer is called upon to investigate and discovers that the ruined virgin is not Madeleine Vanderlynden, as he and others first supposed, but a shrine for the Virgin Mary. The novel follows Dormer from this assignment to his demobilization as his initially simple task, to investigate what happened and to produce a report (a narrative) of the events, proves impossible. As his search is prolonged, spanning three years and taking him along the Western Front, Dormer grows increasingly disillusioned with the war and the task that has been assigned to him, for his pursuit of an unnamed mule driver proves increasingly ridiculous: by 1918, few witnesses to the incident remain, and the culprit is almost certainly dead. This futile endeavour comes to stand for the futility of the war – its general disorder, the absurd extremes of French and British military bureaucracy, and its unexpected side effect, culture shock.

Nationality is the aspect of identity that is most rigid and resistant to change across *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*. While Mottram emphasizes the fixity of class and gender, these elements of identity evolve over the course of the novel, while ideas about nationality do not. In this respect, *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* differs from many of the other "trench novels" written in the aftermath of the war. David Trotter, for instance, has

argued that class is the defining feature of the British trench novel, suggesting that “[m]ost British war novels were written by middle-class writers... The implicit investment these novels all make, with or without enthusiasm, is in the durability of the class system” (35). Certainly, Mottram displays an acute awareness of class, but his novel is less confident in the immutability of class than Trotter suggests. At the very least, the class system in France is not immune to change. In *The Spanish Farm*, describing a scene in late 1915 or early 1916, the narrator explains the static and elaborate system in rural France:

One of the things that render life so easy in France is the absence of change. Anywhere outside Paris, and often in it, change seems to have worn itself out and to have ceased. In that remote corner of Flanders, Madeleine had no shyness, hesitation or doubt in entering the house of her father’s landlord and her lover’s mother. She would not have dreamed of entering by the front... The establishment was ruled by a lean, gaunt, gray-mustached person, discernible to be of the female sex only by her clothes, named Placide. Just as for Madeleine, so for Placide, life was an easy riddle. She knew her place to a hair’s breadth, between God, and her master and her mistress, on the one hand, and the servants, tenants, tradespeople on the other. The great square block of a house, the main building of the older castle, whose wings had been thrown into its moat, whose forecourt had become flower gardens in the revolution of 1790, went on its even way under her iron rule, undisturbed by wars. (27)

This paean to the tenant farmer system in Flanders paints Flanders as a relic of feudal France that survived even the revolution. The region would seem to be immune to the erosion of class that occurred in Britain and the British army over the course of the war. But, in Mottram’s novels, time passes quickly; change happens in a matter of pages, and even the narrator is startled by the change that occurs. In a similar scene, but in the summer of 1916, this time between Madeleine’s father and the Baron, social codes have shifted. Jérôme has profited from the food shortages and the British army’s billeting needs. With this new wealth, his relationship to the Baron has changed: “Old Jérôme,

who, even a year before, would have stood in the Baron's presence until told to be seated, now sat down beside his landlord without apology" (45). Madeleine herself experiences the altered social structures produced by the war: she, a peasant, works in one of the government Ministries, first in Amiens, then in Paris. It is also important to note that this shift in class relations, exemplified by Jérôme's new attitude toward the Baron, belies the narrator's earlier observation about the perpetual "absence of change" in France. Once again, I would suggest, the narrator's descriptions conform to his pre-existing notions about the world, only to be undermined by his subsequent reporting. The novel may share an overt preoccupation with class with other novels from the period, but the salient identity difference throughout *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* proves to be nationality and, in some instance, race.

If the novel depicts the radical disruption of social life and the class system in France, we might read the narrator and the character's reassertion of national and ethnic identity as a response to this rapid and disorienting change. Mottram's novels, like others of the period, contain multiple references to the presence of other races on the front, in particular in the later years of the war and during reconstruction after the Armistice.⁷ Skene's assertion of his Englishness occurs in relation to the persistent "othering" of a panoply of races, ethnicities, and nationalities found on the Western front. Even among the Allies, Skene and Dormer confront the French, Belgians, Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, and Americans. The final scene of *Sixty-Four, Ninety Four!* is

⁷ Claire Buck's paper on Bagnold, Blunden and Masfield, presented at the conference "The Experience of War in the Space Between" in 2007 offers an excellent discussion of race on the Western front in Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner* and Blunden's *Undertones of War*. I am indebted to her drawing my attention to the presence of Chinese labourers in these works.

set in Dunkirk during demobilization. The narrator describes the masses of men as a sea of humanity:

A broad quay ran before one of the old Napoleonic barracks, and all about it men were swarming, in French, German, Austrian, Italian, Serbian, Russian and who knows what other uniforms, parts of uniforms, civilian suits with military cap or pair of field boots. Blue, blue-gray, slate-gray, gray-green, grass-green, ivy-green, with flat, peaked, feather or merely shapeless headgear – one in a thing like a lady’s muff – one in a bowler – sweating and stinking, talking in tongues of all races, they were eddying, forming and breaking around banners, interpreters and gendarmes...

Leaning on a stone coping, Skene gazed and discussed the scene with one of those disillusioned, well-educated, middle-aged Corporals that could exist in no army but the French, and who summed it all up thus:

“One could almost say that the Devil had mixed up all these poor souls expressly for the pleasure of seeing us comb them out again! This pot-pourri of races and tongues is the remnant escaped – and has had the good luck to preserve life, without home or family, existing like beasts for years. What have they learned? Nothing, my Lieutenant; give them rifles and rum, a flag to follow and a master to drive, and they would start another war to-morrow!” (378-9).

This chaotic mass of humanity is a quintessentially modern crowd. Any excitement that the narrator might feel is tempered by fear: there are echoes of Babel in the confusion, a certain contempt for the “sweating and stinking crowd,” and certainly the group is understood to possess the mentality of a herd.

Similar scenes of crowds of mixed race and ethnicity are found in *The Crime at Vanderlynden’s*. The protagonist of the third novel in the series, Stephen Dormer, observes what the narrator calls a “menagerie” on the front: “French and Belgians he knew, he had found them in the trenches beside him years before. Portuguese he had become accustomed to, Americans he looked forward to with anticipation. But farther back he found Chinese, Africans of all descriptions, Indians, East and West, while the French, in addition to their black troops, had Spanish and Italian labour” (479). This passage, like the one above, describes shifting, unstable racial and national allegiances.

The antagonism that Madeleine might feel towards the English, or Skene or Dormer toward the French, seems to disappear in the context of a larger, increasingly heterogeneous group. Skene looks on with a French corporal; Dormer describes feeling an allegiance to the French, Belgians, even the Portuguese, at least in contrast to the racial others he is now encountering.

The novels are, however, self-aware in their nationalism. Mottram deftly includes a scene in which Skene observes the chauvinism of Colonel Werner, an American. “Skene...though he admired the Colonel’s manners, had noticed how right American always was” (358-9). This extends to the Colonel’s appreciation of Madeleine, for just as the narrator likened Madeleine to an Englishwoman in the passage quoted above, Werner sees Madeleine as an incarnation of the ideal American woman: “That girl reminded me of tales my father used to tell of some of our women, in the old days. She might almost have passed for an American girl, I tell you” (359). But the narrator, though often myopic, tells a story about the fluidity of national identities. *The Spanish Farm* opens with a description of the palimpsestic, often hybrid, nature of national and cultural identity in Flanders, specifically at the Spanish Farm: “A farmer stood watching a battalion of infantry filing into his pasture. A queerer mixture of humanity could not have been imagined. The farmer wore a Dutch cap, spoke Flemish by preference, but could only write French. His farm was called Ferme l’Espagnole – The Spanish Farm – and stood on French soil” (3). The narrator invokes rigid ideas of national identity, but against this backdrop of constant national and ethnic conflict that has produced a complex mixture in which discrete “cultures” can no longer be isolated.

The Crime at Vanderlynden's offers a nuanced scrutiny of cultural and national difference. The initial source of confusion, the ambiguous "ruin" of a virgin, stems from a mistranslation: the literal sense is rendered correctly, but the significance of the term "virgin" in France is lost on the officers of the British army. This is not, however, the only instance of cultural miscomprehension: the scene between the mayor who was called to investigate and the British officers is rife with cultural particularity and misunderstandings. The major is immediately uncomfortable upon meeting the mayor: "Major Stevenage fidgeted. He had found it most difficult to go through this sort of thing, day after day, for years. He had been trained to deal with Asiatics" (401). As discussed above, the "other" to the British fluctuates between the peculiar French and a non-white other. Here, however, it is clear that French foreignness can at times be equally if not more disturbing. The British soldiers' lack of respect for the French, whether their bureaucracy or their shrines, is evident. In response to Major Stevenage, the mayor explains: "My garde champêtre comes to tell me that there is a crime of violence at Vanderlynden's. They demand that I go to make procès-verbal. I put on my tricolour sash. I take my official notebook. I arrive. I demand the officer. Il s'est foutu de moi! (Untranslatable)... His troops hold me in derision. They sing laughable songs of me in my official capacity-" (402). The narrator's sly aside, "untranslatable," comments not only on the exclamation "il s'est foutu de moi," (which approximates the English "f--- off"), but on each and every one of the mayor's actions: the procès-verbal, the wearing of a tricolour sash, and the use of an official notebook. As a French officer observes later to Dormer, the affront to the mayor is the true cause for the French army's pursuit of the claim (438).

That the crime is in fact the desecration of a shrine can be read as a critique of the insensitivity of the British to other cultures and of British imperialism's many guises.

This is evident in the following dialogue between Dormer and his fellow officer in the British army, Kavanagh:

“Well, this chap I’m telling you of was billeted there. He was attached to a Trench Mortar battery. He was in charge of the mules. He didn’t talk a lot of rot about it, as you suggest he should. One of his mules was wounded and the other sick. He broke down the front of the shrine at the corner of the pasture to get a bit of shelter for them.

The effect of this recital was not what Dormer expected.

“That was an unspeakably shocking thing to do, worse than losing any number of mules!”

“I suppose you’re a Catholic?”

“Yes, I am!”

“I thought as much. Well, I’m not, nor was this driver I’m telling you about. He just hated the waste and destruction of it all.”

“So he destroyed something more precious and permanent,”

“He thought a live mule was better than a dead saint.”

“He was wrong.” (425).

Kavanagh, of course, is not only Catholic, but from his name, one might assume that he is Irish. The desecration of the shrine is an affront not only to the peasants in Flanders, but also to a significant, if largely silent, portion of the British army. At the end of the war, Dormer concludes: “The Crime at Vanderlynden’s was the War, nothing more nor less” (520). By this, he means that it stands not only for his experience of the war, but that of others as well. “The Crime at Vanderlynden’s showed the whole thing in miniature. The English had been welcomed as Allies, resented as intruders, but never had they become homogenous with the soil and its natives, nor could they ever leave any lasting mark on the body or spirit of the place. They were still incomprehensible to Vanderlynden’s, and Vanderlynden’s to them” (539). The novel, too, shows “the whole thing in miniature”: it

narrates the war in what is perhaps one of the only modes available: a rambling, absurd tale with no conclusion.

In *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*, this decisive shift to the absurd takes place in the third novel. While the first two novels have strong affinities to the realist novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the third anticipates the absurdism of a later war novel, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.⁸ Though the form of the *roman-fleuve* not only allows but encourages multiple perspectives, the extent to which Madeleine Vanderlynden, Skene, and Dormer experience radically different realities during the war breaks the frame, as it were, of the *roman-fleuve*. The *roman-fleuve* posits a shareable, if not shared, history. What *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* reveals most fully in its final installment is that the war is fundamentally about the intractability of cultural difference, throughout the Empire, across Europe, within Britain, and even in private life. To narrate the war seamlessly would be to ignore this reality, and to construct a history of difference (of war) as though difference did not exist. The initial fragmentation of perspective – the telling of the story of the war first as seen by Madeleine, then as seen by Skene – proves to be only one of an infinite number of differences of perspective. In its many references to the soldiers and refugees from other cultures that people the fields of Flanders by the end of the war, the novels gesture toward an infinite and ever-expanding number of perspectives on the war and in the marked “Britishness” of their narrator, the novels gesture toward their inability to imagine the war from these other perspectives. The

⁸ Terry Phillips likens the element of the absurd in this third novel to Kafka, for instance (237). Michael Garrety also detects a shift in tone in the third installment: “The last novel, *The Crime at Vanderlynden's*, is in some ways a pendant to the others; although it has its genesis in the farm, it is more discursive and reflective about the war, gaining its unity from the use of motifs... The tone here is lighter in places” (15). Though I would agree with Garrety's assessment of the novel's interest in broader reflections on the war, I would have to disagree with his feeling that the tone is lighter; I find it much darker, and much more pessimistic.

narrator of the *roman-fleuve*, who purports to see the war from multiple vantage points – his own, Madeleine's, Skene's, Dormer's – cannot ultimately transcend the limitations of his own perspective.

Toward the conclusion of *The Crime at Vanderlynden's*, Dormer observes that he cannot see the war, save for the objects that are within his immediate field of vision:

Here he was, an incident in one of the biggest battles in the world. All he could see was a neglected arable, smashed buildings, a broken bridge and a blocked by-road, all shrouded in steamy vapour. He made out that it was the Lewis opposite the end of the bridge that was firing. He crawled along the gully that had been dug from the château gate to the roadway, and so to the emplacement by the step-off of the bridge. (514)

This passage connects Mottram closely to other works of First World War literature and reinforces Eric Leed's argument, discussed at the outset of this chapter, that combatants in the First World War had a perspective on the war that prevented them from grasping the war in its totality. While the expansive nature of the *roman-fleuve* might purport to offer a panoramic view of the war, moving from a trench in Flanders to a farm just behind the lines, into the streets of Paris and across the Channel to England, the narrator emphasizes the distinction between his omniscience, however limited his view may often be, and the restricted view of his characters. A single perspective on the war – Dormer's perspective, for instance – affords a view of nothing more than a ruined farm and destroyed road. Just as in *Parade's End* Ford emphasized the limits of any perspective on the war – including that of his own, as novelist – *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* makes no claim to be a complete or whole vision of the war.

The Return of the Soldier: shell shock and the gendering of narrative authority

Like *Parade's End*, *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* offers a formal solution to the problems of perspective posed by the events of the First World War and the growing awareness of the crisis of historicism. Where Ford elaborates a parallel between the subjectivity of a given perspective and new understandings of history and the form of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Mottram's *roman-fleuve* reveals the limitations of perspective by clearly distinguishing between different ways of seeing the war. But in Rebecca West's 1918 novella, *The Return of the Soldier*, the reader has access to only a single perspective. Jenny, the narrator, tells the story of the unexpected return from the war of her shell shocked cousin, Chris Baldry. But as Jenny proves to be an unreliable narrator, *The Return of the Soldier* elaborates a parallel between the narrator and the historian's unreliability and, as in *Parade's End*, expresses an anxiety about women controlling the historical narratives.

The Return of the Soldier opens mid-war as Jenny and Kitty, Chris's wife, anxiously await the arrival of a letter from Chris, who is on the front but has not communicated with them for over two weeks. The comfortable routine of their daily lives is interrupted by the arrival of a stranger, a working class woman named Margaret. When she explains that she has had a letter from Chris, who is shell shocked, both Jenny and Kitty are immediately distrustful and confused, unfamiliar as they (and other civilians) were initially with the concept of shell shock. Shortly thereafter, however, they receive confirmation of Chris's condition and, the next day, he returns from the trenches in France with a peculiar case of amnesia: he believes the year to be 1901 rather than 1916, and himself to be fifteen years younger. Like Christopher Tietjens in *Parade's End*, Chris Baldry has lost much of his memory, including all memory of the war. Chris

Baldry has no memory of his wife, Kitty, but is desperate to see Margaret, whom he loved in his youth. With remarkable concision, the novella describes the effects of this situation on the world of Baldry Court and the efforts made to restore Chris's memory.

Chris Baldry has returned to a world where the unimaginable has occurred. He is shocked to read of the violence of the war, especially the atrocities reported to have occurred in Belgium. As a literary device, Chris's shell shock figures the gulf that the war has created between the past and the present. His inability to remember the intervening years – the years leading up to the war and the war itself – is a metaphor for the impossibility of sketching a continuous narrative that can adequately describe the traumatic change wrought by the war. Between 1901 and 1916, Chris has passed from a state of idyllic innocence to the one of absolute horror in the trenches of the war, but this latter experience was evidently so traumatic that Chris's mind has repressed all memory of the war, and in doing so, has erased all memory of the years that preceded it. Thus, the soldier who returns from the war in 1916 is the young Chris Baldry of 1901: he expects his home and his cousin, Jenny, to be as they were in 1901; he remains passionately in love with Margaret, but cannot remember Kitty; and even as he walks he is "loose-limbed like a boy" (90). Unable to bridge the gap that lies between his early life and the reality of the war, Chris returns to an earlier point in his life.

The same narrative, a loss of innocence culminating in a traumatic event, is true of the historical narrative of these years. Chris's life narrative can be read as a metonym for the toll exacted by the consolidation of British imperial power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: in 1901, faced with the impending ruin of his father's business, Chris left for Mexico, "to keep the mines going through the revolution, to keep

the firm's head above water and Baldry Court sleek and hospitable, to keep everything bright and splendid save only his youth, which after that was dulled by care" (53). Upon his return, Chris married Kitty, who transforms Baldry Court from the comfortable, well-worn house that it once was into a showpiece for the architectural magazines. The sleek, manicured surfaces of Baldry Court belie the suffering of its inhabitants: Chris and Kitty's young son dies as an infant. Much as Chris's accumulation of wealth is accompanied by excess, and shortly thereafter, death, the rising fortunes of Britain during this period are followed by a period of death and decline – the war.

The next chapter, on the figure of conversion in autobiographical narratives, will explore in greater detail the implications of the radical changes, real and imagined, effected by the war and the relationship between the individual's life and national history in the autobiographical narrative. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the parallels between the problems of writing history and the problems of narrating the war, reserving for the chapter on autobiography a more detailed consideration of the structures of retrospection that governs the writing of history and the writing of a life.

As a result of his amnesia, Chris Baldry lives neither in the present nor the past. In this respect, Chris is a liminal figure as described by historian Eric Leed in *No Man's Land*. Leed considers war experience as a rite of passage with three stages: rites of separation, liminal rites (those of the threshold/transition), and rites of incorporation (postliminal rites) (14). The separation stage involves transformation and change: society as a whole is removed from the familiar conditions of social life, and the citizen-soldier is removed from civilian status. The liminal stage is the experience of war, of existing beyond social norms (18-19). Though Leed understands liminality as social, West

dramatically and effectively figures Chris's liminality as both social and temporal. The idea of "return" is impossible as Chris inhabits two separate moments in time, though neither one fully. Chris has returned an outsider twice over: he is both a veteran whose mind has been altered by the war, and an amnesiac who believes that he is still a young man living in 1901. The novel focuses on the latter dislocation, which the narrator tends to describe as a state of temporal disjunction: "Strangeness had come into the house and everything was appalled by it, even time," as Jenny explains (25). Chris himself, however, is not himself "strange" because the pressing postwar problem of the reintegration of the returning soldiers had not yet come to pass.

The strict confinement of the novel's action to the domestic sphere is also the product of West's narrative structure and the amnesia plot, because in the world of Baldry Court, Chris's war experience is inaccessible both to Chris himself and to the female characters who populate this world. The trauma that has produced Chris's amnesia has erased all traces of itself in Chris's memory and all that Jenny, Kitty, and Margaret know of the war has been transmitted to them secondhand. The women have seen the war only by means of government-produced films, newspapers, and secondhand reports. This is emphasized early in the novel when Jenny recalls a recurring dream:

By night I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of No Man's Land, starting back here because he trod upon a hand, not even looking there because of the awfulness of an unburied head, and not until my dream was packed full of horror did I see him pitch forward on his knees as he reached safety – if it was that. For on the war films I have seen men slip down as softly from the trench parapet, and none but the grimmer philosophers would say that they had reached safety by their fall. (5)

The film to which Jenny refers is most likely *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), which purported to show footage of the battle itself. Released in 1916, it was subsequently

revealed that the central scene, in which a soldier dies, was in fact staged.⁹ Though this knowledge was not available to West (nor to the implied author of the novella), it compounds the effect of Jenny's reference to the film. The passage quoted above reveals the full extent to which Jenny's understanding of the war is mediated by government propaganda and by popular culture. Her dreams are shaped by a film, rather than a firsthand encounter with the reality of the trenches.

Jenny's distance from the war, both physical and psychological, foregrounds the gendered aspect of shell shock. Though there were certainly cases of women – nurses, ambulance drivers, and civilians – who experienced a form of shell shock, the term arose to describe the seemingly inexplicable psychological and physical symptoms exhibited by combatants. Accordingly, Elaine Showalter situates shell shock within the cultural matrix of gender relations. Showalter argues that the soldier in the trenches was in a position of powerlessness analogous to the restriction of women's activity to the domestic sphere, and that it is for this reason that the symptoms of shell shock (exhibited by men) mirror those of hysteria (exhibited by women) (173). Showalter writes of *The Return of the Soldier* that "West goes well beyond even the enlightenment of Rivers in grasping the connections between male hysteria and a whole range of male social obligations. While her account of the psychoanalytic process is simplistic, West's understanding of the unconscious motives and symbolic meanings of shell shock is moving and complex" (191). She argues that the enforced passivity of the trenches mimics the psychological effects of confinement to the home. But if the war is emasculating, relegating men from action to passivity, Chris Baldry's case of shell shock, his amnesia and regression, compounds his emasculation. In his confusion, Chris becomes dependent on Margaret,

⁹ See the chapter "The New Look of War" in Hynes's *A War Imagined* for further discussion of this point.

who responds to him in a maternal rather than a sexual manner. The situation, however, troubles both Jenny and Margaret, who together determine that Chris's dignity, by which they mean his masculinity, must be preserved.

Though his shell shock serves to protect his body and mind by taking him out of the war, shell shock deprives him of his masculinity. In the following passage, Jenny imagines Chris as an old man, and the vision disturbs her:

I knew that one must know the truth. I knew quite well that when one is adult one must raise to one's lips the wine of the truth, heedless that it is not sweet like milk but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk for ever queer and small like a dwarf... We had been utterly negligent of his future, blasphemously careless of the divine essential of his soul. For if we left him in his magic circle there would come a time when his delusion turned to senile idiocy; when his joy at the sight of Margaret disgusted the flesh, because his smiling mouth was slack with age; when one's eyes no longer followed him caressingly as he went down to look for the first primroses in the wood, but flitted here and there defensively to see that nobody was noticing the doddering old man... He who was as a flag flying from our tower would become a queer-shaped patch of eccentricity on the countryside, the stately music of his being would become a witless piping in the bushes. He would not be quite a man. (88)

Jenny looks at Chris with the harsh assessments of society in mind. The still-young Chris is permitted youthful desires, but the vision of an aged Chris, still desiring Margaret, is unacceptable. That "He would not be quite a man" is a terrible proposition for Jenny, and so she resolves to assist Chris with his return to normalcy, or manhood. Though Chris is treated by a psychologist, it is ultimately the women in the novel, Margaret and Jenny, who find the cure for Chris when they reason that the memory of his dead infant son will jolt him back to reality. The memory of this loss returns Chris to the present.

This "return," however, is as unnatural as his amnesiac return to the past. The novel concludes with the following image of Chris walking across the grounds of Baldry Court:

He walked not loose-limbed like a boy, as he had done that very afternoon, but with the soldier's hard tread upon the heel. It recalled to me that, bad as we were, we were yet not the worst circumstance of his return. When we had lifted the yoke of our embraces from his shoulders he would go back to that flooded trench in Flanders under that sky more full of flying death than clouds, to that No Man's Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead... (90)

Here, the image of Chris "restored" to his natural state is complicated by the description of the front as nature perverted by war. Jenny realizes that the reinforcement of gender roles is far from natural, as it condemns Chris to the war, and likely death, but she prefers this outcome to leaving Chris in his madness. The women in the novel are complicit in the policing of gender, and in doing so, complicit in the slaughter of war.¹⁰

That Jenny and Margaret effectively conspire not only to cure Chris, but to return him to the war, brings to light the novel's ambivalence about the reversal of gender roles and the redistribution of power during the war. It is only through Chris's powerlessness that Margaret comes to have any power over him, but Margaret's maternal instinct assumes a different, threatening, colour when she resolves to return Chris to the war. Jenny, too, gains power at Chris's expense. Initially, Jenny is largely powerless because she is an unmarried female relative who is financially dependent on Chris. Chris's shell shock alters Jenny's position: suddenly she, like Margaret, is in a position to decide Chris's fate and, equally importantly, to describe and to interpret what has happened to him.

Jenny's narration of the novel is crucial to understanding the shift in power relations occasioned by the war. The form that Chris's shell shock takes figures his

¹⁰ Misha Kavka argues that Chris Baldry's shell shock figures the trauma of masculinity. War trauma reveals masculinity to be an empty construct, both for the individual (Chris) and for the social order which is shaped around the idea of masculinity (the three women); that is, the war does not undo masculinity so much as reveal that Edwardian masculinity has been a construct. The war is not the traumatic event, but the moment at which the real trauma, the realization that masculinity is a repressive construct, can no longer be borne. The "cure" for this crisis in masculinity is to attempt to restore the masculine order, and so Margaret's curing of Chris reflects the complicity of women, who are in thrall to masculinity.

inability to tell his own story. Unable to remember the past, Chris cannot narrate his story or that of the war. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris's story is repeatedly told for him, first by Margaret, who arrives with the news of his condition (12), then by his cousin, who is in France with Church (19), and finally by Jenny herself, who describes not only what happened to Chris, but takes control of his words. At the centre of *The Return of the Soldier* is a long chapter in which Chris relates to Jenny the story of his love affair with Margaret. In a peculiar twist, however, the story is not related in Chris's words. Rather than quoting Chris, Jenny instead re-tells the story in her words, prefacing it with the comment, "I have lived so long with the story which he told me that I cannot now remember his shy phrases. But this is how I have visualized his meeting with love on his secret island. I think it is the truth" (33). Thus, though *The Return of the Soldier* might appear to be a polyvocal narrative, in which Jenny speaks, then Chris of 1901, and finally Jenny once again, it is in fact strictly Jenny's story. In narrating the story, Jenny speaks for and as Chris, a controlling and disconcerting narrative stance.

For as *The Return of the Soldier* unfolds, the reader gradually becomes aware of Jenny's sexual possessiveness and jealousy. A myriad of remarks that Jenny makes concerning her cousin reveal that she is, perhaps unconsciously, in love with her cousin. There is an interesting parallel to be drawn with Henry James's *A Turn of the Screw*: as in James's tale told by the governess, Jenny is also an unreliable narrator who is dependent on a powerful male figure and tells a tale which may be distorted by sexual repression and jealousy.¹¹ This aspect of the novel's narration troubles Jenny's authority and casts the authority of her narrative into question.

¹¹ Prior to writing *The Return of the Soldier*, Rebecca West wrote a critical work on Henry James. James's experiments with narration and perspective are a significant influence.

The power dynamic of the narration in *The Return of the Soldier* extends even beyond Jenny's unreliable narration and unexplained ventriloquism, as Jenny narrates Chris's story in an additional sense as well. Because shell shock leaves Chris unable to remember his life after 1901, Chris has a narrative of self which ends in 1901, just prior to his assumption of responsibility for the family's finances and before he married Kitty. This sense of "Chris Baldry" is thus radically different from the one that Jenny and Kitty, Chris's wife, have. Thus far, I have discussed how his deprivation of agency extends to the retrospective narrative of his life. But, just Chris is unable to see his psychological state, to bear witness to his own shell shock, and so it is Jenny who tells his story, Chris is also unable to heal himself, or to decide if he wants to be treated, and so it is Margaret and Jenny who decide that Chris must be cured. Jenny, consequently, not only writes the story of Chris's past life, but also writes the story of his future life by choosing a course for him.

In *The Return of the Soldier*, the power dynamics in the world of Baldry Court are interconnected with the narrative techniques West employs. West's unreliable narrator is revealed to have not only the ability to control the telling of the story, but also to determine its outcome. Jenny is given control of Chris's story by the nature of his shell shock: the shell shocked soldier is unable to describe his own condition, and so it falls to an unafflicted individual, in this case a female who has never seen the front, to describe his condition. Shell shock silences Chris three times: first making him forget the past, and then depriving him of the ability to tell his story, and finally robbing him of all self-determination, of the ability to say which course he wishes to follow. Consequently, shell shock further widens the gap between the men who fought and the women who

stayed behind: Chris's inability to remember the post-1901 world, his literal inhabitation of a different time and place, is the product of the gulf that the war has opened up between him and the women in the novel. The novel responds to this gulf by situating Jenny in a position of power, albeit temporary. One way to read *The Return of the Soldier*, then, might be as the text of a witness, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub employ the term in *Testimony*. Felman and Laub understand "literature and art as a precocious mode of witnessing – of accessing reality – when all other modes of knowledge are precluded" (xx). And yet, the novel seems to resist this interpretation, suggesting that Jenny's control over the narrative is not simply the burden of the witness, but something more sinister, because she assumes control over Chris's future, perhaps even sending him to his death.

Though there is no historian in *The Return of the Soldier*, as such, West's novella belongs firmly in any discussion of the relationship between the writing of history and the problems of subjective perspective precisely because the novella casts Jenny's assumption of narrative control in such an unflattering light. By linking Jenny's narrative control to her power to send a man to his death, West's novella reveals its anxiety about the power Jenny possesses as a result of the war. Just as Jenny comes to speak for Chris because shell shock has silenced him, she writes a war novel because those who would otherwise write of the war – the combatants, nurses, and civilians on the front lines – have been silenced by the war. In *The Return of the Soldier*, West's choice of narrator registers the anxiety about the writers fortunate enough to be able to speak of the war – in other words, those who were not silenced by shell shock. While Mrs. Wannop's assumption of the mantle of the historian in *Parade's End* is ultimately viewed in positive

terms, as I have argued, there is a decidedly darker assessment of Jenny's assumption of the role of narrator and chronicler of historical events in *The Return of the Soldier*. Shell shock is a powerful symbol for the gulf between women's and men's experience of the war, and the power Jenny wields over the narrative figures the power dynamics of this gap.

Mrs. Dalloway and Alternative Conceptions of History

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and, briefly, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), two war novels that propose new understandings of history. Much as Ford imagines a new form for history in *Parade's End* – both in the narrative method of his own novel and in Mrs. Wannop's yet-to-be-written women's history of the war – Woolf also contemplates new methods for the writing of history. Yet, Woolf's novels are not novels in which the representation of the First World War is, at least at first glance, a primary concern. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, set on a single day in June 1923 in post-war London, passing references to the war – thoughts that “the War was over” (5), of the near-perfect gloves that one had bought “before the War” (11) – signal that the war is in the background for Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of a British member of parliament. But Septimus Smith, a shell shocked veteran, continues to experience the war: in his terrifying hallucinations, Smith is still at the front, watching his good friend Evans die. In post-war society, however, Smith is marginalized; visible reminders of the war are not welcome. *To the Lighthouse* is the story of two days at the Ramsay family's house in the Hebrides. The first day is set several years before the war, and the second, several years after. The war figures only in the intervening section,

“Time Passes,” in which the narrator describes the abandoned house against the backdrop of the war in Europe. Though the war seems peripheral in these two novels, the matter of how to represent the war – specifically, which events constitute the history of the war – is inextricably intertwined with Woolf’s critique of history and her experiments with perspective.

In the *Times Literary Supplement* of January 9, 1919, Woolf reviewed D. Bridgman Metchim’s *Our Own History of the War. From a South London View*, published by Arthur G. Stockwell in 1918. Woolf begins her review:

Mr Metchim has discovered the very important truth that the history of the war is not and never will be written from our point of view. The suspicion that this applies to wars in the past also has been much increased by living through four years almost entirely composed of what journalists call ‘historic days.’ No one who has taken stock of his own impressions since 4 August 1914, can possibly believe that history as it is written closely resembles history as it is lived; but as we are for the most part quiescent, and, if skeptical ourselves, content to believe that the rest of mankind believes, we have no right to complain if we are fobbed off once more with historians’ histories. (“The War in the Street” 3)

Karen Levenback cites this passage as indicative of what she calls Woolf’s belief in “civilian immunity” from the war – the sense that the civilians had not truly been part of the war (23-25). The title of the review, Levenback suggests, is deeply ironic, “as Metchim suggests that there was no war from the street” (24). But, Woolf’s opening line suggests that “our point of view” does exist. She concludes her review by noting that the problem that Metchim’s book identifies is that “the history, is, as it is always fated to be, your history, not ours” (4). Where Levenback takes this as evidence of Woolf (and other civilians’) sense of exclusion from the war, I would posit that it is, equally, evidence of Woolf’s frustration with the available forms for representing the war as history.

In the search for a history that could be deemed “ours,” rather than “historians’ histories,” Woolf turns to the novel. Much like *Parade’s End*, *Mrs. Dalloway* challenges the current state of historiography by staging the reading and writing of history within the novel. Both novels include a historian among their cast of characters, but where Mrs. Wannop stood for radical new possibilities, Doris Kilman stands for the moribund practices of early twentieth-century historiography. Miss Kilman, who holds a university degree in modern history, is tutor to Clarissa Dalloway’s daughter Elizabeth. Though Miss Kilman is a difficult, unlikeable woman, Clarissa is disproportionately hostile to her. Clarissa’s feelings are motivated at least in part by a sense of rivalry for Elizabeth’s affections and by concern that Elizabeth may be entertaining sexual feelings for Miss Kilman. But any understanding of Clarissa’s antagonism is complicated by Clarissa’s repeated references to the fact that Miss Kilman is a historian. Wondering why Elizabeth spends much of her time with Miss Kilman, Clarissa thinks: “It might be falling in love. But why with Miss Kilman? who had been badly treated of course; one must make allowances for that, and Richard said she was very able, had a really historical mind” (11). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, we find that Clarissa’s antagonism is directed not only to a woman who eschews Clarissa’s values, her love of beauty and social interaction, and competes with her for her daughter’s attention, but toward a woman who has “a really historical mind.”¹²

¹² The most sustained treatment of the character of Miss Kilman is Elizabeth Pridamore’s article “A Don, Virginia Woolf, the Masses, and the Case of Miss Kilman.” Though Pridamore, as I do, reads Miss Kilman’s training in history as significant, Pridamore works from the premise that Woolf “applauds Kilman’s achievement,” her obtaining of a degree (131). Moreover, Pridamore suggests that the historical training Kilman has received is consistent with what she calls a modernist sense of the importance of history (131-132). Here, too, I disagree, for Woolf’s representation of Miss Kilman supports my general claim that a central element of post-war modernist writing was a re-evaluation of the value and methods of history.

Though Richard Dalloway approves of Miss Kilman's intellectual ability and "really historical mind," the novel suggests that such a mind carries little weight in post-war Britain. Though Miss Kilman is a teacher of history and certainly the most intellectual character in the novel, she is also one of the most marginalized. Miss Kilman thinks of herself, "She had her degree. She was a woman who had made her way in the world. Her knowledge of modern history was more than respectable" (132). But this offers no protection from wartime hostility toward Germans, and no social or economic security, let alone power. In her unsympathetic portrayal of Miss Kilman, Woolf does not lament the decline of history, but mounts a critique of a specific kind of history.

Woolf's critique of the historian is one of many in modern literature. In his 1966 essay "The Burden of History," Hayden White writes:

In the decades before the First World War this hostility towards the historical consciousness and the historian gained wide currency among intellectuals in every country of Western Europe. Everywhere there was a growing suspicion that Europe's feverish rummaging among the ruins of its past expressed less a sense of firm control over the present than an unconscious fear of a future too horrible to contemplate. (119)

In the aftermath of the war, history became "a prime target of those who had lost faith in man's capacity to make sense out of his situation when the war had ended" (120). This phenomenon is mirrored in the literature of the time. White writes that "a good deal of twentieth-century literature...manifest[s] a hostility toward the historical consciousness even more marked than anything found in the scientific thought of our time" (114-5). In particular, "[t]he modern writer's hostility towards history is evidenced most clearly in the practice of using the historian to represent the extreme example of repressed sensibility in the novel and theatre," he argues, citing a host of late nineteenth and early

twentieth century writers, and discussing at length the figure of the historian in George Eliot, Henrik Ibsen, and André Gide (115).

The unflattering portrayal of Miss Kilman is now, however, a Nietzschean attack on the deadening effects of history, but a critique of a specific kind of historian. Much as Ford ridicules the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* but imagines a new form of history, figured by Mrs. Wannop's women's history of the war, Woolf critiques Miss Kilman's idea of history only to imagine a different kind of history. The clearest articulation of Woolf's vision for a different kind of history is found in a much later text, *Three Guineas* (1938). In the three interrelated essays of *Three Guineas*, Woolf discusses education at some length when she wonders if she should contribute a guinea to a women's college. She offers a guinea on the condition that it be used to teach "Not the arts of dominating other people; nor the arts of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital... It should teach the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people's lives and minds, and the little arts of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. The aim of the new college, the cheap college, should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine" (200). Traditional history – presumably the history in which Miss Kilman received her degree – is the former kind, a history of nations, government, and battles. The values of Clarissa Dalloway, her desire to "kindle and illuminate" through her party, are the product of the latter kind of knowledge. The portrayal of the relationship between Clarissa and Miss Kilman, and their antagonism, is produced precisely by this clash of values.¹³

¹³ This facet of my argument extends Lee Edwards's reading of *Mrs Dalloway* into the domain of history. In her seminal 1977 article, Edwards argues that "The politics of Mrs. Dalloway are such that life is possible only when roses, parties, and joy triumph over war, authority, and death" (162). But, I would hesitate to suggest that every facet of Clarissa necessarily triumphs over Miss Kilman. While Clarissa is

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa's understanding of history offers a new conception of history, albeit in embryonic form. Clarissa Dalloway does not, it would seem, have "a really historical mind," in the sense that she recalls events deemed to be of importance in national and world history. Commentators on the novel have often singled out Clarissa Dalloway's ignorance of politics, especially her inability to distinguish between Armenians and Albanians; as Richard Dalloway heads off to a committee meeting, Clarissa can't remember what the meeting is for. "'Armenians,' he said; or perhaps it was 'Albanians'" (119). She acknowledges that "She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she had heard Richard say so over and over again) – no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?) – the only flower she could bear to see cut" (120). Karen Levenback is among the critics who has used this passage as evidence for Clarissa's deplorable distance from modern history, including the war and the Armenian genocide.¹⁴ Levenback argues that "Although the war and its effects are 'something central that permeate' the novel, they are unnoticed by Clarissa Dalloway" (78). Woolf, she argues, dramatized the widespread blindness to the war that characterized post-war Britain, and Clarissa Dalloway exemplifies this harmful situation: "Clarissa did not only enjoy an illusion of immunity from the war; she also, like the other civilians represented in the

threatened by Miss Kilman's attachment to Elizabeth, and especially by her lesbianism, Clarissa's unhappiness with the sexual aspect of her marriage suggests quite clearly that the novel does not endorse Clarissa's repression of her desire for women.

