

War Worlds: Violence, Sociality, and the Forms of Twentieth  
Century Transatlantic Literature

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
English in the Graduate School  
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2016

ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

“War Worlds” reads twentieth-century British and Anglophone literature to examine the social practices of marginal groups (pacifists, strangers, traitors, anticolonial rebels, queer soldiers) during the world wars. This dissertation shows that these diverse “enemies within” England and its colonies—those often deemed expendable for, but nonetheless threatening to, British state and imperial projects—provided writers with alternative visions of collective life in periods of escalated violence and social control. By focusing on the social and political activities of those who were not loyal citizens or productive laborers within the British Empire, “War Worlds” foregrounds the small group, a form of collectivity frequently portrayed in the literature of the war years but typically overlooked in literary critical studies. I argue that this shift of focus from grand politics to small groups not only illuminates surprising social fissures within England and its colonies but provides a new vantage from which to view twentieth-century experiments in literary form.

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Everywhere and always: Meghan

# 1. Introduction: The World Wars, the Politics of the Small Group, and Literary Form

Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and everyone else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew, each other.

Elizabeth Bowen, "Preface" to *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*

The state of emergency is also always a state of *emergence*.

Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

## 1.1 "this sombre spectacle of disaster"

At the end of H.G. Wells' 1908 dystopian novel *The War in the Air*, protracted global combat has brought about the end of the Western world: "Europeanized civilization was, as it were, blown up. Within the space of five years it was altogether disintegrated and destroyed" (Wells 2005, 246). In Wells' prophecy of the near future, technological development—the invention and mass production of airships resembling dirigibles and early airplanes, automatic rifles, and an assortment of bombs—has outpaced Western society's capacity to mediate the relationship between humans and machines. Mass violence and material destruction occasion financial and then "universal social collapse" (Wells 2005, 251). A state of emergency replaces "ordinary law and social procedure" in every world city, bringing about "a social fragmentation as complete as the robber-baron period of the Middle Ages." England has become a nightmare out of Thomas Hobbes, the rule of law reduced to the whims of small local populations, "patriotic associations, brotherhoods of order, city mayors, princes, provisional committees," warlords, itinerant "bands," and "insurgents." In this brave new (but also

old) world of reordered social and political structures, the “great nations and empires have become but names in the mouths of men. Everywhere there are ruins and unburied dead, and shrunken, yellow-faced survivors, in a mortal apathy” (Wells 2005, 253). Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century visions of England, the England of *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *Howards End* for example, have been replaced by something like the broken, jaundiced-gray landscapes of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or P.D. James’ *The Children of Men*.

To this devastated England, Wells’ protagonist Bert Smallways returns home. Having participated in the war’s initial stages, and then having wandered in “universal dissolution” back and forth across the Atlantic for nearly a year, the “little Cockney errant” arrives on the west coast of a country “shaken to the very base of its immemorial order” (Wells 2005, 255). After disembarking at Cardiff, he roves through the once pastoral English countryside, a landscape now littered with reminders of the war’s devastation: ploughed but unsown fields, rusting monorails, burned-out siege weapons, human and animal corpses. Indeed, the Englands of *Howards End* and *The Children of Men* have been almost superimposed here in a scene that Wells describes as “the strangest mingling of the assurance and wealth of the opening twentieth century with a sort of Düreresque mediaevalism” (Wells 2005, 256). Like so many literary depictions of wartime wanderers before and after him (Stendhal’s Fabrice Del Dongo, Tolstoi’s Pierre Bezukhov, Céline’s Ferdinand Bardamu, Pynchon’s Tyrone Slothrop, Coetzee’s Michael K., and Nadeem Aslam’s Mikal, to name a few), Bert Smallways tramps and starves and

prowls amid the ruins of a place he once called his home, among various “lost and disoriented souls.”

Although some formal elements of the text’s preceding political satire and parodied war epic remain (outside of Birmingham, for example, “the Government, or at any rate the War Office, still existed as an energetic fact, concentrated amidst collapse and social disaster upon the effort to keep the British flag still flying in the air” [Wells 2005, 258]), the tone of Wells’ novel takes a significant turn after Bert’s homecoming. From heavy irony, dark humor, and lambaste, the text transitions to a general feeling or atmosphere of exhaustion and even a dark, graduated sentimentality. It seems to do so because life (or what little remains of it) has continued, individually and collectively, despite England’s almost comprehensive desolation and the ongoing conflict within and outside of the island. Even a fragmented social order, like a fragmented house, contains remnants of what it once held, something to which one might return and in which one might seek shelter. The same seems to be true of literary form, at least in Wells’ case, as a kind of pastoral dystopian fiction requisitions the conventions of satire and epic.