¹⁴ See also Trudi Tate's work. Tate argues that the "ruling-class women in the novel are profoundly ignorant" (153) and argues that anyone who read the newspapers (as Clarissa ought to have done) would have understood the difference between the Albanians and the Armenians. As Tate points out, the Armenian question was in the news throughout June 1923 because the Lausanne Treaty, which put an end to the idea of a nation-state for the Armenians, was signed in July 1923. She uses this incident as the basis for her claim that Woolf's novel satirizes the ignorance of women like Clarissa Dalloway.

novel, believes herself immune from its effects and evidence of them in the post-war world” (81). I do, in part, agree with Levenback’s assessment of Clarissa’s blindness to some of the damages wrought by the war, namely the isolation of Miss Kilman, who is ostracized for her German roots, but Clarissa is not entirely without a sense of history, nor a sense of the effects of the war.

The opening pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*, focalized through Clarissa Dalloway, lay the groundwork for an alternative history of the war, both in the content of this history and in the form it assumes. Thus, it is Clarissa who thinks, ecstatically, that what she loved was “life; London; this moment of June” (4) and begins her next thought “For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven – over” (5). The war and especially Lady Bexborough return to Clarissa’s mind on several occasions over the course of the day. Thoughts such as these suggest that Clarissa is not immune to the effects of the war, nor its after-effects. Rather, Clarissa approaches the history of the war with an understanding that rejects what Nietzsche calls “monumental history.”

In “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” first published in 1873, Nietzsche identifies three approaches to history: the monumental, which studies the great figures and events of the past; the antiquarian, which values the past simply because it is old; and the critical, which interrogates the value of the past. He attacks “monumental history” because its focus on the great figures of the past has an oppressive effect on the

present: “If, therefore the monumental mode of regarding history *rules* over the other modes – I mean over the antiquarian and critical – the past itself suffers *harm*: whole segments of it are forgotten, despised, and flow away in an uninterrupted colourless flood” (70-1). In other words, such a history elevates a very limited number of events of significance and in doing so, relegates the rest to oblivion. By the turn of the twentieth century, Nietzsche’s rallying cry against a “great men” approach to history had gained support in various quarters. Within Woolf’s Bloomsbury’s circle, Lytton Strachey’s irreverent portrayal of four great Victorian figures in *Eminent Victorians* (1918) struck at the heart of the Victorian establishment, and especially at the work that Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, had undertaken as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Rather than representing great figures or events from the war, *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a history of the “colourless flood” of the First World War.

Woolf’s rejection of monumental history manifests itself in the narrator’s insistence on synchronic rather than diachronic narrative, and a studied inattention to dates, as in the following passage. Nearly a third of the novel passes before a date is specified by Peter Walsh as he muses on the changes in England in his absence, “Those five years – 1918 to 1923 – had been, he suspected, somehow very important” (71). This fixing of the day as one in June, 1923, happens only a third of the way through the novel, and in the course of identifying the year, the narrator betrays his or her disregard for chronological precision.¹⁵ What Woolf calls in her diary the “tunnels” of past events and

¹⁵ In *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*, Karen Levenback explains that “*Mrs. Dalloway* is explicitly dated, in ‘the middle of June’ 1923, a week before the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919” (46). I would say, however, that though the date of the events of the novel is stated, it is not foregrounded. *Mrs. Dalloway*, as a whole, does not set great store by specific dates.

memories that she “excavates” behind her characters generate render time fluid, shifting from the present of the novel in June, 1923, to the past.

Rather than producing a narrative which fits into “monumental history,” the novel actively displaces this history from its narrative. The scene in which the mysterious grey car disrupts the action of the novel, linking the perceptions of all the characters, is an unresolved mystery. In one of the earliest narrative digressions, the narrator describes the car’s occupant’s future existence in history:

The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for the Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hair’s breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first and last time, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known. (16)

“The face in the motor car,” however, has little place in Woolf’s narrative of Clarissa Dalloway. Here, the narrator pauses to note the effect of the car on the crowd, and hazard a guess about the future importance of the “face in the motor car,” but this is not a central fact to the narrative at hand, to this vision of history. Even the appearance of the Prime Minister at Clarissa’s party, a presence which Clarissa finds deeply gratifying, produces a ripple in the crowd as momentary and ultimately insubstantial as that of the car. Woolf returns to her motif: the Prime Minister appears and causes a stir, but ultimately his function is primarily to bring people together, to focus the dispersed attention of the crowd on a single event and in doing so, to further human intercourse. In the same way,

the car brings people together, reinvigorates and refocuses their attention, much like the Kreemo advertisement written in the sky by an airplane.

Monumental history and personages have a function, but it is ultimately secondary to that of social interaction. This is particularly true for Clarissa Dalloway: her relationship to the war centres on the figure of Lady Bexborough. Virtually all of Clarissa's thoughts of the war return to this memory of Lady Bexborough opening a bazaar while holding in one hand the telegram that brought news of her son's death. In one respect, Lady Bexborough is the woman that Clarissa might have been; had Clarissa had a son, rather than a daughter, she might well have lost her son in the war. Clarissa is no stranger to such loss, however; Peter Walsh reveals that Clarissa witnessed her sister, Sylvia, "killed by a falling tree" before her very eyes (78), and proposes that this early trauma led Clarissa to adopt the belief that if "the whole thing [life] is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners...; decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way, - her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady" (77). Peter's articulation of Clarissa's beliefs sheds a different light on Clarissa's behaviour, elucidating a philosophical basis for Clarissa's love of flowers, people, and parties. Clarissa deliberately continues to value social interaction in the face of terrible adversity and the same, evidently, is true of Lady Bexborough. Her refusal to let the news of her son's death interfere with her participation in the bazaar should be read not simply as a sign of stoicism, but as a gesture of defiance against the horrific events of the war. Clarissa's belief in what Peter

calls “all that interminable traffic that women of her sort keep up,” involving “visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people; running about with bunches of flowers, little presents; So-and-so was going to France – must have an air cushion” and so forth (77). In the context of these values, the important events in history are a series of seemingly fleeting interactions and relationships.

Turning briefly to *To the Lighthouse* (1927) enables us to see clearly that Woolf consistently links a rejection of a monumental history of the war to the development of alternative perspectives on the war and, thus, alternative histories of the war. While only a single day elapses in the course of the first section of the novel, and again in the third section, the second section of the novel spans the many years that pass between the other sections. Entitled “Time Passes,” the second section begins with the inhabitants of the house going to sleep. Darkness settles over the house, and the narrative shifts from describing the words, thoughts, and actions of characters to describing the passage of time. In the absence of the Ramsay family, air and wind move through the house, light from passing ships or the lighthouse itself enters the windows, stairs and walls creak, weeds and spider webs grow, and Mrs McNab, a local woman, comes to clean and air the house.

The lyrical narrative that spans the period between the first and third sections is, occasionally, interrupted by parenthetical asides in square brackets, rather than Woolf’s normal parentheses. The section subverts the conventional relationship between the character and the setting, between “history” and the everyday, by rendering the passage of time through the changes to the house. In the background, rendered in brief, unmoored asides, are the “events” in the lives of the characters and the period of the war. The first

of these seven interruptions reads, “[Here Mr Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was past midnight]” (173); it anchors the text in the present of the novel. The next, however, reveals the rapid passage of time: “[Mr Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]” (175). Here, the abruptness of this information mimics the suddenness of Mrs Ramsay’s death. But after this aside, the narrative settles into a regular rhythm in which the lyrical description of the passage of time is punctuated by brief asides that bring news of war, marriages, and deaths: “[Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father’s arm was given in marriage that May. What, people said, could be more fitting? And, they added, how beautiful she looked!]” (179); “[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.]” (180); “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]” (181); “[Mr Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an unexpected success. The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry.]” (183). In each of these instances, the novel evokes the events that are normally at the centre of a novel but pushes them rapidly to the side. The war, which so often occupies a central position in the works of history that Nietzsche deems monumental, penetrates the world of the novel only by virtue of Andrew’s death and Mr Carmichael’s success.

I read “Time Passes” as a deliberate subversion of the ordering principles of novels and histories. Woolf inverts the relationship between background and foreground,

bringing small details to the fore, whether a shawl hung over a skull or the light cast by a lighthouse, while compressing news of the war – its outbreak, battle reports, and the effect on civilians in England – into the parenthetical comments about the Ramsay household. In “Time Passes,” Woolf offers us a glimpse of an alternative employment of the novel and the history, one in which the thoughts and actions of human beings are relegated to the background. The subject matter of monumental history, and the historical discourse that entrenches the events of monumental history into the historical consciousness, disappears. In the same *TLS* review from which I quoted above, “The War from the Street,” Woolf writes that “Soon your mind...has had certain inscriptions scored upon it so repeatedly that it believes that it has originated them” (4). *Time Passes* attempts to wipe the mind clean of these inscriptions, focusing the narrator (and by extension, the reader’s) attention on the minutiae of existence. This section of the novel orients us to the slow passage of time in a world with only traces of human activity. This shift away from human activity and the human mind extends even to the narration. The dominant narrative mode of the novel – the variable focalization that takes us from the mind of one character to another – is abandoned in favour of external focalization, in which the disembodied voice of the narrator describes the changes wrought by time in the summer house.

The novel, however, returns to the lives of the characters of the extended Ramsay household by the end of the section. The final aside reads “[Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in September. Mr Carmichael came by the same train.]” (192). This joins the narrative to the time of the third section, in which the Ramsay children, Mr Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and August Carmichael return to the summer

house for the first time since the death of Mrs. Ramsay. But the radical experiment of “Time Passes” has achieved its end: having powerfully disrupted the narrative of the novel, the remainder of the work is haunted by echoes of the different modes of writing evoked by “Time Passes.” The narrator returns to a day in the life of the Ramsays, leaving behind the incremental changes effected by the passage of time, as well as the world of monumental history.

In *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf’s narrators view the war retrospectively through the eyes of Clarissa Dalloway, or from a remarkable external vantage point that perceives only the smallest of details. In this manner, both novels reject the narrative mode that would describe the war in chronological, linear terms, imagining in its stead new forms of history, whether Clarissa Dalloway’s relational understanding of history and the war, in which every small gesture or brief exchange is, indeed, historical and meaningful, or a detached, disembodied glimpse of a single, abandoned house throughout the years of the war. In both instances, Woolf’s deliberate use of shifting focalization prevents the formation of a single, “historical” narrative that purports to survey great historical events. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, all thoughts are historical in the sense that they are narratives, or pieces of narratives, about the past, which are produced by a single and singular consciousness; in *To the Lighthouse*, history, as we understand it, is cast aside or relegated to parentheses. The two novels deliberately reassess what a historical narrative of the First World War should include and how it should be told, offering alternative narratives of the First World War.

This chapter has mapped a set of concerns about the writing of history as they appear in a set of First World War novels. While the references to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the writing of history in Ford's *Parade's End* make explicit the culture-wide anxiety about the inherently subjective nature of historiography, the rise of the woman historian, and new forms of history, the other texts studied in this chapter confirm the prevalence of these concerns. From Rebecca West's wartime novella about the new phenomenon of shell shock (and the soldier's attendant forgetting of history), through Mottram's decision to imagine the war from incommensurable perspectives, to Virginia Woolf's radical rewriting of the war, these novels offer a range of perspectives on the war, partial glimpses of a phenomenon so large as to preclude apprehension. In each case, the perception of the war is often presented as overtly biased, excessively mediated, or ineluctably distorted.

Visible across each of the novels discussed in this chapter is a tension between the search for a form that will acknowledge the indeterminacy of a single (or even multiple) perspectives, yet permit the generation of a historical narrative, if only one that is provisional, tentative, or imagined. To this end, Ford envisions a new kind of history – a woman's history of the war – while Mottram stages a failed attempt to accommodate cultural difference by including two diverging perspectives. West embeds a war story in the domestic sphere, acknowledging the limitations of her unreliable narrator, while Woolf proposes new understandings of history.

Chapter 2: Autobiographies of War and Narratives of Conversion

My claim that many writers of the First World War understood their war writing as both literature and history is borne out most clearly in the autobiographical works of the war. For witnesses to the First World War, the effects of the war on the self needed to be told in conjunction with the events of the war. As Vera Brittain discovered, writing one's own story of the war can rapidly entail writing a history of the war. Her notes for the project reveal that Brittain began work on her autobiography, *Testament of Youth*, by constructing elaborate timelines of events in the war and her life.¹ Her recollections of working at the hospital in Étaples in 1917, moreover, led her to historical inquiries about the date of the short-lived mutiny in the camp, all news of which had been heavily censored at the time. Brittain wrote to her good friend Winifred Holtby to ask her to ask a friend about the date for the Étaples mutiny. In a letter dated March 14, 1932, Brittain writes: "I believe you said once that you found it mentioned in one of the war books but I couldn't remember which one, and have been through all the likely ones – Graves, Blunden, Sassoon – quite in vain. Faith Moulson, who might remember, is in India" (Brittain and Handley-Taylor 209). Brittain eventually obtains the date, but finds no published account of the mutiny until her manuscript is in press. A footnote – the lone footnote in the work – explains:

Since writing the description of the mutiny at Étaples on p. 386, I have learnt from "Songs and Slang of the British Soldier, 1914-1918," by John Brophy and Eric Partridge (Eric Partridge Ltd.), that the only account of it hitherto published appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on several dates during February, 1930. The mutiny was due to repressive conditions in the Étaples camps and was provoked by the military police. (426)

¹ Brittain's notes for each chapter of the manuscript for *Testament of Youth* include a list of current events for the period, a list that includes details such as the publication of various works of literature – war literature and other works such as E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*.

In Brittain's case, writing a war autobiography and writing history were at times indistinguishable, and she came to think of her work as not only her story, but as a history of her generation.

Wilhelm Dilthey's writings on history emphasize the inseparability of autobiography and history. Dilthey understands autobiography as "the highest and most instructive form of the understanding of life" (214). He explains:

Comprehending and interpreting one's own life takes place in a long series of stages; the most complete presentation is the autobiography. Here the self comprehends its own life in such a way that it becomes conscious of the basis of human life, namely the historical relations in which it is interwoven. Therefore autobiography can, ultimately, widen out into a historical portrait; this is only limited but is also made meaningful by being based on experience, through which the self and its relations to the world are comprehended. The reflection of a person about himself remains the standard and basis for understanding history. (218)

Here, Dilthey expands upon his claim, discussed in the introduction to this work, that history begins with self-understanding. Through the process of reflection entailed in autobiography, the writer comes to understand historical relations and begins to write history.

For nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century historians in Britain, to consider autobiography as the basis of historical knowledge would be unthinkable. In an age of documents and Ranke's insistence that the work of the historian was to tell things as they really were, history understood itself as an attempt to describe the past objectively. Brittain's own comments on her project reveal the lingering influences of this thinking. She writes, again to Holtby, on March 5, 1932, that "I do agree that the great difficulty is to make enough of an autobiography *objective* to give sufficient variety to the prolonged *subjectiveness*" (203; her emphasis). For Brittain, the subjective nature

of the autobiography – that the work is inescapably written from her own, idiosyncratic perspective – needs to be offset by “objective” details, a focus on the larger picture of the war and events that others had experienced. Brittain accordingly conceives of her work as having a dual focus, her life, and the lives of her generation – or in other words, history. Though she conceives of autobiography and history as independent of each other, in practice, as these anecdotes illustrate, writing autobiography repeatedly enabled her to begin to understand the historical events that unfolded around her.

Echoes of Dilthey’s argument that historical understanding has its roots in autobiography resonate throughout the many autobiographies written during and after the First World War. If, as I argue, autobiographical works often understand themselves as histories, the writers of these works share Dilthey’s belief that an understanding of history begins with the work of understanding the events of one’s own life, in its daily details and in its relationship to larger “historical” events such as the war.

In writing autobiography, however, these writers necessarily encountered the conventions, both liberating and restrictive, of an established literary genre. In particular, works of First World War autobiography were required to negotiate the legacy of the conversion narrative, arguably the master narrative in Western autobiography. In these works, the trope of conversion continues to be invoked. As the first section of this chapter shall discuss, conversion is a powerful figure, both for the writing of history and the writing of autobiography, as it holds the promise of offering a narrative structure that will figure radical change and enable the writer to merge narratives of historical and personal transformation. However, as the subsequent sections of the chapter shall demonstrate, the actual narratives produced are better characterized as instances of failed

conversion. The conversion narrative fails for one or more reasons: the war's failure to effect radical historical change; the individual's failure to experience radical change; or the incommensurability of the personal and the historical narratives, which reveals the limitations of the trope that brings these two narratives together.

Accordingly, the second part of the chapter examines specific examples of the intersection of the discourse of war as regeneration and the discourse of conversion as it finds expression in a wide array of First World War autobiographies: Enid Bagnold's *A Diary Without Dates* (1918), T.E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), and Gertrude Stein's *Wars I Have Seen* (1945). As discussed above, a distinctive pattern emerges in these works. Instead of a narrative of conversion, these works generate a narrative of incomplete personal transformation (Bagnold and Brittain), failed historical and personal transformation (Lawrence), failed historical transformation (Blunden and Graves), or a failure to connect incommensurable narratives of transformation (Stein). Modifying the conventions of autobiography, these works create a new narrative structure, failed conversion, which ultimately conveys the difficulty of writing history.

I begin with Enid Bagnold's First World War memoir *A Diary Without Dates* (1918). It is an unusual text because it is a narrative of personal and historical transformation written in the midst of war, rather than in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when most of the canonical war autobiographies were written. As such, it employs a narrative of conversion at a time when the public was coming to understand that war was leading not to glorious rejuvenation of a society, but to unprecedented destruction. In *A*

Diary Without Dates, the yearning for social transformation merges with the impulse to produce a narrative of conversion, and yet this narrative is undermined by Bagnold's narrative of an insubstantial, reversible transformation that ultimately proves incomplete.

T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, not often considered as a First World War text, employs the rhetoric of conversion overtly. Lawrence sees both his own life and the history of the war (in his case, that of the British-supported Arab Revolt) in terms of radical conversion. Lawrence aspired to transform himself and Arab history during the war, but failed; his autobiography is the story of a failed conversion, both historical and personal.

The "trench autobiographies" of Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden continue to exhibit a failed conversion narrative. Both texts are marked with a profound disillusionment; the war, which wrought such destruction, failed to effect the widespread regeneration of society that had been promised, and instead only furthered the civilization's decline. Though Blunden and Graves are cognizant that the war did change them profoundly, they actively resist inscribing the story of this change as a narrative of conversion. Accordingly, Blunden displaces his transformation outside the scope of the narrative, refusing to directly attribute any transformation in himself to the war, while Graves repeatedly forecloses the possibility of interpreting his life and recent history in the framework of conversion.

Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is, like Graves's and Blunden's autobiographies, a survivor's account in which she surveys the war's failure to effect positive social transformation. But where Graves and Blunden resist employing the conversion narrative, Brittain carefully shapes her work to produce a narrative of

personal renewal. Her autobiography ends, neatly, with her marriage in 1925 and what she calls a “new beginning.” By fashioning the life after the romance plot, the text draws attention to the discrepancy between the narrative of failed conversion (history) and successful conversion (autobiography).

Wars I Have Seen, Gertrude Stein’s war autobiography, concludes this chapter. Stein’s reflections on the wars of her lifetime, which include the First World War, reflect and amplify the concerns of the First World War autobiographers. Her radical narrative experiments disaggregate the different narratives that tend to be conflated in the conversion narrative. For Stein, history must always begin with the person who experiences history; rather than simply attempting to draw parallels between autobiography and history, Stein attends to the way that war creates a new subjectivity.

The Trope of Conversion

A distinct current of longing for transformation ran through pre-war Edwardian England in the years leading up to the First World War. War was to bring about this transformation: it would restore the nation’s glory, bring radical change to British society, and purify the individual. Not surprisingly, the language and imagery of conversion permeates the early literature of the war. In his sonnet sequence “1914,” Rupert Brooke writes of the soldiers who will “turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping, / Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary” (38). Brooke’s simile, which describes the transformative effects of the war, encompasses two interrelated propositions, namely that pre-war British society was degenerate and weak and that the war would offer an alternative.

Brooke's "1914" draws on a discourse of degeneration and regeneration that has its roots in the nineteenth century. In *A War Imagined*, Samuel Hynes traces the origins of the discourse of war as positive transformation to Thomas Carlyle's critique in "The Condition of England" of British society as weak from its material excesses (12-13). In the early twentieth century, Hynes demonstrates, critics and journalists argued along similar lines to support the war: most memorable, perhaps, is Edmund Gosse's description of war as a "Condy's fluid," a caustic scouring agent. Gosse writes, "War is the great scavenger of thought. It is the sovereign disinfectant, and its red stream of blood is the Condy's fluid that cleans out the stagnant pools and clotted channels of the intellect" (12). Brooke and Gosse offer particularly memorable formulations of the belief that war would be a tool for the regeneration of society, reinvigorating its thought and art; it is a belief shared with various strands of early modernism, such as the Italian futurists and the English vorticists.²

That the First World War was a watershed moment in British and European history, permanently transforming the political, social, and cultural landscape, has been a commonplace of historical scholarship and cultural commentary for close to a century now. In 1936, Walter Benjamin wrote:

With the [First] World War a process began to be apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent - not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. (77)

For Benjamin, what makes the experience of war incommunicable is the experience of radical, absolute transformation "in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds."

² The pervasive interest in the concept of regeneration is also reflected in the title of Pat Barker's First World War novel *Regeneration* (1991), the first of the *Regeneration Trilogy*. Barker refers to various forms of regeneration: physical, psychological, and above all, social.

The destruction and violence of war has eroded the individual's ability to possess, let alone communicate, experience. In this essay, Benjamin articulates a central trope for narrative, especially autobiography, in the twentieth century, the incommunicability of experience and the impossibility of representing trauma.³ Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, discussed in the introduction, shares this understanding of the First World War as the event that marked the beginning of modern culture, though Fussell, writing from the perspective of 1975, can see modern culture in more positive terms than are possible for Benjamin, writing from the perspective of Germany in 1936.

In his psycho-history of the First World War, *No Man's Land*, Eric J. Leed argues that the individual experienced "a deep and profound alteration of identity" (1). The war experience was, for many men, wholly discontinuous with their previous lives; Leed explains that "[t]he psychic problems caused by the experience of war often lay in a profound sense of personal discontinuity" (2). But a change in identity also occurred across society. Leed argues that the outbreak of war in August 1914 was accompanied by a desire to escape industrial civilization's model of individuality. Leed explains that "[t]he motive that thrust many out into the streets, into the recruiting offices, and onto the parade grounds and barrack yards was precisely a longing to throw off a too narrow and confining identity" (47). War was understood as diametrically opposed to social life, Leed suggests: "It was commonly felt that, with the declaration of war, the populations of European nations had left behind an industrial civilization with its problems and conflicts and were entering a sphere of action ruled by authority, discipline, comradeship, and

³ In *The Limits of Autobiography*, Leigh Gilmore writes: "While trauma has become a pervasive subject in contemporary self-representation, it is nonetheless experienced as that which breaks the frame. Because trauma is typically defined as the unprecedented, its centrality in self-representation intensifies the paradox of representativeness. Indeed, autobiography's paradox is foregrounded so explicitly that the self-representation of trauma confronts itself as a theoretical impossibility" (Gilmore 8).

common purpose” (41). War, it was widely believed, offered the individual and the society as a whole an absolute break with the status quo, Leed concludes (41-2).

Although at least two generations of literary and historical scholarship have understood the First World War as an event that produced radical transformation, the tide of historical scholarship has begun to turn. Arthur Marwick, for instance, proposed in 1965 in his influential social history of Britain, *The Deluge*, that the war ushered in dramatic social change, for women, labour, government intervention, and living conditions. More recently, however, Gerard DeGroot has been one of many historians to refute Marwick’s thesis, arguing that the war’s “change” was understood in pre-war years as a reactionary change which would restore the values and conditions of Victorian England. DeGroot concludes that the change due to the war was in fact minimal: “Continued fascination for the Great War derives in part from its imagined status as a catastrophic event which swept away all that was noble and great and replaced it with drabness, disillusion and strife” (290). The reality, DeGroot argues, is that “what is striking is how much of pre-war society survived. The war was not a deluge which swept all before it, but at best a winter storm which swelled the rivers of change. And, just as it (like all wars) provided opportunities for positive change, so too it stimulated conservatism and counter-reaction, rendering progress erratic and limited” (291). In new accounts of the First World War, change is understood in greater complexity. Jay Winter’s disagreement with Paul Fussell’s thesis, for instance, is part of this new tendency in the historiography of the First World War.

This chapter attempts to understand the representation of change, historical and personal, in the autobiographies that were part of the first wave of interpretation of the

significance of the First World War. To be sure, as Samuel Hynes's work demonstrates, the idea that the war would change everything loomed large in the prewar period, and, when the reality of war became apparent around 1916, people continued to believe that the war would change everything, only for the worse, not the better. But in the case of writers working in the last years of the war, the 1920s, and the 1930s, interpretations of the significance of the war had not yet been fully entrenched. In the readings of First World War autobiographies that follow, I attend to how different writers understand transformation, whether "historical" transformation, in the sense of sweeping changes to a society's political and social structures, or personal transformation, understood as a profound change in the self. I propose that the figure of conversion in the autobiographical writing of the First World War reveals the complexity and variation in attitudes toward the changes effected by the war.

Whether or not radical change actually occurred as a result of the First World War, the expectation of radical transformation – in the history of a nation, in a society, and for the individual – meant that narratives of change were ideally suited to take the form of a conversion narrative in works of autobiography. Conversion is a trope that can be applied both to individual and historical narratives. It is the basic structure of biblical typology: the birth of Christ breaks history into two, so that the Old Testament becomes the source of types for the New Testament. Augustine's *Confessions*, which many literary critics take as the foundational text of Western autobiography, employs this structure of radical change explicitly. Books I through IX describe Augustine's life until the moment of his conversion, the pivotal event in his life that provides the rationale for telling his life story. Once he has converted to Christianity, however, the individual life

ceases to be the subject of the work, and Augustine shifts instead to a discussion of time, history, and scripture. As the birth of Christ disrupted history, so does Augustine's conversion disrupt the autobiography.

In the nineteenth-century tradition of autobiography, conversion is central to the genre. John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (which, although a work of fictional autobiography, engages explicitly with the generic conventions of autobiography, and thus warrants discussion) are both texts in which the autobiographical subject undergoes a dramatic conversion, Mill from extreme rationality to poetic sentiment and Carlyle's fictional alter-ego Teufelsdröckh from the "Everlasting No" to the "Everlasting Yea." Understanding discontinuity and change is the work of autobiographical reflection. Autobiography is, by definition, a record of the development of the self: in his essay "The Autobiographical Pact," Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is on his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (4). The "story" of a personality always entails a certain amount of discontinuity, and the autobiographical narrative is always charged with the task of giving meaning to a seemingly fragmented series of events. In the conversion narrative, the retrospective and often linear structure of autobiography creates the illusion that all prior experience led up to a moment of radical change. Moreover, in both Mill and Carlyle's work, change on the part of the autobiographical subject is made narratively to coincide with a moment of historical transition, Carlyle from the eighteenth to nineteenth century and Mill from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. In these examples, autobiography entails not only an explicit commentary on the individual as representative

of a particular historical moment, but also an explicit philosophy of history. While in Augustine, this philosophy of history is Christian teleology, in Carlyle and Mill, it is a progressive view of history.

By the early twentieth century, however, the evolution of the conversion narrative had taken a further turn. As Peter A. Dorsey explains in *Sacred Estrangement: The Rhetoric of Conversion in Modern American Autobiography*, the development of the modern autobiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resulted in a secularization and individualization of the conversion narrative. (The slave narrative is one such example). By the dawn of the twentieth century, Dorsey argues, conversion narratives no longer had the strict socializing function that they once had. Rather than serving to convert the individual to the norms of a specific group, the narrative of conversion “was now being used to inscribe a sense of separateness” (9-10). He includes among the instances of conversion narratives describing a process of marginalization Edith Wharton’s account of the Great War shattering her artistic community (149); in this example, autobiography continues to merge personal and historical narratives by means of the conversion narrative.

Wharton’s autobiography is one of many that First World War autobiographies that takes the form of a conversion narrative. These works employ the rich language of transformation and conversion that was that was made available to them, as I have argued, in both the discourse of war as regeneration and autobiography’s convention of conversion. As Jane Potter has argued persuasively, women’s wartime autobiographies evoke the nineteenth-century pattern for men’s autobiographical writing: paradise,

journey, conversion, and confession. Studying a series of wartime memoirs, Potter suggests that:

each follows a linear trajectory: pre-war life is represented either as an idyll for the narrator, or a time of (often false) security for the world-at-large; the voyage to the war zone corresponds to the journey; realizations about ‘what modern warfare means’...usher in the conversion phase; and the ways in which all of these experiences have changed the narrator, physically or emotionally, form her confession. (154-55)

Conversion, in Potter’s analysis, is the product of a form of historical analysis – “what modern warfare means.” The exception, she argues, is Enid Bagnold’s *A Diary Without Dates*. But in what follows, I propose a different model for autobiographical writing. Enid Bagnold, I will suggest, does in fact produce a narrative of conversion, like many other women autobiographers, however she modifies this narrative, writing instead a narrative of failed conversion. Bagnold’s work, as we shall see shortly, conforms to a pattern of failed conversion that I identify in across the autobiographical literature of the First World War.

Before turning to individual texts, however, I would like to clarify the importance of form and genre to my argument. My readings of First World War autobiographies proposes that it is on the level of form – the repudiation of the conversion narrative and the substitution of a narrative of failed conversion – that the autobiographies I study register the experience of the war. I use the term “experience” guardedly, however, for as Joan W. Scott has demonstrated, historians and literary critics have both too often constructed a rigid and essentialist understanding of “experience.” As Scott writes in “The Evidence of Experience,” “It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience” (779). She proposes a method for historicizing experience in which the production of subject-positions is to be visible: “not in the sense

of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced, and which processes themselves are unremarked and indeed achieve their effect because they are not noticed” (Scott 792). Scott’s proposal draws attention to the process through which a set of experiences produces an identity.

My study of the autobiographies of the First World War endeavour to historicize the experience of the war by examining a generic convention, the conversion narrative. If, as Scott suggests, we must look to discursive processes to understand experience, the trope of conversion may enable us to historicize experience because it is a site where conflicting narratives and discourses converge. Accordingly, I have analyzed the trope of conversion in order to isolate cultural discourses about war and change in First World War autobiographies. Reading a specific literary form – the conversion narrative – in this fashion allows me to trace the process of subject formation. Rather than taking specific events in these narratives as indicative of war experience, I study the way that literary form reflects and refracts the autobiographer’s experience. In this fashion, I endeavour to avoid reading works of autobiography as transparent renderings of experience, which often occurs when literary critics and historians read the life writing of the war.⁴

⁴ For instance, in *Remembering War*, Jay Winter uses Scott’s influential work on experience to demonstrate how discussions of war literature construct the idea of “war experience.” Winter critiques German literary scholar Philipp Witkop’s edited collection of German soldiers’ letters from the First World War. He explains that the editor made unrepresentative elites seem representative of the nation. “If spiritually minded soldiers carried the *Geist* - the spirit of the German *Volk*, or people - then an explanation of their letters would take on the features of cultural anthropology: Germany - the true Germany, the ideal Germany - was in essence what these soldiers said and did” (106). Winter argues that the letters were constructed as a window into “war experience” - and that this concept of “experience” is essentialist. It is unrepresentative at best and, at worst, philosophically misleading. He writes: “That is, experience is a thing - fixed, immutable, separate from the man or woman who had it. The soldier writing home has gathered some fragments of this “experience” and tries to convey it in a kind of prose which would enable his loved ones to grasp where he is and what he is” (114). Winter argues that the anthology utterly failed to historicize experience.

A Diary Without Dates: Incomplete Conversion and Fluid Subjectivity

Enid Bagnold's *A Diary Without Dates* (1918) was one of the first autobiographical accounts of the war to be published. It is a record of Bagnold's service as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse (VAD) at a hospital for wounded soldiers located outside London. As the title suggests, Bagnold's work takes the form of a series of undated sketches, purportedly drawn from Bagnold's diary. Though the passage of time is somewhat unclear, the work nevertheless reveals Bagnold's transformation under the conditions of war.

A Diary Without Dates opens with a meditative scene in which Bagnold describes the pleasure she experiences in work and routine. "I like discipline" is Bagnold's opening sentence, a reflection upon the liberty war has inadvertently granted her and her embrace of military structure. "I like to be part of an institution. It gives one more liberty than is possible among three or four observant friends" she writes (3). She writes that the work of laying trays for the patients' meals frees her mind: "Out in the corridor I meditate on love...Laying trays soothes the activity of the body, and the mind works softly" (5). The institution of military nursing affords Bagnold mental, if not physical privacy:

Let them pile on the rules, invent and insist; yet behind them, beneath them, I have that strong, secret liberty of an institution that runs like a wind in me and lifts my mind like a leaf.

So long as I conform absolutely, not a soul will glance at my thoughts – few at my face. I have only to be silent and conform, and I might be in so far a land that even the eye of God had lost me. (19)

Conformity entails ceding control, but, paradoxically, it frees her: while Bagnold's activities are highly regimented, the more regimented the task, such as the laying of trays, the greater her freedom.⁵

I begin with Bagnold's opening tray-laying scene not only because it reveals Bagnold's belief that the war has changed her, but also because it foregrounds Bagnold's awareness of the coexistence of different temporalities. She is attentive to her interior states throughout the work, recalling and recording a sense of the self as fluid and multiple because it exists within a series of discrete temporalities. The scene cited above presents a bifurcated sense of time. While Bagnold's body is highly regulated, the sequence of actions prescribed by her supervisor frees her mind. Bagnold's opening scene insists on the coexistence of the body's experience of time and the mind's experience of time. It is tempting to classify these two experiences as "public" and "private" time: Stephen Kern employs this classification and argues that time is increasingly private until the war reverses this phenomenon (288). Kern's analysis accurately describes Bagnold's experience of discipline: public time is imposed upon the VAD, and this is likely her first experience of the intrusion of public time. War, however, complicates the distinction between public and private time, and Bagnold's text reveals this complication. If, during tray laying, the body and mind can exist in different temporalities, other scenes reveal that class, gender, and work produce further complications in Bagnold's experience of time.

The discipline and control of one's days, hours, and even minutes, as described above is a relatively new experience for Enid Bagnold. She belongs to the upper middle-

⁵ Sharon Ouditt observes that "She gains a curious kind of freedom, then, as a result of the restrictions placed upon her" (29).

class and, as a woman, her life prior to the war did not involve this kind of structure.⁶ In this respect, her experience of the war as liberating is an experience particular to her gender and class. Working-class women left domestic service in favour of munitions work, which was better paid and less restrictive, while women in the medical profession, both nurses and doctors alike, saw the war as an opportunity to prove their worth. For the middle-class women who joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment as amateur nurses, however, professional advancement was not the goal. Instead, they viewed their work in richly symbolic terms: for many, it was the women's equivalent of joining the army.⁷ Janet Watson notes that "The hospital was their trench. Unlike the professional orientation of trained nurses' writings, again and again in both men's and women's wartime writing the concept of the symbolic parity of hospital service with military service recurs, within the restriction of gender divisions" ("Wars in the Wards" 495). And, as Bagnold's work demonstrates, for the middle-class and upper-class women who had previously been restricted to the domestic sphere and to philanthropic social work, its one related and permissible extension, working as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse offered the opportunity to work outside the home, and even overseas.

Bagnold's sketches include astute commentary on the overlapping forces of gender and class in the context of a military hospital. The difference between Bagnold

⁷ See Janet S.K. Watson, "Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain" and "Wars in the Wards: The Social Construction of Medical Work in First World War Britain." VADs were drawn largely from the upper-middle class, but had no formal training; meanwhile, their supervisors, the nursing sisters, were women from the lower classes who had, in fact, received formal training. Accordingly, numerous historians have studied the role of gender, class, and the discourse of professionalism in structuring the experience of British volunteer nurses. In addition to Watson (cited above), see Jenny Gould, "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain," Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses, 1854–1914*, and Janet Lee, "'I Wish My Mother Could See Me Now': The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and Negotiation of Gender and Class Relations, 1907–1918."

and women of other classes is brought into relief by her contact with the nursing sisters.

As a VAD, Bagnold works under the supervision of professionally trained nurses employed by the military, referred to as “Sisters.” These women, who work for a living, do not belong to the upper-middle class. A Sister explains to her: “If I hadn’t taken up nursing, I should have gone in for culture” (86). Bagnold reflects, “I don’t laugh at that...To have an intimate life one must have a little time” (86). Time for leisure is a sharp marker of class difference; so, too, is the experience of professionalization.

Bagnold subsequently recalls an exchange with another sister: “Long ago in the Mess I said to *my* Sister, laughing: ‘I would go through the four years’ training just to wear that cap and cape!’” The nurse responds, “You couldn’t go through it and come out as you are...” (87). Bagnold is acutely aware in these passages that experience generates a particular kind of subjectivity: her willing subjection of her body to military discipline liberates her mind and grants her privacy, yet Bagnold is also aware that prolonged training as a nurse would likely have eliminated this capacity for reverie. In this opening scene, Bagnold implies that the war has changed her, establishing from the outset that she has a highly developed sense of the conditions that shape her encounter with the war and, perhaps, transform her.

For example, Bagnold observes that the discipline of the hospital contrasts sharply with her intermittent return to civilian life. Stationed in a hospital in the suburbs of London, Bagnold can return to her previous life with relative ease. In a brief paragraph, she describes leaving the hospital and her nearby accommodations for a night’s stay with a friend: “Then at Madeleine’s...the light, the talk, the deep bath got ready for me by a maid, instead of my getting it ready for a patient...Not that I mind getting it ready; I like

it. Only the change! It's like being turn and turn about maid and mistress" (36). The change has a spatial aspect, as she travels from the hospital to the home, but there is also a temporal aspect to her movements in space, which happen with such rapidity that Bagnold finds herself abruptly living a life that belongs to the past. The subjectivity produced through nursing experience can be replaced by Bagnold's sense of herself as a young lady. These sudden reversals produce a sense of the self as performative and reveal that the wartime class structure is fluid; it is this which makes it possible for her to exist simultaneously in a number of parallel universes which unfold in different temporalities. The title of the work, *A Diary Without Dates*, gestures toward this fluid sense of time: Bagnold's record lacks the dates of public time because her experience carries her outside a strictly linear temporality. The experience of moving rapidly between civilian and military life emphasizes the impermanence of her transformation, a point to which I shall return.⁸

Bagnold's descriptions of death speak to the disorienting effects of these different senses of time. She witnesses the pain of a soldier immediately after an operation as she sits with him behind the screens used to give privacy to the very ill and the dying:

Is it the ether which rushes up from between his broken teeth? – is it the red glare of the turkey-twill screens? – but in ten minutes I am altered, mesmerized. Even the size of my surroundings is changed. The screens, high enough to blot out a man's head, are high enough to blot out the world. The narrow bed becomes a field of whiteness. The naked arm stretched towards me is more wonderful than any that could have belonged to a boy with dirty fair hair and broken teeth; it has sea-green veins rising along it, and the bright hairs are more silver than golden.

The life of the ward goes on, the clatter of cups for supper, the shuffling of feet clad in loose carpet-slippers, but here within he and I are living together a concentrated life.

⁸ Jane Potter sees another instance of discontinuity in Bagnold's work that suggests that Bagnold lives distinct lives. Potter argues that "Two kinds of writing style are present – one for the world outside, another for the hospital and work" (212).

“Oh, me back!”

“I know, I know...”

Do I know? I am getting to know. For while the men are drinking their cocoa I am drinking ether. I know how the waves of the pain come up and recede; how a little sleep just brushes the spirit, but never absorbs it; how the arms will struggle up to the air, only to be covered and enmeshed again in heat and blankets. (136-7)

Behind the screens, Bagnold inhabits a different world. Time moves slowly; space also dilates. The passage describes the impressions received by someone in an altered state: the ether exhaled by the patient seems to produce a near-hypnotic state in Bagnold. The rhythm of her sentences captures the growing screens, the widening bed, the slowly moving arm of the patient, the waves of pain. This is the “concentrated life” behind the screens. And yet, at the same time, she narrates her awareness of life continuing at a regular pace on the other side of the screen: the clattering cups and shuffling feet. Pain alters the patient’s relationship to the world; as a nurse, Bagnold is witness, and by extension, participant in, this alteration. She is immersed in the pain that produces a different temporality for the patient, and her own consciousness must expand to include the awareness of this other time, yet she remains conscious of the co-existence of the “normal” life of the ward on the other side of the screen. Bagnold’s contact with the men she cares for is registered in the form of her work. Once again, an awareness of the coexistence of different temporalities pervades the work, but in this passage in particular, her narrative derives its shape from the scene she witnesses: the fragmentation of the narrative and its deceleration as she describes men in great pain reproduce in narrative form her movement from the life of the ward to the death scene behind the screens.

I use the term witness deliberately to describe Bagnold’s actions and her writing. Serving as she does in England, Bagnold is not an observer of the fighting on the front,

but she is witness to the physical and mental suffering and to the alteration in the soldiers produced by war. Bagnold wonders if the near-death experience of the front alters the soldiers' perspective irreversibly: "It must happen to the men in France that, living so near the edge of death, they are more aware of life than we are" (27). Bagnold emphasizes the gulf of experience in a scene where one of the Sisters has an earache: "What struck me was her own angry bewilderment before the fact of her pain. 'But it hurts... You've no idea how it hurts!' She was surprised" (100). Bagnold observes how often the Sister is told by her own patients of their pain; she comments, "It is almost impossible to nurse a man well whose pain you do not imagine" (101).⁹ Both in her actions and her writing, Bagnold attempts to convey the experience of pain, of proximity to death. For Bagnold, to witness pain is to be changed by the experience: to gain an awareness of the other's pain, and in doing so, to be made aware yet again of unbridgeable difference between the self and the other.

Gender places further limits on Bagnold's ability to understand the experience of the other. In the medical wards of the military hospital, gender differences are particularly marked. Roles are always irrevocably gendered: medical officers and orderlies are men and nurses and VADs are women. More importantly, women are never patients, and are necessarily excluded from the experience of the patients: they have not fought, nor, generally speaking, been patients themselves. This sense of exclusion is figured by Bagnold as the difference between one who has been left behind, and one who

⁹ In "'The Impotence of Sympathy': Touch and Trauma in the Memoirs of the First World War Nurses," Santanu Das suggests that Bagnold's observation anticipates Elaine Scarry's comments about the unshareable nature of pain. Scarry writes, "pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed." See Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (4). See Lucy Bending's *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late Nineteenth-Century English Culture* for a different perspective on the representation of pain in this period.

is part of a new world. This division between “old” and “new” structures Bagnold’s experience of the past relative to the present, in an explicitly typological manner. Like the birth of Christ, the war has cleaved history into before and after, old and new. She writes, “They know so little about each other, and they don’t ask. It is only I who wonder – I, a woman, and therefore of the old, burnt-out world. These men watch without curiosity, speak no personalities, form no sets, express no likings, analyse nothing. They are new-born; they have as yet no standards and do not look for any...Ah, to have had that experience too!...I am of the old world” (p. 64). The metaphor of rebirth is striking: images of the war as a purifying or cleansing experience were prevalent prior to and in the early years of the war. The “old, burnt-out world” that Bagnold inhabits is atrophying pre-war society, now also physically destroyed by the war.

Although Bagnold certainly envies the men their new-found freedom, in particular their escape from the confines of socially regulated standards for behavior, the context of the passage suggests that Bagnold’s envy is ultimately overshadowed by the horror of this new world. Cognizant of the toll paid for access to this new world – the physical and psychological horror of war - her envy can only be fleeting. Where the Christian ideas of baptism and of death as birth figure rebirth positively, *A Diary Without Dates* employs the metaphor cautiously. The “old, burnt-out world” may be degraded, but it is social; the men described as “new-born” live in a world that lacks individuation, critical thought, and the affirmation of norms.¹⁰ Her formulation thus lacks the positive valence of the metaphors of purgation and rejuvenation usual in the discourse of war as

¹⁰ That Bagnold emphasizes the lack of social behaviour in this new world is consistent with Sidonie Smith’s claim, adduced most fully in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, that women’s autobiography exhibits a pronounced tendency to focus on the female subject’s relationship to others, as opposed to the bounded unitary self of western rationalism.

regeneration. Her ambivalence toward this strange new world indicates that she adheres neither to the logic of progress that would read the new world as an improvement, nor to the logic of the fall that would read the new world as decline.

What is clear from the gendered division of the old and new worlds is the existence of a gulf between the patients and the nurses. The violence of war has brought Bagnold's patients into the new world, for her patients are, for the most part, irreversibly wounded and maimed. On the other hand, Bagnold's transformation has been primarily psychological and minimally physical: she writes ironically of her physical changes, "My ruined charms cry aloud for help... The cap wears away my front hair; my feet are widening from the everlasting boards; my hands won't take my rings" (47-8).¹¹ For the wounded soldier, the "experience" of war is a physical wound and this is a change which Bagnold recognizes as qualitatively different from her own, much as she recognizes that her easy transition between the drudgery of work and the luxury of civilian life marks her transformation as fleeting and impermanent.¹²

Pain and wounding, then, constitute the gulf between the hospital staff and the patients. This gulf determines the shape of Bagnold's autobiography, particularly in its use of the figure of conversion. The retrospective narrative of the autobiography looks back at the self as it was before and after change or conversion. (Imagining a physical break in the narrative structure is a helpful visual aid.¹³) Bagnold's narrative is

¹¹ Jane Potter takes this comment as an external indication of an internal change. She writes that Bagnold "realizes that her work has changed her forever and it is the physical change which the outside world sees and comments on" (217).

¹² Bagnold nurses soldiers who have been physically wounded; she does not, in her work, refer to men who are suffering from shell shock. For this reason, I restrict my discussion in this section to the irreversibility of the physical wound, though the same principles may certainly apply to shell shock.

¹³ For a series of illustrative diagrams and excellent discussion of this point, see Carolyn Williams's "Teaching Autobiography."

particularly attentive to this moment in the lives of others, and she herself uses the figure of irreversible change. Bagnold is puzzled that the men in the ward are preoccupied by the anniversary of the wound. She writes of one man, Waker:

How will he celebrate it? I would give a lot to know what will pass in his mind. For I don't yet understand this importance they attach to such an anniversary. One and all, they know the exact hour and minute on which their bit of metal turned them for home...I can't imagine what he thinks of as the minute ticks. For I can see by his words that the scene is blurred and no longer brings back any picture...I know that for some of them, for Waker, that moment at two o'clock in the morning changed his whole career. From that moment his arm was paralysed, the nerves severed; from that moment football was off, and with it his particular ambition. And football, governing a kingdom, or painting a picture – a man's ambition is his ambition, and when it is wiped out his life is changed. (139)

While Bagnold professes not to understand the importance of the anniversary, her meditation suggests otherwise. She realizes that a life's trajectory is altered by the wound: the life imagined has been irretrievably lost.¹⁴ Radical change that alters the course of one's life is a key feature of autobiography. Historically, the moment of conversion provided that radical change in spiritual autobiography, but in secular autobiography, conversion, or radical change, still figures prominently. Spiritual autobiography provides a model in which the autobiographical subject participates in the change: though to an extent, external forces produce conversion, there is an assumption that the subject is a willing participant in conversion. Life without conversion is imaginable and possible, but undesirable. But for the wounded soldier, the infliction of the wound, the life-altering event, was not willed, nor was it desirable. For these men,

¹⁴ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's work on disability and literature, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependency of Discourse* offers a critique of literary works which tend to use disability in a reductive fashion: "disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device. We term this perpetual discursive dependency upon disability *narrative prosthesis*" (47). "[W]hile stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions" (48). Bagnold's work, I want to suggest, manages to employ the disabled soldiers in a way that is literal and attentive to the social reality of disability while also understanding how disability reconfigures a life narrative.

the selves they might have been are dead; they are no longer imaginable. So, too, is the self's imagination of the future: as Bagnold notes, the men live for the next cup of tea, but not for the future (123). They relive the past and the moment of wounding; Cathy Caruth's description of the mind's obsession with reliving the moment of the traumatic event, in this case the infliction of the wound, offers an accurate description of the structure of time for the traumatized soldier.¹⁵ Time is not linear, a progression from past, to present, and on to the future. It is marked instead by the return to the past, exemplified by the soldier's celebration of the anniversary of his wound.

Ultimately, *A Diary Without Dates* is marked by an awareness of the inadequacy of Bagnold's conversion. Bagnold realizes that, unlike the men she cares for, and the nursing sisters for whom she works, hers is a life of expectation. Neither the nurses nor the soldiers are expectant. They live mostly in the present, often in the past, but almost never in the future. Of the nurses she says: "The hospital – a sort of monotone, a place of whispers and wheels moving on rubber tyres, long corridors, and strangely unsexed women moving in them. Unsexed not in any real sense, but the white clothes, the hidden hair, the stern white collar just below the chin, give them an air of school-girlishness, an air and a look women don't wear in the world. They seem unexpectant" (36-7). The hospitalized men share this unexpectant outlook:

On the whole, I find that in hospital they do not think of the future or of the past, nor think much at all. As far as life and growth goes it is a hold-up!

¹⁵ Caruth describes this as follows: trauma is "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind - the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world - is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (3-4).

There is really not much to hope for; the leave is so short, the home-life so disrupted that it cannot be taken up with content. Perhaps it isn't possible to let one's thoughts play round a life about which one can make no plans. They are adaptable, living for the minute – their present hope for the cup of tea, for the visiting day, for the concert; their future hope for the drying of the wound, for the day when the Sister's finger may press, but no drop be wrung from the long scar. (123-4)

While the lives of the patients and professional nurses gravitate around the hospital, Bagnold's portrait of her own daily life is consistently oriented outside of the hospital and toward the future. Bagnold's experience of war has not produced a permanent change, nor altered the course of life, breaking the trajectory of the imagined life as it did for the disabled soldiers. Tellingly, in the autobiography Bagnold writes near the end of her life, the war is largely absent: it is not positioned as a significant or even formative experience.¹⁶ It is a route to publication, to further adventure in France as an ambulance driver (*Autobiography*, 166).

In observing that Bagnold's horizon extends beyond the war even in her wartime memoir, I am not suggesting that Bagnold was not transformed by her experience as a VAD, nor that she in any way condemns others for living without expectation. Any tone of condescension is perhaps best read as her discomfort with her own position, her own story, in the midst of a memoir which records the stories of soldiers who seem to inhabit a new world, to have had a conversion experience so extreme that her own cannot compare.¹⁷

¹⁶ Gerard DeGroot argues that VAD service was, for many middle-class women, simply a hiatus in a conventional life (305).

¹⁷ Das has made a similar observation about the reticence of nurses to disclose physical suffering: These moments reveal at once the blurring of and the anxiety to overcome the strict division between the masculine world of bodily trauma and the feminine sphere of mental suffering, and yet there is always the agonizing awareness of the greater magnitude of the male ordeal" ("The impotence of sympathy," 244).

Autobiography addresses the relationship between change and continuity, both the manner in which the self remains the same despite undergoing change or even conversion, and the manner in which the self experiences a radical change that produces a lasting rupture. Bagnold illustrates one of these outcomes: change occurs, but is wholly reversed. I have emphasized the fluidity of Bagnold's identity throughout the work and the fact that she assumes a role that can be discarded, whereas the professional nurses and patients cannot. Her experience of transformation is, in comparison, incomplete. Transformation, for Bagnold, is temporary; her wartime subjectivity is a transient state. In part, certainly, this may be a function of her class and gender.¹⁸ Bagnold's social position does not allow for the easy integration of her experience as a nurse into the trajectory of her life. The war brings radical change to Bagnold's personality, but larger social structures return her, at least in a social and physical sense, to her pre-war state at the war's conclusion. While Bagnold's narrative evokes the idea of conversion, the figure is one of incomplete conversion. Though the men who fought at the front find themselves in the new world, Bagnold is left behind in the old world.

T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: Conversion and Failure

Seven Pillars of Wisdom is seldom discussed as a First World War text.¹⁹ The Middle Eastern front, a third, often neglected front, was in many ways wholly unlike the

¹⁸ It may also be related to the fact that Bagnold did not, as many other VAD's did, serve abroad.

¹⁹ There are several book-length studies of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, but they do not treat Lawrence in relation to the larger war, nor the body of literature associated with the First World War. Thomas J. O'Donnell's *The Confessions of T.E. Lawrence: The Romantic Hero's Presentation of Self* places the work in the nineteenth century tradition of literature of self-division (1979). Other major studies include Jeffrey Meyers's *The Wounded Spirit: A Study of Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which considers Lawrence's relationship to Nietzsche's idea of will, and Stephen Tabachnick's *T.E. Lawrence*, which is primarily a biographical and structural analysis of the text and draws heavily on alternative manuscripts. (Tabachnick revised the work for publication in 1997, under the title *T.E. Lawrence: Revised Edition*: the work de-

Western and Eastern fronts: here, war was “irregular,” with bands of Arabs joining the revolt against the Turks over the course of several years. But T.E. Lawrence’s autobiography, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, shares with Bagnold’s narrative both the centrality of the trope of conversion and a profound sense of its inadequacy for representing his experience. Lawrence invokes the idea of conversion both to describe his personal transformation and the political transformation that is the objective of the Arab Revolt and to link the personal and the historical. However, both attempts at transformation fail, as does the narrative strategy of linking the personal and the historical.

The merging of the narrative of the life and the narrative of history in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* emerges most clearly in Lawrence’s metaphorical description of the course of Arab history as series of waves. In the opening chapters in which Lawrence relates the history of the Arab people, he describes the progress of history through a metaphor of the sea:

They were a people of starts, for whom the abstract was the strongest motive, the process of infinite courage and variety, and the end nothing. They were as unstable as water, and like water would perhaps finally prevail. Since the dawn of life, in successive waves they had been dashing themselves against the coasts of flesh. Each wave was broken, but, like the sea, wore away ever so little of the granite on which it failed, and some day, ages yet, might roll unchecked over the place where the material world had been, and God would move upon the face of those waters. One such wave (and not the least) I raised and rolled before the breath of an idea, till it reached its crest, and toppled over and fell at Damascus. The wash of that wave, thrown back by the resistance of vested things, will provide the matter of the following wave, when in fullness of time the sea shall be raised once more. (41)

emphasizes the biographical aspects of the earlier study). Terry Reilly’s article “T.E. Lawrence: Writing the Military Life from Homer to High Modernism” situates Lawrence in relation to the growing canon of First World War literature, but does so by suggesting that Paul Fussell’s interpretations of features of WWI military writing, namely irony, can in fact be applied to Lawrence.

This metaphor of waves for Arab history conforms to what Louise Blakeney Williams calls a “spiral” theory of history: history entails cyclical repetition, but with eventual progress (7-8). Lawrence sees history as a series of waves, each one an unsuccessful attempt to secure self-determination and an Arab state, but with the hope of eventual success. He describes one wave, however, as a wave that he “raised and rolled” himself, and in the figure of this wave, he imagines the trajectory of the Arab Revolt and the trajectory of his life as one.

In the figure of the wave is also a figure of conversion. When Lawrence imagines a wave that will “roll unchecked over the place where the material world had been, and God would move upon the face of those waters,” he employs an image of conversion, for Arab history and for his own life. And, as the story of “one such wave,” *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is equally a narrative of conversion. But, the Arab Revolt fails to produce the hoped-for Arab state; Lawrence’s autobiography describes both Lawrence’s sense of personal failure and the failure of the revolt. It is, therefore, a narrative of failed conversion. This is, in large part, the product of Lawrence’s understanding of history as a series of waves, which restricts his interpretation of his own life to a rise and fall, an attempt at transformation and conversion which ultimately fails.²⁰

Lawrence’s personal failure, however, is not restricted to his understanding of the part he plays in the revolt. Edward Said argues that Lawrence identifies with the Arabs and their struggle to such an extent that the failure of the Arab Revolt is a personal disappointment (*Orientalism* 243). As a British intelligence officer, Lawrence fought and

²⁰ Tabachnick does not comment on Lawrence’s conception of Arab history as a series of waves, but he does offer an interesting reading of the work as whole “in terms of wave crests and troughs” (Tabachnick 119), taking his cue from Lawrence’s description of how “we lived always in the stretch or sag of nerves, either on the crest or in the trough of a wave of feeling” (Lawrence 27). Tabachnick argues that the military plot and the personal plot both attempt to follow this schema (119-122).

lived in the desert throughout the war, assuming the dress, manner, and language of the Arabs, to such an extent that he describes himself as being transformed into an Arab. For Lawrence, his personal story of the war is the story of this attempt to become Arab, but *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* describes the difficulty of this transformation:

Bedouin ways were hard even for those brought up to them, and for strangers terrible: a death in life. When the march or labour ended I had no energy to record sensation, nor while it lasted any leisure to see the spiritual loveliness which sometimes came upon us by the way... In my case, the efforts for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our legend, with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. Such detachment came at times to a man exhausted by prolonged physical effort and isolation. His body plodded on mechanically, while his reasonable mind left him, and from without looked down critically on him, wondering what that futile lumber did and why. Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments. (29-30)

Seven Pillars of Wisdom is saturated with images of conversion and radical transformation, for Lawrence adopts the language of conversion to describe his assimilation to Bedouin life. Images of reversal (“death in life”), destruction, rebirth (“new eyes”), and conversion (the discussion of faith) run through this passage; here, the trope of conversion is overdetermined.

In the passage above, however, it is clear that Lawrence's attempt at self-transformation has failed. No longer English, but not Arab, Lawrence speaks of having multiple selves conversing in the void. Though he suggests that he was “quitted of” his English self, Lawrence's English self persists as it is this English self, his “reasonable mind,” that looks down at the body that wears the dress and experiences the privation of

the Arabs marching in the desert. Halfway through this passage, Lawrence begins to speak of himself in the third person, registering his dissociation in his syntax. The figure of dissociation reappears midway through the text, again as a signal of Lawrence's failure to "become" Arab. As Lawrence rides through the desert after being captured and interrogated by the Turkish forces in Deraa, where he was tortured and raped, Lawrence struggles and fails to keep body and mind together:

Now I found myself dividing into parts. There was one which went on riding wisely, sparing or helping every pace of the weary camel. Another hovering above and to the right bent down curiously, and asked what the flesh was doing. The flesh gave no answer, for, indeed, it was conscious only of a ruling impulse to keep on and on; but a third garrulous one talked and wondered, critical of the body's self-inflicted labour, and contemptuous of the reason for effort. (461)

Here, the body separates itself from the mind and the mind splits in two again.

Here, however, dissociation signals a second kind of failure. While Lawrence may speak of "becoming" an Arab, his desire to assimilate is conflicted, as he retains a desire to preserve what he understands as an English attitude toward the body. He subsequently explains:

The conception of antithetical mind and matter, which was basic in the Arab self-surrender, helped me not at all. I achieved surrender (so far as I did achieve it) by the very opposite road, through my notion that mental and physical were inseparably one: that our bodies, the universe, our thoughts and tactilities were conceived in and of the molecular sludge of matter, the universal element through which form drifted as clots and patterns of varying density. (477)

Rejecting the Arab willingness to separate "mind and matter," Lawrence insists on the inseparability of mind and body. He sees this is a fundamental difference between himself and the Arabs. Yet, as the images of dissociation reveal, Lawrence fails, and is painfully aware of this failure. He is, once again, partially and imperfectly transformed, acquiescing to dissociation while insisting upon the inferiority of this Arab practice.

For Lawrence, adopting an Arab identity leads to endless and unhealthy self-scrutiny. Lawrence recalls how, on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday, he came to view himself

with my detached self always eyeing the performance from the wings in criticism...To be added to this attitude were the cross-strains of hunger, fatigue, heat or cold, and the beastliness of living among the Arabs. These made for abnormality. Instead of facts and figures, my note-books were full of states of mind, the reveries and self-questioning, induced or educed by our situations, expressed in abstract words to the dotted rhythm of the camels' marching...The eagerness to overhear and oversee myself was my assault upon my own inviolate citadel. (580)

This is a moment where “madness was very near”; adopting an Arab identity has a state of unbearable self-consciousness that manifests itself as harmful introspection that Lawrence describes as an “assault,” an act of violence against the self, that necessarily recalls the violence Lawrence suffered in Turkey. Physically and psychologically, Lawrence’s experiences have broken him apart rather than transformed him.

Lawrence’s conflicted desire to transform himself into an Arab in body and mind is curiously doomed to failure. Though Lawrence suggests that he is consistently taken for an Arab, Edward Said argues that this is preposterous; it is “a wish-fantasy of someone who would like to think that everything is possible, that one can go anywhere and be anything. T.E. Lawrence in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* expresses this fantasy over and over, as he reminds us how he - a blond, blue-eyed Englishman - moved among the desert Arabs as if he were one of them” (*Culture and Imperialism* 160-1). For Said, this is the product of Lawrence’s being one of a new breed of twentieth-century Orientalists who “believed his vision of things Oriental was individual, self-created out of some intensely personal encounter with the Orient, Islam, or the Arabs: each expressed general contempt for official knowledge about the East” (*Orientalism* 237). It is

Lawrence's "intensely personal encounter" with the Arabs that allows him to adopt their way of life, but Said suggests that Lawrence is naïve to think that he can become one of them.²¹

Said's readings of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* offers a trenchant critique of Lawrence's politics, but he does not account for the larger narrative structure of the text. Why does Lawrence frame his text and his quest so that it fails or succeeds on the basis of his ability to "become" an Arab? I read Lawrence's linking of his personal identity to the history of the war not as a straightforward instance of hubris, but as a common strategy found across the First World War autobiographies discussed in this chapter. I contend that Lawrence's hunger for conversion reveals a desire not simply for change on an individual level, but an impulse to unify personal and historical narratives. In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and in the works I will discuss subsequently, there are repeated attempts by autobiographers to understand their lives by first situating them in their historical context, and then interpreting the significance of this (most often national) historical context through recourse to a philosophy of history which seeks to understand the general direction and movement of history. These two acts of interpretation entail separate acts of autobiographical and historical narration: the life history is written and understood in the context of the national history. Rather than isolating the life from the "history," the two are recounted and interpreted simultaneously. For Lawrence, this conflation of the personal and the historical occurs not only in the text of his autobiography, but in his life as he lives it in the desert during the war. In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, however, Lawrence reveals the limitations of understanding the life

²¹ For an alternative reading of Lawrence as an Orientalist, and an interesting reading of Lawrence's conflicted self, see Brandabur and Athamneh's "Problems of Genre in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*."

strictly in terms of history: Lawrence's autobiography is haunted by the spectre of failure and failed conversion because the life and the history are conflated, but incommensurable.

Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden: Resisting Conversion

Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden published their autobiographies nearly ten years after the war's end: Graves's *Good-bye to All That* in 1929 and Blunden's *Undertones of War* in 1928.²² As I shall demonstrate, both Blunden and Graves write from the dominant perspective of disillusionment. Their autobiographies display an awareness of the discourse of war as regeneration that produced the initial fervour for the war, but as I shall argue, both Graves and Blunden see the war as an event that led to historical decline rather than historical progress.²³ Yet, they do acknowledge that the war gave them a new perspective. Nevertheless, they reject the conversion narrative as a structure for both history and the story of their lives. Blunden displaces his change outside the bounds of the narrative, refusing to attribute his transformation directly to the war, while conversion is rejected openly in Graves in favour of a narrative of gradual decline and disorder.

²² Page references to Graves's text refer, unless noted otherwise, to the 1957 revised edition of the text.

²³ Evelyn Cobley's book *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives* (1986) is the only full-length study of First World War literature to emphasize the narrative form of First World War literature. (As in the studies that precede hers, Cobley studies only the literature written by combatants). Drawing on deconstruction and narratology, she analyzes the ideology of formal strategies in First World War narratives and concludes that though the critical tendency has been to read the work as protest literature, the texts' formal strategies reveal that they are more often than not "complicit" with war (Cobley 5). She explains that "Although the violence of events during the First World War defied the continuist image of civilization progressing from triumph to triumph, the war writers insistently, and most often unwittingly, reproduced in their narratives the traditions and formal structures associated with this image" (116-117). The omnipresence of the conversion narrative in First World War autobiographical texts would seem to support her conclusion that these texts conform to a narrative of historical progress. But as this chapter argues, rather than adopting a conversion narrative, First World War autobiographies refashion this traditional form into a narrative of failed conversion.

Among the works of autobiography discussed in this chapter, Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* stands as a notable exception to the observation that First World War autobiographies tend to merge the narrative of the life and the narrative of the war. Blunden's work is consistently oriented toward external events. Rather than the remarkable attention to inward states that characterizes Bagnold's nursing memoir or T.E. Lawrence's story of his exploits in the desert, Blunden is not himself a focus of his text. Surprisingly lacking in introspection and virtually devoid of the details of his life, Blunden conceals himself behind the conventions of the pastoral by adopting the persona of a shepherd. A distinctive structure of retrospection characterizes autobiography: the autobiographical narrative is structured by the difference between the narrator (the I of the writing now, or I-now, as Virginia Woolf calls this self in "A Sketch of the Past") and the protagonist (the I of events, or I-then, again following Woolf).²⁴ But, in Blunden's work, the narrating and the experiencing selves are weakly differentiated. The artificiality of the persona masks any difference between the self who writes the autobiography in the mid-1920s and the self who fought in the war.

Evelyn Cobley suggests that the explanation for the text's refusal of introspection lies in the autobiographer's desire to produce the illusion of objectivity. Cobley is particularly interested in the techniques the narratives employ in order to produce the illusion that the work is an objective record of events. She explains that documentary novels and autobiographies produce the effect of truth through the meticulous rendering of facts: "Convinced that the horrors of war were best conveyed through the presentation

²⁴ Jean Starobinski calls this phenomenon the "double-deviation," a deviation in time and identity. He writes, "The personal mark (the first person, the "I") remains constant. But it is an ambiguous constancy, since the narrator was different from what he is today...Pronominal constancy is the index of this permanent responsibility, since the "first person" embodies both the present reflection and the multiplicity of past states" (79).

of unadorned facts, First World War narrators tried to create the illusion of an objective discourse and concealed all evidence of manipulation by a subjective consciousness” (100). Focalization, Cobley argues, is crucial to the style of First World War narratives. She explains that First World War narratives tend to privilege the I-then, which she calls the “experiencing self” (88) and that the autobiographer suppresses the emotional life of the self (then and now): the narratives of war experience are outward, rather than inward-looking for the most part. Certainly, the emphasis in Blunden’s work and others’ memoirs of enlisted men and officers from this period is on the world as seen by the I-then; though texts that Cobley does not consider, such as *A Diary Without Dates* or *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* are the most obvious exception to this principle, but they fall outside the scope of her study. Cobley claims that the emotional life of the self is excluded “not out of any real reluctance to reveal himself but out of a desire to avoid sounding emotional, sentimental, or biased. Like the historian, the autobiographer wanted to create the overriding impression that the horrors of war can be mastered by means of a calm and detached narration” (92-3).

Cobley’s argument rests upon the assumption that great value was assigned to the concept of historical objectivity in the early decades of the twentieth century. To a certain extent, this was true, but as I have been arguing, the war brought the crisis of historicism to Britain and undermined the value of objectivity. Blunden, I would suggest, does not subscribe to the ideal of historical objectivity. Rather, he is attuned to the crisis of historicism and its attendant rejection of the ideal of objectivity. Accordingly, I would suggest that Edmund Blunden’s effacement of emotion, and of the narrating self (the I-then) may in fact be seen as a “reluctance to reveal himself” produced by his resistance to

the discourse of conversion. By effacing both the I-now and the I-then, Blunden is able to conceal the difference between the I-now and the I-then and to obscure the existence of any kind of personal change or transformation.

The idea of transformation is evoked in the final paragraph of the work.

Undertones of War ends on an open, undefined note; much, the text implies, has been left unsaid by this naïve narrator. In the final paragraph of the text, Blunden writes in the present tense of the journey he took through France toward England, concluding as follows:

But here is Buire-sur-Ancre, where we must change our train, and wait indefinitely for the next; and while we prowling inspectingly in the way of the fighting man round huts and possibly useful stores, the willows and waters in the hollow make up a picture so silvery and unsubstantial that one would spend a lifetime to paint it. Could any countryside be more sweetly at rest, more alluring to naiad and hamadryad, more incapable of dreaming a field-gun? Fortunate it was at the moment I was filled with this simple joy. I might have known the war by this time, but I was still too young to know its depth of ironic cruelty. No conjecture that, in a few weeks, Buire-sur-Ancre would appear much the same as the cataclysmal railway cutting by Hill 60, came from that innocent greenwood. No destined anguish lifted its snaky head to poison a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat. (191)

This is the deferred conversion in the text – the final lines of the work make it clear that a change did occur, that Blunden did change so that he could see the war from an ironic stance: “I was still too young to know its depth of ironic cruelty” is a complex statement in which the speaker describes a change (aging, and a change in perspective) that has not occurred in the events of the narrative. Thus, both the moment of conversion and the new, ironic vision are outside the bounds of the text. They made possible the writing of the text, but the change is not part of the story Blunden tells. In this respect, Blunden conforms to Paul Fussell's observation that, “In reading memoirs of the war, one notices the same phenomenon over and over. By applying to the past a paradigm of ironic

action, a rememberer is enabled to locate, draw forth, and finally shape into significance an event or a moment which otherwise would merge without meaning into the general undifferentiated stream” (30). Not only does this description of the ironic process of recollection apply to Blunden’s recollection of individual events, though, but it also applies to the narrator, the self who is able to write this autobiographical text. This image of an older self who is able to interpret the events that were not understood by the young man filled with “simple joy” is the ironic paradigm writ large.

This description of a radical change which is not admitted into the scope of the narrative bears directly on what I have been identifying as the discourse of conversion. Blunden separates personal change from the violence of the war, erecting barriers of focalization and narrative persona and voice around his narrative. While the experience of the war may have altered him, he refuses the oversimplified narrative which would have personal transformation produced immediately and directly by the war. Blunden posits instead a model of delayed change; in the same way that it has been argued that the late 1920s “boom” in war literature was the product of a latency period (Leed 191), I would like to suggest that Blunden depicts the individual’s change in war as a product of the war that emerges only after its end.

This resistance to the cultural narrative of conversion is visible in the complex narrative and temporal structure of *Undertones of War*. A specular structure underlies Blunden’s work: an elusive I-now produces the highly literary and carefully modulated voice of the narrator, who in turn reproduces the now-lost I-then who experienced the war through the naïve eyes of a young man. These elaborate constructions produce a sense of fluid identity in the autobiographical “I,” but also a sense of loss or absence. In

“Autobiography as De-Facement,” Paul De Man writes, “Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause” (81). By this, he means that in attempting to create the voice of a past self, the autobiographer is forced to confront the reality that all the past selves are gone. Autobiography is an extended fiction which tries to grasp something that is not there. Blunden’s work illustrates the illusive nature of the I-then: the artificiality of the narrator’s persona seems to result from the impossibility of recreating the naïve younger self. Faced with these ever-multiplying personae, the idea of conversion loses its trenchancy. Where other autobiographies of the First World War cling to the model of conversion, Blunden’s work lacks a sense of radical, unidirectional change on the part of the autobiographical subject. Blunden, as an autobiographical subject and an autobiographer, is both present and absent. His voice emerges from a void: the reader gleans that he is in Japan, that something has occurred in the intervening years, but a stable sense of Edmund Blunden, then or now, is not to be found in this narrative. Blunden’s text conceals the moment, though not the extent, of his knowledge of the “ironic cruelty” of the war.

If Blunden is reticent to situate his experience of the war in the larger story of his life, he is equally reticent to situate the war in the larger context of British and world history. Paul Fussell suggests that “the Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful ‘history’ involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future...the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable” (21). Samuel Hynes continues in the same vein, writing “Discontinuity, incoherence, irony: these terms define a

conception of history that the individual, autobiographical narratives assume and render” (Hynes 427). Certainly, Blunden’s story is discontinuous. He refuses to frame his story with the war’s beginning and end and he displaces his transformation outside the narrative’s chronological span. But of even greater significance is Blunden’s refusal to engage with the events of “history,” the story of nations, battles, and leaders. Instead, he fits the war into a linear history which emphasizes a different order of events: a literary history of events.

Rather than a narrative of the years leading up to the war, Blunden’s text defines the past in terms of literature: the work is enmeshed in the Western literary tradition to a far greater extent than most First World War literature. Blunden’s text is densely allusive: “Trees in the battlefield are already described by Dante,” Blunden explains at one point (157); in a section entitled “The Cherry Orchard,” Blunden speaks of being “free for an hour to play *Il Penseroso*.” And, of course, Blunden repeatedly figures himself as a shepherd, employing the tradition of the pastoral.²⁵ Most significant, however, is Blunden’s treatment of his own life as a literary life: he excludes the conventional details of autobiography, referring to his life outside the war almost exclusively in terms of his identity as a writer. He describes learning of the publication of a book of verse, and its review in the *Times Literary Supplement* while he is in France (54), and a rare description of his post-war life slips into the narrative when he mentions, “I did not know it in 1916, but I was to become a writer for [the London *Athenaeum*] as well” (100). As with the historical narrative, the personal narrative that we would expect to find is missing, replaced instead with an alternative chronology of literary “events” in

²⁵ For a complete discussion of the pastoral in First World War literature, see Paul Fussell’s chapter “Arcadian Recourses” in *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

Blunden's life. Blunden recalibrates the relative importance of "history," finding significance in events unrelated to the war. Though *Undertones of War* is almost exclusively a linear narrative of Blunden's role in the war, he refuses to build a traditional historical or autobiographical narrative around the war, much as Ford and Woolf, as we saw in the first chapter, envision alternative histories in their novels.

Like *Undertones of War*, Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* resists the discourse of conversion. However, while Blunden's omission of introspection and his careful delimitation of the scope of his memoir to the time of his war service displaces his conversion to a moment outside the bounds of the memoir, Graves constructs a highly introspective narrative that ranges from the moment of his birth to that of the memoir's writing. He resists the narrative of conversion more overtly, deliberately evoking and then rejecting the neat emplotment of his life and of his history.

One episode in the autobiography illustrates Graves's refusal of the language of conversion most clearly. Graves describes false reports of his death (he had been injured). Consequently, his mother is notified of his death, only to learn that he is in fact alive (219). Though Graves rises from the dead, as it were, his return to life for his family and acquaintances is only a darkly humorous moment in the war, not an actual rebirth. Graves refuses the language of death and rebirth on the battlefield, the sacred and sacralizing discourse of war, in favour of his own rejection of Victorian and Edwardian society in his own, highly demotic language.

This is not to say that Graves does not change over the course of the war, but the war's effects are more subtle than a moment of death and rebirth. Rather, the war alters Graves's aesthetic sensibilities. The autobiography begins to track these changes early in

the work, when Graves explains that “On our visits to Germany [as a child] I had felt a sense of home in a natural human way, but above Harlech I found a personal peace independent of history or geography. The first poem I wrote as myself concerned those hills. (The first poem I wrote as a Graves was a neat translation of one of Catullus’s satires)” (34). After the war, however, Graves sees the landscape of Harlech through the eyes of a soldier and observes that his response to literature is also coloured by the war (287, 293). Transformation for Graves, as for Blunden, does not occur in an epiphanic moment. Here, it is shown to be a gradual adaptation.

There is also evidence in *Good-bye to All That* that Graves, like many of his contemporaries, embraced a reversion to what Charles Taylor has called the “warrior ethic” of pre-modern society. In his study of the evolution of modern identity, *Sources of the Self*, Taylor emphasizes that modern conceptions of selfhood hinge upon a rejection of what Taylor calls “the affirmation of everyday life” (211). Taylor explains that modernity entailed a transition from the ethic of honour to that of everyday life, defining the former as follows: “it involved a strong sense of hierarchy, in which the life of the warrior or ruler, which turned on honour or glory, was incommensurable to that of men of lesser rank, concerned only with life. Willingness to risk life was the constitutive quality of the man of honour” (212-3). Though Taylor describes the progression from the warrior ethic to the affirmation of everyday life as a process that occurred over centuries, I would argue that the unprecedented fervour surrounding the first total war led to a sudden, temporary reversion to the warrior ethic, much as Eric Leed, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, suggests that the population of Europe suddenly rejects

individuality in favour of a communal identity. Graves describes his mental state on the front in terms that echo Taylor's understanding of the warrior ethic:

I wondered whether I could endure to the end with faith unto salvation...My breaking-point was near now, unless something happened to stave it off. Not that I felt frightened. I had never yet lost my head and turned tail through fright, and I knew that I never would. Nor would the break-down come as insanity; I did not have it in me. It would be a general nervous collapse, with tears and twitchings and dirtied trousers; I had seen cases like that. (198)

The rhetoric of courage and Christian imagery of this passage aligns Graves's values with the older tradition of the warrior ethic. Nevertheless, Graves resists employing the figure of conversion to describe his transformation in the war. Insisting that "I knew that I never would...I didn't have it in me," Graves believes that he is not susceptible to the purportedly transformative effects of the war.

Graves writes a quasi-scientific narrative of change which eschews the mysticism of the language of conversion. The same tone of cool detachment with which Graves describes his near-breaking point runs throughout the text. For instance, he comments cold-bloodedly on the life-span of the officer (himself):

Having now been in the trenches for five months, I had passed my prime. For the first three weeks, an officer was of little use in the front line; he did not know his way around, and had not learned the rules of health and safety, or grown accustomed to recognizing degrees of danger. Between three weeks and four weeks he was at his best, unless he happened to have any particular bad shock or sequence of shocks. Then his usefulness gradually declined as neurasthenia developed. At six months he was still more or less all right; but by nine or ten months, unless he had been given a few weeks' rest on a technical course or in hospital, he usually became a drag on the other company officers. After a year or fifteen months he was often worse than useless. (171)

W.H.R. Rivers' medical explanation for this phenomenon follows the explanation, adducing further proof for the life-span of the officer (171). It is in the same vein that, in the final paragraph of the work's 1957 epilogue, Graves emphasizes that his background

made his fate inescapable: “And if condemned to relive those lost years I should probably behave again in very much the same way; a conditioning in the Protestant morality of the English governing classes, though qualified by mixed blood, a rebellious nature and an over-riding poetic obsession, is not easily out-grown” (347). The text professes a belief in heredity and the conditioning effects of one’s environment, but it describes the story of Graves’s struggle to escape these effects.

Good-bye to All That begins with an account of his lineage, especially his German ancestry, and his education in England’s public schools. Graves has just completed his schooling at Charterhouse when the war begins and by the 11th of August, 1914, Graves has been convinced not to enlist, but to take up a commission, and has begun his training. Graves serves in the Royal Welch Fusiliers for the duration of the war, enrolling in Oxford upon demobilization. He teaches briefly in Egypt, and then returns to England in 1926, where the narrative ends rather abruptly. In the final chapter of the 1929 edition, he describes how he left his wife on the 6th of May, 1929, and then wrote the work from the 23rd of May to the 24th of July, 1929.