For it comes to pass that Bert, an Odysseus of a much less auspicious moment, returns by some miracle of pluck and good fortune to find his old flame, Miss Edna Bunthorne, making do among a proto-fascist gang in a derelict brickfield near Horsham. The plot is familiar even if the scene has changed, so the novel’s pace quickens as Bert’s journey slides toward its conclusion. War-hardened and now unable to hide behind the middling character traits that had directed his comportment in a prior, pre-war life, Bert rescues Edna from a usurping suitor, the gang’s “chief” Bill Gore, whose “mind ran to

‘improving the race’ and producing the Over-man, which in practice took the form of himself especially and his little band in moderation marrying with some frequency” (Wells 2005, 260). After killing Bill and confronting his “little band of ambiguous roughs,” Bert (Wells regrets to say) establishes a “Vigilance Committee” of his own in Bill’s stead. For it had become clear that if “he did not go into politics at once”—that is, if he did not move to fill the void of political authority left by Bill’s absence—he would be hanged as a political assassin (Wells 2005, 261).

It is unclear, however, how and with what degree of commitment Bert reigns in this violent, precarious fiefdom. Wells’ narrative quickly leaves Bert and Edna and the particulars of their daily lives, as they

become squatters among the clay and oak thickets of the Weald, far away from the stream of events. From that time forth life became a succession of peasant’s encounters, an affair of pigs and hens and small needs and little economies and children, until Clapham and Bun Hill [the English villages of Bert’s childhood] and all the life of the Scientific Age became to Bert no more than the fading memory of a dream. He never knew how the War in the Air went on, nor whether it still went on. . . . At times came robbers and thieves, at times came diseases among the beasts and shortness of food; . . . he went through many inconsecutive, irrelevant adventures. He survived them all. / Accident and death came near them both ever and again, and passed them by; and they loved and suffered and were happy. . . . They lived and did well, as well was understood in those days. They went the way of all flesh, year by year (Wells 2005, 262).

Wells’ pastoral dystopia introduces a world after the Enlightenment reign of Man, where the British state and its empire have been broken up into so many “shatter zones,” anthropologist James C. Scott’s term for those peripheral, non-state spaces where refugees, stateless peoples, and fugitives from older societies coalesce (Scott 2010, 7). In a world at endless war that lacks the stability and comfort of Ithacas regained, let alone

the global promise of perpetual peace, Wells' post-apocalyptic micro-societies move "toward simpler, smaller, and more dispersed social units—toward . . . the elementary forms of social organization" (Scott 2010, 208). Life comes to center on small needs, little economies, and rough enclaves of filiative and affiliative belonging. In a world after the regime of nation-states, people gather by choice, accident, or necessity to survive the dissolution of modern political community.

Wells' "fantasia of possibility" often has been read—and for good reason—as a prescient warning of twentieth-century warfare and the dangers of unchecked technological advancement. As Jay Winter writes in his introduction to the novel, Wells offered "a premonition of what could happen when technology developed more rapidly than the capacity of statesmen to control its destructive potential. . . . To a surprising degree, this dystopic novel anticipated much of the catastrophes to come in the two world wars" (Winter 2005, xiii). Five years before World War I, Wells imagined the world at total war: the mass mobilization of industrial societies and the collapse of the distinction between civilians and combatants—a collapse, he knew, that had long since taken place in European colonies across the globe. He envisaged the extension of strife beyond and outside of direct warfare into the realms of economic, political, and ecological violence, and even the state of forever war, endgame-less contests between state and non-state actors, which has become the West's contemporary warring paradigm.

But I begin with Wells' novel for other reasons. For his vision of England, indeed, of a world, near a state of complete devastation demonstrates in its concluding pages what I perceive to be the signal social and political form arising in British and

Anglophone literary depictions of total war, namely the beleaguered small group. In Wells' text, the subgenre of dystopian fiction not only allows the author to draw out and critique a set of emergent, dominant, and residual modern problems—from urbanization, national political factionalism, the violence of imperialism, and social inequality to the dangers of uncontrolled technological development—but it enables him to speculate on the transformations of community that might take place during mass social and political disaster. As the Victorian structures that Bert Smallways and his contemporaries once knew fall to pieces, the scale of collective life in England shrinks and scatters. Though Wells' narrative is never removed from questions concerning the British state and its imperial aspirations in the wider world (these live on, at the very least, as fading memories), *The War in the Air*—already in 1908—foresees that mass violence and shifting definitions of civilians and combatants, friends and an enemies, will require alternative conceptions of what constitutes social and political life. While they may still operative in many ways (often as instruments of destruction), the familiar politics of the twentieth century and the language used to articulate them in familiar terms (nationalist or cosmopolitan, liberal democratic or totalitarian) no longer will be sufficient to narrate or describe community amid total war.