As personal history, then, *Good-bye to All That* could be read as a story of Graves’ triumphant escape from England, reminiscent, in some respects, of the final pages of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist*, in which Stephen Dedalus flees Ireland to pursue his vocation as an artist. But Graves refuses such a clear-cut ending. In the 1929 edition, Graves explains: “The story trails off here. But to end it with the return from Egypt would be to round it off too bookishly, to finish on a note of comfortable suspense, an anticipation of endless human sequel. I am taking care to rob you of this. From a historical point of view it must be read, rather, as one of gradual disintegration” (437).

He then offers a confusing and cryptic overview of intervening events. In the “Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding,” he explains that he has taken care to make no reference to Riding, for whom he leaves his wife, in the body of the text. At the work’s end, Graves emphasizes the unruly nature of the story he has constructed. Evoking a “historical point of view” – a perspective on events achieved through temporal distance – Graves suggests that no pattern other than disintegration can be discerned. Just as Graves believes in the effects of heredity and environment, he also believes in the positivist search for the laws of history. Graves, perhaps having read the work of Oswald Spengler, argues that recent historical events are a sign of inevitable historical decline.

Thus, in both Blunden’s and Graves’s autobiographical texts, the individual’s change is understood not as conversion, but as a shift in perception. This shift occurs in the context of a narrative of historical decline. Neither Graves nor Blunden will employ the conversion narrative to represent either of these processes; for them, conversion is linked to the idea of progress and improvement.

Vera Brittain: Plot and the Displacement of Conversion

Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* (1933) is, like Robert Graves’s *Good-bye to All That*, an autobiography in which the life is positioned in the historical context of the early years of the twentieth century. But while Graves and Blunden are skeptical of the narrative of conversion and change in their autobiographies, Brittain, like Bagnold and Lawrence, exhibits a powerful desire for change and transformation. Brittain’s younger, experiencing self alternately resists and embraces the ineluctable transformations brought about by the war. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain shapes her life story as a work of

conversion. This is most apparent in the work's formal structure, for Brittain elects to conclude the work with her marriage, an event which she describes as a "new beginning" (661). But the narrative of conversion is repeatedly undermined by the narrator's awareness of the instability of the self and the difficulty inherent in representing lost selves.

Testament of Youth (1933) narrates the events in Vera Brittain's life between 1900 and 1925. After a comfortable, middle-class childhood in Buxton, Brittain succeeded in obtaining a place at Oxford, but the war interrupted Brittain's studies. While her brother and his friends enlisted, Brittain became, like Enid Bagnold, a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse, or V.A.D. Brittain lost her fiancé, Roland Leighton, to the war, as well as her brother and two other close friends. In 1919, Brittain returned to Oxford to finish her degree after the war, though the experience was marked by isolation and grief, then lectured for the League of Nations throughout the 1920s while simultaneously pursuing a career as a journalist and novelist. *Testament of Youth* concludes in 1925 with Brittain's marriage to the political scientist George Catlin.

Early in *Testament of Youth*, there is evidence in the text that Brittain was thoroughly immersed in the discourse of war as conversion. Brittain reproduces in *Testament of Youth* a letter from Roland Leighton in which he writes, "I wonder if your metamorphosis has been as complete as my own" (*Testament of Youth* 216). Metamorphosis, of course, belongs to the same cluster of ideas as rebirth, purgation, and purification through war. Brittain feared a radical transformation, explaining that "for Roland I reserved half-hours of tranquillity from the hard, monotonous days; even when I did not hear from him for a long, anxious period, I endeavoured, as I believed he was

endeavouring for me, to preserve the integrity of the self that he had loved” (174). This passage, in which Brittain suggests that she deliberately struggles to resist change, is written in the early 1930s; it is not, as is much of *Testament of Youth*, an excerpt from her diaries or letters from the period. It suggests that in 1915, Brittain was aware of the self’s potential for change, but that she initially resisted it. Andrea Peterson explains that “While reflecting on her wartime experiences during her postwar writing career, Brittain came to accept that she had been changed dramatically by the war, although she had initially tried to resist the process of change” (Peterson 120).²⁶

Brittain’s reference to half-hours of tranquility in this passage and an allusion to Wordsworth in the preface, in which she characterizes *Testament of Youth* as “emotion recollected in tranquility,” situate Brittain firmly in the Romantic tradition. Brittain believes that she has a unique, essential self – the one Roland loves – that must be preserved. She achieves this through its expression: the preservation of moments of tranquility allows her to express this self, whether through the reading of poetry (the text implies that this is one such use of the tranquil moments), the writing of the diary, or through further correspondence with Roland. Brittain preserves her self through the careful cultivation of a particular kind of intellectual and emotional life and expression. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor argues that this Romantic emphasis on self-expression (what he calls “expressivism”) has a moral dimension: it locates the good in

²⁶ Reading *Testament of Youth* in the context of contemporary feminist theory, Peterson argues that Brittain’s desire to make her personal story stand as a public and representative narrative necessitates thinking about subjectivity in new ways: “In order to overcome these difficulties, she was compelled to theorize not only a ‘new type of autobiography’ but also a new type of fluid, inconsistent, and contradictory *female* subjectivity” (114). I would suggest, then, that Brittain’s understanding of the subject as changeable is not produced only when Brittain goes to write her autobiography, but during the early years of the war.

the expression and fulfillment of the self. Such an assumption underpins Brittain's struggle to preserve her self for Roland.

But given this context, "preservation" is a misnomer. Preservation is an expression of the self, yet the expression of the self can (perhaps even should) produce change in the self. Taylor writes:

My claim is that the idea of nature as an intrinsic source goes along with an expressive view of human life. Fulfilling my nature means espousing the inner élan, the voice or impulse. And this makes what was hidden manifest for both myself and others. But this manifestation also helps to define what is to be realized. The direction of this élan wasn't and couldn't be clear prior to this manifestation. In realizing my nature, I have to define it in the sense of giving it some formulation; but this is also a definition in a stronger sense: I am realizing this formulation and thus giving my life a definitive shape. A human life is seen as manifesting a potential which is also being shaped by this manifestation; it is not just a matter of copying an external model or carrying out an already determinate formulation. (375)

The writing of the life, then, is an extension of the extent to which the self is "realizing this formulation and thus giving my life a definite shape." Taylor explains that expressivism places a particular emphasis on art:

The expressive view of human life went along naturally with a new understanding of art. If expression defines in a double sense, i.e., both formulates and shapes, then the most important human activity will partake of this nature. The activity by which humans realize their nature will also define in this double sense... It is art which comes to fill this niche. In our civilization, moulded by expressivist conceptions, it has come to take a central place in our spiritual life, in some respects replacing religion. The awe we feel before artistic originality and creativity places art on the border of the numinous, and reflects the crucial place that creation/expression has in our understanding of human life. (376)

In other words, Taylor is arguing that art is privileged because it is the ultimate expression of self-determination. As a form of writing that is understood to refer to actual events, autobiography operates within certain restraints, but it remains a form of art in which the self finds expression.

Taylor's observation that self-expression both "formulates and shapes" resonates with the writing of autobiography. The act of expressing a potential that seems to come from within occurs in such a way that the act of expression itself shapes and alters the potential. In autobiography, the double sense of definition, formulation and shaping, is transposed onto the act of recollection of the life. The I-then is assumed to have effected an initial formulation and shaping of the self, life, and potential in the living; in writing an autobiography, the I-then (the narrator of the text) retrospectively re-formulates and re-shapes the self, the life, and the self's potential in the writing. This inevitably produces conflicts: the I-now must confront the formulations and shaping attempts of the I-then in the act of writing. Certainly, Brittain's writing of her diary and letters during the war allowed her to formulate and in doing so shape her understanding of her life, and *Testament of Youth* embeds such moments in its text when Brittain quotes or transposes passages from her diaries and letters. However, retrospective narration of a life from a distance of fifteen years can have another shaping effect, and this becomes clear when one considers Brittain's aesthetic strategies.

That autobiography both formulates and shapes experience clarifies the importance of the marriage plot in *Testament of Youth*. *Testament of Youth* is a text which critics have repeatedly discussed in relation to the heterosexual romance plot, as many critics question the ideological implications of Brittain's reliance on romance to conclude the work.²⁷ And it is difficult not to agree with these assessments: Brittain's

²⁷ As Jean Pickering argues, "Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is built on the structure of romantic comedy, ending, after years of grief and isolation, in the traditional comic conclusion of marriage" (76). Liane Schwarz concurs with Pickering, arguing that "the pattern of the traditional romance" of Brittain's narrative sets it apart from "the largely unstoried accounts of the male war writers" (249). Schwarz argues that the romance plot reflects Brittain's "insistence on narrative interest" (251): Brittain foregrounds her "narrative interference" and in doing so rejects the possibility that any text can be a perfect replication of historical events (252). Susan Leonardi also discusses Brittain in relation to the romance plot. Though she focuses

work veers suddenly toward the novelistic when she concludes both the story of her life and her history of the first quarter of the twentieth century with her marriage. Where in other works I have teased out the correlation between the life and history, Brittain makes the critic's work easy: she emphasizes the coincidence of dates the parallels between her life and a wider history so that both life and history take a dramatic turn in 1925. An era comes to a close, personally and historically, and the work looks optimistically toward the future. In many respects, Brittain represents her life as one of progress, imposing – by means of retrospective narration – a form of conversion on the conclusion. A new beginning dawns for her as Brittain marries not Roland, her wartime fiancé, but a man who survived the war. This is, however, only one way of reading the ending.

The excessively tidy ending of the autobiography is the product of the convergence of Brittain's ideas about change, social conceptions of change, and aesthetic requirements. The question of aesthetic requirements is clear: ending an autobiography is difficult, for the life never stops before the narrative must. The autobiographical narrator must instead find an alternate means of attaining closure. Evidently, for Brittain, the marriage plot of the nineteenth century novel satisfied multiple goals: it concluded an era in her life and a historical era, the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. In the context of the discourse of conversion, however, this somewhat forced ending is produced by the same anxieties surrounding change that are present in the other texts I have considered so far. Bagnold's sense of not experiencing change of the same magnitude as the soldiers seems particularly relevant to Brittain: the lives of many of her

primarily on Brittain's novels, she argues that the same tendency is visible in the fiction and the autobiographical writing: that the romance plot tends to take over, though she locates the dominance of the romance plot in Brittain's continuing thoughts of Roland Leighton as she prepares to marry George Catlin (222). Finally, Anthea Trodd argues that Brittain "falls back" on the romance ending "which is not integrated with the rest of the work" (154).

male contemporaries ended not with marriage, but with death. For Brittain, a young woman, it may seem that her options for ending the narrative are, as so often is the case in the novel, death or marriage.²⁸

Brittain's retrospective shaping of her life story is undermined, however, by a consistent pattern of remarks that insist upon the mutability of the self and of memory. Though the ending insists that Brittain has conclusively entered a new phase of her life, other facets of the narrative resist such closure. Liane Schwarz's perceptive reading of *Testament of Youth* suggests that Brittain is a highly self-conscious narrator, aware of the constructed nature of her narrative, and of autobiography itself (247). One scene in particular reveals Brittain's awareness of the complexity of memory and the difficulty of autobiographical narrative. As she writes in *Testament of Youth* of leaving Malta, Brittain describes reading her diary in order to reconstruct the past, but finding that the one recollection she has is not recorded in the diary. Though Brittain's description of leaving Malta is a transcription of her diary records, she prefaces the transcription by recalling a particularly striking memory which is absent from her diary:

Somehow I found a corner for my diary; the last few entries describe what I still remember, for all my sorrow and anxiety, as one of the queerest and most exciting adventures of the War. I do not know why I omitted an incident which I recalled long after other details of the journey were forgotten – the melancholy sadness of listening at sunset in Syracuse harbour, to the 'Last Post' being sounded for a Japanese sailor who had been washed overboard from the destroyer that had acted as our convoy across the turbulent Mediterranean. (348)

This passage quietly reveals the inadequacy of her written records. The memory that proves to have the most significance to Brittain's recollection of the time – a feeling of “melancholy sadness” at hearing the Last Post – was omitted from her narrative of the

²⁸ See, for instance, Rachel Blau Duplessis' *Writing Beyond the Ending*, in which Duplessis argues that twentieth-century women writers attempt to “write beyond the ending,” to develop narrative strategies which reject the romance plot.

journey. The I-now's moment of lyrical remembrance, of "emotion recollected in tranquility," interrupts the process of narrative recreation of events, and in doing so it challenges the previous mode of recollection, the reliance upon personal documents. The written record fails to register the one event the writer later remembers; here, especially, Brittain seems to question documentary history. Moreover, the I-then's definition of the emotional response to a particular experience occupies a position in limbo: despite careful documentation, definition, formulation, and shaping (given its written form), the inner state recorded seems inauthentic to the I-now. This gap between the I-now and the I-then illustrates Taylor's proposition: Brittain's early self-definition, both its formulation in the diary and its shaping (the selective aspect of diary writing), develops and alters the self such that a later self does not recognize the previous self. The creation of a particular plot, a deliberate (if unconscious) aestheticizing and shaping of experience is a means of concealing and compensating for the inaccessibility of the previous self. The romance plot repairs the loss of the previous self; it organizes and directs experience in a plausible, if ultimately perpetually inadequate fashion. Brittain's text registers new ways of thinking about the constructed, subjective nature of autobiography and history.

Disruptions of History: Gertrude Stein's *Wars I Have Seen*

In Gertrude Stein's *Wars I Have Seen*, the tendencies I have observed in this chapter across the range of autobiographical texts crystallize. Stein's radical narrative experiments include repeated evocations of various incarnations of the conversion narrative, yet although Stein argues for the congruence of personal and historical transformation, she ultimately also insists on the separation of personal history from

national history because merging the personal and the historical obscures the extent to which the daily experience of war is responsible for generating historical understanding.

Wars I Have Seen is most often discussed as a Second World War text, but it can also be read as a First World War text. For Stein, the First World War is her primary point of reference for comparisons with other wars. Stein was in England when the First World War began in 1914 and succeeded in returning to Paris in 1916. When the United States entered the war in 1917, she volunteered to drive a van carrying hospital supplies for the American Fund for French Wounded and in 1919, Stein and her partner, Alice B. Toklas, delivered supplies to civilians in the formerly occupied Alsace. Later in life, Stein once again lives in a war zone: when she thinks back to the First World War in the writing of *Wars I Have Seen*, she is living in occupied France in 1943-1944.

In *Wars I Have Seen*, Stein initially merges the historical and the personal by developing an overt analogy between her personal development and historical development. The text begins with a narrative of childhood through which Stein describes her contact with various wars. The history of Gertrude Stein, born 1874, and world history, from 1874 on, unfold simultaneously. Stein records her encounters with war in various connections: in reality, through her family (the American Civil War), and through literature, Shakespeare's history plays in particular. Where Bagnold, Lawrence, Brittain, Blunden, and Graves often hesitate to equate the dramatic transformations of war with their own less dramatic transformations, Stein claims that, at least in her case, adolescence was a kind of war. She writes:

It was when I was between twelve and seventeen that I went through the dark and dreadful days of adolescence, in which predominated the fear of death, not so much of death as of dissolution, and naturally war is like that. It is and it is not. One can say that in war-time there is death death and death but is there

dissolution. I wonder. May that not be one of the reasons among so many others why wars go on, and why particularly adolescents need it. (14)

Stein's equation of adolescence with war draws on the "dark and dreadful days" that characterize these two periods.

The figure of dissolution is often associated with periods of dramatic change and, often, decline. For instance, in her fictional autobiography *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning offers dissolution as a metaphor for depression and inner turmoil. At the close of Book 7, Browning writes:

I did not write, nor read, nor even think,
But sate absorbed amid the quickening glooms,
Most like some passive broken lump of salt
Dropt in by chance to a bowl of oenomei,
To spoil the drink a little, and lose itself,
Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost.

Here, the figure of dissolution suggests that it occurs in the context of a deep depression, where the self ceases the activity (in this instance, writing, reading, and thinking) that defines it, and so it will "lose itself" or "dissolve." Stein's figure of dissolution is more difficult to parse, but one might paraphrase her comments about dissolution above as follows: a fear of death predominates during adolescence, though perhaps it is a fear of dissolution rather than a fear of death. War both is and is not like death, but is there also dissolution? Perhaps this is why wars go on and adolescents need war. Given this paraphrase, Stein seems to be suggesting that war obviously can lead to death ("It is and it is not like that") but that it can also dissolve the self (or society). In this reading, Stein furnishes a plausible explanation for "why wars go on, and why particularly adolescents need it" (14). For Stein, the violence of war enables historical transformation. Stein explains that the First World War and the Second World War are both attempts to "kill"

the nineteenth century. She writes, "...and the nineteenth century dies hard all centuries do that is why the last war to kill it is so long, it is still being killed now in 1942, the nineteenth century just as the eighteenth century took from the revolution to 1840 to kill, so the nineteenth century is taking from 1914 to 1943 to kill" (16).

It would seem, then, that Stein articulates a version of the conversion narrative in which radical transformation assumes a positive valence. Certainly, Stein's tone is, characteristically, relentlessly cheerful. War, like adolescence, is presented as a required stage of development; transformation is painful, but necessary. Both in the course of personal development and in the course of a society's history, Stein isolates a transformative moment. The overt comparison between the two periods brings to light what attracted others to similar comparisons and narrative forms: that both society and the nation are in flux at the same time as the individual invites this comparison.

Thus, as in the other works that I have discussed, Stein sees parallels in the personal and historical narratives, sometimes to a degree that troubles her critics. Stein's observation "what is the difference between life and war. There is none" (15) has been the subject of diverging critical interpretations. Phoebe Stein Davis reads this and other passages in the same vein as evidence of Stein's view that history and the everyday are inseparable. Davis argues: "For Stein, personal development and war form a natural correspondence. She seems to anticipate the resistance readers might have to a characterization of warfare based on her own personal stages of development, at one point posing and responding to her own question: 'so what is the difference between life and war. There is none'" (Davis 589). These thoughts, Davis argues, "can be recognized as implicit arguments for the connections between history (here represented by war) and

the everyday” (590). Liesl Olson, on the other hand, has observed that Stein’s work illustrates the continuity of daily life despite the war: the focus in *Wars I Have Seen* is “domestic experience: the rationing of food, wine, and tobacco, the dependence on neighbouring farmers, and the closeness of a small community against the threat of impending violence” (340). Olson is critical of Stein’s reliance on the everyday, arguing that “habit” entails the denial of the violence around her (343).²⁹ These diametrically opposed critical assessments of Stein’s politics in this text suggest that Stein’s equation of personal turmoil with total war warrants further scrutiny.³⁰

I read the passages in Stein which suggests that there is no difference between the life of an individual and war as an observation that suggests that it is difficult to narrate a life that occurs in the shadow of war because the war fundamentally alters the life. As Davis suggests, it proves impossible to narrate the story of her life without referring to war, though it is the case, as Olson emphasizes, that Stein often suggests that her life proceeds as though the war were not happening. By writing of daily life as seemingly detached from the events of the war, Stein simultaneously foregrounds in *Wars I Have Seen* at least two distinct temporalities: that of her daily life in France and a historical narrative of the war’s progress in conventional, linear terms. Though she acknowledges that war subjects the individual to historical forces that will irrevocably shape (or

²⁹ Not all critics condemn Stein’s detachment from the war: Ellen Berry, in connection with *Mrs Reynolds*, Stein’s Second World War novel which describes the life of Mrs Reynolds during the reign of a dictator, validates Stein’s privileging of the everyday. Berry argues, “By encircling linear history within the temporal dimensions of other orders of experience - the repetitive, ongoing rhythms of the daily and the natural, and the archaic or mythic time of prophecy - Stein shatters patriarchal claims to sole mastery over what happened” (130).

³⁰ These critical debates are also animated in part by some critics’ discomfort with the circumstances of Stein’s life in France under the Vichy regime. Faced with conflicting accounts of Stein’s relationship to the collaborationist regime, critics have sought to redeem or condemn her narrative techniques and, often by extension, her actions.

dissolve, in Stein's case) the self and sees war as a necessary process, she also entertains the idea that war gives rise to a wartime subjectivity.

Wars I Have Seen develops a complex understanding of the effects of war on the self. Stein claims that there is something about war that distinguishes it from other moments in history; she goes so far as to suggest that it produces a particular kind of subjectivity. Stein explains, "But war makes things go backward as well as forward and so 1914 was the same as 1878 in a way" (5). Stein isn't clear on what she means by "in a way," but it does seem that she is suggesting that war produces the same effect at various points in history. For instance, "To be sure when there is a war the years are longer the years are much longer but the weeks are shorter that is what makes a war" (5). She clarifies further a few pages later: "So I say I know what it is to be any age now that there is a war and so remembering back is not only remembering but might be being...It is funny about wars, they ought to be different but they are not" (11). And so, remembering war brings her back to as she was during the previous war – "not only remembering but might be being" (11). Stein connects historical events to subjectivity in such a way that war does effectively produce an intersection in personal and historical transformation. It does this, however, without reference to linear history. Stein holds on to linearity only with reference to personal development, but war makes this, among other things, "go backward as well as forward," and she returns to the past, a state of "being" rather than "remembering."

Wars I Have Seen is a record of this state of being. Though it is the direct product of Stein's World War II experience, it is also the product of all of the "wars she has seen," the product of a wartime subjectivity. Accordingly, Stein's autobiography

registers not only the war, but more importantly, the subject in war. This is the link that connects the war autobiographies I have considered here, and many of those that I have not. Autobiography that recalls the experience of war must carefully negotiate the differences among writing the life, writing the war, and writing about living through war. These are three distinct stories, though the trope of conversion tends to collapse them into one: the war as a pivotal moment in the life, the war as a time of transition for a society, and the war as condition for the creation of a new subjectivity. Stein, in *Wars I Have Seen*, represents each of these narratives, but refuses to collapse them into a single narrative. Stein recognizes the interrelation between discourses of individual transformation and the unfolding of the events of the war, yet resists the totalizing narrative that would yoke together daily life and history in a narrative of historical transformation, always reading the life in terms of war. War might be analogous to adolescence, but she refuses to make war a pivotal experience in the narrative of her life. In the same fashion, although war might inevitably alter a society, *Wars I Have Seen* does not suggest that the change is permanent; daily life in occupied France continues to resemble pre-war life. Stein isolates the effect of war on the subject, suggesting that war produces a state of being characterized, much like the other texts discussed in this chapter, by a confusion of temporalities.

Stein's interest in different experiences of time and history resonates with mid- and late twentieth-century critiques of linear and continuous history. Foucault's critique of "continuous history" is perhaps best known, though it builds on the earlier work of the *Annales* school.³¹ In opposition to the single narrative, or *récit*, of linear history, French historian Fernand Braudel of the *Annales* school distinguishes between three different

³¹ For the critique of continuous history, see *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (9-12).

temporalities, each of which produces a different historical narrative: Braudel writes “within historical time, of a geographical time, a social time, and an individual time” (4). Geographical time, he explains, is virtually changeless, “the history of man in relation to his surroundings. It is a history which unfolds slowly and is slow to alter, often repeating itself and working itself out in cycles which are endlessly renewed” (3). Social time is “a history of gentle rhythms, of groups and groupings” (3). Finally, individual time is “concerned with traditional history, history, so to speak, on the scale not so much of man in general as of men in particular...the history of events” (3). Braudel seeks to expand history beyond the history of nations, battles, and great men – what he calls individual time – to encompass the history of humans in relation to geography (geographical time) and the history of civilizations (what he calls social time). The latter, individual time, is what I have been calling “history” until this point in this chapter, with some reservations. First World War autobiographies, especially Stein’s *Wars I Have Seen*, are marked by the awareness that individual time, seemingly the only temporality and the only history, can actually be further subdivided, into the everyday and the historical.

An awareness of discrete temporalities runs throughout the texts discussed in this chapter. This emerges clearly in Bagnold’s work, for instance, when her encounters with military discipline and dying soldiers gave her new experiences of time. It is also true of Lawrence; participating in the guerrilla warfare of the Arab Revolt exposed him to different rhythms of life. Blunden’s foregrounding of literary history as a significant historical narrative has a similar effect, though it employs a different system of distinctions than Braudel’s series of temporalities. In *Undertones of War*, not only do the literary allusions and references to Blunden’s life as an author construct an alternate

history, but the lyrical sections which interrupt the terse descriptions of trench life can be read as a means of incorporating aspects of his literary, everyday, and individual existence into the narrative. Blunden does not achieve the same degree of equivalence between his personal life and the war that Stein does, but I would argue they share the same objective: to insist upon the primacy of the everyday even, perhaps especially, during times of war.

Brittain's autobiography, especially her unpublished letters, are also particularly attentive to different temporalities and the understanding of history that this produces. Brittain is drawn to Rupert Brooke's lines "We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing / War knows no power." In *Testament of Youth*, she describes "whisper[ing] to myself exultingly: 'War knows no power'" (173) and these lines appear throughout her letters, but her experience of war is in fact marked by the instability of time.³² Her letters contain endless references to the erratic delivery of letters: time seems to dilate and contract with the arrival of letters, and makes it difficult to feel any sense of connection to the letter writer whose letters arrive out of sequence, never quickly enough. For instance, in one letter, Roland requests that she send him newspapers, but Brittain replies, explaining that it would involve a delay of nearly two weeks. She promises to summarize the contents for him, further explaining:

Apparently my letters to you reach you rather sooner than yours to me; yours come fairly consistently 5 or 6 days after they have been written – just in time for me to know that you are back in the trenches when you have written that you are about to come out! The chief advantage of getting them so long after is that if you are experiencing, or just going to experience, any particular danger, I know

³² See the following letters held in the Vera Brittain archive, William Ready Division of Special Collections, McMaster University: Brittain to Roland, 29 July 1915; Brittain's letter to her brother, Edward Brittain, on 8 January 1916 (though dated 1915), where she describes having written these lines in the fly-leaf of a book she gave to Roland Leighton, who died two weeks previously; see also Brittain to her brother Edward on 4 May 1917.

when I read your letter that this at least is over – for better- because if it was over for worse I should have heard before. (20 April 1915)

The war itself is further responsible for a confused sense of time. She writes to Roland while visiting her former school, St Monica's:

Only it seems years & years since I was here – more like thirteen than three. Everything before the war seems centuries ago; I told my headmistress last night that I felt about thirty, and she said that the war did have that effect on anyone who realizes it at all, but how very glad I should be when the war was over & I woke up from the nightmare to find that I was only twenty-two or twenty-three after all. (22 June 1915)

Though the war has produced a new temporality, Brittain expects the “nightmare” temporality to end, and normal time to resume, at the end of the war. *Testament of Youth* bears traces of this sense of disordered time, as Brittain's detailed reconstructions of events in timelines as she prepared to write her autobiography (discussed in the introduction to this chapter) suggest a her difficulty in producing a linear history of events in her life and those in the war. Turning to Brittain for a final example, we see that *Testament of Youth* shares the attention to the details of everyday life and social life of *Wars I Have Seen* (in particular, Stein's record of the availability of food and the stories of her neighbours). Brittain produces her autobiography by reworking her copious diaries: the emphasis on daily life that is part of the diary form is transmuted into the autobiography, which produces a text which focuses both on daily life and the “events” of the war, predominantly the military action on the Western front, without submerging the life into the events of the war.

These works write history from the perspective of the individual, but in writing autobiography alongside history, the personal narrative risks being submerged in the historical narrative. The trope of conversion, in particular, tends to assimilate experience

to a single narrative of linear progress, privileging history, more often than not, over the life. By disaggregating the narrative of “history” and the narrative of the life and employing a narrative failed conversion, the autobiographies of Bagnold, Lawrence, Blunden, Graves, Brittain and Stein offer narratives of incomplete, displaced, and failed transformations that are attentive to the nuances of wartime subjectivity. In this manner, they ensure that their historical understanding obtained by living through war illuminates the larger web of historical relations.

Chapter 3: Figures of History: Allegory in the Literature of the First World War

The previous two chapters considered narrative strategies in fiction and autobiography through which writers of the First World War incorporated their anxieties about the subjective nature of historical writing and ensured that the individual's perspective emerged in histories of war. This chapter, and the one that follows it, explore strategies for the recovery of frameworks that promote a shared understanding of the past. The texts that I study in this chapter acknowledge the problems of historical representation, but rather than developing literary forms that emphasize the individual's experience of the war, they turn to allegory, an existing literary strategy for representing and interpreting historical events that has deep roots in the Western tradition. The pressures of the crisis of historicism, however, lead to conflicting attitudes toward allegory as a device for interpreting and representing the events of the war. Working across different genres, this chapter treats four texts in which allegory has a central, if disputed, place: David Jones's long poem *In Parenthesis* (1937), Vernon Lee's illustrated narrative *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) and subsequent revision of this work in *Satan the Waster* (1920), and ee cummings' autobiography *The Enormous Room* (1922). These four works represent the broad range of First World War texts that employ allegory. In the novels, stories, plays, poems, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, pageants of the war, allegory figures prominently.

Despite this prominence, minimal critical attention has been paid to the allegorical dimension of the literature of the First World War. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Fussell has little patience for allegory, painting it as alternately juvenile or complicit in the glorification of the war; on these grounds, respectively, he dismisses

cummings's *The Enormous Room* as a work in which the allegorical parallels to Bunyan's work are little more than a "schoolboy trick" (160) and criticizes the analogy that Jones draws between the First World War and medieval history and legend by means of allegory in *In Parenthesis*. In Fussell's work, allegory is read as an index of a text's allegiance to specific literary and cultural attitudes, and as a consequence, he critiques cummings and Jones for turning to a literary figure that tends to obscure the harsh reality of modern war.

There are, nevertheless, critics who have sought to study the significance of allegory in the literature of the First World War. Jay Winter, whose work aims to serve as a corrective to Fussell, directs attention to allegory in the art and literature of the war. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995), Winter examines works that explore apocalypse and the "allegory of catastrophic disaster," arguing that "the sacred returned in the period of the Great War...as a vocabulary of mourning, and as a code through which artists expressed in enduring ways the enormity of the war and the suffering left in its wake" (177). In his account, allegory is inseparable from the sacred, specifically the Christian tradition. Jane Potter's analysis of biblical typology in women's wartime romance novels in *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print* (2005) also focuses on the Christian implications of a specific form of allegorical interpretation, that of biblical typology. Potter writes that in the works she studies, "Biblical typology...obscures historical reality and analysis" and tends to view history as a "teleological force" (98). Potter's analysis thus broaches the issue of the relationship between allegory and the philosophy of history within the framework of Christian thought.

This chapter takes the philosophy of history, rather than the Christian tradition, as its point of departure for assessing the role of allegory in the literature of the First World War. The First World War texts that I consider in this chapter turn to allegory in order to access a shared interpretive framework for history. On the one hand, David Jones's *In Parenthesis* employs allegory in order to evoke the idea that history is, in fact, cyclical; far from repudiating the shared frame of reference and philosophy of history that allegory provides, he endorses it. But on the other hand, Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster* as well as ee cummings's *The Enormous Room* question the implications of writing history as allegory. Comparing Vernon Lee's little-known allegorical narrative *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) and her subsequent expansion of the text as a play with commentary in *Satan the Waster* (1920) reveals that while Lee initially employs allegory in the service of a blunt critique of the war, revision alters her attitude toward reading history as an allegory. In the later work, she refines her understanding of the role of allegory in historical writing, ultimately arguing that allegory is a necessary, if reductive, aspect of writing history. Like Lee's works, ee cummings's autobiographical and allegorical narrative *The Enormous Room* resorts to allegory, drawing explicitly on an earlier allegorical text, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, to give shape to his experience of the war. But cummings repudiates the Christian meaning of *Pilgrim's Progress*; breaking with the established connection between allegory and Christian historiography, he refashions allegory to accommodate a secular understanding of the war in which he substitutes a celebration of life on earth for the narrative of salvation. My analysis of these diverging uses of allegory in the literature of the First World War proposes that the repercussions of the First World War and the crisis of historicism

extend into the domain of allegory, for while allegory promises a powerful explanatory structure for the events of the war, the certainty it implies about historical knowledge proves problematic.

Allegory and the philosophy of history first intersect in Christian historiography. Christian historiography places the life of Christ at the centre of its pattern: the events preceding the birth of Christ are understood as leading up to it, and those following the birth of Christ are understood as its consequences. History is the product of God's will; as R.G. Collingwood explains in *The Idea of History* (1946), in this context history is understood as "universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized" (49). This conception of history gives rise to the medieval fourfold method of interpretation, in which scripture is understood to have historical, allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. In this context, "allegorical" refers to a typological reading of the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New Testament. As Erich Auerbach explains in his essay "Figura," the writings of the Church Fathers give the Latin term *figura* a historical basis in reality: "*figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. The relation between the two events is revealed by an accord or similarity" (29). The medieval Christian understanding of the relationship between allegory and history turns on the practice of seeking out specific patterns in the historical record of the Bible. "Often vague similarities in the structure of events or in their attendant circumstances suffice to make the *figura* recognizable; to find it, one had to be determined to interpret in a certain way" Auerbach writes (29). Christian allegorical interpretation thus depends upon a specific understanding of the course of history.

In the modern context, allegory can be defined most simply as a narrative that develops two levels of signification. The term allegory is derived from *allo*, meaning other, and from *agoria*, meaning speaking. Thus, in Angus Fletcher's basic formulation, "allegory says one thing and means another" (2). Fletcher explains that allegory is characterized by "a peculiar doubleness of intention, and while it can, as it were, get along without interpretation, it becomes much richer and more interesting if given interpretation" (7). Allegory can take the form of a narrative that elaborates a historical or fictional parallel between characters or historical figures – what was once known strictly as figural interpretation – and their actions, or it can take the form of an allegory of ideas in which characters represent specific abstract concepts.

Allegory resonates with conceptions of history that involve repetition. The Christian conception of the shape of history, specifically the idea of historical repetition inherent in allegorical interpretations of scripture discussed above, exerted a powerful influence over subsequent understandings of history. In the modern era, thinkers as diverse as Giambattista Vico in eighteenth century Italy, Hegel in nineteenth century Germany, Oswald Spengler in twentieth century Germany, and Arnold Toynbee in twentieth century Britain made recourse to determinist philosophies of history in which history takes a cyclical, sometimes spiral shape. In the literature of the twentieth century, echoes of these ideas are found in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Yeats's *A Vision*.¹

To interpret the historical record as a cycle of events repeating themselves is to read history in an allegorical mode, searching for patterns of events that signal the existence of a specific course for history. Thus, allegories in which the characters are

¹ See Louise Blakeney Williams's *Modernism and the Ideology of History: Literature, Politics, and the Past* for the most thorough study of key modernist figures such as Ford, Pound, and Eliot and the philosophy of history.

allegorical personifications distill the specificity of historical events to an ahistorical narrative. Like the general laws formulated by the positivists, this ahistorical allegorical narrative understands history as events that follow a certain predetermined pattern. The second form of allegory, which develops historical or fictional parallels, engages in the same form of inductive reasoning from historical data as positivist historians. In both instances, the writer or historian searches for patterns in the historical data.

In the First World War texts considered in this chapter, allegorical representations of the First World War take the form of both an allegory of ideas and an allegory of historical parallels. Jones's *In Parenthesis* creates a constellation of historical parallels between the First World War and earlier historical events. Lee's "Ballet of the Nations" is an allegory of ideas in which the conditions that give rise to and perpetuate war take the form of allegorical personifications. Cummings's autobiography proposes both a fictional and a Christian historical parallel, likening his experience to that of Christian in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But what is of particular interest in each of these instances of allegory is that the secondary meaning that lies behind what Fletcher calls the "hermeneutic wall" separating two sets of meanings are various assumptions about the laws that govern history. In a later formulation of a rhetorical definition for allegory, Fletcher explains that "allegory is a method of double meanings that organizes utterance (in any medium) according to its expression of analogical parallels between different networks of iconic likeness. In setting up its correspondences between a certain story, let's say, and a set of meanings (the *significatio* of medieval exegesis), the method usually gives a vague impression of system" ("Allegory Without Ideas" 10). In the literature of the First World War, as this chapter shall demonstrate, the correspondence

between the story told and the set of meanings implied (the working of the allegory) is governed by the assumption that history repeats itself. In Jones's work, this assumption stands unchallenged, but in the works of Lee and Cummings, allegory's implicit assumption of historical repetition is subject to scrutiny.

“Re-participating in history”: Allegory and Historical Continuity in *In Parenthesis*

The genesis of *In Parenthesis* lies in David Jones's experience as a private in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers during the First World War. In the early 1930s, Jones began work on a series of drawings about the war, accompanying them with text, but to his surprise, Jones found himself discarding the images and concentrating solely on the poem. Jones, a visual artist by training and practice, had not previously written poetry. Yet, *In Parenthesis* has been hailed as one of the greatest long poems of the twentieth century and praised by Eliot, Yeats, and Auden alike.²

In Parenthesis follows the men of one company of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers as they spend six months in the forward trenches, tracing the movements of the company and the thoughts of Private John Ball. Divided into seven parts, the narrative begins as the company is dispatched to France and ends with the attack at Mametz Woods, part of the Battle of the Somme. The poem, which incorporates long sections of lyrical and rhythmic prose, is often compared to the poetry of T.S. Eliot, as it is densely allusive but also attentive to the particularity of different voices, and because, like Eliot in *The Waste*

² See Dilworth's *Reading David Jones* (1-2) for a discussion of Jones's reputation among his contemporaries. Jones has suffered from relative critical neglect in recent years. His allusions, which are steeped in Catholicism and Welsh mythology, tend to limit his appeal. The central work in Jones criticism is Thomas Dilworth's *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* (1988). Jonathan Miles and Kathleen Henderson Staudt are the two critics who have examined closely the place of history and the influence of Oswald Spengler in Jones's work.

Land, Jones accompanies *In Parenthesis* with a set of notes directing the reader to the sources for some of the poem's more obscure allusions. But, unlike Eliot's work, *In Parenthesis* consistently refers to a more limited set of traditions: Christianity, Welsh mythology, and the Arthurian legends of Malory. In its web of allusions and analogies, *In Parenthesis*, like *The Enormous Room* and *Satan the Waster*, reads the events of the First World War – recent history – in allegorical terms. The speaker of the poem understands the events and characters in the trenches on the Western front and in the Battle of the Somme as recurring types from the chivalric and Biblical tradition and this pattern, taken as a whole, is understood to gesture toward the design of history.³ *In Parenthesis* reads history as allegory, compiling historical parallels which point toward a deeper but undisclosed meaning.

Understanding the events as the war as the most recent instance of a historical pattern is a defining feature of *In Parenthesis*. The narrator's conviction in the recurrence of types is crystallized in the following passage, which is drawn from Part 7, the attack on Mametz Woods:

When they put up a flare, he saw many men's accoutrements medleyed and
strewed up so down and service jackets bearing below the shoulder-numerals the
peculiar sign of their battalions.
And many of those shields he had seen knights bear beforehand.
And the severed head of '72 Morgan,
its visage grins like the Cheshire cat

³ As both Staudt and Dilworth have suggested, this web of allusions consistently evokes a typological scheme, meaning that specific types (whether events or persons) recur throughout history. Staudt likens Jones's typology to the "mythical method" Eliot sees in Joyce. She writes "But while Joyce's method, in Eliot's account, is implicitly the product of an inner, psychological principle, Jones's typological vision provides a way for the modern poet to engage the history and methodology of the past as persistent modes of interpretation applicable to the present.... For him, typology is more than a principle of order providing underlying unity for an apparently fragmented stream of consciousness. It is also a principle of continuity, linking the contemporary poet to a community of human sign-makers from the past, a community that his Christian faith also connects to a transcendental order" (32). Along similar lines, Thomas Dilworth quotes Jones's observation that "About his poetry, Jones writes, 'I deal almost only with the typic' (qtd in Dilworth 17).

and full grimly.
 It fared under him as the earth had quaked – and the nose-cap pared his heel
 leather. (180)

In this passage, the narrator describes what Private John Ball sees when a flare illuminates the landscape. The ground is covered with the soldiers' possessions, including their jackets, which bear the insignia of the man's battalion. A curiously antiquated diction ("medleyed") prepares us for the rapid shift between the modern and the medieval that occurs in the next sentence. The insignia for the battalion are transformed into "those shields he had seen knights bear beforehand." In an instance best described as historical vertigo, Ball sees a scene from the Middle Ages. By employing this transhistorical perspective, Jones elides the temporal gap between the First World War and the Middle Ages and, in a mystical moment of vision, Ball sees history as the recurrence of symbols and events. In the flash of the flare, he sees signs of the design of history. But as quickly as we left Mametz Wood, we return: to a severed head of another soldier with a "Cheshire cat" grin, a disconcerting allusion to the distorted world of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The earth shakes as a shell explodes. This passage from Part 7 is representative of the poem's consistent distortions of time: throughout the work, the narrator moves from the First World War back to the time of Arthur and of great Welsh heroes, and forward again to the twentieth century.

That history repeats itself is not simply a structuring device for the poem, a means for Jones to generate aesthetic order from the chaotic and confusing memories of the war. Rather, it is a principle for historical understanding that Jones explored as early as 1917. For Jones, the mental habit of thinking of the events of the war as the repetition of earlier historical events dates to long before the writing of *In Parenthesis* in the 1930s. Even in

his earliest literary work, Jones represents the war through historical parallels. A New Year card that Jones produced for his friends and family in November 1917 depicts a knight raising a sword before him, the hilt pointing up, and the blade to the ground. He is surrounded by figures carrying staffs, books, and a harp. In the background is a body of water, and beyond that, a walled castle. The image evokes the quest for the Holy Grail. Depicting a different point in history, there is no hint of the present conflict in the image. Yet, a portion of the card's text reads as follows:

Now he spake to the young Knight: "Sir Knight, the men of valour in yonder wondrous hall, when they make them wars, war not but for the cause of liberty. Thou, therefore, when thou liftest high thy battle-blade, strike not but to make men free. And if a great prince shall say to thee, "Sir, fight thou for me, and for my fair province, for surely thy reward shall be great", thou shalt cry scorn upon him and his province; for he speaketh a vain thing, and after the manner of princes. But if one grey-headed shall cry unto thee, saying, "Fair Sir, they have taken from me the only ox that I had, and despoiled me of mine only acre," then shalt thou straightaway raise thy sword for him, - yea, thou it meaneth a right bloody affray. Thou shalt e'en esteem thy life well hazarded in such a cause. (qtd in Hyne 162)

Though this card describes the instruction of a knight, rather than a soldier, and employs deliberately antiquated diction and syntax, it is tellingly dated "The Trenches, France, November 1917." Jones's story of the Knight is an allegory for the First World War in which he draws a parallel between two historical instances of war and, in doing so, gestures toward the existence of a historical pattern in which the strong engage in a just battle in defense of the disenfranchised.

That Jones began to believe that history repeats itself as early as the First World War is further apparent in his explanation for an allusion to Shakespeare's *Henry IV* in the midst of *In Parenthesis*. One of the characters says, with no further explanation, "I say Calthorp, have a bite of this perfectly good chocolate you can eat the stuff with your

beaver up” (*In Parenthesis* 173). This is a curious line: the decidedly modern “perfectly good” merges with the antiquated term for helmet, “beaver.” In his study of David Jones, Jonathan Miles quotes from a letter Jones wrote to Bernard Bergonzi in which he explains the origin of the line. I will quote Miles’s transcription of this letter at length, for it bears directly on Jones’s understanding of history emerging from his personal experience in the war. In the letter, Jones describes looking for his friend Harry in the trenches and calling to a corporal,

‘Have you seen Harry?’
to which he replied before darting off –
‘I saw young Harry with his beaver on’.
... my friend guessed that I should probably
know the context of ‘I saw young Harry with
his beaver on’ and it chanced that, in a vague
way, I did, but might well not have done,
for I was [...] not then, nor, for that matter
am I now, all that familiar with Shakespeare.

True, he (the friend) was a cultivated & educated
Englishman, but not ... ‘high brow’ – not at
all. I’m convinced that to an extent far
more than is now realised, and leaving my own
tendencies out of it altogether, there was in that
war, a sense of re-participating in history... (qtd in Miles 85; I have transcribed
the letter as Miles reprints it, respecting Jones’s line breaks)

In this excerpt from the letter, Jones recalls a brief wartime exchange that had a particular resonance for him. At the time, perhaps, the incident stood out as a moment where Jones felt markedly uncultivated, surrounded by highly educated men. But here, upon reflection, Jones suggests that he later came to see this moment, in which he happened, against the odds, to understand the allusion, as a sign that the war had given both him and his fellow soldiers access to the literary and historical past.

This letter can deepen our understanding of Jones’s remark in the preface to *In Parenthesis*, that “I suppose at no time did one so much live with a consciousness of the

past, the very remote, and the more immediate and trivial past, both superficially and more subtly” (xi) and his subsequent catalogues of historical equivalents for the experience of the Western Front. The war, in Jones’s account, provided him and his contemporaries with unmediated access to the past; they lived with experiences akin to the moment in the poem in which Ball had already seen the insignia of his battalion on a medieval battlefield. But the letter quoted above extends this argument in an important direction. It makes explicit the sense that history is repeating itself – that in the war, Jones was “re-participating in history.”

In many of the texts discussed in this study, it has been necessary for me to draw out the historiographic implications of each text. This is not necessary to the same extent for *In Parenthesis*. Over the course of his lifetime, David Jones articulated his ideas about history clearly and consistently. His understanding of history is greatly influenced by Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, which was published in German in 1918 and translated into English in 1926. Although Jones made a systematic study of Spengler in the early 1940s, several years after the publication of *In Parenthesis*, it is clear that he read *The Decline of the West* before this time, and likely before completing *In Parenthesis*.⁴ *The Decline of the West* propounds the existence of a cyclical pattern in history. In Spengler’s account, a culture emerges as a primitive society, then develops a political system, art, and science which reach maturity in the culture’s classical period. This is followed by a period of decadence and decline. As the culture dies, it becomes increasingly barbaric and sterile. For Jones, the attraction of Spengler lay in his diagnosis of early twentieth-century Europe as a culture in decline. As Jonathan Miles explains,

⁴ See Miles 36. But, as another critic has observed, Spengler’s association with National Socialism has led to some critics minimizing Spengler’s importance for Jones (Staudt 121).

“Spengler inspires because, in not unpoetic terms, he catches and gives exhaustive expression to the *Zeitgeist*, registering the tremblings of a society shocked by world war” (Miles 63).⁵ Spengler’s claims resonated powerfully with Jones’s own sense of living and working in a weakened and sterile culture. While Spengler was not the first to make this claim about modern Europe, his work captured the imagination of Jones and many others; variations of his understanding of history remain with us to this day.⁶

The Decline of the West imagines history as homology, developing this idea through a series of compelling metaphors and images. Spengler, whose work is consistently poetic, describes these stages of the culture’s evolutions as the seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Spengler does not, however, evoke the course of history metaphorically as an approximation of its pattern. On the contrary, so confident was Spengler of his scheme that he insisted on a perfect correspondence between cultures at distinct historical moments. He writes:

I hope to show that without exception all great creations and forms in religion, art, politics, social life, economy and science appear, fulfil themselves and die down *contemporaneously* in all the Cultures; that the inner structure of one corresponds strictly with that of all the others; that there is not a single phenomenon of deep physiognomic importance in the record of one for which we could not find a counterpart in the record of every other; and that this counterpart is to be found under a characteristic form and in a perfectly definite chronological position. At the same time, if we are to grasp such homologies of facts, we shall need to have a far deeper insight and a far more critical attitude towards the visible foreground of things than historians have hitherto been wont to display...” (Vol. 1 112)

This passage conveys the force and the extent of Spengler’s view of history. Though Spengler allows for some deviation from the pattern, his theory of history is

⁵ Kathleen Henderson Staudt is a second critic to have considered Spengler’s influence on Jones at length. In her assessment, “David Jones evidently recognized in Spengler a historical imagination equal to his own,” and was particularly drawn to the historical parallels that Spengler established between cultures (120).

⁶ Northrop Frye suggests, writing in 1974, that “everybody accepts his main thesis in practice,” thinking in terms of the existence of a “Western culture” and of twentieth century Western civilization as old (187).

overwhelmingly homologous (Frye 185-6). In the hands of David Jones, who converted to Catholicism in 1921, Spengler's homology becomes typology; the historical parallels discerned by a positivist historian are imbued with religious significance. *In Parenthesis* views the war from Spengler's transhistorical perspective, but rather than searching for patterns in history, the poem searches for recurring types, and the accretion of these parallels produces a second level of meaning as the text gestures toward the shape of history.

The turn of phrase "re-participating in history" also orients us toward a second, related aspect of Jones's understanding of history, namely his idea that a "Break" has severed the past from the present. Jones had his own formulation of the cultural malaise of the early twentieth century; just as Eliot before him spoke of the "dissociation of sensibility" in the seventeenth century, Jones believed that a great chasm divided the early twentieth century from previous centuries, separating the modern era from its history. His despair responds to the ahistorical tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as manifested in the work of Nietzsche, among others; it also, by extension, engages with the crisis of historicism. But for Jones, the heightened awareness of history brought about by the war is a first step toward repairing this chasm. Rather than seeing the war as an event that further severs his generation from the past, he sees the war as an opportunity for the regeneration of historical consciousness, and in this respect his work differs substantially from that of many of his contemporaries, for whom the war often marks the final break with the past.

Jones gives his newly awoken sense of the past literary embodiment when he represents the historical parallels between the First World War and an earlier, heroic age

in *In Parenthesis*. Jones brings together the past and present in a manner that recalls Eliot's helpless description in *The Waste Land* of "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" and the palimpsestic historical images of H.D.'s *Trilogy*. His poetics have undeniable affinities with other, often earlier, works of literary modernism. Staudt observes that, "like his better known contemporaries Eliot and Pound, Jones tried to devise poetic techniques and a poetic language that would somehow come to terms with what he called "The Break" between the contemporary world and a more unified past culture" (2), while Miles explains that "Jones's work, though it subsists on traditions or cultural elements, many of which have hitherto occupied an important place in the intellectual life of the West, by appearing obscure, testifies to the breakdown of that intellectual synthesis..." (Miles 67). These and other readings of Jones situate him in the familiar narrative of modernism's fragmented aesthetic emerging from a fragmented culture.⁷

And, like many works of modernism, Jones's poem works steadily toward a synthesis of past and present. This occurs most powerfully in a speech at the centre of *In Parenthesis*. Dai Greatcoat, a private in the company, delivers a lengthy monologue.⁸ It begins as follows:

This Dai adjusts his slipping shoulder-straps, wraps close his
misfit outside greatcoat – he articulates his English with an
alien care.

My fathers were with the Black Prinse of Wales
At the passion of
The blind Bohemian king.

⁷ For more on the "the Break," see Colin Wilcockson's "David Jones and 'The Break.'" See also A.C. Everatt's "Doing and Making" for an interesting discussion of Jones in relation to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. Blissett's *Long Conversation* also treats the subject of "the Break" at length.

⁸ Thomas Dilworth observes in *The Shape of Meaning* that "[w]e hear him as he boasts, in what is structurally, spatially, and thematically the centre of *In Parenthesis*. A sort of poem-within-the-poem, his boast brings into focus most of its host poem's motifs" (108).

They served in these fields,
 It is in the histories that you can read it, Corporal – boys
 Gower, they were – it is writ down – yes.
 Wot about Methuselum, Taffy? (79)

Dai's speech is a boast, "a set genre in the Welsh oral tradition and in Malory. The convention is that the boaster claims to have been present, either in his own person or in the person of an ancestor, at key events in the history of his community" (Staudt 61). In a lengthy footnote, Jones lists the three specific boasts in the Welsh work *Widsith* that inspired this speech, and observes that "I was not altogether unmindful of the boast in John viii. 58" (n. 37 207). In the ten lines quoted above, the conventions of the boast are apparent. In the first line of this section, Dai physically prepares himself to speak to the group, adjusting his pack and his coat and, in doing so, adopts a more authoritative posture. The narrator's description of his voice, the "alien care" with which he speaks, establishes that Dai speaks as an outsider. Dai's first words confirm this. He is not English, but Welsh: he proudly traces his lineage back to the "Black Prince of Wales" and claims that his fathers fought in the battle of Crécy in 1346, a turning point in the Hundred Years' War. (The "blind Bohemian king" is John the Blind, King of Bohemia, who died on the battlefield at Crécy.) In this capsule history of a previous time, Dai neatly elides the fact that the English were fighting against the French. The detail that he draws out instead is that his fathers "served in these fields." The parallel is not simply geographic, for Edward, the Black Prince of Wales, is associated with the end of the heroic era. Dai, in his ill-fitting greatcoat and too-heavy pack, is a figure from both the First World War and the fourteenth century, two eras that saw the decline of chivalry. In the figure of Dai, as elsewhere in the poem, Jones evokes a Spenglerian notion of decline and historical repetition.

Dai's boast employs the same transhistorical perspective that momentarily allowed John Ball to recall seeing the insignia of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers on a medieval battlefield. Dai's rhetoric, as Vincent Sherry has argued, traces the trajectory of the Western heroic tradition, beginning as it does with the Black Prince, and concluding, five pages later, with the First World War song "Old Soldiers Never Die." Staudt, building on this interpretation, argues that Dai's boast figures the poet's relationship to history: "it underscores the poet's role as a person conscious of history yet speaking to a present-day audience.... Dai exhorts his audience to remember, to maintain the poet's insights into the causes and consequences of events, to resist discontinuity and affirm connections, to say with Dai, "I was there" (61-62). Most crucially, however, the boast insists on allegorizing history. As he begins his boast, Dai directs his audience to the histories of Wales, for "It is in the histories that you can read it, Corporal – boys / Gower, they were – it is writ down – yes." But the poem – and at the centre of the poem, the boast – is a necessary allegorical supplement to the histories in which the history of Wales and the history of modern Europe are set in context as part of a larger historical pattern.

Originating in Jones's sense that the war awakened him to his place in history, the poem aims to do the same for his readers, to allow them to feel that they are "re-participating in history." In opposition to the growing awareness of the limitations of history and the eroding sense of the past, Jones insists that our understanding of the present, of the recent history that is the First World War, depends upon our understanding of the past. In contrast to much of the literature discussed in this study, *In Parenthesis* does not respond to the crisis in historicism by further problematizing the historical method. Instead, Jones establishes himself as a defender and maker of historical

narrative. Drawing on Spengler's confident (and positivist) assertion of the shape of history and borrowing the techniques of modernist poetry, Jones crafts a poem that argues for coherent historical narrative as a necessity if we are to make sense of the experience of the war. For Jones, reading history as allegory, as a text that encodes a secondary meaning that propounds specific ideas about the meaning and direction of history, is central to this task.

Revisions of Allegorical History: Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster*

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Vernon Lee (1856-1935) was well known for her work on Italy's history and culture, on aesthetics, and on psychology. She was a historian, novelist, philosopher, and essayist who published widely, as well as a committed pacifist who opposed the Boer War, wrote extensively about the need to avoid war in the subsequent years, and was outspoken in her opposition to the First World War. The publication of the anti-war *The Ballet of the Nations* in 1915, however, isolated Lee from many of her contemporaries. By the time she published an expanded version of this work in 1920 under the title of *Satan the Waster*, she had begun to fade into obscurity, due in no small part to the unpopularity of *The Ballet of the Nations*. These two works are seldom read and rarely studied, but they are important both for the study of Vernon Lee and for the study of attitudes toward allegory and history in the literature of the First World War, for in their treatment of allegory, these two works allow us to trace the evolution of Lee's understanding of history over the course of the years 1915-1920.

A short, illustrated narrative, *The Ballet of the Nations* describes a performance by a cast of allegorical figures. The third-person narrator describes Satan's announcement that he wishes to "re-open the Theatre of the West" (1) and Ballet-Master Death's offer of assistance. The first half of the text describes the assembly of an orchestra of allegorical figures: Sin, Fear, Suspicion, Idealism, Adventure, Heroism, Science, and Organization, among others. Also summoned are the unnamed allegorical personifications of the nations, who will perform the violent dance of the "Ballet of the Nations," an allegory for war. This version of the dance begins with the trampling of the unnamed nation who is the "Smallest-Dancer-of-All" by the "Giant" nation, and the nations proceed to dance, "lopping each others' limbs and blinding one another with spirits of blood and pellets of human flesh" (14). As the dancers flag, Pity and Indignation appear to revive them. The narrative concludes, written as it is in 1915, "And thus the Ballet of the Nations is still a-dancing" (20).

If, as Gordon Teskey suggests, an allegory is a text that "contains instructions for its own interpretation" (*Allegory and Violence* 3), then *The Ballet of the Nations* is most certainly an allegory. In the following description of the heads and bodies of the nations, the narrator models allegorical reading:

Nations, contrary to the opinion of Politicians, are immortal. Just as the Gods of Valhalla could slash each other to ribbons after breakfast and resurrect for dinner, so every Nation can dance Death's Dance however much bled and maimed, dance upon stumps, or trail itself along, a living jelly of blood and trampled flesh, providing only it has its Head fairly unhurt. And that Head, which each Nation calls its Government, but the other Nations call "France," or "Russia," or "Britain," or "Germany," or "Austria" for short, that Head of each Dancing Nation...is very properly helmeted...(13)

The narrator offers an allegorical interpretation of the body of the nation in which the invulnerable head of the figure is the government, a reading which both explains a

nation's willingness to endanger its body and offers a critique of the state. The allegorical figures for the nations are not only embodiments of the abstraction of the nation. The knowing narrator orients the reader toward the body of the nation as allegory for the body politic, in the unlikely event that reader had missed the allegorical commentary.

But if the pleasure of allegory resides in the interpretation and decoding of the text, *The Ballet of the Nations* offers relatively little in the way of such pleasure for the reader. There is minimal scope for the reader to interpret the characters who are personifications of abstractions, such as Fear or Heroism, though there is greater latitude for interpretation in identifying the unnamed dancers, the nations.

The narrator stresses that the "Ballet of the Nations" has been performed many times; the First World War is only the most recent performance. In keeping with this principle, the narrator's commentary on the costumes of the musicians and the dancers stresses the historical indeterminacy: the musicians are dressed in "classical, mediaeval, biblical, or savage costumes" (4). The illustrations by Maxwell Armfield fuse the style of Aubrey Beardsley with Greco-Roman illustrations: not only are the figures of an indeterminate historical period, but so too is the style of the illustration. (See appendix: figures 1 and 2). Even the historical particularities of the First World War are reduced to a series of abstract allegorical personifications. While the trampled "Smallest-Dancer-of-All" is clearly Belgium, the text suggests that even this historical detail conforms to a larger pattern, for "among those Dancing Nations there was a very little one, far too small to have danced with the others, and particularly unwilling to dance at all, because it knew by experience that the dances of Ballet-Master Death oftenest took place upon its

prostrate body” (10). *The Ballet of the Nations* suggests not only that war is a historical event that repeats itself, but also that the specific events that comprise the phenomenon we call “war” conform to a specific pattern. As Grace Brockington writes: “Its indeterminacy lifts it out of its historical moment, encouraging us to trace the pattern of its dance in all conflicts” (143). Traces of historicity are deliberately suppressed.

But the very presence of these traces signals a degree of uncertainty in the narrator’s view of history. At moments, the work includes details that mark this war as a distinctively modern conflict, such as the figures of Organization and Science, who “were habited in a manner uncompromisingly modern, the one like a city clerk who should have joined the Red Cross, and the other, who was a lady, in the spectacles and smock most commonly seen in laboratories” (4-5). A detail such as this renders the allegory not universal but specific. The narrator oscillates between positioning the allegory as a universal statement about the nature of war and as a specific statement about the First World War. In this manner, the text raises questions about the fundamental assumptions about history that underpin the allegory. Is history a repetition of events in which a pattern can be detected and laws formulated? Or is the First World War – or any war – a unique historical event? This tension within the text resonates with a tension within late nineteenth-century historicism. The persistent attention paid to history and the historicization of phenomena can, on the one hand, lead to attempts to formulate general historical laws. It can also, on the other hand, lead to attempts to thicken historical description, to amass facts and detail in the interest of producing a more complete and evocative description of the past.

The intellectual history of historicism is particularly relevant to the study of Vernon Lee's work. Lee in fact established her reputation as a historian with the publication of her first work, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), and she was deeply engaged with nineteenth century debates about history and historicism. In *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual*, Christa Zorn considers Lee's historical writing in the light of nineteenth-century historiography, suggesting that Lee's history is consistent with trends in this scholarship: "first, the breaking up of historical universality into individual and relative standpoints; second, the preference of descriptive (aesthetic) over normative approaches; and third, the attempt at diversifying the concept of historical subjectivity" (31). Zorn's thorough survey of Lee's work, which I will not attempt to replicate here, leads her to conclude that Lee repudiates fact-based history in favour of an exploration of "thoughts and feelings" and "sensations and temperaments" (xxi). Walter Pater was a friend of Lee's and a direct influence: her *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance* in 1884 is dedicated to Pater, and it is clear that Lee's "intuitive and impressionist" historical methods, as Zorn calls them, are indebted to Pater's aesthetic historicism (xxi). *The Ballet of the Nations*, however, suggests that Zorn's characterization of Lee's historical methodology requires further qualification.⁹ Certainly, as we will see momentarily, Lee came to repudiate fact-based history. But, as the oscillation between attempts to formulate general principles for history and attempts to describe the historical

⁹ Zorn's *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* is the only full-length critical study of Vernon Lee, and she makes only a brief mention of *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster*. Vineta Colby's *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* discusses the works only briefly, and notes that "Her choice of the genre of allegory was, for its time, appropriate, since it allowed for freedom of expression without the responsibility of factual documentation" (302-303). Lee's work has attracted critical attention in recent years, but her later work, including *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster*, remains largely undiscussed, save for the three articles, by Gillian Beer, Grace Brockington, and Gill Plain, that are cited in this chapter.

particularity of the First World War in *The Ballet of the Nations* reveals, Lee's work bears traces of the crisis of historicism.

Deeply dissatisfied, Lee returned to *The Ballet of the Nations* after the work's publication in 1915. Her displeasure stemmed most immediately from Armfield's illustrations, which often failed to correlate to the text.¹⁰ Accordingly, Lee negotiated with her publisher for the right to republish *The Ballet of the Nations* and reworked the text into *Satan the Waster: A Philosophic War Trilogy with Notes and Introduction*. In this revised and expanded text, Lee complicates and refines her understanding of history.

Satan the Waster is a massive, baggy text: the twenty illustrated pages of *The Ballet of the Nations* swelled to 350 pages of type in *Satan the Waster*. Lee transformed the narrative of *The Ballet of the Nations* into a closet drama in which the "ballet of the nations" of the original text becomes the second act of a three-act play. *The Ballet of the Nations* is now prefaced by the "Prologue in Hell" and followed by an Epilogue, while around this dramatic centre Lee erected a further mass of textual scaffolding, including a fifty-page introduction justifying the work and close to two hundred pages of notes that consist of musings on war that often begin by discussing an element of the play, but quickly move to more general philosophical analysis. Many of the notes carry a specific date, as Lee connects her thoughts to specific historical moments. Generically mixed, the work is a play, literary criticism on the play, philosophical ruminations on the ideas contained in the play, and a dated diary.

Satan the Waster introduces a new character into *The Ballet of the Nations*: Clio, the Muse of History. Clio first appears in the "Prologue in Hell," where she participates

¹⁰ See Brockington's "Performing Pacifism: The Battle between Artist and Author in *The Ballet of the Nations*" for a thorough discussion of this issue.

in a sustained dialogue with Satan, an old friend of hers. While the debates surrounding the concept and methodology of history are implicit in *The Ballet of the Nations*, ideas about history are addressed directly in *Satan the Waster*. From the outset, it is apparent that Clio has been introduced not simply as a device for transforming the narrative of the 1915 *Ballet of the Nations* into a work of drama, but also because Lee is deeply invested in criticizing specific conceptions of history. By putting Clio on the stage Lee intervenes in the conflict surrounding historical methodology. In the “Prologue in Hell,” Clio introduces herself as “Clio, Muse of History, not to be mistaken for that newfangled impostor who makes free with my name to retail vulgar details about laws and institutions and the price of food stuffs; Clio, real Muse of real History, sister of Tragedy and the Impassioned Lyric, and dealing only with deeds heroic, elevating, and most often destructive,” to which Satan responds, “No one would ever mistake you for anything scientific, my dear Clio” (4). Clio’s definition of history restricts history to the acts of individuals, especially the heroic and destructive acts of war, while excluding newly emerging fields of study for history, such as law and economics, and a scientific approach to the study of history.

Garrulous and foolish Clio stands in for those who would understand history as the story of glory gained through war. Less clear from this passage are the implications of Satan’s rejoinder, that Clio is hardly scientific; though this clearly alludes to late nineteenth-century positivist conceptions of history, the Epilogue subsequently subjects positivist historiography to critique as well, a point to which I shall return. In the notes to the play, in the section entitled “The Muse of History,” Lee denounces Clio as the “[i]ndustrious artificer of faked nationalities as well as preserver of bygone enmities;

parasite, sycophant, purveyor of drawingroom entertainments; agent of holy and unhallowed alliances” (228). As Gill Plain has observed of *Satan the Waster*, “Clio symbolises not the intricate history of cause and effect, but the insidious school-book history of glorious deeds by great men, the history of Empire and aggrandizement, simplification and evasion, and the crude opposition of good and evil, self and other” (7). This indictment of Clio, however, is also a form of self-critique. Gillian Beer has argued persuasively that Lee implicates herself in the production of history: “History here is implicated in falsification and disaster. She is the scribe of Satan. Yet she is also the admonitory recorder. By having the figure of the allegorical woman, writing, on stage throughout her “ballet” or “pantomime”, Vernon Lee places herself too on the exposed stage of history” (108). Following Beer, I read Lee’s revision of her earlier work in which she transforms the narrator of *The Ballet of the Nations*, perhaps understood as herself, into Clio, as an indictment of the failings of her earlier work, in particular its oversimplification of history. Biased, reductive, and nationalistic, Clio figures a flawed and dangerous approach to the study and dissemination of history from which even Lee herself was not immune.

Clio’s approach to history precludes the recognition of the “true” nature of history. Lee argues, again in the notes to the play, that Clio panders:

to our dramatic instincts, often sanguinary; to our insidious collective vanity and (what is quite harmless in comparison) to the snobbishness which makes simple persons delight in discussing the looks and habits of royalties and pry into the peccadilloes of illustrious men; this pandering implies that we translate the past into terms of the present, else we should not sympathize, and thereby cheats us of History’s fundamental lesson, which is that *nothing which happens is ever entirely alike*. (222)

In a further condemnation of the writing of history as a practice that indulges human tendencies toward violence, vanity, and gossip, Lee also articulates her understanding of the concept of history. History teaches us that “*nothing which happens is ever entirely alike,*” she writes. With this statement, Lee engages directly with contemporary debates about historiography; she repudiates concepts of history that view the events of the past as a series of repetitions and, by extension, the use of allegory as a means of transmitting history.

The Ballet of the Nations of 1915, and the version narrated by Clio in *Satan the Waster* may be critical of the war, but in narrating history as allegory, it falls prey to the biases and oversimplifications of historical writing. As a figure which strives to establish the similarity, even identity between, between discrete historical events, allegory represents history as a series of like events. In her comments on history in the various philosophical notes and meditations that surround the text of the play in *Satan the Waster*, Lee suggests that history (as figured by Clio) consistently fails to be properly historical. Lee offers the example of the representation of Joan of Arc, explaining that “all that horrible business can be understood only in the light of witch trials and burnings of heretics, in fact only if you grasp the difference between our own time and the late Middle Ages. But such difference would enormously damp the interest, quench the passions which enliven our dull lives... Hence Clio never brings that difference forward” (227). From the official mythologizing of Joan of Arc to Lee’s earlier attempt to write about recent history in *The Ballet of the Nations*, these historical narratives fail to historicize their subjects. When Lee revises the *Ballet of the Nations*, she puts Clio on

stage in order to overtly critique inadequate forms of historical writing, including her own.

In the revised *Ballet of the Nations*, the third-person narrator of the 1915 *Ballet of the Nations* has taken on the identity of Clio, who now speaks much of the narration from the earlier work. Where the *Ballet of the Nations* was narrated by a disembodied and unidentified voice, divorced from the action, Clio is now a visible body on stage and, given the lengthy exposition of her character and her relationship with Satan in the prologue, Clio's own biases are apparent, perhaps even excessively so, to the reader. As the performers gather in the first act, Clio records events; the stage directions read that she is "writing on her tablets, while what she is describing is seen happening by the spectator" (35). In the second act, "The Ballet of the Nations," Clio takes center stage, sitting next to Satan as she describes what is happening on stage. *The Ballet of the Nations* puts the writing of history on stage, quite possibly inspired by similar scenes in many of the First World War pageants that I will discuss in the next chapter.

From the outset, the play occupies a peculiar space between narrative and drama. Rather than allowing the audience to watch the action on stage, the play has Clio describe for the audience or reader what is happening on stage. Telling rather than showing, the play foregrounds the narration rather than the events of the ballet. In the "Author's Note for Stage Managers (other than Satan)" Lee expressly indicates that

In the event of this play being performed, it is the author's imperative wish that no attempt be made at showing the Dancing of the Nations. The stage upon the stage must be turned in such a manner that nothing beyond the footlights, the Orchestra, and the auditorium shall be visible to the real spectators, only the changing illumination which accompanies the Ballet making its performance apparent. Similarly, in accordance with Satan's remarks on p. 49, none of the music must be audible, except the voice and drum of Heroism. Anything beyond this would necessarily be hideous, besides drowning or interrupting the dialogue. (57)

This is a radical departure from the 1915 version of *The Ballet of the Nations*, in which Armfield's illustrations tend to overwhelm and contradict the text. The effect of this prohibition on displaying the Ballet of the Nations is to emphasize Clío's control of the reader or spectator's understanding of the events on stage. (Here, too, Vernon Lee's work seems to follow the strategies employed in First World War pageants.) By virtue of its reliance on narration rather than action, the play makes apparent that the events depicted on the stage are invested with meaning by virtue of Clío's narration, for the light and occasional sound coming from the stage upon which the Ballet of the Nations is performed is meaningless without Clío's explanations. In this manner, *Satan the Waster* suggests that emplotting historical events is the work of the historian. Note, for instance, the emphasis on the word "begin" as the play opens:

SATAN. Begin your record, Muse of History!

The MUSE rises and writes, standing by the side of SATAN'S throne, declaiming what she is writing in a clear, impassive voice. The performance on the stage, of course, proceeds in accordance with her spoken description, but a trifle in advance of it; and the MUSE pauses now and then, resuming her low seat next to SATAN in order to allow the action to repeat itself and accumulate.

The MUSE. Now, the beginning of the Ballet of the Nations was as follows...
(47)

What is apparent from this passage is that, for the audience and the reader of the text, the play begins only when Satan asks Clío to begin her record. Repeating the verb "begin" twice, Lee draws our attention to the fact that Clío gives history – the ballet of the nations – a literary shape, a beginning and an end. But even the action that Clío watches is already allegorical. What we, as readers or spectators, read or see, has been mediated at least twice. Clío may narrate the action of "The Ballet of the Nations," but what she sees

is already rendered in allegorical terms. Someone has already transformed history into allegory.

Satan the Waster acknowledges its own reliance on allegory when, in the Epilogue to the “Ballet of the Nations,” Satan says to Clio that “it can scarcely have escaped your acumen that what...rolled about on the shoulders of the dancing nations could be only cardboard masks” (64). He offers to show Clio a “mystery...what was passing behind the stage” and recorded by his cinematograph and gramophone (63). In his “green room,” Satan reveals that what he has recorded is a stream of disjointed visual scenes and sound recordings that exceed Clio – and the audience’s – interpretive capabilities. Where we might expect scenes and sounds from the trenches – the violence that the allegorical Ballet of the Nations depicted – Satan’s recordings of the war show a stream of people and interiors, of “public offices, newspaper sanctums, embassy reception-rooms, sometimes even quite humble private houses; also committee tables and banqueting tables, with people discussing or speechifying; lobbies in various countries, club-rooms and Houses of Parliament and Senates in different parts of the globe” (64-65). The reader of the play is suddenly and violently transported from the allegory of the Ballet of the Nations, and the abstract ideals associated with war, to the banal, seemingly unrelated acts that produced the war. It is the latter, Satan argues, that is “reality.”

Satan the Waster thus stages the desire for revelation, and its frustration, that is central to allegorical reading. Gordon Teskey has argued that this is a convention of many allegorical texts, which move “toward a point where all mystery is dispelled in the presence of truth,” but it is at this moment that the reader encounters instead “a point where all further progress is blocked by the inadequacy of language to express something

that is always beyond it” (“Allegory” 16). He calls this the effect of “secondariness” (16). In this instance, however, Clio – and the audience – cannot understand what lies behind the allegory because they lack Satan’s interpretive capacities. Satan explains: “Allow me to tell you, dear old Clio, that the meaning discernible in Reality depends upon the eye and mind of him who witnesses and hears it” (67). In other words, Satan argues that perception is subjective, which returns us to the emphasis of the earlier chapters and the idea that the crisis of historicism made a belief in the inherent subjectivity of history all-pervasive. Here, in the midst of Vernon Lee’s strange play, Satan articulates a very modern understanding of history. As he continues his explanation, he suggests that “when reality happens to be a fragment so vast, wide-spreading and intricate, and of such long duration as the preliminaries of my Ballet, it needs, perchance, an eye accustomed to Eternities to take in the connections and put two and two together” (67). The war, and the course of history, are vast fragments of this type. Mere mortals who are unable to perceive the connections, Satan implies, require the assistance of allegory and other devices if they are to comprehend history.

Satan the Waster concludes with Satan producing an edited version of reality for Clio. He offers to “manipulate Reality so you can take it in...I will precipitate the action, omit details, isolate essentials, typify the gestures, and parody the words” (67). The scenes that follow depict the various negotiations that preceded the war: talks between diplomats, the intervention of journalists, and family discussions of France’s right to annex Alsace or the ethics of investing in arms manufacturing. Satan’s scenes from history are a third model for a narrative of history – the others being allegory and unmediated reality – but the montage degenerates into a cacophony of voices. As this

third model for historical representation fails, Satan proclaims, “Ladies and gentlemen of my indulgent audience, you will, I doubt not, also appreciate all that Stage-Manager Satan owes to his varied and accomplished personnel” (107) – that is, to the allegorical figures of the Ballet of the Nations. In the process of revising *The Ballet of the Nations* into *Satan the Waster*, Lee embedded a critique of various forms of history, among them the allegorical, by incorporating the muse of history into the new text. But, in the person of Satan, the play argues that the unmediated recording of reality, and attempts to make sense of such recordings, is not sufficient. Allegory, Lee concludes in *Satan the Waster*, is the mode of historical representation that allows us to understand history, however imperfectly.

The same idea, in a different guise, is advanced by Hayden White in his essay “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory.” White argues that

Precisely insofar as the historical narrative endows sets of real events with the kinds of meaning found otherwise only in myth and literature, we are justified in regarding it as a product of *allegoresis*. Therefore, rather than regarding every historical narrative as ‘mythic’ or ‘ideological’ in nature, it is more correct to regard it as allegorical, which is to say: it says one thing and means another.... As thus envisaged, the [historical] narrative figurates the body of events that serves as its primary referent and transforms these ‘events’ into intimations of patterns of meaning that any *literal* representation of them as ‘facts’ could never produce. (22)

Here, White builds on his argument from *Metahistory* that historians employ different modes of emplotment and that the reader of a history can provide the “meaning” of a history by reading it for the kind of story that it tells, whether romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire (*Metahistory* 7). The boundary between history and literature is porous; the same structures of thought that have given us literature permeate the work of historians as well. But in this later essay, White is not analyzing history for its emplotment, but

making a point about the process by which historians fashion the raw materials of history – that is, a series of historical events – into a narrative. He argues that historians engage in allegoresis – that is, that they perform an allegorical reading of the events of history – in order to generate a historical narrative gestures toward the secondary, higher meaning of history, an implicit philosophy of history.

In this respect, then, Lee anticipates White's argument about understanding transformation of the raw material of history (the historical chronicle) into historiography (in this instance, the writing of history as a process of allegoresis). The writing of history – or in Lee's case, the performance of history – is always the production of an allegory about history because historical narratives are not simply collections of facts, but complex narratives that work by indirection. In *Satan the Waster*, Lee recognizes that allegory is both necessary and unavoidable in the writing of history, but, the work retains its deep suspicion of allegory as a figure that reduces historical complexity by flattening out historical difference in the search for historical patterns.

Allegory and Iconoclasm in *The Enormous Room*

In 1917, ee cummings volunteered for the Norton-Harjes volunteer ambulance service in France. While in France, cummings's friend in the ambulance service and fellow American, William Slater Brown, wrote letters that attracted the interest of the censors. Brown and cummings (by association) were arrested by the French, charged with sympathizing with the Germans, and consequently imprisoned in a detention centre in La Ferté-Macé. For three months, cummings lived with other detainees in the “enormous room” of the title: a forty-foot by eighty-foot room with a vaulted ceiling.

The Enormous Room (1922) is an autobiographical account of this experience, modeled after the journey of Christian in John Bunyan's allegorical narrative *Pilgrim's Progress*. cummings begins his narrative with his arrest and narrates in detail his journey to the detention centre. cummings and Brown are held with other "enemies of France," most of whom were foreign nationals accused of espionage. In this room, the narrator is transformed: he comes to value his fellow prisoners. *The Enormous Room* is the story of the narrator's radical revision of his world view and values, his mental breakdown, and subsequent reemergence as a new person when he is freed. There is also an aesthetic component to this story of conversion: *The Enormous Room* is cummings's first published work and the text in which his distinctive poetic voice emerges clearly.

As a series of conversions, all of which appear to be successful, it would seem that *The Enormous Room* diverges from the model for wartime autobiography that I developed in the second chapter. But, as we shall see, the lack of a spiritual conversion in this text places cummings' work squarely in the category of failed conversion. *The Enormous Room* is, like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a narrative of a difficult journey that renews a man's faith. But where Bunyan's narrative describes Christian's journey as a test of his faith and his eventual salvation, cummings's narrative describes a journey in which the narrator comes to value his fellow humans and eventually regains his freedom. cummings's narrative, though it carries religious overtones, is decidedly secular. The Celestial City in *The Enormous Room* is, in fact, New York City. The final conversion – Christian salvation – is conspicuously absent and this ultimate failure of Christian conversion is an integral element of cummings's refashioning of Bunyan's allegory.