In Wells' novel and, as this dissertation will show, in many other British and Anglophone texts written throughout the century to come, mass war directs the political attention of literature toward “little communities” (Wells 2005, 264), even as these groups stare out into a wider world and sometimes foster broader, coalitional, even

transnational, social and political commitments.<sup>1</sup> Although scholars of modernist studies and twentieth-century literature have often overlooked the social and political form of the small group in favor of grander literary questions concerning the nation, the empire, or the world republic, it is my contention that much of the literature set during the world wars focuses primarily on the activities of enclaves such as those depicted late in Well's novel, often portraying those on the fringes of national or imperial belonging. This dissertation will argue that writers turn to these groups and their manifold, shifting forms, their sometimes dissident social practices, to illuminate the increasing convergence of state politics and war as well as the social and political violence of total mobilization. Moreover, they use the small group to think politically both beneath and beyond—with hope as well as trepidation—the grand politics of the modern state and empire. If the utopian dreams of the *fin de siècle* are shattered in the century that follows, the desire for, the thought and even the practice of, social and political alternatives to the West's martial-political nightmare subsist perilously as a scattered collection of fragments, particularly during wartime.

## **1.2 Wartime, Representation, and the Politics of Twentieth-Century Literature**

In *A Singular Modernity*, Fredric Jameson articulates a contradiction at the heart of twentieth-century Western politics and literary production. On the one hand, Jameson

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<sup>1</sup> As Daniel Immerwahr has argued, in a transnational American context, the global wars, economic depression, violent revolutions, and rise of totalitarian governments in the early to mid-twentieth century (particularly the years 1930-1960) inspired a “newfound appreciation for small-scale social solidarities, from the small group to the faraway village. . . . Across the political spectrum, thinkers joined the quest for community, the attempt to re-embed social, economic, and political forces with small-group life” (Immerwahr 2015, 8).

argues, the West, “as far back in ‘modernity’ as we can determine,” has found itself unable to think the category of a large-scale social project other than war. Indeed, modernity’s “great collective project . . . is simply war itself. It is finally as a war machine that the efficiency of a state is judged: and no doubt modern warfare offers a very advanced form of collective organization.” That World War II persists in “the American mind as the great Utopian moment of national unification and the lost object of our political desire” demonstrates the fundamental structural and ideological limits of the West’s social and political imagination, its inability to formulate grand political alternatives (Jameson 2002, 212). On the other hand, Jameson contends, modernist culture offers another vision of things. Linked to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century spirit of social change arising from expanding political suffrage as well as socialist and anarchist movements across the Atlantic, modernist literature is given form by an “impending enlargement of social space.” As a result, much of modernist writing expresses a desire for “a radical depersonalization of the bourgeois subject, a programmatic movement away from the psychological and from personal identity” (Jameson 2002, 134-135). In other words, modernist literature seeks existence outside of the self, an “ex-timate” relation to the world and the other lives that populate it. “What has so often been described as a new and deeper, richer subjectivity,” Jameson avers, “is in fact this call to change which always resonates through it: not subjectivity as such, but its transfiguration” (Jameson 2002, 136). With its marginal but generative characters, its experimental, fragmented forms and alienation effects, modernist literature expresses the social energies shaping any “deeper, richer” understanding of the subject. For Jameson,

the alterations undergone by modernism's diverse characters, its unsteady subjects, are allegorical of the transfiguration of the world itself, figuring the utopian impulse—the continued, if faint, belief in or commitment to an alternative grand collective project—that survives into the first half of the twentieth century.

This dissertation moves within the spaces opened up by Jameson's contradiction, even while pivoting away from any sustained concern with utopian politics on a grand scale. In what follows, I investigate the curious crucible of the world wars in England and its colonies, where the radical social impulses (if no longer utopian) bolstering modernist, anti-colonial, and postcolonial literature continue to arise, improbably, within sites of imperial domination, total mobilization, and mass violence. As I move from wartime England to contested colonial zones in the Middle East and the Caribbean and back again, the central questions guiding my study will be these: how do twentieth-century British and Anglophone texts that depict or desire depersonalization and existence outside of the limits of the subject—as well as alternative notions of collective life—engage with the grand social project of total war? Are these works' alternative social and political imaginings simply overrun, subsumed, or even requisitioned by the British Empire's transforming modern war machine and its discursive auxiliaries (state propaganda, official history, popular media, and so on)? And at what degree or scale do writers think about and portray social and political life during these periods of strife? What spaces do the British state and its colonies, even or especially during wartime, leave open for other forms of collectivity? How do twentieth-century texts account for such openings?

Recently, Jan Mieszkowski has argued that literature depicting modern warfare is increasingly permeated by the discursive valences of war itself, the latter coming to resemble an ineradicable, even fundamental, political condition. The “violent interplay of representational systems, physical destruction, and competing interpretive authorities,” Mieszkowski contends, “has proven to be one of the most abiding features of the Napoleonic legacy, continuing to shape our cultural experience in the twenty-first century” (Mieszkowski 2012, 11). Indeed, the way “we” encounter war as mediated in its peculiar, directed frames has become a “field of combat in its own right, a battleground on which our most basic ideas about violence and human sociality are explored in an ongoing debate about what it means to be a part of an audience to mass destruction” (Mieszkowski 2012, 28). In his discussion of post-World War I European writing and the emergent paradigm of aerial bombardment, Paul K. Saint-Amour situates Mieszkowski’s argument within urban zones and the literature that depicts them: “to write seriously of the city after the first bombs had fallen on civilians was necessarily to write of the city in and as a state of total war” (Saint-Amour 2005, 156). With its grand political projects, totalizing aspirations, and dispersed afterlife as trauma or “slow violence,” modern war infects individual and collective experience as well as the narratives told about conflict, lacing personal or private concerns with public matters, and vice versa.<sup>2</sup> In various hidden and apparent, deliberate and unintentional ways, literature has played its part in

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<sup>2</sup> Rob Nixon has coined the term “slow violence” to describe the effects of war, social catastrophe, and environmental degradation that follow the direct violence of war itself. It is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not typically viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2011, 2). As Nixon argues, each war creates a distinctive chemical, radiological, epidemiological, and environmental (not to say psychological) legacy that extends its violence into the future (Nixon 2011, 209).

mediating the manners in which people view, think about, and even participate in mass conflict, serving as a kind of representational liaison among the manifold perspectives of life lived during wartime.

For Jameson, Mieszkowski, and Saint-Amour, the modern transformations of war and its often overbearing official or mass-mediated narratives encourage literary writers—just like the publics out of which they arise—to shift uncertainly between particular and general accounts of strife. Moving from the first- or second-hand traumas of individual experience (Erich Maria Remarque’s Paul Bäumer or Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Smith, for example) to the panoramic displays of what Jameson calls “scene” (which, as in David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* or David Malouf’s *The Great World*, seeks to figure the inscrutable, collective nature of war, its spatial and ecological scope, as well as its uncanny dialectical motors), the literature of twentieth-century war wobbles between subjective and collective poles that are on the verge of collapsing in on one another. As civilians are drawn increasingly into the war effort—becoming laborers as well as targets—as the private becomes a space of public concern and vice versa, the uncertainties of restructured collective life come to the fore, no matter the ideas of order the wartime state and Empire project. Texts that engage mass conflict struggle to mediate between forced and chosen forms of depersonalization and community.

Unsurprisingly, many literary scholars, from Erich Auerbach and Paul Fussell to Jed Esty and Margot Norris, have scrutinized the complex relationship between twentieth-century literature, the grand political projects of total war, and the great anxieties of those living amid disaster. As in the questions concerning mass conflict and

scales of representation that Jameson, Mieszkowski, and Saint-Amour outline, critical discussions of literary politics and mass war have involved a constant movement between particular and general concerns, between the experience or perspective of the individual and diverse forms of national and cosmopolitan community. For these scholars, modernist and postcolonial writers orient themselves along a political spectrum in wartime, either seeking to avoid voicing political commitments with an anti-social individualism, to position themselves in some relation to a national entity, or to operate with a wider birth, to live as a citizen of the world like a Baedeker-informed Diogenes or Kant, and to imagine a globe without (or with porous) national borders. Perhaps because modernist and postcolonial works often contain shifting and/or uncertain social allegiances and political multitudes, the tendency of these studies has been to read literary texts as social or political allegories whose surfaces often belie some other, analogous socio-political desire, a political unconscious in Jameson's language.