Throughout this narrative, the narrator's journey is likened to that of Christian's journey in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Though the correlations are not systematic, they are consistent. For instance, the narrator titles his first chapter "I begin a Pilgrimage." His narrative repeatedly coincides with the stages in Christian's journey: the narrator refers to the xenophobic American ambulance section as the "Slough of Despond," and for much of his journey from the front to the detention centre in La Ferté-Macé, he carries a heavy bag akin to Christian's burden. Upon his arrival at the detention centre, however, the chronological narrative of the journey ceases. Marked as they are by monotony, the narrator describes only one of his days before embarking upon a series of portraits of the other inhabitants of the Enormous Room. Four of these men, in particular, he calls the "Delectable Mountains."

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell devotes considerable attention to the omnipresence of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the writing of soldiers in the First World War, demonstrating that in diaries, letters, autobiographies, and novels, writers consistently evoke Bunyan. Fussell observes that it "is odd and wonderful that front-line experience should ape the pattern of the one book everybody knew. Or to put it perhaps more accurately, front-line experience seemed to become available for interpretation when it was seen how closely parts of it resembled the action of *Pilgrim's Progress*" (138-9). Fussell's insight that a specific work of literature, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, enabled understanding of the experience of war complements Hayden White's argument that history draws on literary plots and devices. For Fussell, a well-known work of literature provides the framework for understanding a historical event; for White, specific plots and tropes provide a framework for imbuing historical events with

meaning. But cummings goes beyond employing Bunyan to shape and understand his experience. Like Vernon Lee, ee cummings does not simply write history as allegory, but he also interrogates the implications of this strategy. Fussell suggests that cummings displays “a refusal or affected inability to come to grips with traditional meanings” and that “cummings’s awareness of *Pilgrim’s Progress* is verbal rather than substantive...[His] allusions evaporate away the meaning of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, de-Christianize and de-mythologize it; they use it as a framework for a sentimentality quite at odds with the import of Bunyan’s work. Its terms and motifs remains as a mere ‘allusion’ – ultimately to nothing – invoked as a schoolboy trick” (160). Fussell’s principal objection, that cummings’s allusions to Bunyan are emptied of their Christian and mythological significance, is due to cummings’s willingness to employ a well-used framework for understanding the war in allegorical terms but in doing so, to question the assumptions of the Christian historiography implied by the framework.

Before examining cummings’s secularization of Bunyan in greater detail, however, let me establish that cummings text is, in fact, an allegory, and one which asks its readers to interpret it as such. Gordon Teskey has termed the process by which the reader interprets a text as allegory “allegorical aesthesis.” In Teskey’s account, the reader of the text “translates the narrator into conceptual form,” and in doing so, enters into a “loop of interpretive play” (“Allegory” 17). As the reader progresses through the text, he or she will

absorb further experience of the text into a larger structure of meaning wherein no gap or inconsistency between narrative and truth will be felt. Yet while the goal of interpretation is to eradicate all signifying difference in a motionless ideal, the very work of moving toward that ideal opens more spaces than it can close. The true purpose, therefore, of that increasingly problematic structure of meaning

which we accumulate as we read is not to capture the truth but to engage us in further, and more powerful, interpretive play. (17)

In *The Enormous Room*, cummings models this process of allegorical aesthesis for the reader. By establishing a web of allusions to Bunyan, the narrator reads his own life through the lens of Bunyan's narrative. But he does not make the rationale for the comparison explicit, leaving this interpretive work to the reader. The overt references to *The Pilgrim's Progress* lead the reader to believe that the text contains a concealed meaning, both in relation to Bunyan's text and in and of itself. The reader examines *The Enormous Room* as an allegory which establishes parallels with Bunyan's text, and this invites consideration of various aspects of cummings's text: character, events, or places, even the structure of the narrative, can be fruitfully (and endlessly) held in relation to Bunyan's text. But, because the intertext – *The Pilgrim's Progress* – has itself a concealed meaning, the reader is also drawn into a search for a concealed meaning in cummings's text. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is perhaps the most widely read allegory in the English language, and thus readers enter the text of *The Enormous Room* knowing that the journey of Christian from a life of sin to his reception in the Celestial City stands for the journey of every Christian.

But can an equally straightforward allegorical interpretation can be produced for cummings's text? Certainly, cummings imports the central image of the self undone and transformed from the *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Tracing the development of this image suggests a reading of the narrator's journey, imprisonment, and release as the journey of the individual who rebels against various forms of authority. In Bunyan's text, Christian declares to his wife, "I your dear friend am in my self undone, by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me" (10). The image of a "self undone" permeates *The Enormous Room*.

But it does so, initially, in an inversion of the image. While we might expect imprisonment to undo the self, it does the opposite.¹¹ The narrator describes the beginning of his imprisonment as follows:

I put the bed-roll down. I stood up.
I was myself.
An uncontrollable joy gutted me after three months of humiliation, of being bossed and herded and bullied and insulted. I was myself and my own master.
(17)

But, in prison, cummings experiences what he calls a “mental catastrophe” (230). “When I finally made my exit, the part of me popularly referred to as ‘mind’ was still in a slightly bent if not twisted condition” (230). cummings’s release, however, restores his self. cummings describes the following transformation upon being told he is leaving for Paris: “I turned, I turned so suddenly as almost to bowl over the Black Holster, Black Holster and all; I turned toward the door, I turned upon the Black Holster, I turned into Edward E. Cummings, I turned into what was dead and is now alive, I turned into a city, I turned into a dream –” (238). Accordingly, we might read *The Enormous Room* as an allegory for rebellion. This reading deepens if we also pursue the relationship between the two texts as a biographical parallel: Bunyan began *The Pilgrim’s Progress* while imprisoned as a dissenter, while cummings wrote *The Enormous Room* after being imprisoned as a suspected enemy of the state.

Various critics have devoted substantial attention to the intertextual relationship of *The Enormous Room* and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and in doing so, have sought to discern such concealed meanings in cummings’s text. David E. Smith has observed,

¹¹ As Smith has written, the symbolism of *The Enormous Room* is often governed by inversion. It is at once Christian and a perversion of Christianity: baptismal imagery is employed alongside a glorification of filth. “The theme is at once revolting and transcendent: human excrement, normally the object of universal disgust, symbolizes human brotherhood and, eventually, Christian Salvation” (125).

“The parallel journey is spiritual, not literal, yet the identification of the narrator with Christian is illuminated at crucial instances in such a way as to reflect a fundamental dependence upon the earlier allegory” (122). Smith argues that Cummings’ experience of bodily filth and unprecedented proximity to others while imprisoned in the enormous room leads him to a revelation about the Christ-like characteristics of his fellow prisoners. Smith writes that “[w]hat most disturbed Cummings in the immediate post-war years was a mass insensitivity to the distressing and, relevantly, stinking conditions of war (and, by extension, of civilization). Those who refused to use their noses except to avoid the actual smell of life became, like the Cambridge ladies of the sonnet, possessed of furnished souls and comfortable minds merely...” (127). For this reason, “his own pilgrim would need to be able to smell his fellow-human beings in order to progress with them toward the Delectable Mountains” (128). Jeffrey Walsh offers a slightly different interpretation of the meaning of the narrator’s journey, reading it as an account not only of a moral quest, but also an account of the artist’s emergence. Walsh writes:

The journey undertaken by the narrator of the novel, a prototype of Cummings the emergent artist, is one of moral regeneration, which is why it is appropriate for the novelist to utilize religious language and symbolism ironically related to Bunyan’s famous allegory. The narrator of *The Enormous Room* makes two journeys, one a specific geographical one to La Ferté in the early part of the novel, and a more significant quest, involving the book as a whole, which symbolizes a spiritual and artistic awakening. (33)

In Walsh’s reading, *The Enormous Room* can be read, like Bunyan’s, as a model for the casting aside of one mode of being, and the adoption of another. Just as Christian leaves sin for salvation, Cummings abandons the values of his society, determined to discover a new set of values.

In the passage quoted above, Walsh observes in passing that *The Enormous Room* uses “religious language and symbolism ironically related to Bunyan’s famous allegory.” This observation that the intertextual relationship is ironic isolates an important feature of cummings’s use of allegory. cummings’s narrator does not aspire to Christian salvation; his objective is instead to find a better mode of being in this world. While it invokes an explicitly Christian framework for the text, the allegory in *The Enormous Room* describes a largely iconoclastic and arguably secular process of self-realization. This disjunction between the two texts brings a second disjunction into sharp focus. As Erich Auerbach’s study of the evolution of figural interpretation has shown, allegorical reading is closely aligned with the reading practices of the Christian theological tradition. But cummings’s narrative of self-realization turns on his rejection of the constraints of this world view. The world view presupposed by his allegorical structure runs counter to the world view he proposes in the text itself.

The conflict between the world view cummings espouses and that of his use of allegory and of Bunyan as intertext is part of a broader phenomenon. The evolution of allegory in relation to shifting world views has been the subject of much theoretical work on allegory. In her historical survey of allegory, *Reinventing Allegory*, Theresa Kelley reads a set of texts spanning the Renaissance to the late twentieth century. Building on Walter Benjamin’s seminal work on allegory, Kelley argues that modern allegory is “alienated... from the theological framework of medieval and Renaissance allegorical traditions” (258). Cut off as it is from the religious framework of medieval and Renaissance world views, allegorical agency is diminished. The explanatory power

allegory previously possessed has been lost, and allegorical meaning cannot be made whole or continuous.

In Cummings's case, however, the narrator's break with tradition is presented as the logical outcome of his experience of the First World War. War, it would seem, has decisively accelerated the gradual decline of allegory occasioned by the forces of secularization. The war exposes Cummings firsthand to the stupidity and cruelty of the military and government, thoroughly demystifying authority and the values to which authority appeals. In *The Enormous Room*, the tension between the ontological assumptions of Christian interpretive practices and the rebellion of the narrator against authority is particularly pronounced. One might, of course, read this as an inevitable tension produced by the coexistence of dominant secular structure of feeling existing at the same time as the residual Christian structure of feeling, to borrow Raymond Williams's terms. But Cummings employs this conflict between the form of allegory and the substance of his text to particular effect. Foregrounding Bunyan and allegory as he does, he sharply distinguishes his understanding of Christianity from the values that are espoused by the civilization at war in 1914-1918. Though separated by a temporal gap from Christian, the unnamed narrator of *The Enormous Room* undertakes a comparable journey, but with a different end. The narrator's journey ends in a Celestial City that is New York City, and so rather than transcending life on earth, his text concludes by affirming the value of earthly existence.

The final image in *The Enormous Room* is, as in *Pilgrim's Progress*, a vision of the Celestial City. But, for Cummings, the Celestial City is none other than New York City. At the end of the text, the narrator sails from France back to America; his crossing

of the Atlantic mirrors Christian's crossing of the River Death. *The Enormous Room* ends with this vision of a worldly city in motion:

The tall, impossibly tall, incomparably tall, city shoulderingly upward into hard sunlight leaned a little through the octaves of its parallel edges, leaningly strode upward into firm hard snowy sunlight; the noises of America nearingly throbbed with smokes and hurrying dots which are men and which are women and which are things new and curious and hard and strange and vibrant and immense, lifting with a great undulous stride firmly into immortal sunlight... (242)

The narrator sees New York City from the deck of the boat returning him to America.

This final paragraph captures the city in motion: growing "shoulderingly upward," it "leaningly strode upward," "lifting with a great undulous stride firmly into immortal sunlight." Up and forward: rather than an inert stage for millions of people, the city itself is in motion. For a moment, the narrator sees history as though he is not a participant in history, instead seeing history as it unfolds.

Thus, while cummings's text might initially seem to recapitulate the problematic implication of allegorical representations of historical events, namely that employing allegory to figure history presumes that history is governed by repetition, the final non-correspondence of his text and Bunyan's subverts this assumption. cummings repudiates the Christian story of salvation, which is the secondary meaning that lies behind Bunyan's text and those of his many imitators. cummings begins by writing history in the tradition of Christian allegoresis but through his iconoclastic typology, writes a secular history of his experience of the war. If, as in *Satan the Waster*, it is a literary device – in both instances, allegory – that allows us to comprehend the reality that is war, the conclusion to *The Enormous Room* breaks free of the restrictions of allegorical history, which force us to see the present in terms of the past. cummings rewrites the significance of Bunyan's "Celestial City" and in doing so, reorients his allegorical

interpretation of history such that it points us not toward a Christian secondary meaning, as is the case in Bunyan's work, but toward a still-unfolding secular secondary meaning, figured by the rising city of the early twentieth century.

This chapter has sought to understand the place of allegory in works of the First World War by suggesting that while David Jones, Vernon Lee and ee cummings alike were drawn to the structuring and interpretive capacities of allegory, both Lee and cummings found themselves revising this framework in order to accommodate their representations of the First World War. Allegory's tendency to posit a specific understanding of history, whether cyclical or Christian, proved at odds with their understanding of history. Both Lee and cummings, moreover, use talismans of modernity to break apart the frame of allegorical representations of history; Lee gives Satan a gramophone and cinematograph to reveal the limitations of allegory, while cummings has a mystical vision of the skyscrapers of New York in motion that displaces Bunyan's vision of heaven as the culmination of the Everyman's allegorical journey.

While Lee and cummings's works demonstrate their belief in the necessity of breaking and remaking the allegorical tradition, rebelling against the constraints of allegory, allegorical readings of history have continuing appeal, as *In Parenthesis* suggests. If Lee and cummings, as I have argued, denounce the manner in which history, as allegoresis, tends to restrict us to interpreting recent history in light of the past, Jones sets himself in opposition to such claims, retaining an unshakeable belief in the value of interpreting recent history as continuous with various lost traditions. Where Lee and cummings explicitly reject the idea of history as repetition, Jones embraces Oswald

Spengler's theory of historical cycles. Jones does not, in this respect, conform to the pattern I identify in the works of Lee and Cummings. But this chapter has deliberately included Jones alongside Lee and Cummings to illuminate the powerful allure of allegorical representations of history and the range of understandings of history that coexisted during and after the First World War.

Chapter 4: Performing History: Forms of Distance in the Wartime Pageant

A craze for pageantry swept over England and North America in the early decades of the twentieth century. Starting in 1905, in the village of Sherborne, the playwright Louis Napoleon Parker produced a series of outdoor plays in which casts of hundreds of amateur actors reenacted scenes from local history. These performances, which Parker called “pageants,” were a resounding success and spurred a host of imitators. Villages, towns, and cities on both sides of the Atlantic produced lavish outdoor performances modelled after Parker’s pageants. In the years leading up to the First World War, the pageant was also a powerful tool for political protest: the NAACP, British and American suffragettes, and striking workers in Paterson, New Jersey, performed scenes from their respective histories in large-scale outdoor performances. Then, in the 1930s, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, and Virginia Woolf each took up the pageant form in their own work.

This is the established literary history of English-language pageantry, as narrated by historians, literary critics, and art historians.¹ The most thorough contemporary critical treatment of the modern pageant is Jed Esty’s chapter “Insular Rites: Virginia Woolf and the Late Modernist Pageant-Play” in *A Shrinking Island* (2002). Esty explores

¹ The most detailed historical survey of civic pageantry in England remains Robert Withington’s two-volume *English Historical Pageantry*, which traces the development of English pageantry from the Renaissance to the revival of pageantry by Parker. Paul Readman’s “The Place of the Past in English Culture c. 1880-1914” offers an overview of modern pageantry and a list of major English pageants from the era. For American civic pageantry, see David Glassberg’s authoritative *American Historical Pageantry*. Sarah J. Moore notes that 1913 marked a turning point in American pageantry, as pageantry began to be used for explicitly political ends. The Paterson Strike Pageant was held in New Jersey, W.E.B. duBois’s *The Star of Ethiopia* was first performed as part of the NAACP’s celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the National Woman Suffrage Pageant, the subject of Moore’s article, was held in Washington, D.C. (Moore 90). For further discussion of these political pageants in an American context, see Martin Green’s *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* and David Krasner’s “‘The Pageant is the Thing’: Black Nationalism and the Star of Ethiopia.” For a discussion of suffrage pageantry in the British context, see Lisa Tickner’s *The Spectacle of Women*, especially page 233. Scholars in disciplines as diverse as literature, history, art history, and geography have taken an interest in pageantry; in the footnotes that follow, I refer to the relevant work.

Parker's revival of pageantry and the continuing appeal of pageantry for late modernism, examining Eliot's *The Rock* (1934), Forster's *Abinger Pageant* (1934) and *England's Pleasant Land* (1940), and Woolf's pageant-novel *Between the Acts* (1941), and argues that late modernist pageants are the site of an encounter between modernist cosmopolitanism and an insular nativism.

Like Esty's work, this chapter also begins with Parker and concludes with Woolf, but the narrative I trace offers a reassessment of the pageant's representation of history by approaching early twentieth century pageantry through a different body of work: the First World War pageant and a selection of texts that inherited its mode of historical representation. Scholars of literature and history have devoted only minimal attention to the many First World War pageants performed in Britain, the United States, and on the Western front, though these pageants were significant cultural events. For instance, Louis Napoleon Parker, the originator of the modern pageant, produced four different, but related, pageants, all of which were performed in large and established theatres in London, but none of which have attracted the interest of critics.² Thomas Wood Stevens's *The Drawing of the Sword* was repeatedly performed throughout the United States and was recognized as a remarkable production. On October 6, 1917, the *New York Times* reported: "All social roads led yesterday to the National Red Cross pageant held at the Rosemary Open Air Theatre...at Huntington, L.I. More than 5,000 persons witnessed the spectacle, which proved to be one of the most elaborate dramatic events ever staged out of doors. The proceeds of the performance, estimated at about \$50,000, will go to carry on the work of the Red Cross on the battlefields of Europe" ("Red Cross

² See Williams (11, 83) for brief references to wartime pageants and Collins for a passing quotation from Parker's war pageants (202-3). Although both Williams and Collins are engaged in surveys of wartime theatrical production, neither Williams nor Collins considers the phenomenon of wartime pageantry.

Pageant” 12). Stevens’s *Joan of Arc* was performed on the French front in 1918; photographs of the event suggest that the audience, once again, numbered in the thousands. Slightly more critical attention has been paid to the wartime pageants written by women: Jane Potter has identified numerous First World War pageants written by British women for performance by children, while Frances Bzowski has constructed a record of American women’s First World War pageantry.³ But, no work to date has offered a complete study of wartime pageantry, and these wartime works have not been considered in relation to the dominant critical narrative of the rise of modern pageants in the early twentieth century.

Thus, part of the work of this chapter is to sketch an alternative genealogy of the pageant by focusing on the development of the wartime pageant and its legacy in the years after the First World War. The first half of this chapter analyzes the manipulation of historical distance in Boer War and First World War pageants by Parker and the personification of history in two pageants by Gladys Davidson and Elsie Fogerty. These First World War pageants established a model for the re-enactment of history that persisted in the decades that followed, most overtly in Noël Coward’s play *Cavalcade* (1930) and Virginia Woolf’s novel *Between the Acts* (1941), the two works discussed in the second half of this chapter. Each of these pageants, pageant-plays, and pageant-novels written and performed under the shadow of war is marked by an oscillating historical distance. A range of formal devices and strategies (including allegory, self-consciousness, audience participation, and movement between narrative scenes and tableaux) alternately produce affective immersion in the historical scene and an

³ See also Claire Tylee’s *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness* for a passing mention of women’s amateur pageantry (27).

investment in the ideology of the pageant, on the one hand, and on the other, cognitive distance from and scepticism toward the pageant's representation of history. Drawing on theorizations of distance by Mark Salber Phillips and Bertolt Brecht, this chapter proposes that the First World War pageant manipulates historical distance in order to undermine the construction of a stable historical consciousness, by which I mean "broad popular understandings of the past" or "how ordinary people beyond the history profession understand the past."⁴ Though some scholars use the term historical consciousness to refer to an awareness of the historicity of events, I will instead describe this awareness of the historicity of events as a "critical historical consciousness."⁵ Wartime historical pageantry is deeply invested in not simply the generation of historical consciousness, but in making the process visible, and thus, in the production of a critical historical consciousness.

Pageantry dramatizes the past; it is both performance and historical representation. As such, it is fundamentally a form of reenactment, a concept that has considerable contemporary currency.⁶ In recent years, historians have developed a significant literature on the practice of historical reenactment.⁷ Studying phenomena as diverse as civil war reenactments, television programs featuring contemporary reenactments of historical events and ways of life, and the experiential emphasis of many

⁴ In defining historical consciousness in this fashion, I am quoting from and following Peter Seixas in his introduction to *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (9,8).

⁵ See Seixas 8-9 for a discussion of the historians who understand historical consciousness as awareness of the historicity of the event and of the past.

⁶ Although the historian R.G. Collingwood employs the term reenactment in *The Idea of History*, he understands reenactment as the mental work of the historian, rather than a dramatic performance. For this reason, I have not considered Collingwood's work in this chapter. See *The Idea of History* (282-302).

⁷ See the special issue "Reenactment" in *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007), edited by Vanessa Agnew, and the special issue "Extreme and Sentimental History" in *Criticism* 46.3 (2004) edited by Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb.

museum exhibitions, historians use the term reenactment to refer to an emerging form of history in which individuals viscerally experience the past. In an article that surveys work on reenactment, Vanessa Agnew argues that reenactment is a form of affective history, as it is an instance of “historical representation that both takes affect as its object and attempts to elicit affect” (“History’s Affective Turn” 301). This focus on affect endeavours to replicate the psychological, emotional, and physical experiences of individuals in the past, and in doing so, emphasizes the individual’s subjective experience of reenacting history. Pageantry, as an instance of historical reenactment, is a form of affective history.⁸

Historians have raised questions, however, about the utility of reenactment. Does affective history, which departs from established historiographic practice, promote historical understanding? Agnew and other critics of reenactment suggest that it does not: “reenactment’s collapsing of temporalities and its privileging of experience over event or structure...raise[s] questions about its capacity to further historical understanding and reconcile the past to the present” (“History’s Affective Turn” 301). It is possible, however, to understand historical knowledge in different terms.

For performance theorists, the value of reenactment lies in the practice’s avoidance of established channels for the transmission of knowledge. In other words, affective history is useful precisely because it offers an alternative mode of engagement with history. Diana Taylor’s influential work on performance and history, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, argues that certain performance practices transmit tradition.

Contrasting the transmission of knowledge achieved by the archive with that achieved

⁸ In “What is Reenactment?”, Agnew argues that the pageant is a precursor to late twentieth century forms of reenactment (328).

through performance, Taylor writes: “The written/oral divide does, on one level, capture the archive/repertoire difference.... The repertoire, whether in terms of verbal or nonverbal expression, transmits live, embodied actions. As such, traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, and transmitted ‘live’ in the here and now to a live audience. Forms handed down from the past are experienced as present” (24). Along similar lines, Rebecca Schneider reassesses the document-centered logic of the archive. She points to American Civil War reenactors as an example of a cultural practice in which performance is not understood as ephemeral. Schneider writes that these reenactors, “motivated by a distrust of documents, consider performance as precisely a way of keeping memory alive - making sure it does not disappear. In such practices - coded primitive, popular, folk, naïve - performance *does* remain, does ‘leave residue.’ Indeed the place of residue is arguably *flesh* in a network of body-to-body transmission of enactment - evidence, across generations, of impact” (102).⁹ Though Taylor and Schneider employ the language of embodiment rather than affect, they value the fact that knowledge transmitted is not subject to the potentially repressive effects of dominant historiographic discourse: Schneider, for instance, observes that scholars tend to treat performance “under the rubric of ‘memory’ versus history” (102).¹⁰ Though affective history is in some instances ahistorical, the performance of history enables an alternative and valuable epistemology.

⁹ Schneider uses the body of a civil war reenactor who is particularly adept at looking like a corpse to argue that “remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body - even Hodge’s bloating one - becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory we might situate, with Freud, as symptomatic, with Cathy Caruth after Freud as the compulsory repetitions of a collective trauma, or with Foucault after Nietzsche as ‘counter-memory’ - the bodily, read through genealogies of impact as arguably always performative” (103).

¹⁰ See the discussion of historical consciousness above. Schneider is employing the distinction between memory and history in which memory constitutes popular understanding of the past and is opposed to the discipline of history.

Though historians who study reenactment and performance theorists disagree as to the efficacy of reenactment as an epistemology, I adopt the work of performance theory in arguing that we must at least in part locate the value of pageantry to historical understanding in its affective dimension. The pageant and other forms of reenactment are powerful tools for the representation of history because they work not simply through reason, but through emotion, the body, and memory. That said, Parker's pageants mobilize affective history in service of the hegemonic nationalist and patriotic historical narrative, and I am not suggesting in the course of this chapter that these pageants subvert this paradigm.¹¹ Rather, this chapter contends that the First World War pageant alternately collapses historical distance by promoting the spectator's affective response to the history onstage and engaging the spectator in the pageant's patriotic ideology and produces historical distance by means of metatheatricality and historical self-consciousness.

The concept of distance has been theorized by critics, dramatists, philosophers, and, more recently, historians. What links the work of theorists is, more often than not, their repudiation of affect. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, or as it has often been translated, alienation effect, offers a model for the estrangement of the viewer. Brecht's plays aspire to produce an "attitude of observing or looking on" (Brecht 93). In his seminal discussion of distance, Edward Bullough suggests that it is "psychical distance" that makes aesthetic appreciation possible. We achieve distance by looking at the object, whether the experience of fog, a painting, a play, or even an emotion, "'objectively', as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasise the

¹¹ Though Taylor and Schneider examine forms of reenactment from the margins, in sharp distinction to the imperialism and militarism of Parker's wartime pageants, the fundamental premise – that reenactment works through affect and embodiment – holds true.

‘objective’ features of the experience, and by interpreting even our ‘subjective’ affections not as modes of *our* being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon” (95). But, while Brecht seeks to maximize distance, Bullough seeks a medium between over- and under-distancing: writing of art, Bullough argues that “the verdict in the case of under-distancing is that the work is ‘crudely naturalistic’, ‘harrowing’, ‘repulsive in its realism’. An excess of Distance produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity” (101).

I will return to these two conceptions of distance in relation to specific works, but before turning to the pageants, Mark Salber Phillips’s work warrants discussion. Phillips observes that although various disciplines have developed ways of speaking about the phenomenon of distance – among them Brecht’s alienation effect and Bullough’s psychological distance – history has not. Over a series of works, Phillips has developed a heuristic for discussing historical distance.¹² In Phillips’s model, historical distance has formal, affective, ideological, and cognitive aspects. In “Distance and Historical Representation,” he writes:

If we accept that temporal distance is a defining characteristic of historical work, but that in practice historical distance is always a much more mediated construction, then the elementary dimensions of historical representation that I have outlined – form, affect, ideology, and cognition – can be understood as crucial mediations of that initial distance. They stand, we might say, as a series of distances (or even distance-effects) that modify and reconstruct the temporality of historical accounts, thereby shaping every part of our engagement with the past. (126)

In other words, a historical work manipulates formal, affective, ideological, and cognitive distance in order to shape the reader or audience member’s attitude towards, and understanding of, the past. Phillips reads historical texts for the manner in which they

¹² See Phillips’s articles “Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance” and “Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography.”

generate proximity to or distance from their subject matter, and in doing so, historicizes historiographic practices. Thus, rather than simply positing affect and its absence as the determining factor for historical distance, as Brecht does, Phillips develops a multifaceted model and, rather than positing an ideal historical distance, understands any given work's handling of historical distance as itself a historical matter.

Following Phillips's work and employing his terminology, this chapter seeks to understand the manipulations of historical distance in the First World War pageant. As discussed in the introduction, participants in and witnesses to the First World War consistently described themselves as living through history. This gave concrete expression to the dilemma of the crisis of historicism: embedded in history as these writers were, they struggled to understand whether all history is inherently subjective, or if the study of history, and their own attempts at writing history, should seek to produce objective, general laws. For the playwrights and the novelist discussed in this chapter, the crisis of historicism is played out on the stage, in the pageant's oscillating movement between radical distancing strategies that force the spectator to recognize the constructed nature of historical narratives and powerful attempts to immerse the spectator in an affective and ideologically motivated experience of history.

Louis Napoleon Parker's Wartime Pageantry

Louis Napoleon Parker is, by all accounts, the originator of the twentieth-century pageant. In 1905, Parker was invited to produce a play in celebration of the twelve-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the town of Sherborne. He envisioned a tremendous outdoor spectacle in which hundreds of actors would reenact scenes from the

town's history before an audience of thousands of spectators. Though Parker initially called this work a "folk play," he eventually came to call it a "pageant."¹³ The pageant in Sherborne in 1905 was the first of several village pageants Parker would produce and with this work, Parker created a vogue for pageants in Edwardian England which also swept North America, where it coincided with the burgeoning interest in civic celebrations.¹⁴

This chapter challenges the standard account of the origins and development of Parker's pageantry. While Parker's village pageants occupy an indisputably central place in the history of early twentieth-century drama, Parker's wartime pageants cast a different light on the origins and development of his pageantry. I propose that Parker's early pageants consist of two distinct strands: the aforementioned village pageants, which other critics have discussed at some length, and a Boer War-era production entitled *The Masque of War and Peace* (1900), which has not to my knowledge been discussed by literary critics or historians. These early works establish two models for the performance of historical distance: the affective proximity promoted by the village pageants and the formal distance produced by the mediating effect of allegory in the masque. These two strands are synthesized in a third body of work, Parker's First World War masques, which move between affective proximity and cognitive distance in the manner characteristic of the First World War pageant.

¹³ See the article "The Sherborne Pageant: A Striking Revival of Old England" (ed. Norman) for further details about the production and Parker's use of the term "pageant."

¹⁴ Parker produced a series of pageants over the course of the next four years: *The Warwick Pageant* (1906), *The Bury St. Edmund's Pageant* (1907), *The Dover Pageant* (1908), *The Colchester Pageant* (1909), and *The York Pageant* (1909). The souvenir "books of words" containing the texts of these pageants are held in the British Library and the Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. See David Glassberg's *American Historical Pageantry* for a thorough discussion of not only American pageantry, but also Edwardian pageantry in Britain.

By calling his “folk play” about Sherborne a pageant, Parker evoked the pageants of Elizabethan England and their allied form, the court masque, but with a distinctively modern outlook. Robert Withington’s *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline* (1918) argues that unlike the Elizabethan pageant, which most closely resembles a late-twentieth century parade with floats, the modern pageant as practiced by Parker was “essentially dramatic,” fusing the episodic nature of the Elizabethan pageant with the Elizabethan and Jacobean masques, which were lavish and predominantly allegorical court entertainments (2:231). For instance, the *Sherborne Pageant* of 1905 contains eleven distinct historical episodes: it begins with the founding of the town of Sherborne by St. Ealdhelm in 705 A.D., depicts the construction of the castle in 1107 and of Sherborne School in 1550, and ends with the visit of Sir Walter Raleigh in 1593. Though the overall structure is episodic, the episodes constitute a chain of historical events that grant narrative cohesion to the performance. The Parkerian pageant, however, has a distinctively modern political orientation. The anti-industrial politics of the Arts and Crafts movement had a profound influence on Parker’s work as a pageant-master. With the work of John Ruskin, William Morris, and others in mind, Parker envisioned the pageant temporarily stemming the tide of industrialism. Thus, Parker’s pageants commissioned local tradespeople to design sets and print programs, and to sew the hundreds of costumes necessary for the local cast. In every possible respect, the pageants sought to reenact the past.

Yet, the consensus among critics has been that Parker’s village pageants are politically disengaged. To a certain extent, Parker is himself responsible for this turn in the criticism, having described his pageants as “entirely undenominational and non-political,” claiming only that the pageant is a “great incentive to the right kind of

patriotism; love of hearth; love of town; love of county; love of England.”¹⁵ In his narrow understanding of “political” and his uncomplicated embrace of “the right kind of patriotism,” Parker discourages close scrutiny of his pageants for their political orientation. Thus, the earliest critic to write on Parker, Robert Withington, echoes Parker’s disavowal of politics, and suggests that Parker avoids modern, post-civil war history partly to avoid conflict, and partly because the costumes of the past are better suited to his romantic and spectacular vision of history (2:222). David Glassberg, however, offers a more nuanced interpretation of this neglect of recent history: “Viewing historical pageants as a protest against modernity, however, Louis Napoleon Parker and his British imitators abhorred industrialism and rarely reenacted historical incidents from after Elizabethan times” (149). Glassberg’s reading of Parker’s depiction of a pre-industrial golden age as a political gesture is the lone sympathetic interpretation of Parker’s politics. Other critics decry Parker’s work – and that of his imitators – as reactionary and ahistorical. In his study of modernist pageantry, Jed Esty notes that Parker’s pageantry is invested in heritage, not history:

The typical pageant managed to represent hundreds of years of English history by suggesting that all the important things had stayed the same. The key to the genre, then, is that it displays a series of chronological episodes in order to project the absence of change. The pageant-play dissolves history into the seductive symbolic continuity of rural folkways and national traditions; here, in the manner described by Patrick Wright, history is displaced by heritage and reduced to ‘amnesia in fancy dress.’ (Esty 59)

¹⁵ Parker’s own retrospective discussion of his pageants in his 1928 autobiography *Several of My Lives* emphasizes the apolitical spirit of pageantry – at least, as Parker understands politics. He writes:

What a Pageant Is. A Pageant is a Festival of Thanksgiving, in which a great city or a little hamlet celebrates its glorious past, its prosperous present, and its hopes and aspirations for the future. It is a Commemoration of Local Worthies. It is also a great Festival of Brotherhood; in which all distinctions of whatever kind are sunk in a common effort. It is, therefore, entirely undenominational and non-political. It calls together all the scattered kindred from all parts of the world. It reminds the old of the history of their home, and shows the young what treasures are in their keeping. It is the great incentive to the right kind of patriotism; love of hearth; love of town; love of county; love of England. (279)

Parker's critics generally agree that his pageantry is not properly historical: Mick Wallis has concluded that "the standard historical pageant offers a shared narrative that is shareable precisely because it narrates nothing of substance" (195, 199-200). Wallis dismisses the pageant as a vacuous entertainment; he writes that the historical sense "is awakened and constructed by what is after all a fundamentally aesthetic procedure: the showing of and participation within a series of attractive vignettes" (195-6). This critique of the pageant pursues the same argument as the critics of historical reenactment who dismiss the pageant as overly "affective history": it assumes that affective history is necessarily uncritical.

To perform historical events, it would seem to scholars, is not to comprehend history. Yet, following the work of performance theory, I contend that wearing the clothes of another era or watching one's neighbour reenact the arrival of Raleigh transmits knowledge of the past by promoting an affective relationship to the past. As Taylor and Schneider have argued, the nature of performance, which includes reenactment, is embodied. Pretending to inhabit a different body at a different time is ephemeral, but its effects, stored in the body, may be lasting. Certainly, reenactment may elide important historical details: the clothes an actor wears in a pageant may have been produced by a volunteer seamstress, rather than a child labourer; seeing Raleigh arrive in Sherborne, Raleigh's role in the colonization of Ireland may be overlooked or forgotten. Reenactment does not produce historical understanding (that is, knowledge of the past), but historical consciousness – a sense of the past. What remains for the participant and performer is a sense of oneself inhabiting another historical time – an affective

understanding of history that critics of reenactment and of the pageant do not always acknowledge.

While the pageant is not an embodied experience for the spectator as it is for the performer, Parker's village pageants repeatedly solicit the affective engagement of their audience. The scenes selected for performance are, in most cases, well-known scenes of local history, familiar to the audience members and, by extension, more likely to evoke an emotional response. And, as Parker produced his series of pageants, the defining features of the new genre of the pageant emerged. Several conventions of the genre tended to efface the distinction between performer and audience, and thus enhance the spectator's sense that s/he is part of the action on stage. Using amateur actors, for instance, rather than professional actors, dissolves the boundary between the stage and the audience. So, too, do scenes in which crowds figure prominently. For instance, as a crowd gathers to watch the arrival of Raleigh in an open-air theatre in the *Sherborne Pageant*, period costumes distinguish the crowd of actors from the crowd of spectators, but audience and performers are equally part of a crowd. The final scenes of Parker's pageants further reduce the distinction between performers and audience. Each pageant concludes with a final tableau in which all of the performers appear on stage in costume and sing "God Save the King." Actors in costume from each of the scenes stand in the area designated as the stage, and both actors and audience members join in singing the anthem. The Edwardian village pageants invite the audience to identify with the performers on stage, and in doing so, encourage affective proximity to the historical events depicted by the pageant and reduce historical distance because the audience identifies with the performers, who in turn embody historical personages.

Long before Parker produced the village pageants, however, he was commissioned to write *The Masque of War and Peace*. The manuscript of this play, dated December 1899, is held in the Parker Papers at Columbia University.¹⁶ This text, which has not been cited by literary critics or historians, can be read as the prehistory of twentieth century pageantry: although Parker does not yet use the term “pageant,” it is not only his first wartime pageant, but also the seed of his later pageants.¹⁷ *The Masque of War and Peace* was performed on February 13, 1900, at Her Majesty’s Theatre in aid of the Widows and Orphans of the Household Troops. This masque establishes a model for the First World War pageants, and it is a model that differs substantially from the model for the village pageants of 1905-1909. Rather than representing specific historical figures, characters in the wartime pageants are allegorical personifications (War or Peace), or archetypal figures (the War Worker, the Soldier). Thus, *The Masque of War and Peace* opens with Father Thames inquiring after the absent soldiers, then summoning Neptune to provide this information. When Neptune has no news, War is summoned; she arrives, followed quickly by Rumour, who brings word of the victories of the troops. With this news, London suddenly decides to enlist, which results in the appearance of Glory. Mercy, Pity, and the Arts of Peace float down the Thames on a barge. Mercy, dressed as a nurse, heals a wounded man, and a Yeoman appears to express his

¹⁶ Although performed in 1900, Parker wrote *The Masque of War and Peace* most likely at some point in 1899: the typescript manuscript at Columbia has a handwritten note which indicates that the list of battles on the colours of the Household Troops is correct as of December 1899. I am grateful to Jennifer Buckley for alerting me to the fact that this pageant is distinct from the 1915 pageant of the same title.

¹⁷ This is despite the fact that Parker does not explicitly connect this early masque to his later pageantry. In his autobiography, *Several of My Lives*, Parker discusses this masque in a section entitled “My Theatrical Life,” rather than in the section “My Pageant Life,” which begins with the commission for the Sherborne Pageant. Parker writes of *The Masque of War and Peace*: “I was busy devising a masque at Lady Arthur Paget’s invitation, to be played at Her Majesty’s for the benefit of the Widows of the Household Troops.... the cast we got together was, at any rate from the social point of view, absolutely stupendous; we had what I believe is called a galaxy of beautiful women, headed by Miss Muriel Wilson” (191-192).

willingness to fight. Science, Music, Literature, and Art are present, but stand apart, as “War keeps them silent.” In the final scene, Science, Music, Literature, and Art advance upon War, disarming and transforming her into Peace.