In their respective readings of the Anglo-American literature of World War I, for example, Fussell, Norris, and Vincent Sherry have dovetailed studies of modernist form or style with accounts of political intention, describing the relationship between literature and "The Great War" as a constant struggle with the impossibility of both political and aesthetic totality, or totalizing representation. Often traumatized by the war's horrors and overawed by its scale, writers from Siegfried Sassoon and Jones to Rebecca West and Woolf used formal techniques such as irony, satire, and allegory to suppress or engage the war's realities. For Fussell, irony is the central structuring mechanism for memories of, and for texts that address, World War I. This war, like a robust, feverish scion of the

modern conflicts that had preceded it, is ironic because its violence is much worse than expected, its means so melodramatically disproportionate to its alleged ends (Fussell 1975, 7). Literary uses of this irony—manifested in various forms, from the fictionalization of memoir after experiences of acute trauma to the absurd, satirical transposition of Ruskin’s aestheticism to the trenches—open up spaces for the critique of Western martial-politics. For Norris, “Modernism’s formal response to the challenge of mass warfare and mass death was to translate the nineteenth-century discourses of population control and quality into mandates to produce aesthetic formalism and artistic connoisseurship” (Norris 2000, 36). Working with a narrowly defined set of “high” modernists, Norris argues that the frontlines were often troped as an industrial slum by non-combatant writers, as a world within but nonetheless removed from civilization. In an attempt to suppress the realities of the war, these writers made the political decision to turn inward toward formal innovation and craft. Sherry has argued, in the opposite direction, that the “aesthetic formalism and artistic connoisseurship” of many British modernists was not an attempt to avoid the violent realities and troubling politics of the war but indeed mobilized as its own kind of anti-nationalist, vanguardist discursive combat against the rationalizing language of British Liberalism. Against governmental attempts to justify the war with language that seemed, for a time, entirely logical, modernists like Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Woolf scrutinized the Empire’s discursive power and the claims of Enlightenment reason that subtended it. These writers turned from an ostensibly clear and logical (but often dubious and contradictory) Basic English to an opaque, fragmented, and critical language, using

experiments in form and style to set the politics of British Liberal modernity against itself (Sherry 2004, 16).

World War II, according to critics like Esty, Marina MacKay, and Patrick Deer, occasioned a return to nationalist concerns in British writing that was deeply informed by modernism's critical, disillusioned stance toward the first war, the modern state, and imperial power. For Esty, late modernist texts such as Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Eliot's *Four Quartets* invented literary forms dedicated to accommodating imperial contraction and the fading significance of British universalism as the Empire moved into a period of territorial retrenchment. The gaze that British high modernist writing had directed toward the colonial periphery and the European continent is turned back upon England in the interwar and World War II years. "Events of the thirties, both continental and colonial, challenged the universalist and cosmopolitan tenets of metropolitan intellectuals, forcing them into the embrace of ethnically and nationally specific little worlds" (Esty 2003, 51). While more socially engaged within England than the earlier period of high modernism, British late modernism turned "to a more limited (e.g. national and organicist) concept of history" (Esty 2003, 53). For MacKay, the forced consensus politics of the English home front during World War II sparked acutely self-aware literary forms in works by Woolf, Henry Green, Evelyn Waugh, and others. Recycling many of the strategies of World War I artists, these writers used experiments in form to rehabilitate private life in face of overwhelming state power. Echoing Esty, MacKay contends that late modernism in British literature gave voice to a period of diminution rather than decline, where the dominant aesthetic and narrative modes were circular or

recursive rather than linear in their treatment of national history and social development. Deer gives literature pride of place as a mode of dissidence on the World War II home front: “Its emphasis on personal expression, on witness and memory, on narrating the seemingly unnarratable, and on the role played by rhetoric in war-making made war literature a crucial resource for survival and resistance.” Through various modes of formal subterfuge, British writers challenged the bellicose nationalist rhetoric of Churchill’s war ministry and the wartime media: “To confront the traumatic impact of total war, and also to compete with the overpowering official visions of patriotic Englishness, fortified masculinity, and compliant femininity, of a disciplined Home Front and loyal Empire at war, successive generations of British writers had to discover, and often camouflage, their own subversive tactics of resistance” (Deer 2009, 5). Literary experimentation provided writers with vital resources for disputing the official and/or mass-mediated versions of events and finding their own points of view on the conflict.

Rebecca Walkowitz has sought to move discussions of twentieth-century British and Anglophone writing and the world wars beyond the individual and the nation. She describes literary modernism in terms of a political double gesture. Extending modernism beyond its typical 1910-1945 period, Walkowitz argues that writers from James Joyce and Woolf to Kazuo Ishiguro and W.G. Sebald at once enhance and disable local points of view in their works. With experimental forms that move through and around national borders and attempt to sift through transnational modes of thought, they demonstrate how local spaces throughout the British Empire participated in, and were deeply influenced by, global networks. This “delocalized style,” which Walkowitz calls both modernist and

cosmopolitan, “registers the limits of perception and the waning of a confident epistemology, the conflict between the exhaustive and the ineffable, the appeal of the trivial, the political consequences of uniformity and variousness in meaning, the fragmentation of perspectives, and the disruption of social categories” (Walkowitz 2012, 20). In this expansive reading of modernism (that is in many ways linked to Jameson’s and Mieskowski’s respective studies of the limits of representation), wartime writers employ various formal maneuvers to maintain a critical stance toward overwhelming strife and social regulation. Woolf’s cosmopolitan style, for example, goes against the current of British nationalist discourse (or what Deer would call the hegemonic “war culture” in England) by exposing and resisting the political structure of choice—enemy or friend, war or peace, political party or death—that often guides official national (and even resistant) discourses during total war (Walkowitz 2012, 99).

While it is certainly true that twentieth-century British and Anglophone writers sometimes articulate political positions within individualist, national, or cosmopolitan projects, this dissertation shows that many literary depictions of collective life in wartime do not fit within a clearly defined political lineage, but that they exhibit social and political desires nonetheless. Although recent critics have provided expansive accounts of modernist literature’s diverse communities, their studies too often fall back on familiar categories of political formation that fail to describe the complex, unstable, and often unnamed ways British and Anglophone writers have imagined social and political life in wartime. The difficult case of Woolf, whose life, politics, and writing have been scrutinized—in almost all of the critical texts I list above—from many, often

oppositional, perspectives, serves as a reminder that writer's political commitments are often multiple, itinerant, and prone to change.

It will be my contention throughout this dissertation that politics, at least as it is portrayed in, and to some extent gives shape to, British and Anglophone texts set during the world wars, is never simply the continuation of inherited forms, a belief in determined or named utopian pasts, presents, or futures (whether individualist, nationalist, cosmopolitan, liberal democratic, socialist, or totalitarian). Rather, politics in these texts is often the unsteady practice—through collective experiment however limited in scale, through different communal structures that are sometimes coercive and sometimes freely chosen—of various, occasionally dissident, forms of relation: unlikely friendships, treacherous labor, otherworldly social networks, queer domesticity, anticolonial rebellion, and unorthodox religious groups, to provide but a few examples. As I will demonstrate, writers across the twentieth-century often experienced or sought out “ex-timate” forms of relation in smaller communities, variously composed enclaves of local and transnational, living and dead, life that did not aspire to become grand collective projects, whether in social, political, or martial terms. Writing in and of periods of large-scale social regulation, political uncertainty, and mass violence (if not exactly the apocalypse of which Wells had forewarned), modernist artists depict enclaves that take up vexed positions within and toward the British Empire at total war. Indeed, the state and greater empire are often understood by these works to have deleterious effects on all lived and potential fellowship, whether local, national, or global.

### 1.3 The Enemy, Collectivity, and Literary War Worlds

While the politics of these small groups are almost as various as their members, one of their most commonly shared characteristics is a critical engagement with the modern commingling of state politics and mass war. As thinkers as different as Fussell and Michel Foucault have maintained, the order of the subject and predicate in the early nineteenth-century dictum, that war is the continuation of politics by other means, is essentially reversed over the course of modernity.<sup>3</sup> No longer ancillary to or the last resort of politics, war—as the creation and policing of difference within and outside of a territory—becomes the modern state’s primary practice, its mode of territorial expansion, consolidation, and self-justification. Subsuming diplomacy and policy-making within its efforts to construct and control difference, war is institutionalized as a grand collective project and made permanent. Indeed, as the twentieth-century jurist Carl Schmitt has argued, the modern state has war at its base, despite what he perceives to be the political weakness of liberalism, its pluralism (which, according to Schmitt, results in indecision, inactivity, and inefficiency). The foundation of a state’s political activity and motivation rests (and, for Schmitt, *ought* to rest) with its power to distinguish between friend and foe. In order to maintain internal cohesion, states are compelled, especially in critical situations, to declare both external and internal enemies. In perhaps the central contradiction of modern politics, those (at least half-imagined) individuals or groups