The Masque of War and Peace differs most obviously from the village pageants in that it represents contemporary history – the recent past and present of the Boer War – rather than the distant past. In this work, Parker begins to treat the present as the subject of history, but in order to do, relies extensively upon allegory. Without the historical distance afforded by temporal distance, Parker uses allegory to produce a formal distance from the present. As Edward Bullough observes of allegory, “Art springing from abstract conceptions, expressing allegorical meanings, or illustrating general truths...have too much general applicability to invite a personal interest in them, and too little individual concreteness to prevent them applying to us in all their force....By mere force of generalization, a general truth or a universal ideal is so far distanced from myself that I fail to realize it concretely at all” (103). Allegory, in other words, produces what Bullough calls psychological distance, or what Phillips would call formal distance. In contrast, the village pageants of 1905-1909 employ allegorical personification sparingly, though we will see momentarily that the First World War pageants rely extensively on allegorical figuration.¹⁸ In this respect, *The Masque of War and Peace* hews more closely to the Jacobean masque than to the Elizabethan pageant, as discussed above. Finally, performed as it is in a large West End theatre rather than outdoors, and acted by socially prominent women, rather than a cross-section of the community, the work does not aspire

¹⁸ See, for instance, the figure of Hope, who appears to console the “mourning figure” of Colchester in *The Colchester Pageant*.

to produce the same degree of affective proximity through audience identification with the performers as the village pageants do.

This is not to say that the pageant does not attempt to influence the emotions of its spectators. In 1900, the events of the Boer War loomed over Britain. The masque was performed in February 1900, during the siege of Mafeking (October 1899-May 1900), and therefore at a moment when the British risked losing the Boer War. Given this context, Parker surely felt obliged to produce a masque – and a historical narrative – which would not only present the British troops in a favourable light, but which would also boost morale. Thus, *The Masque of War and Peace* offers a retrospective narrative of the Boer War, describing as it does the voyage of the troops across the sea to Africa. It then imagines the future, forecasting the outcome of the war by representing the transformation of war into peace. By performing “future history,” the pageant interprets the past and present as steps toward this outcome. History is interpreted in the light of a future victory.

Though *The Masque of War and Peace* was performed in 1900, it would seem that Parker forgot about the existence of this text until 1915, when he revised this work for the First World War. In the intervening fifteen years, Parker worked intensively on the six village pageants, which seem to have little affinity with his earlier Boer War masque. Though his pageants were successful, Parker was disheartened by the wave of imitators that had followed his lead, and so he returned to the theatre in 1909. His play *Drake: A Pageant Play* (1912), which chronicled the life of Sir Francis Drake, was written shortly after the village pageants. Though *Drake* is not, in Parker’s sense of the word, a pageant, the play stages Parker’s awareness of the pageant as an intervention in

the construction of historical consciousness; this metatheatrical work seems to emerge out of Parker's years as a pageant-master. Thus, before turning to the First World War pageants, I will pause briefly to discuss an important scene in *Drake*.

Drake is not technically a pageant, but Parker did not scruple to call this play a "pageant-play," perhaps to capitalize on his fame in the realm of pageantry. Rather than a pageant, *Drake* is a tightly plotted play in three acts which depicts the adventures of Sir Francis Drake from 1571 to 1588. But *Drake* does, in a scene from 1588 (Act 3, Scene 3), depict an instance of Elizabethan pageantry and thereby offer meta-commentary on its own pageantry. As the scene opens, Drake's defeat of the Spanish Armada has made him a hero: in a performance-within-a-performance, crowds line the streets of London outside St. Paul's Cathedral, waiting for the procession to pass and for Drake's appearance. The event is clearly identified as the Lord Mayor's Day Parade, an annual parade in London which is a celebration of the installation of the mayor, and an occasion for the expression of civic pride; as Robert Withington has argued, the Lord Mayor's Day Parade is the link of continuity between Elizabethan pageantry and the Edwardian revival of pageantry (1:143). Calling the parade a pageant, the scene links the parade to contemporary pageants with which Parker's Georgian audience would be familiar:

[From beyond St. Paul's, R., comes a procession of the GUILDS OF LONDON, with their banners. They march to C., divide and line up on each side, in front of the crowd]

HABERDASHER. These be the Honourable City Companies...

POTTER. Pooh! I'm a Londoner! I've seen Pageants afore now. You should ha' been here when King Philip o'Spain came to marry Queen Mary. That was something. (107)

While it is clear that the Haberdasher is familiar with the pageant, the Potter makes a show of cynicism: he is an seasoned spectator, “a Londoner,” and one difficult to impress. Parker draws the attention of a 1912 audience – an experienced audience also composed of Londoners habituated to the Lord Mayor’s Day Parade, likely exposed to the Edwardian revival of pageants, and certainly aware of the pageant performed in London in 1911 as part of the Festival of Empire – to the pageant-within-a-pageant.¹⁹ Parker’s meta-commentary encourages the audience of *Drake* to be aware of their status as spectators at a pageant, and as an extension of this self-awareness, to think about how works of art, including pageant-plays (both the pageant within *Drake*, and *Drake* itself) shape historical consciousness. The meta-theatricality of the scene constructs historical distance: as the scene unfolds, the Ballad-monger repeatedly sings the ballad of Francis Drake and attempts to sell the crowd copies of the ballad. “Thirty-nine verses, setting forth the birth, life, and heroic deeds of Francis Drake, Knight, with his true presentment done from life. One groat. Buy! Buy! Buy!” he cries (107). Just as the pageant scene in *Drake* draws the audience’s attention to the role of the pageant in constructing a historical narrative, so does the Ballad-monger draw the audience’s attention to the role of the ballad in shaping history. *Drake* re-enacts Francis Drake’s entry into England’s national historic discourse, emphasizing the role that public performances and popular literature, such as the ballad, played in this process; the play offers a self-reflexive comment on pageantry’s intervention in the construction of historical consciousness.

The crowd scenes in *Drake*, however, function along the same lines as the crowd scenes in the village pageants. They model for the audience the appropriate (and possibly

¹⁹ See Ryan, “Staging the Imperial City: The Pageant of London, 1911” for a discussion of the Pageant of London, part of the Festival of Empire held in celebration of the coronation of George V.

hoped-for) emotional response of an audience to a performance. Thus, in the final section of the pageant scene, Drake appears to the crowd, then is immediately attacked by an assassin. The assassin is foiled by Drake's voluminous cloak, at which point Queen Elizabeth gives thanks to God on the steps of the cathedral and knights Drake. The play ends with the crowd spontaneously singing:

[Moved by a common impulse, the CROWD on both sides of the open space sway restlessly inward and break spontaneously into the following Psalm, which the CHOIR on St. Paul's steps take up, as does also the Organ within the Cathedral:]

Let God arise, and then His foes
Will turn themselves to flight:
His enemies then will run abroad,
And scatter out of sight.

[Elizabeth Sydenham has sunk on her husband's breast. At the end of the Psalm the People all turn towards the Queen and Drake with outstretched arms. Cries: "God save the Queen!" – "God save Drake!" – "God save England!" – Flags are waved. Roses are tossed on high, trumpets blare, bells clash, and the sun quivers on the QUEEN and DRAKE]

CURTAIN.

This ending borrows from the form of the village pageants, which consistently concluded with a final tableau in which the hundreds of actors appeared on stage at once and sang "God Save the King." Though the singing of the anthem was, until recently, customary at the close of any theatrical performance, these final scenes simultaneously break the illusion of the pageant by massing the actors on stage to sing and by inviting the audience into the action through communal song.²⁰ In *Drake*, "God Save the Queen" would be an

²⁰ For instance, the *Sherborne Pageant* was to end as follows:

...the final scene promises to be both beautiful and imposing. The musical choir is to sing a tribute to Sherborne, a veritable song of triumph. During this song a may-pole is set up and a troop of laughing children dressed as shepherds and shepherdesses dance a may-pole dance to the tune of the song, "With a laugh as we go round"... While this is in progress the final picture is arranged in the background. A stately woman representing Sherborne has been raised on a pedestal in the centre. On her right stands her god-daughter, the American Sherborne, whose

anachronism, thus Parker substitutes the singing of Psalm 68. As in the pageants, the audience for *Drake* is encouraged to model its response after the crowd on stage and to join in a visible display of patriotism and emotion. While it seems unlikely that audiences in 1912 would have joined in the singing of Psalm 68, it seems more than likely that wartime fervour would have led audiences for the wartime revivals, to which I shall turn next, to join in the singing. Not only does the audience watch history, but by soliciting their involvement and engagement, the plays incorporate their audience in to the production of historical narrative. The performance of history collapses historical distance in these moments of intense affective proximity to the action on stage. In *Drake*, however, affective proximity is interrupted by moments of cognitive distance from the performance in which the audience becomes conscious of the role of performance, literature, and song in the generation of historical narrative, and of the constructed nature of history itself. The audience is made aware of the play as a play, and aware of the play's role in manufacturing historical consciousness.

It is with *Drake*, then, that a metatheatrical strain emerges most decisively in Parker's work, and it is after completing a series of pageants that Parker comes to reflect on the significance of historical representation on the stage. It is only, however, with a wartime revival of *Drake* in 1916 that the three strands of Parker's work that I have been discussing – the allegorical masque's creation of historical distance through form, the

introduction into the pageant is sure to please all American visitors, as well as those in the name town across the sea. While the bands are playing a stately march, all the figures who have appeared in the pageant collect round the pedestal, the leading characters making obeisance to Sherborne. Those on horseback collect in the rear, and far out on either side are massed the townsfolk and minor characters in their various costumes. Then rush in groups of the players throwing roses about the pedestal, the whole mass of performers is picturesquely fitted into its place, children bearing shields make another gorgeous line of colour, and the entire crowd sings the National Anthem and the Old Hundredth. (Norman 12)

village pageant's affective history, and the metatheatrical and metahistorical commentary of *Drake* – merge.

The first of Parker's wartime theatrical productions was a revival of *Drake* in August of 1914.²¹ The revival of the play suggests Parker's acute awareness not only of the play's potential to inculcate and to unleash patriotic sentiment, but also to invite analogies between the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the hoped-for defeat of Germany. Of greater interest, however, is the second revival. In 1916, an outdoor performance of *Drake* at York necessitated the writing of preludes and interludes which would narrate for the audience the scenes that could not be performed, due to the constraints of outdoor production. The "Prelude" makes the historical parallel explicit for the audience:

Ladies and Lords: I greet you well. To-day
 You shall behold an honest English play;
 More than a play: a brief epitome
 Of one great hour in British history;
 Played by your friends, to help the men who give
 Their youth, their blood, their lives – that you may live.

I say a history. We nothing show
 That did not happen, centuries ago,
 In great Elizabeth's heroic days.
 Ay, and to-day we're in the self-same case:
 The jarring trumpet through the welkin rings,
 The nations rage with vain imaginings;
 Then it was Spain; to-day a fouler foe
 Lifts perjured hands to deal a felon blow.
 Three hundred years ago those hands were there:
 The Teuton in Spain's venture had his share;
 And Spanish galleons, as now we're told,
 Were full of German men and German gold.

²¹ In *Several of My Lives*, Parker recalls his reaction to the declaration of war: "On Wednesday, August 5, the day after the declaration of War, early in the morning, I rang Tree up and suggested he should at once revive *Drake*; that the profits should be given to some War fund; and that I would gladly contribute my author's fees, calculated on the original scale....The revival started on August 19, with overwhelming success, and lasted well into November" (251-2).

England had banned the Hanseatic League,
 The German huckster, then, with base intrigue,
 Made Spain his catspaw, and against us hurled
 The Armada, to erase us from the world.²²

Here, Parker insists that *Drake* is not just a “play,” but a “history.” As history, the play is presented as incontrovertible fact. In the lines that follow this justification of the play’s veracity, Parker argues that “to-day we’re in the self-same case,” delineating the similarities between the historical moments and arguing that the real foe then, as now, was Germany. In a rhetorical sleight of hand, Parker attempts to cloak this interpretation of the events of the play in the same robe of historical truth. History, the prelude argues, repeats itself. In this frame, *Drake* is both a faithful historical play and a timeless tale about the sanctity of Britain and her need for staunch defenders. This prologue is overtly a work of propaganda, and while the prologue works in tandem with the affective engagement of the final scene, it exists in an uneasy tension with the self-conscious aspects of the play discussed previously. There is a curious conflict between *Drake*’s foregrounding of the constructed nature of history, which contains echoes of the crisis of historicism, and the prologue’s evidently ideological recasting of history as both objective and implying a cyclic philosophy of history.

A tension between propagandistic and affective history, on the one hand, and an insistence on the artifice of history, on the other, runs throughout Parker’s wartime pageants. With the outbreak of war, Parker was pressed into service as a pageant-master once again.²³ Parker produced three pageants during the First World War: a new version

²² From the program for the performance of *Drake* held at York in 1916.

²³ In *Several of My Lives*, Parker writes: “When the War fell upon us, being judged incompetent to even lick stamps, I used the experience the Pageants had given me to invent and manage War Fund Entertainments, some of which we called Pageants.... Taking the small with the great there were eighty-five of them during the War. Some of them, produced at Covent Garden or at Queen’s Hall or in some of

of *The Masque of War and Peace* (1915), *A Pageant of Fair Women* (1917), and *The Pageant of Freedom* (1918). The 1915 version of *The Masque of War and Peace* borrowed extensively from the 1900 Boer War version, and each successive pageant was adapted from its predecessor and revised to reflect topical concerns. For instance, *A Pageant of Fair Women*, which concludes with the image of Joan of Arc, was tailored to commemorate Joan of Arc's Day. My discussion will focus on the final version, *The Pageant of Freedom*, which ran in 1918.

Like the earliest version of *The Masque of War and Peace* (1900), the plot of *The Pageant of Freedom* is advanced through the interactions of allegorical figures. Thus, the play begins with the entrance of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, followed by Britannia herself. Twenty figures representing the various colonies greet Britannia, and promise her their help. The procession is interrupted by the arrival of Youth. Faith, Hope, Love, Courage, and Pity give Youth their gifts, and Youth's Mother speaks, as does his Wife. They are joined on stage by women war workers, a Postwoman and the General Worker, who speak of the work they do. Britain's allies – including the tardy America – appear in a procession, and together, they proclaim that “We – fight – for FREEDOM!” (29). But there is no figure of War, and no transformation of War into Peace in this play. Instead, the play concludes with the actors singing “God Save the King” (31). *The Pageant of Freedom* conforms to a model for First World War pageantry that is highly formulaic and relies on the spectacle of a procession of symbolic figures to advance the action. In *American Historical Pageantry*, David Glassberg describes the existence of a standard plot in the American wartime masques: “To elicit

the greater variety theatres, and played by all the stars of the stage and all the fairest women of Society, were very beautiful spectacles; especially, perhaps, the Pageant of Freedom, which had quite a run” (301).

the desired emotional response, pageant writers created the melodramatic equivalent of World War I recruiting posters, depicting in symbolic form the events that led Woodrow Wilson to send American troops overseas. Typically, pageant-masters assigned a woman draped in a flowing classical gown to represent each of the nations involved in the war” (216). The principal pageant masters in the United States (Langdon, Stevens, MacKaye, and Mackay) all used virtually the same symbolic format: Great Britain and France appeal to America to help them fight, and a frail Belgium asks America for aid. America then agrees to help. My research confirms that British wartime pageants also tend to conform to the general pattern Glassberg identifies in American pageantry. The pageants represent, through allegorical personifications, the invasion of Belgium, the attack on France, and Britain’s decision to defend Belgium. Britain’s nations (England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales) come to her aid, as do her colonies.²⁴ The 1915 *Masque of War and Peace* is one of the first texts to employ this model, though by 1918, the model had been widely disseminated. Whether or not Parker was the originator of this formula, it is clear that his plays are central to the evolution of the model.

One might expect that the representation of contemporary history on stage would constitute an instance of minimal historical distance by virtue of shared ideology. Certainly, in the case of a pageant that is also a wartime fundraising event, it would be fair to expect a great deal of ideological sympathy between the pageant and its spectators. Yet, by continuing to rely upon allegorical abstractions, Parker’s play employs a formal strategy for representation that simultaneously produces historical distance and

²⁴This representation of the British Empire, though well suited to the representation of the war, in fact seems to have its origin in the 1911 Pageant of London produced by Frank Lascelles as part of the Festival of Empire: the fourth section, The Masque Imperial, concluded with an “Allegory of the Advantages of Empire” in which Britannia was surrounded by female figures representing the overseas dominions (see Ryan 127-8).

minimizes it. Parker foregoes the mythological abstractions of the 1900 version of *The Masque of War and Peace*; there is no Neptune in this play. Instead, the gallery of allegorical figures includes a distinctly modern archetypes, such as the Postwoman or the General Worker. (The allegorical personifications in *The Pageant of Freedom* are decidedly contemporary, much as they are in Vernon Lee's *Satan the Waster*, which I discussed in the previous chapter.) In this manner, formal distance – allegory – coexists with affective proximity when “everyday” allegorical figures appear on stage. I would argue, however, that such moments are in fact more powerful for advancing the play's ideological interests than a more realistic mode of representation. The Woman War Worker is, as a character, sufficiently broadly drawn that the range of spectators capable of identifying with her is vast, and the same is true of Youth or the Mother.

The most striking innovation in *The Pageant of Freedom* is its explicit theorization of the relationship between the work of propaganda and its audience. This first stanza of the prologue is both introduction and prescription:

Fair Ladies, gentle Lords, it well may be
 You marvel we should show our pageantry
 In such a world of turmoil. Let me say
 We do not come to while the time away
 With idle song and frivolous display;
 We would not have you lose in vain delight
 The sense of waiting, or the thrill of fight;
 Nor lead you to forget the strenuous hour
 Amid the perfumes of Armida's bow'r.
 Think us not puppets in a raree-show;
 Not acting, but in earnest; and aglow
 With the same fire as yours. Let what we speak
 Be what you think, although our words be weak.
 Let our minds interact: while we discourse,
 Think us yourselves, and think our voices yours. (9)

The Muse begins by anticipating an objection, that pageantry is a form of “idle song and frivolous display” that could be associated with “the perfumes of Armida’s bow’r.” The rhyme scheme intensifies at this point: couplets give way to a triplet, say-away-display. But this rhyme, an instance of “frivolous display,” is only a momentary frippery. The rhyme scheme is resumed, and the Muse ends the stanza with on a wholly different note. For, while it might seem that pageantry is ill-suited to a time of war (the “strenuous hour”), this need not be the case. She asks the audience to think of the characters, the allegorical personifications of the pageant, as “in earnest,” or real, and “aglow / With the same fire as yours.” Pageantry, as the Muse understands it, is a vehicle for the transmission of patriotic sentiments. The final lines of this stanza ask the audience to identify with the play: “Let what we speak / Be what you think, although our words be weak.” The Muse acknowledges the inadequacy of her speech, her “weak” words, but the use of the term “think” complicates her rhetoric. It goes without saying that the words that the actors speak will be “heard” by the audience, but what does it mean to “think” what someone “speaks”? The choice of words betrays the tension between affective proximity and cognitive distance from the spectacle. History, as represented on the stage, produces intense identification – and yet the prologue suggests that the audience must continue to think in order to maintain cognitive distance. With these lines, the pageant acknowledges the collapse of historical distance generated by affect, while insisting on detachment produced by the separation of voices, minds, and selves.

This stanza does not ask its audience to simply accept what is performed on stage, but nor does it quite generate the same degree of cognitive distance as *Drake*. Parker’s meta-commentary in *Drake* asks the audience to think about the transmission and

consolidation of historical narratives: to look at themselves looking at the crowd, a crowd that in turn looks at the pageant and hears the ballad of Drake. The complex *mise-en-abîme* moment is a Brechtian estranging strategy. The prologue to *The Pageant of Freedom* employs a different strategy: it asks the audience to absorb the play as if they were themselves acting and speaking. Parker's pageant asks the audience to alter how they think. But, it does so explicitly, rather than employing the coercive and subliminal techniques generally employed by propaganda. Thus, although Parker's work tends to be critiqued for distancing itself from the past and present and for embracing and perpetuating forms of amnesia, careful attention to the pageant's text as a complex literary object and to the pageant as historical event in and of itself suggests otherwise. While Parker avoids modern history in his village pageants, war forces Parker to treat the recent past as contemporary history. Parker's wartime pageants offer insight into the early twentieth century's fascination with historical re-enactment and suggest that by the time of the First World War, Parker's pageantry was decidedly self-conscious. Though Parker understood pageantry's goal to be "the awakening or creation of communal historical sense" (qtd in Withington 2:203), his wartime pageants also encourage an engaged and critical historical consciousness by showing how historical consciousness comes into being. Thus, while the wartime pageants exhibit a sharp sense of their ideological purpose, they also express ambivalence toward the cooptation of the pageant for political and propagandistic ends in a series of metatheatrical moments which display a critical historical consciousness.

History Onstage in the First World War Pageant

I have until now focused on the work of Louis Napoleon Parker, whose pageants were central to the development of First World War pageantry. There were, however, many other works of pageantry produced during the war in the United States, England, and the British colonies. Many conformed to the pattern I discussed above, in which women dressed in flowing classical gowns symbolized the nations, and the pageant revolved around the interactions between these figures and, in the case of Britain, children dressed in national garb who stood for her colonies. Such is the case in May Bell's *Britannia Goes to War* (published 1919), American author Catherine T. Bryce's *To Arms for Liberty* (published 1918), Thomas Wood Stevens's *The Drawing of the Sword* (performed 1917, published 1918), and Gladys Davidson's *Britannia's Revue* (1914). Various peace pageants held to celebrate the end of the war employ the same device: included among these are Rose Patry's *The Vision of a New World* (1919) and Bernice de Bergerac's *The Oxford Pageant of Victory* (1919).²⁵ In a variation on this dramatic plot, Elsie Fogerty's *The Harrying of the Dove* (published 1915), employs "The Seven Champions of Christendom" to represent the nations.

Each of these works is invested in allegorical modes of representation, a dramatic device which, I argued in relation to Parker, produces a formal distance between the historical representation of the war and the audience. Treating the present conflict as a battle between abstractions alters the audience's relationship to the subject matter of the pageant; it is one of a variety of ways through which Parker manipulates historical distance. In two pageants, however, history itself is subject to allegorization: Gladys Davidson's *Britannia's Revue* and *Britannia's Pageant of Peace* include "History" as a

²⁵ A notable exception to this pattern is Lilian Martindale's *The Dawn of Peace: A Pageant Play* (1921) which, written as it was for the Heswall Branch of the League of Nations, does not represent individual nations, only the League of Nations.

character, and Elsie Fogerty's *The Harrying of the Dove* includes Clio, the classical muse of history. Like other First World War pageants, the allegorical nature of these works distances the present such that it may be treated as "history," but in these two pageants, the allegorical figure "History" makes visible the latent and conflicting historiographical discourses that, as earlier chapters argued, animate the representation of history in the literature of the First World War. Where Parker's pageants constructed cognitive distance from history through a series of metatheatrical moments which dramatized critical historical consciousness, these plays have a more explicit interest in theories of history.

Britannia's Revue was published in 1914 by Samuel French as an inexpensive edition likely designed for use by schools and churches.²⁶ Its author, Gladys Davidson, was a prolific author of books and plays for children. Prior to the war, she published various compilations of fables, fairy tales, and ballet plots.²⁷ Though I have not been able to find evidence of amateur performances, which almost certainly took place, the archives of the Lord Chamberlain's Office indicate that *Britannia's Revue* was licensed for professional performance at the Lyceum Theatre, in Sheffield, on May 23, 1917. The Lord Chamberlain's comments on the play offer an economical means of conveying the tone and content of the pageant: "A patriotic production of which little need be said. Britannia sits on a throne and the Allies, represented by children, come and make speeches and dance. Britannia also delivers speeches, and so does John Bull etc.... The

²⁶ *Britannia's Revue* (London: Samuel French, 1914) is held in both the War Poetry Collection of the Birmingham Central Library and in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays at the British Library. In both copies, there are six typescript pages attached which include verses and songs for America.

²⁷ I have not been able to locate specific biographical information, and so this is deduced on the basis of the dozens of children's books by Davidson held at the British Library.

verse is doggerel, but very well meant. Recommended for licence.”²⁸ The Lord Chamberlain’s synopsis highlights the array of songs, dances, and speeches that comprise the pageant. Among these speeches is the recitation of the poem “Britannia’s Book of Memory,” a poem that introduces the character of History.²⁹

The presence of History on stage makes explicit Davidson’s assumptions about history, both as event and as a narrative of events. First, as in Parker’s *Drake*, the process by which historical narratives come into existence is dramatized. In the action leading up to the recitation of the poem, Britannia explains to Scotland, Ireland, and Wales that “My Children o’er the Seas,” her colonies, are arriving: “And whilst you bid them welcome, I will write / Within my Book of Memory, so bright!” The stage directions for this section read: “All go out R., and BRITANNIA is left alone. She takes up big book with clasps and begins to write in it. Then either BRITANNIA herself, or, better still, another performer dressed to represent HISTORY, recites” (2). As such, the scene enacts the writing of history: while Britannia writes in the “big book with clasps,” the figure of History narrates the act of writing of history. History is, quite literally, written on stage, and the audience watches the constituent pieces of this process. They see the events, the arrival of the colonies; they see Britannia writing history, the story of these events; and they see History personified, reflecting on the significance of the events and of writing a narrative of these events. This personification of History is surprisingly sophisticated, and reveals Davidson’s understanding of history as both events in the past and a narrative of these events.

²⁸ This note is held in the file with *Britannia’s Revue*, Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, MS 965, Vol. 11, Department of Manuscripts, British Library.

²⁹ This poem was originally published in *The Yorkshire Post* on December 5, 1914, page 3. With the exception of some minor typographical changes, the poem is the same.

The pageant's representation of history also suggests that history remains to be written. In other words, one of the assumptions about historical knowledge in evidence in the performance is that history does not have a predetermined outcome. The figure of History describes how the heroes' deeds "Are written down in precious blood," and how "Britannia's children read / Of how she's conquered tyrants, grim, / ... Of how they've fought for Liberty, / For Hearth, and Home, and Peace." History says in the third verse:

Within her Book of Memory,
 Britannia's writing now
 Her greatest page of History,
 To tell the nations how
 She met the "Mailed Fist" that sought
 To deal her death's fell blow,
 And how her children rallied round
 To lay the aggressor low. (3)

The emphasis in this verse on the act of writing – "Britannia's writing now" – implicates the audience not only in the creation of historical narratives, but also as historical actors.

The final verse of the poem addresses the audience directly and calls them to action.

Here, I quote from the 1917 version:

Oh, sister, brother, British born,
 What meaneth this to *you*?
 Shall *your* name go down to fame
 With khaki, or with blue?
 If not, then help with hand or purse,
 Let History be told,
 Britannia's Book of Memory
 Is clasped with Hearts of Gold! (4)

As Britannia writes her history – a text to which the audience is not privy – History reminds the audience that they have the opportunity to be included in the history books.

The pageant collapses the temporal dimension of historical distance because what the audience sees on stage as history is not the past, but the present as it becomes history.

That Britannia writes as the actors appear on stage reminds the audience that the same simultaneity operates off the stage. Consequently, the audience's actions determine what is being written down as history.

A far more deterministic view of history is on display in Elsie Fogerty's *The Harrying of the Dove* (1915). This pageant also employs a personification of history in the form of Clio, "The Muse of History." Fogerty identifies her play as "A Masque," but it shares the principal feature of the wartime pageants: it is an allegorical representation of the war. It is, moreover, designated for amateur performances, as the play is published by George Allen & Unwin as part of the series "Standard Plays for Amateur Performance." The masque, however, does not employ the standard form of the wartime pageant. Rather, the plot consists of the harrying of Peace, who is described as "a beautiful pale girl." When Peace dies, the Seven Champions of Christendom set out to avenge Peace. On their return, Peace's tomb is found to be empty (evidently, an allusion to the resurrection of Christ), and the play ends with Peace reappearing on the stage carrying an olive branch.

Throughout the play, Clio carries a tapestry and a loom. As the masque begins, the stage directions indicate, "Clio enters bearing her weaving loom for tapestry, over which Faction, and Luxury, Folly and Pleasure are wrangling" (5). As these figures fight over the loom, Clio observes "My web is twisted. I can see no form.... Folly tangled it" (8). On the stage, Peace is growing weary. "What troubles her?" England asks Clio. Clio responds:

In my golden sacred web
The Vision stands; wait till it comes to me.
"The Heavens opened, and behold I saw
One riding on a red horse. Dyed in blood:

The winepress of God's wrath his horse-hoofs trod."
He from the Earth shall bear away fair Peace. (9)

In Clio's vision, Death kills Peace. But this event restores order: as Death approaches, the stage directions indicate that Clio "begins to draw her web into order and weave again" (9). The masque implies, then, that war is the product of Folly, Faction, Luxury, and Pleasure. This resonates with the discourse of war as regeneration discussed in the second chapter, as it is war that enables Clio to "draw her web" into order.

Rather than an allegorical personification of History, as in *Britannia's Revue*, Fogerty follows classical mythology by figuring history as the muse of history, Clio. Yet Fogerty departs from traditional representations of Clio: rather than a writer of history depicted with pen and scrolls of paper, Clio is the weaver of history. Clio's tapestry is a complex figure for history, gesturing toward the mimetic function of history, and also to the possibility that history consists of the repetition of a cycle of events. Clio is the recorder of history, whose tapestry represents events, and is also possibly in control of historical events. For instance, at one point Clio says that what troubles Peace is, "an old-world dream," while the stage directions read "*raising her mirror and looking back over her shoulder*" (8). In this instance, Clio's mirror signals her mimetic function. But Clio is elsewhere figured as an agent who appears to control the cycle of history. As Peace dies in Scene I, Clio picks up an "empty hour-glass" and announces: "My hour-glass turns; the sands flow back again" (9). Here, the endless turning of the hour glass suggests that history has a pattern, controlled at least in part by Clio herself.

These assumptions about the predetermined course of history which underpin *The Harrying of the Dove* are quite unlike the assumptions implied in Davidson's *Britannia's Revue*. While Davidson's pageant emphasizes the spectator's responsibility for acting in

such a way as to make future generations proud of their history, there is no such attempt to engage the audience in shaping history in *The Harrying of the Dove*. Instead, it is suggested that the outcome of events – of the wrangling of Faction, Luxury, Folly, and Pleasure – is inevitably the death of Peace. The scenes which solicit the audience's emotional involvement in the other wartime pageants I have discussed are missing from this pageant; instead, *The Harrying of the Dove* keeps its audience at a distance as spectators to predetermined historical events. The archaic speech style of the allegorical figures on the stage and the resolutely classical setting and dress create a formal distance between the masque and its audience, estranging the spectators from the action on stage. Moreover, while the audience for *The Harrying of the Dove* sees a historical narrative being written on the stage, Fogerty's work does not register the idea that history can be relative, the product of multiple, often conflicting accounts. These two patriotic plays thus suggest the range of attitudes and popular ideas about history in circulation during the First World War, but the tendency toward self-conscious theatricality and critical historical consciousness that we have seen in Parker and Davidson's work is the one that endures in the pageants and pageant-inspired works in the interwar period.

The Postwar Legacy of Pageantry: Noël Coward's *Cavalcade*

The wave of pageantry that swept England and America between 1905 and 1918 abated in the post-war years. There remained, however, great enthusiasm for pageantry in various circles. For one prominent theatre critic, Huntley Carter, the future of a people's theatre was closely connected to the pageant. In 1925, Carter published *The New Spirit in the European Theatre*. Carter's book traces the development of the "Art for

the People” movement, which sought to align the theatre with the National Guild movement, and its successor, the “Arts League of Service,” which sought to bring “good plays and good representation round the country on a barrow, as it were, and to penetrate to the smallest hamlet.... It was also a sequel to the wartime Camp theatre, inasmuch as it sought to reach and amuse the soldiers who had resumed their normal occupations in farm and factory districts” (113-4). The organization that, in turn, replaced the Arts League of Service was “The League of Arts.” Carter writes:

An awakening of the more important character appeared in “The League of Arts,” organised to do the very work which the “Arts League of Service” failed to do. The organizers recognized there were signs that “a new corporate music and pageantry were to bind us all in a living tether.” It was a recognition, in fact, of the new corporate life and its cultural needs for which the war was mainly responsible. According to the ambitious programme, there were to be great pageants, great open-air festivals, great processions of singers and massed bands. The old river carnivals were to be revived, the open spaces were to be set ablaze with festoons and flags and alive with multitudes engaged in national and self expression. (114)

But these dreams of a people’s theatre that would promote political engagement did not come to fruition. While the prewar village pageant culminated in lavish spectacles like the 1911 *Pageant of London*, postwar pageants were small-scale productions for schools, theatres, or villages.³⁰ The most exciting developments in pageantry, it would seem, were the late modernist experiments with pageantry, which do seem to share Huntley Carter’s understanding of the pageant as a vehicle for national expression. As Jed Esty has shown, the pageant enjoyed great currency in this period: both T.S. Eliot and E.M. Forster wrote pageants, and novelists as disparate as John Cowper Powys and Virginia Woolf (to whom I shall turn shortly) wrote novels with a pageant at their centre. In

³⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of postwar pageantry in America, see Glassberg’s chapter “The Receding Past” in *American Historical Pageantry*.

Esty's analysis, the pageant is the site where modernism begins to turn inward, away from high modernism's cosmopolitanism and toward folklore and heritage.

I propose, however, that the late modernist interest in the pageant's connection to folk culture is only one strand in the pageant's development in the first half of the twentieth century. While Eliot and Forster's interest in the pageant in the 1930s is arguably the continuation of the tradition of pageantry begun by Parker's Edwardian village pageants, the wartime pageants established a different tradition. With their self-consciousness about history and theatricality, these pageants inaugurated a style that finds expression in Noël Coward's *Cavalcade* (1931).

Cavalcade originated in Coward's desire to challenge himself by producing a massive work on a historical subject. The concept for *Cavalcade* came to Coward as he leafed through an illustrated history and came upon an image of British soldiers departing for the Boer war (Lahr 96). Coward himself was evidently influenced by pageantry's model of history as spectacle. "Noel knew he wanted something like Pageant or Procession," writes Cole Lesley in *The Life of Noel Coward*. "He finally shouted 'Cavalcade! A procession on horseback'" (96).

The image of the Boer War soldiers that inspired *Cavalcade* was transformed into the second scene of *Cavalcade*, and Coward developed a plot to structure his presentation of recent history. Through the lives of two families, one the upper-middle class Marryot family, and the other their servants, the Bridges, *Cavalcade* traces a history of Britain from 1899 to 1929. The first scene is set on December 31, 1899. In the midst of the celebration of the new century Ellen and Alfred Bridges, the Marryots' servants, discuss Alfred's departure for the Boer war; as they leave the room, Jane and Robert

Marryot enter, and they discuss Robert's impending departure. In this and subsequent scenes, we see the history of the twentieth century as it is experienced through these characters: the men fight in the Boer War; the mothers and children watch the funeral procession of Queen Victoria; Edward, the elder Marryot son, and his wife die when the Titanic sinks; and Joe, the younger Marryot son, is engaged to be married to the Bridges' daughter Fanny, but he dies in the First World War. The play ends on December 31, 1929: in different corners of the stage, Jane Marryot proposes a toast to England while Fanny, now a renowned dancer and singer, performs a song entitled "Twentieth-Century Blues." With its two wars, tragedies, scandals, and reconfiguration of the class system, *Cavalcade* depicts the rapid historical change of these three decades.

Cavalcade was a great success, which one might duly attribute to Coward's ability to capture the zeitgeist, but also to Coward's ability to represent recent history for an audience trained to respond to the pageant-play. Given the widespread performance of pageants both amateur and professional, popular and elite, I would argue that years of historical pageantry had produced an audience receptive to spectacular depictions of history. Coward's play, with its presentation of recent history through a domestic drama, mediated in turn the reception of subsequent literary-historical works. For instance, Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), discussed in the second chapter, was often taken to be directly modeled after *Cavalcade*, to Brittain's great chagrin. Among Vera Brittain's papers, held at McMaster University, is a file marked "Material Found in Testament of Youth." Within this file, a two-page, typed document entitled "Suggestions for Publicity: Genesis of *Testament of Youth*" includes the following comment on *Cavalcade*:

Some people with whom I have discussed my book have called it "A Woman's 'Cavalcade.'" It may be quite a good way to describe it, but if this is done it

should be pointed out that my book was planned and begun in 1929, long before “Cavalcade” was written. Noël Coward and I may have had some of the same ideas but I did not get mine from him.

I should, however, be glad if the publicity for this book could emphasize as far as possible that it is a biography of my own generation and of the first twenty-five years of the century as much as an autobiography of myself. I don’t really play any more part in it than Noël Coward’s heroine plays in ‘Cavalcade.’

One might, in fact, trace both Brittain and Coward’s influences back to the pageant. The pageant’s construction of a series of historically significant events, without plot or consistent characters, and its reduction of history to a series of historical types presages both Brittain’s autobiography and Coward’s play. The pageant’s use of representative, sometimes even allegorical figures, shapes the era’s understanding of historical representation.

Cavalcade was received in 1931 as a patriotic statement. It opened in the midst of a period of intensified economic anxiety: England was three years into the depression and had recently unpegged its currency from the gold standard. In this context, Jane’s final patriotic speech, the singing of the anthem, and Coward’s unscripted comment as he received his ovation on stage, “I hope that this play made you feel that, in spite of the troublous times we are living in, it is still pretty exciting to be English” (qtd in Lahr 98) led to the play being received as morale-boosting patriotism. Late twentieth-century critics, however, are divided on *Cavalcade*’s politics. Many dismiss the play on the grounds that it was simply a vehicle for Coward to test his abilities as a director; others accept the received wisdom that the play endorses an uncomplicated patriotism.³¹

Consequently, *Cavalcade* has not received any sustained critical attention, and only a few

³¹ See, for instance, John Lahr’s *Coward the Playwright* (3, 96-100). Philip Hoare offers a different take on Coward’s politics. He writes: “in Cavalcade ‘ideas are quickly defused by sentiment’. In private, or in published but unperformed work, Coward was willing to risk his hand, questioning authority and the Establishment; but in the public glare of the limelight, he refused to take himself seriously” (234).

pages in books that treat Coward's complete oeuvre. Robert Kiernan is one exception. He writes: "The ending is generally regarded today as the most shameless claptrap, but its cavalier juxtaposition of chaos and national faith crowns the flickering illuminations of the play with suitable ambiguity. Are we to understand that faith in king and country can withstand the "twentieth-century blues"? That such faith triumphs over chaos? That it simply coexists with despair in some mindless doublethink?" Kiernan concludes that "as a patriotic melodrama it is oddly uncommitted" (120-121). I agree completely with Kiernan in this respect and, like him, find that the key to understanding the politics of *Cavalcade* lies in its treatment of history. Kiernan writes that "The play's mixture of antiwar invective, patriotic flag-waving, and sentimentality is a perfectly balanced formula for capturing the history of thirty tumultuous years without appearing to have a special point of view... The play offers so many and such varied points of view that it accommodates almost any understanding. History is not a course pursued in *Cavalcade*, but a gauntlet run – and run by such flickering illumination that it managed to seem everyone's rite of passage" (119). In other words, Kiernan suggest that Coward's treatment of history is sufficiently capacious as to be apolitical.

My sense of the play's treatment of history, however, differs from Kiernan's. Over the course of the play's twenty-two scenes, Coward constructs a historical narrative that draws attention to its artifice. While *Cavalcade* initially seems to establish a firm distinction between the reality of history (the early twentieth century, and especially its wars and deaths) and the imagined world depicted on stage, this distinction proves inadequate, for history and theatricality prove to be intertwined. *Cavalcade* constructs historical distance in the same manner as the First World War pageants: affective

distance is minimized while moments of metatheatricality and historical self-consciousness produce cognitive distance. *Cavalcade*'s metatheatricality insists that historical narrative is only another kind of artifice, but the play evokes affective proximity to the past through music and staged tableaux. The ensuing oscillation between historical distance and proximity is, I would argue, the product of an unstable ideology. While the wartime pageants and *Cavalcade* are overtly ideologically motivated, they nevertheless register a distinct ambivalence toward their ideological function through these moments of cognitive distance. The most interesting difference between *Cavalcade* and the pageants, however, lies in *Cavalcade*'s return to a more realistic mode of representation. Form, in *Cavalcade*, does not produce distance; rather, as we shall see momentarily, form itself stands in for specific assumptions about history.

While *Cavalcade* does not announce itself as a pageant, it is governed by the same logic and structure as the historical pageant-plays. The play consists of a series of scenes depicting significant events in Britain's recent history. Rather than relying on dialogue and plot to advance the action, however, many scenes in *Cavalcade* are tableaux rather than dramatic scenes. There is, for instance, a scene in which the Marryot family, dressed in mourning for Queen Victoria, walks through a park. This technique is used again to represent the First World War in Scene VII, which has no action involving the characters in the drama. Instead, the stage directions for the scene read as follows:

Above the proscenium 1914 glows in lights. It changes to 1915-1916, 1917 and 1918. Meanwhile, soldiers march uphill endlessly. Out of darkness into darkness. Sometimes they sing gay songs, sometimes they whistle, sometimes they march silently, but the sound of their tramping feet is unceasing. Below the vision of them, brightly-dressed, energetic women appear in pools of light, singing stirring recruiting songs – "Sunday I walk out with a soldier," "We don't want to lose you," etc., etc. With 1918 they fade away, as also does the vision of

the soldiers, although the soldier can still be heard very far off, marching and singing their songs. (105)

Light and darkness, and sound and music conjure the war. In this Coward borrows extensively from expressionist theatre, with its interest in externalizing psychological states on the stage. But, like the pageant, the play works by evoking nostalgia in its audience. Coward, in his autobiography *Present Indicative*, writes that “[t]he emotional basis of *Cavalcade* was undoubtedly music. The whole story was threaded on to a string of popular melodies... Popular melodies probe the memory more swiftly than anything else, and *Cavalcade*, whatever else it did, certainly awakened many echoes” (341). At the same time, however, Coward’s play shares Parker’s fidelity to the naturalist tradition, attempting to recreate a highly realistic set for the production. Kiernan observes that the play has twenty-two scenes and necessitates sixteen sets, forty principal actors, hundreds of secondary actors, and 3700 costumes (115). Coward’s moving train, however, surpasses Parker’s work for sheer audacity and expense; audiences were stunned, for instance, by the life-size train that moved across the stage. Like the songs, the breathtaking special effects of *Cavalcade* seek to move the audience members, evoking history through affective response. For this reason, characters, as critics have observed, are secondary to the music and the impressive scale of this staging of historical scenes. As in the pageants, history, not the plot, occupies centre stage. And, again as in the pageants, the transformation of history into spectacle leads to a renewed sense of both the artificiality of historical narrative and the fact that art (in its artificiality and theatricality) is central to remembering the past and thus, to the creation of historical consciousness.

A play-within-a-play at the centre of *Cavalcade* thematizes the role performance and spectatorship play in the development of historical consciousness. Here, as

elsewhere, there are strong echoes of Parker's dramaturgy. In Part I, Scene 4, the siege of Mafeking, and particularly the fates of her husband and brother, weigh on Jane Marryot as she anxiously awaits reports from Africa. A friend, however, persuades Jane to go to the theatre on this night, the 18th of May, as a show of resilience and gallantry. Thus, Jane sits onstage in a theatre box, watching *Mirabelle* being played center stage. Coward's stage directions indicate that the play is a "typical musical comedy of the period": six girls dressed in army uniforms sing an army song, then *Mirabelle*, the heroine, appears. *Mirabelle* has been living in disguise on a farm, hoping in this way to find someone who will love her for herself: she thinks that she has found this in Lieutenant Edgar. But her ruse is discovered: it seems that Edgar knows that she is the Princess *Mirabelle*, and he intends to marry her for her money. Just as this revelation is to occur, with the actors mid-song, the stage manager interrupts the performance to announce that Mafeking has been relieved (37). The events of the war disrupts the performance in the theatre; rather than resuming the performance, the audience joins hands and sings "Auld Lang Syne." The lighthearted musical comedy of *Mirabelle* is forgotten. It would seem that the play sets up an opposition between the artifice of theatre and the reality of history.

Mirabelle, however, resurfaces in the play in a scene ten years later, complicating this opposition. At a raucous and debauched dinner party in 1909 (Part II, Scene III), Edward Marryot meets the actor Rose Darling, who played a supporting part in *Mirabelle*. For Edward, this calls to mind history: "'Mirabelle'! I was taken to see that. Mother was there on Mafeking night. She took me a few weeks later to a matinee" (80). Like those today who remember where they were when Kennedy was assassinated,

Edward remembers that his mother was attending a performance of *Mirabelle*. I read this particular association, however, as Coward's means of eroding the opposition between art and history. That Edward thinks of the play in connection with his mother's experience of Mafeking night tells us a great deal about the workings of memory through art. It is significant that Jane was at the theatre rather than in a restaurant or on the street as the end of the siege was announced; that Jane was at the theatre and that Edward remembers this figures the role that literature, theatre, and the imagination play in the formation of historical consciousness. It is in this same scene, however, that the audience, and Edward, learn that Laura Marsden, who played *Mirabelle*, died of excessive alcohol consumption in 1900, less than a year after the play's run. Art proves to be an illusion as we learn that the actress who played *Mirabelle*, who embodied – among other things – the pastoral tradition, health, and virtue, died an ostensibly disreputable death. In *Cavalcade*, *Mirabelle* is a touchstone for the artifice of historical representation. Though art may conceal and even distort reality, Coward's play suggests that art nevertheless mediates history.

The meta-theatricality of *Mirabelle* and subsequent references to the play thus produce a formal distance which exists in tension with the affective proximity produced through the nostalgia-evoking tableaux and songs of the play, the same device that characterizes the pageantry discussed in the first half of this chapter. *Cavalcade*'s affinity with pageantry also extends to its emotional manipulation of the audience. The influence of the pageant on Coward's dramaturgy is perhaps most evident in the final scene of *Cavalcade*, which concludes with the Union Jack glowing in the darkness. Then, "The lights slowly come up and the whole stage in composed of massive tiers, upon

which stand the entire Company. The Union Jack flies over their heads as they sing ‘God Save the King’” (139). Precisely the same finale is employed in all of Parker’s pageants, and many others during the war: all of the actors appear on stage in a final tableau, and lead the singing of the national anthem. The effect in the pageants is to bring performers and actors together in a display of patriotism. Frances Gray has observed that Coward’s play employs this tactic: “Until recently the national anthem was played at the end of every performance of any play in England; so, naturally, the audience of 1931 rose and joined in, themselves reinforcing the values to which Coward had given such confident expression” (76).

I would argue, however, that the scenes which precede the singing of “God Save the King” trouble Gray’s claim that the pageant unproblematically endorses patriotic values. Here, it is helpful to return to Kiernan’s argument that the final dramatic scenes are particularly ambiguous. In Part III, Scene I, Jane Marryot offers a toast on the occasion of New Year’s Eve, 1929:

Now, then, let’s couple the Future of England with the past of England. The glories and victories and triumphs that are over, and the sorrows that are over, too. Let’s drink to our sons who made part of the pattern and to our hearts that died with them. Let’s drink to the spirit of gallantry and courage that made a strange Heaven out of unbelievable Hell, and let’s drink to the hope that one day this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and greatness and peace again. (134)

In a setting for conventional rhetoric, a representative of the establishment and the past (Jane is now Lady Jane Marryot) speaks the discourse of patriotism, coupled with a deterministic view of history as a “pattern.” This world view exists in opposition to the one espoused by Fanny Bridges in the next scene, set in a nightclub on the same evening. Fanny performs a song entitled “Twentieth Century Blues,” and the stage directions read:

“The decoration is angular and strange, and the song she is singing is strangely discordant.” Her verse begins “Why is it that civilized humanity / Must make the world so wrong? / In this hurly burly of insanity / Your dreams cannot last long” (137). The confusion the song describes, coupled with its dissonant notes and the “angular and strange” setting, evokes disarray and despair and uncertainty, and stands in sharp distinction with Jane’s confident speech, which though melancholy, is not despairing. These two ideological positions are clearly linked to two distinct modes of expression and two philosophies of history, one cyclic and one chaotic. Art, in the final scene of the play, figures distinct narratives of British history, one of sacrifice and glory and hope, and one of chaos, decline and despair. Britain, it is clear, is faced with two choices. The formal tension poses an open question to the audience: which route will Britain take? Placing the two options before the audience, *Cavalcade* awakens the audience’s sense of themselves as historical actors poised at a turning point in the interpretation of British history, if not British history itself.

Performing History in *Between the Acts*

In late 1940, the working title for Virginia Woolf’s novel *Between the Acts* was *The Pageant*.³² Published in 1941, but set in June of 1939, the novel is an account of the day on which the annual village pageant is performed on the grounds of Pointz Hall. The focus of the novel shifts from the emotional lives of the Olivers, the inhabitants of the hall, to the afternoon production of the pageant, and returns to the Olivers at its close. The pageant at the novel’s centre, a small-scale production with a cast of dozens rather than hundreds, and with an audience comprised of the villagers, is depicted as a failure,

³² See Joplin (91) for a discussion of the different titles Woolf employed.

an overly ambitious effort by the elusive outsider Miss La Trobe, but the pageant also moves its audience to commentary, confusion, speculation, anger, and wonder. *Between the Acts* can be read as an exploration of the pageant's potential for engendering a critical historical consciousness, in the same tradition as the wartime pageants and Coward's *Cavalcade*.

Many critics have discussed the representation of history in *Between the Acts*, several of them suggesting that the pageant anticipates the politics of a Brechtian theatre of estrangement, but this body of critical work consistently overlooks the importance of the specific history and form of the pageant.³³ On the other hand, the critics who discuss the novel in relation to Parker and the British vogue for pageants see *Between the Acts* as

³³ Various critics have examined Woolf's interest in alternative understandings of history. Westman argues that *Between the Acts* generates a feminist, dialogical historiography ("The Character in the House"2). More recently, Delsandro has argued that the novel participates in the queering of historicism, interrogating the limits and structures of historical thought. Many critics have examined the play through a Brechtian lens. The most thorough of these treatments are Shattuck's "The Stage of Scholarship," which addresses potentially Brechtian aspects of Woolf's play, and Westman's "History as Drama," which offers a sustained interpretation of both *Between the Acts* and *Orlando* as Brechtian. Sears also places the pageant in the tradition of modernist theatre that seeks to awaken political consciousness, but argues that La Trobe is ultimately not successful (229). Joplin examines the "interrupted structure" and, quoting Benjamin's work on Brecht, the performance's "making strange" daily life (89, 98). Wiley argues that "a few years before Brecht published his strategy for creating political theater, Virginia Woolf vicariously staged an epic theater piece. The pageant succeeds in alienating its audience to the point of criticism, of it and of themselves" (7). Finally, though not Brechtian in its orientation, McWhirter argues that the pageant "affords [the] characters, as members of the audience, the opportunity to contemplate their emotions, and the social and historical forces which condition them, from a distance that is at once historical and aesthetic, to see their own lives objectified in the past and on the stage," but, like Sears, views the pageant's attempt to force the audience to see themselves clearly as a failure (797). Though I concur with McWhirter that the pageant is designed to produce distance from the past and present – and thus agree in principle with the critics who understand Woolf's pageant as anticipating Brecht's strategies for estrangement – I suggest in this paper that Woolf's goal is more modest. For, like Parker's pageants, La Trobe's pageant occurs in the shadow of war; in this context, critical historical consciousness is necessarily subordinated to patriotic national narratives. In this respect, my interpretation of the representation of history in *Between the Acts* agrees most closely with that of Madelyn Detloff, who argues that "the reiterated citation of historical precedent...consolidates the proper nationalist subject at the expense of scapegoated outsider-within; and disrupting and deconstructing nationalist historical narrative through the ironic performance of the pageant of British history. This self-consciously performative historiography acts upon its dual audiences (the 1939 audience of the novel's historical pageant and the present-day audience of the novel) in ways that encourage political accountability rather than patriotic identification" (405). Again, however, I would suggest that Detloff's argument fails to adequately historicize the pageant form, which swings between encouraging identification and distance.

a satire or ironization of the pageant.³⁴ I propose instead that Woolf explores pageantry in *Between the Acts* as a legitimate vehicle for the exploration of historical consciousness – that is, what is popularly understood as history. In this respect, *Between the Acts* is firmly situated in the history of pageantry I have elaborated. *Between the Acts* is produced in the shadow of war, inheriting the legacy of the First World War, and written in 1940-1941 during the Second World War.³⁵ In *Between the Acts*, the shadow of impending war renders the representation of history both more difficult and more urgent. In its representation of the pageant from the perspective of the audience, *Between the Acts* explores the cognitive processes of the spectator and, like its dramatic predecessors, the novel turns to the pageant as a mode of historical representation that generates both affective engagement and critical historical consciousness.

The first third of *Between the Acts* depicts the morning and mid-day lunch at Pointz Hall, but what receives particular attention in this portion of the novel are specific instances of historical texts being read. These scenes, in which the narrator is particularly attentive to the reactions of the characters, act as a frame for the central section of the novel, in which the narrator depicts the pageant and the audience's reactions, such that

³⁴ Judith L. Johnston, situating Woolf in the context of Bloomsbury, reads the pageant as a sharp contrast to Forster's "nostalgic historical pageant *This Pleasant Land*," suggesting that La Trobe's work is "a satirical pageant portraying England's commercial exploitation of labour, colonial peoples, and women" (258). Jed Esty argues that Woolf's interest in the pageant lies in the pageant's ability to disrupt the narrative momentum of the novel, to introduce a "folkloric choral element" into the novel, and to explore the intersection of pastoral, insular culture and imperialist modernity. Esty argues, most suggestively, that it is through the pageant that "Woolf presents an *uncertain performance* of – rather than a thorough ironization or a complete identification with – nationalism" (93). Yoshino also links her analysis to the nationalism of the 1930s. She writes, "Woolf's deep antipathy to the nationalism of her time did not let her simply re-create a Parkerian pageant. *Between the Acts* is full of conscious mockery of the nationalism often associated with it. To write a pageant became for her an opportunity to write an alternative history.... Being an amateur production, the performance was often of only a modest standard, and gave Woolf an excellent opportunity to satirise the whole concept of communal celebration of the country" (54).

³⁵ See Karen Levenback's *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* for an interesting discussion of what Levenback calls Woolf's "war consciousness": "her progressive vision of how representations of the Great War in the popular press and official histories affected the people she describes in her personal, nonfictional, and fictional writings" (5).

the reactions of Mrs. Swithin and Isa Oliver to the texts they read model both the reactions of the reader to the play and the reactions of the audience at Pointz Hall to the pageant embedded in the novel.

In the first scene of the novel, Mrs. Swithin reads *The Outline of History*, a sweeping history that begins by tracing the evolution of life on the planet.³⁶ She is absorbed in the early sections of the work, which describe the earth tens of thousands of years ago:

...she had stretched for her favourite reading – an Outline of History – and had spent the hours between three and five thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly; when the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel, was all one; populated, she understood, by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend.

It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest.... ‘Batty,’ Grace called her, as she felt on her face the divided glance that was half meant for a beast in a swamp, half for a maid in a print frock and white apron. (8)

The work of history has captured Mrs. Swithin’s imagination, transporting her to another age. History has produced the same effect on Mrs. Swithin that we more commonly ascribe to imaginative literature: it has allowed her to inhabit another reality so fully that she struggles to return to her own reality. The comic aspect of the scene stems from Mrs. Swithin’s immersion in her reading: the strange juxtaposition of the imagined past, populated by extinct “barking monsters,” with the reality of the present, embodied by Grace, who carries “blue china on a tray” and is herself in “a print frock and white apron.” Caught between these competing historical realities, Mrs. Swithin struggles to

³⁶ As Joplin argues, this is not a reference to H.G. Wells’ book of the same name, but to Trevelyan’s 1929 *History of England* (103).

reconcile them, and fails. Her imagining of the past is transposed onto the present; in a fleeting moment charged with class dynamics, Mrs. Swithin appears to receive Grace as one might receive a “beast in a swamp.” Reading about the past produces a changed perspective on the present.

Later in the morning, in the library, Isa Oliver reads the newspaper, and she, too, struggles to distinguish what she reads from what she sees around her. Here, too, events that occurred elsewhere, at another time, intrude on her reality:

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 was just an ordinary horse. And they dragged her up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed. 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. (18-19)

The narration in this passage takes the form of free indirect discourse: as Isa reads, we read what she reads alongside her reactions. These reactions are initially classificatory: she reads of a green tail on a horse, “which was fantastic,” and notes the setting of Whitehall, “which was romantic.” But Isa’s literary descriptors are abruptly replaced by something that she describes as “real; so real...” As this occurs, Isa is no longer able to distinguish between what she is reading and what is happening around her. Her experience of her reality is altered by reading of the girl’s rape. And so, as the scene unfolds, what Isa has read stays with her. Hearing the bells, she hears the words of the newspaper article. “The same chime followed the same chime, only this year beneath the chime she heard: ‘The girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer’” (20).

The story of the girl raped by the soldiers has merged with the hammer Mrs. Swithin carries. As with Mrs. Swithin mistaking Grace for a beast in a swamp, Isa suddenly – mistakenly – sees instruments of violence in the living room. In both instances, the experience of immersed reading about historical events, whether earlier life forms or violent crime the day before, grants the reader a fleeting glimpse of the present from another perspective.³⁷

In both of these passages, the act of reading is what allows this momentary erosion of boundaries to occur. In one moment, Mrs. Swithin and Isa experience their reality as continuous with another reality; in the next moment, they belatedly realize that the two realities are distinct. Reading that produces affective proximity to historical events paradoxically returns the characters to their own reality estranged. In the autobiographical essay “A Sketch of the Past,” written in 1939, as Woolf worked on *Between the Acts*, Woolf describes her own experience of such disjunctive moments as “moments of being” (73). She describes the experience of a “sudden violent shock” that furnishes a revelation (71). For instance, Woolf describes a childhood scene in which she was fighting with her brother, Thoby: “We were pommelling each other with our fists. Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me. I remember the feeling. It was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness” (71). Such shocks cause us to see the world differently and, Woolf

³⁷ Karin Westman’s article “‘For her generation the newspaper was a book’: Media, Mediation, and Oscillation in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*” argues that “Woolf’s narrative about newspapers arms her readers with the active critical reading skills she believes necessary for the immediate and mediated world war reported in the daily newspapers” (2). Westman concludes by observing that Woolf’s handling of the newspaper reflects her belief that art “sharpen[s] our critical reading skills for the narratives of everyday life” (14). Along the same lines, this essay contends that the pageant itself produces this ability to think critically about historical narratives and historical consciousness.

suggests, her “shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer” (72). I would suggest, in turn, that the value Woolf places on these revelatory moments of being inform the scenes of reading in *Between the Acts* and are central to Woolf’s understanding of the pageant.

Woolf, one might argue, turns to pageantry as a more effective and collective means of producing such “moments of being.” David Chinitz has argued, in reference to T.S. Eliot, that Eliot’s turn away from poetry and toward drama was motivated by his desire to “reconcile the dissociated realms of modern culture” and his desire to secure a larger audience for his work (14). One cannot argue the same thing of Woolf: her interest in drama was comparatively minimal, and her death, which occurred as she revised *Between the Acts*, makes it impossible to know if she might have further pursued the novel’s interest in drama.³⁸ Nevertheless, I entertain the possibility that *Between the Acts* is not a critique or satire of the village pageant, but, as many critics have argued, an exploration of the pageant’s potential for producing a politically engaged art. While Mrs. Swithin and Isa Oliver are changed by what they read, these moments are essentially private, limited in scope, and occasioned by chance incidents, such as a door opened at the right time. The pageant, however, offers the possibility of communal experience. Here, before, between, and after the acts of the play, the audience constructs a collective response to the performance of history.

³⁸Woolf was involved with the plays performed by the Rodmell Women’s Institute during the Second World War. But in the diary entry for May 29, 1940, Woolf despairs of these rehearsals: “Then the [W.I.] plays rehearsed here yesterday. My contribution to the war is the sacrifice of pleasure: Im bored: bored & appalled by the readymade commonplaceness of these plays: which they cant act unless we help I mean, the minds so cheap, compared with ours, like a bad novel – thats my contribution – to have my mind smeared by the village & WEA mind; & to endure it; & the simper” (288). Passages such as this one make it difficult to assess Woolf’s attitude toward community theatre. Does she, like Miss La Trobe, have an artistic vision that cannot be made reality? Or does she discount the possibility of community theatre entirely?

Between the Acts represents the pageant by imagining the experience of sitting in the audience. Woolf's novel captures the thoughts and reactions of the principal characters and a host of minor characters. Miss La Trobe, the local artist who writes and directs the pageant, follows in part the model for the village pageant established by Parker. The novel makes it clear that the audience is schooled in the conventions of pageantry, as expectations for the pageant are clearly articulated by the audiences: "Look, there's the chorus, the villagers, coming on now, between the trees. First, there's a prologue..." a voice from the audience remarks (143). The narrator is further attuned to the pageant's potential for unintended comic effects: the narrator notes, "And once more a huge symbolical figure emerged from the bushes" (143-4). But for the restless audience, this familiarity obscures rather than aids understanding. Mrs. Swithin, late to her seat, apologizes, and asks "What's it all about? I've missed the prologue. England? That little girl? Now she's gone...And who's this?...A cushion? Thank you so much...That's England in the time of Chaucer, I take it. She's been maying, nutting. She has flowers in her hair...But those passing behind her – The Canterbury pilgrims? Look!" (73-4). Mrs. Swithin sees what she expects to see. So, too, does Mrs. Manresa: "'Scenes from English history,' Mrs. Manresa explained to Mrs. Swithin. She spoke in a loud cheerful voice, as if the old lady were deaf. 'Merry England'" (74). Mrs. Manresa's interpretation is unintentionally droll: the chorus is raking hay, and singing a bawdy song. Jed Esty has noted that "[t]he position of the pageant in the text places rhetorical emphasis on the power of inherited culture to both inform and restrict the mind's verbal and mnemonic pathways," and this is particularly clear in these instances (101). Here,

the very form of pageantry and its stable of conventions limits the audience's interaction with the material.

As the pageant evokes the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries by performing scenes from these eras, the audience is restless and disengaged, but as the pageant moves toward the present, representing the Victorian age, the audience is disquieted. It is through this disquiet that the audience begins to engage with the play and to think of themselves in history. This shift in the audience's response parallels the moments I have identified in the pageants in which an oscillation between historical proximity and distance produces an understanding of the unreliability of any given historical narrative. In Miss La Trobe's pageant, the depiction of the Victorian age is not charitable: it is represented by a fierce policeman who upholds "the laws of God and Man" with "The Rule of my truncheon" (145), and by a pastiche of a nineteenth-century play, the plot of which combines missionary fervour with zealous schemes to marry the newly arrived clergyman. Miss La Trobe's harsh critique of the Victorian sensibility makes the audience members who remember the era uncomfortable: some remember the time with fondness, others with ambivalence, but they nevertheless feel wronged: "'Tut-tut-tut,' Mrs. Lynn Jones expostulated. 'There were grand men among them... ' Why she did not know, yet somehow she felt that a sneer had been aimed at her father; therefore at herself" (147). In Miss La Trobe's hands, the pageant transforms discomfort into a critical historical consciousness:

'The Victorian age,' Mrs. Elmhurst read out. Presumably there was time then for a stroll round the gardens, even for a look over the house. Yet somehow they felt – how could one put it – a little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup; as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn't settle. Not quite themselves, they felt. Or was it simply that they felt clothes conscious? Skimpy out-of-date voile dresses; flannel trousers; panama

hats; hats wreathed with raspberry-coloured net in the style of the Royal Duchess's hat at Ascot seemed flimsy somehow. (134)

The play has a disconcerting effect which exceeds Mrs. Lynn Jones's feeling of having been slighted, or the shock of recognition at seeing one's reflection in the mirror. What the narrator describes here is the experience of doubting one's identity, felt as a small shock to one's self-conception. This recalls Woolf's description of the function of art in "A Sketch of the Past" as a flash of insight that is lost as quickly as it arrives. In *Between the Acts*, the narrator accordingly retreats from his or her initial observation, suggesting that this is merely a sensation borne of so much attention to matters of dress, both on stage and off stage. But the narrator's offhand remark points to the issue at hand: the play, most visibly through its use of costumes, has forced the audience to feel that they, like the actors on stage before them, are acting a part in history.³⁹

A final passage in the novel explicitly engages with different degrees of historical consciousness. In the pause between the Victorian scene and the present day, Isa, aged 39 in 1939, asks the older generation about the pageant's portrayal of the Victorians:

'Were they like that?' Isa asked abruptly. She looked at Mrs. Swithin as if she had been a dinosaur or a very diminutive mammoth. Extinct she must be, since she had lived in the reign of Queen Victoria.

Tick, tick, tick, went the machine in the bushes.

'The Victorians,' Mrs. Swithin mused. 'I don't believe' she said with her odd little smile, 'that there ever were such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently.'

'You don't believe in history,' said William. (156)

Three very different reactions to the play, and to the concept of history, are on view here. The first is Isa's: the play has made the past seem remote and has disrupted the notion of linear causality. For Isa, the relationship of the present to the past is not clear – and yet she lives a life in which "the future disturb[s] the present" (75-6), or in which "[t]he

³⁹ Cf. Madelyn Detloff's discussion of political accountability in *Between the Acts*.

future shadowed their present” (103). Implicit in this way of thinking is a belief that history – the fabric of events, large and small, that occur in a person’s life – shapes his or her being. Mrs. Swithin, on the other hand, takes the contrary view: she dismisses the notion that historical events shape subjectivity. For her, history is a matter of dress, and dress alone. Mrs. Swithin holds this belief alongside a deep and abiding faith. William is dismissive: “You don’t believe in history” he charges – and his choice of the term “history” connects this charge to his attack on her faith. Mrs. Swithin believes when she ought not to believe, and fails to believe in the reality of history. The performance of history in the pageant leads the characters not simply to think about history, but to think about how they think about history.

What, then, is history, Woolf asks? Can we historicize ourselves? The narrator, voicing an opinion held by many in the audience, suggests that the self is impervious to representation as a historical object. Awaiting the final scene, the audience reads the program:

‘Ourselves...’ They returned to the programme. But what could she know about ourselves? The Elizabethans, yes; the Victorians, perhaps; but ourselves; sitting here on a June day in 1939 – it was ridiculous. ‘Myself’ – it was impossible. Other people, perhaps...Cobbet of Cobbs Corner; the Major; old Bartholomew; Mrs. Swithin – them, perhaps. But she won’t get me – no, not me. The audience fidgeted. Sounds of laughter came from the bushes. But nothing whatsoever appeared on the stage. (160)

When the actors do appear on the stage, they hold a series of mirrors up to the audience, who are forced to confront their reflections. The narrator prepares the reader for this moment with great care. The fluid free indirect discourse of the narrator initially adopts the first person plural: “But what could she know about ourselves? The Elizabethans, yes; the Victorians, perhaps; but ourselves...” But then the narrator abruptly adopts the

first person singular: “Other people, perhaps...But she won’t get me.” The narrative traces the dissolution of collective identity: the audience collectively sets itself against the remote past, the Elizabethans, and then their younger selves and their parents, the Victorians. And then even the formerly solid “ourselves” begins to disintegrate, each individual insisting that he or she cannot be known, cannot be represented as a historical being in a pageant. But it happens: the mirrors are held up, and each individual sees his or her reflection on the ground used as a stage. This moment, when the audience sees itself suddenly, is the pageant’s theatrical equivalent for the “opening of a door” that Isa and Mrs. Swithin experienced as they read. The final scene in Miss La Trobe’s pageant estranges the audience from themselves. Any residual affective proximity to the pageant disappears as the audience is forced to confront its own reflection, and in doing so, to perceive themselves as historical subjects.

Far from empty spectacle, the pageant depicted in *Between the Acts* discomfits the spectator in order to shatter expectations. Parker’s First World War pageants consistently generate affective proximity to history punctuated by moments of cognitive distance, as do other First World War pageants and Coward’s *Cavalcade*. But in Miss La Trobe’s village pageant of 1939, the novel suggests that such affective identification is the product not of the pageant, but the audience members’ own expectations. Enervated but trained by decades of pageantry, this audience finds itself surprisingly shocked by the final scene of the play. They are startled not least because the play, with its focus on literature and its unorthodox finale deliberately excludes the history of military battles and national triumphs. The absence of the military is noted as Colonel Mayhew reads the program:

The Nineteenth Century. Colonel Mayhew did not dispute the producer's right to skip two hundred years in less than fifteen minutes. But the choice of scenes baffled him.

'Why leave out the British Army? What's history without the Army, eh?' he mused. Inclining her head, Mrs Mayhew protested after all one mustn't ask too much. Besides, very likely there would be a Grand Ensemble, round the Union Jack, to end with. Meanwhile, there was the view. They looked at the view. (141)

Colonel Mayhew's shock at the exclusion of the Army, an institution which had been formative to his own understanding of self and country, is not surprising – but his inclusion in the novel to utter these lines (and these lines only) directs the reader's attention to the omission of what is largely taken for history, for many people in Woolf's time and in the present day. Yet what is perhaps most interesting about this passage is Mrs Mayhew's consolation of her husband. She suggests that a "Grand Ensemble, round the Union Jack" is sure to follow. In *Between the Acts*, Mrs Mayhew speaks of this impending display of patriotic sentiment as a substitute for the army's presence in the pageant, and in doing so, implies that her husband's concern is based in the unpatriotic nature of the pageant. She offers patriotism as a substitute for the army – and in doing so delineates a conception of patriotism in which the army and imperialism figure prominently. Pageants often concluded with a final patriotic tableau, as we have seen in the village pageants, the wartime pageants, and *Cavalcade*. But the patriotic finale fails to materialize in *Between the Acts*: when the actors gather on stage for the final scene, they produce not a static patriotic tableau, but a fragmented, unformed, and moving reflection of the audience. Rather than singing the anthem, each actor "declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts...*I am not (said one) in my perfect mind ... Another, Reason am I...And I? I'm the old top hat...Home is the hunter, home from the hill...*" (166). Miss La Trobe's pageant frustrates expectations that the audience has of a

representation of history while also frustrating their expectations of patriotism and, perhaps equally important, unity. The absence of the army from history signals a radical revision of what constitutes “history,” and the absence of this kind of history is linked to the self-conscious revision of the pageant and its relationship to patriotic discourses. The First World War is conspicuously absent, but the representation of war and history as both distant and immediate – the legacy of the First World War pageant – underpins Miss La Trobe’s pageant and Woolf’s novel.

More than twenty years after Parker’s First World War pageants, Woolf’s novel suggests that the charms of the pageant have evaporated, but that its critical charge remains. At Pointz Hall, in 1939, the pageant may seem hackneyed, but its performance of history continues to interrogate the process through which historical consciousness comes into existence. The audience’s expectations for the pageant produce identification with the past and a sense of historical proximity, both affective and ideological, through this sympathy. But the pageant Woolf entrenches in her novel frustrates all expectations and in doing so produces the shocks and jolts that characterize the experience of reading in the early sections of the novel. *Between the Acts* repeatedly stages the oscillation between proximity and distance, and in doing so, undermines a stable sense of the past.

The origins of this oscillating historical distance lie in the wartime pageants and pageant-plays of Louis Napoleon Parker. These pageants produce different, at times conflicting, modes of historical understanding: Parker promotes proximity to the subject matter through affect and patriotic ideology, and historical distance through scenes that encourage the audience to think about the construction of historical narratives. A series of metatheatrical moments engender a critical historical consciousness, which in turn

produces cognitive distance and dissonance, interrupting the audience's affective immersion in the events of the past. This interest in history and the assumptions that underpin the representation of history is not, however, restricted to Parker's wartime pageantry; it is, in fact, intensified in the works by Gladys Davidson and Elsie Fogerty that dramatize the figure of history, and is arguably one of the distinctive features of wartime pageantry. The production of an oscillating historical distance is the legacy of the wartime pageant and can be found in works as disparate as *Cavalcade* and *Between the Acts*. In these works, the dramatization of contemporary history retains its urgency, but in a time of a precarious peace and imperial decline, oscillations in historical distance increasingly emphasize the difficulty of interpreting the past. History remains open to multiple and conflicting interpretations on the stages of *Cavalcade* and *Between the Acts*.

Coda: The First World War Remembered

When Timothy Findley published his novel *The Wars* in 1977, the First World War had been over for nearly sixty years. But in Findley's work, the same concerns that animated the novelists, poets, autobiographers, and dramatists writing of the First World War between 1914 and 1945 endured. This study has argued that the literary representations of the First World War were deeply concerned with contemporary debates about problems of historical knowledge. Understanding that their work had a historical dimension, war writers deftly crafted literary forms that could accommodate not only the reality of the war, but also the new reality of the impossibility of objective knowledge of history. *The Wars* suggests that throughout the twentieth century and, as other works suggest, into the twenty-first century, the link between the representation of the war and the crisis of historicism persisted.

The Wars is the story of Robert Ross, the son of a Toronto industrialist who enlists as an officer in the 30th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery in 1915. Ross enlists despite his profound abhorrence of killing, whether other humans or animals. Confronted with the horrors of the war, Ross learns to kill, first a wounded horse, then, as the war conditions him, the human enemy. But as the Germans begin to raze Bailleul in a terrible attack from the air, Ross begs to be able to lead the horses massed in the town to safety in the countryside. His commanding officer, who has revealed himself repeatedly to be a poor tactician with no regard for the lives of his troops or his horses, refuses permission. Driven to distraction at the needless suffering and slaughter of the animals, Ross revolts; he kills his commanding officer and the wounded animals, then drives the surviving horses to safety. Travelling alone across the post-apocalyptic French countryside, he

collects other animals. But when a court martial is issued for Ross and he is cornered in a barn with the horses, he refuses to surrender. He calls out, “We shall not be taken” (191). The narrator explains that “It was the ‘we’ that doomed him. To Mickle, it signified that Robert had an accomplice. Maybe more than one” (191). In a terrible turn of events, his pursuers set fire to the barn, attempting to drive out Ross, the horses, and whoever else was in the barn. But Robert is unable to open the door. As the barn collapses around him, he is maimed, left disfigured and unable to walk or see. He dies in 1922, dishonoured and disowned by his family.

The Wars is also the story of how the narrator pieces this story together. If, as I have argued, there is a heightened self-consciousness about literary writing as history in the literature of the First World War, Findley’s late twentieth-century First World War novel renders explicit this earlier self-consciousness. Findley casts the nameless narrator as a historian in search of the story of Robert Ross. In the early pages of the novel, the narrator describes in tremendous detail how s/he uncovered the story of Robert Ross. In doing so, the process of writing history – the identification of events, the sequencing of events, the interpretation of events, and the narration of events – unfolds on the page.

The narrator explains:

All of this happened a long time ago. But not so long ago that everyone who played a part in it is dead. Some can still be met in dark old rooms with nurses in attendance. They look at you and rearrange their thoughts. They say: ‘I don’t remember.’ The occupants of memory have to be protected from strangers. Ask what happened, they say: ‘I don’t know.’ Mention Robert Ross – they look away. ‘He’s dead,’ they tell you. This is not news. ‘Tell me about the horses,’ you ask. Sometimes they weep at this...Sometime, someone will forget himself and say too much or else the corner of a picture will reveal the whole. (6-7)

This is one of the ways in which the novel begins. The narrator's attempts to piece together the past by means of oral history are thwarted repeatedly, by those who can't remember, and by those who won't remember.

Nevertheless, passages marked "Transcript: Marion Turner – 1" or "Transcript: Lady Juliet d'Orsey – 2" are interspersed throughout the novel, drawing the reader's attention to the many mediations of the past. Marion Turner is the nurse who received Ross at the Bois de Madeleine hospital in June of 1916; in her final transcript, she describes how Ross arrived, burnt and disfigured and under military arrest, and how she secretly offered him enough morphine to end his life. Lady Juliet d'Orsey, twelve years old in 1916, watched Ross leave for the front for the last time. Reading from her childhood diary to the narrator, who records and then transcribes the interview, she describes Ross's state of mind as he left.

From these first-person accounts of Ross, the narrator reconstructs a fragmented narrative of his two years in the war. The narrative that emerges is not seamless and, somewhat unsystematically, the narrator takes pains to tell us how he arrived at this information. Repeatedly, what remains and what is lost of the historical record frames the narrative. For instance, a third "beginning" to the novel reads as follows:

You begin at the archives with photographs... Boxes and boxes of snapshots and portraits; maps and letters; cablegrams and clippings from the papers. All you have to do is sign them out and carry them across the room. Spread over table tops, a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamps. *The war to end all wars*. All you can hear is the wristwatch on your arm. Outside, it snows. The dark comes early. The archivist is gazing from her desk. She coughs. The boxes smell of yellow dust. You hold your breath. As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you'll never find. This is what you have. (7)

While the previous passage figures the forgetting and suppressing of history, this passage renders the historical record in all its materiality. Yet here, too, the historical record is figured as it disintegrates and dissipates. The novel, with its imagining of Ross's life, builds on the historical remnants that exist. But the narrator offers no apology, no explanation for her or his flights of imagination. There are long passages in the novel that, strictly speaking, could not be the product of the kind of history that he evokes above. So few survived the war that a witness could not possibly offer the kind of detailed description of Ross's actions on the front that the novel contains. . . Nor, in perhaps the most harrowing scene of the novel, could anyone but Ross have spoken of his rape by his fellow soldiers at the baths at Desolé, behind the front lines. These poignant scenes, strictly the work of the narrator's imagination, are not flagged as something other than history. In *The Wars*, the frame of the novel insists on the equivalence of these different acts of reconstruction of the past.

The first half of this work examines how the First World War novel and autobiography accommodate newfound uncertainty about the objectivity of history. Chapter 1 proposes that novels fragment perspective to express the fact that a single perspective on history is not adequate, while Chapter 2 examines the convergence of narratives of personal and national history in narratives of failed conversion. The novels and memoirs of the war discard any pretense of objectivity, emphasizing instead the subjective nature of their representation of history. If these chapters study texts that struggle to transcend the individual's perspective, the second half of the dissertation studies texts that attempt to revitalize literary strategies for creating shared historical narratives. In Chapter 3, allegorical narrative, in its turn, is revealed to be a fundamental,

if deeply problematic, structure for historical thought. In Chapter 4, I examine how pageants evoke the variability of historical distance in order to both create historical consciousness and to draw the audience's attention to the artifice of historical narratives. The pageants and the allegorical narratives emphasize that historical narrative is shifting and provisional, but necessary.

The Wars is one of many much later texts that, in seeking to represent the First World War, continue to probe the difficulties of writing history. The postmodern historiography that underpins Findley's novel develops the very historiographic concerns that shaped the novels, poems, plays, and autobiographies written in the aftermath of the war. The memory of the First World War is inextricably intertwined with the problems of writing the history of the First World War.

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