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<sup>3</sup> This dictum was penned by Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz in *On War*, a text written in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and published posthumously in 1832. For Foucault’s account of modern politics as war, see *Society Must Be Defended*. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Fussell preempts Foucault’s lectures when he writes: “modern society is largely a continuation of war by other means” (Fussell 1975, 320). For an account of the popular rhetorical and theoretical play with Clausewitz’s dictum over the last two centuries, see Mieszkowski, “How To Do Things with Clausewitz.”

against which a state defines itself—enemies within and outside of its territories—are necessary for that state’s creation and survival. But more than this power to decide between enmity and amity, the state wields “the right to demand of its own members the readiness to die and unhesitatingly to kill enemies” (Schmitt 2007, 46). To the state as the essential political entity belongs the *jus belli*, the power to decide upon the enemy and actualize the state’s violent potential.

In his canonical study of World War I’s impact on Anglo-American culture, Fussell moves this discussion of political enmity to the literary field by making a startling claim. Situating modernism within a moment where state politics and war become almost indistinguishable from one another, Fussell places Schmitt’s martial vision of politics at the base of modernist achievement: “The most indispensable concept underlying the energies of modern writing,” he proclaims, “is that of ‘the enemy’” (Fussell 1975, 76). Seemingly with Richard Hofstadter’s notion of the “paranoid style” of post-World War II American politics in mind (although Hofstadter goes unmentioned in his text), Fussell offers the writings of Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon as examples of modern texts imbued with inimical energies. Indeed, “paranoid melodrama,” or the literary figuration of a belief in a world overfull with enemies, Fussell contends, continues to be the “primary mode in modern writing” (Fussell 1975, 76). In the European context, one only needs to mention the antagonistic proclamations of Marinetti’s Futurism or Vorticism, which, in their famous manifestos, never shied away from declaring who was friend and who was enemy to the avant-garde cause.

While I will not contest Fussell's claim that a concept of the enemy underlies the energies of some modernist texts, my dissertation argues that modernist writing, especially those works set during the world wars, often has a much more capacious conceptual and political ground, even as it limits its focus to smaller social units. Although the grand collective projects of martial modern states seek to manage and form populations by framing them as manipulable and knowable groups (friends and enemies; civilians, combatants, and criminals; those who must be preserved and those who are dispensable), the literature of the war years often moves outside of such violent official frames. Rather than marking out enemies and using such distinctions as a source for its constructions, this literature demonstrates "the fundamental sociality of embodied life," to use Judith Butler's terms, "the way in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in the lives that are not our own" (Butler 2006, 28). Or, to return to this introduction's epigraph from Elizabeth Bowen, writing of her experience in London during the Blitz: "Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and everyone else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew, each other" (qtd in Mellor 2011, 162). In seeking to depict moments of extreme, shared precariousness, where the "solidity" of the self fragments along with the "bulk and weight" of modern infrastructure, many wartime British and Anglophone texts turn to the strangely "heady and disembodied," at once imaginative and affective ways that people experienced collective life. While the concept and construction of the enemy

is certainly influential in modernist literature, the sociality of embodied life—friendly and hostile, destructive and productive, as problem and as possibility—provides a wider, perhaps even more “indispensable,” conceptual and political foundation for much of twentieth-century writing.

As if to scrutinize the martial foundations of modern state politics and to emphasize the fundamental sociality of embodied life in times where state violence is most acute, British and Anglophone writers at once contract and expand their sense of community in their portrayals of life during the world wars. From Sassoon’s *Counter-Attack* and David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* to Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* and Sarah Waters’ *The Night Watch*, many twentieth-century literary texts move beneath and across state or imperial borders (borders both physical and imaginative) that would separate friend from enemy. Indeed, these works often depict groups that are deemed internal enemies within the British state and its imperial zones, clusters of criminalized and persecuted life such as anticolonial rebels, fifth-column traitors, queer men and women, and shell-shocked, disillusioned soldiers. In these enclaves, geographical proximity and national or imperial affiliation, physical presence, even life itself, are not the only factors influencing relationality. Although their aspirations are hardly utopian, these groups often supplement and subvert the imagined communities of the nation with what Leela Gandhi has called “affective communities,” emergent, coalitional, and provisionary collectives that put forth relation rather than enmity as their characteristic feature and render “politics into a performance of strange alliance, unlikely kinships, and impossible identification”

(Gandhi 2006, 184).<sup>4</sup> While Gandhi locates such affective communities in late nineteenth-century socialist and anarcho-utopian movements within England and its colonies (remnants of which she traces to the May 1968 demonstrations in France and the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle), this dissertation will show that the thought and practice of such groups leads a peculiar, improbable afterlife in literature depicting the world wars. Malleable and often transient, affective as well as imaginative, countless small groups of unassimilated life dot the modernist landscape.

Raymond Williams' notion of "structures of feeling" provides a sturdy platform to begin a discussion of such wartime groups and the socio-political situations that occasion them. For Williams, sociality is ceaselessly dynamic—"life will not be reduced to fixed forms"—and daily experience in private or in public is always more than a handling of received cultural norms. "Structures of feeling" designates the indescribable tension between dominant modes of thought or being and emergent but as yet nameless alternatives that arrive and are practiced in the actuality of lived experience: "It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange" (Williams 1977, 131). Though these structures of feeling have not yet solidified into a distinct ideology or world-view that could be defined, classified, and rationalized, they nonetheless exert

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<sup>4</sup> These groups also echo what Rebecca Solnit has called "disaster communities," where the breakdown of social structures during catastrophic events discloses or opens up different forms of social and political existence. However, the political form of these enclaves of exposed life cannot be easily categorized, as Solnit does, as an almost utopian "anarchy in Kropotkin's sense of people coming together freely in chosen cooperation" (Solnit 2010, 91). Even if other ways or forms of being in the world are discovered, experimented with, and affirmed during wartime, these groups create and re-create unstable, transient collectives without name, social forms that are not free from, and are "still haunted by[,] ten thousand memories of a greater state," to use Wells' prescient language.

“palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action.” Within these structures, meanings and values, impulses and restraints—or the “specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationship,” often thought to be personal or private—are lived and felt as a kind of social being in process (Williams 1977, 132). There are norms, values, and inherited practices that partially structure everyday life, and there are indemonstrable excesses to these fixed forms. “Structures of feeling” names the murky, protean relationship, the negotiation that takes place, between them.

As Williams avers, structures of feeling manifest themselves during periods of social and political transition, whether it be the emergence of a social class or the increased contradiction, fracture, and mutation within a dominant social order. These structures play an especially crucial role in the art and literature that arises from and depicts these periods, Williams contends, where “the true social content is in a significant number of cases of this present and affective kind, which cannot without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships, though it may include all these as lived and experienced.” Whether or not a writer consciously depicts a structure of feeling (most often they do not, according to Williams), the latter find their way into literary form and theme. They arise “not by derivation from some other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind,” the articulation of living processes that are much more widely experienced if not yet labeled by familiar social or political terminology (Williams 1977, 133). These shifting but never merely fluctuating structures, as represented in art and literature, exist at the borderlands of semantic availability, somewhere between sense and nonsense, received and practical consciousness. And it is

precisely within and around such structures, I will argue, that the social and political movements, the affective and imaginative communities, of twentieth-century British and Anglophone literature might be traced.

Despite severe social regulations backed by legislation such as the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act and the 1939 Emergency Powers Act, the world wars disrupted the dominant, “fixed forms” of the British state and civil society, introducing or uncovering other structures of feeling. In portraying the loosening of fixed socio-cultural forms at the front lines as well as the home front, British and Anglophone writers turn to precarious collectives that improvise social existence in many surprising, often unsanctioned and illicit, ways. While these groups, in their uncertain positions before the law, allow modernist writers to take a critical stance toward state power and the wars it promotes, their alternative social and political practices often also mark the formal aspects of the “literary worlds” within which they arise. I borrow the term “literary worlds” from Eric Hayot, who—rather than understanding “world” as totality (as in “world literature,” which desires “to be epistemologically responsible to the world as a major cultural and intellectual inheritance of European modernity” [Hayot 2011, 134]), or as a realm of experience, as a self-constituted thing within a larger, global position—focuses “on the ontology of composed works,” seeking to account for the worlds created within literary texts. Hayot describes literary worlds as “the diegetic totality constituted by the sum of all aspects of a single text, constellated into a structure or system.” They are “always relations to and theories of the lived world, whether as largely unconscious normative constructs, as rearticulations, or even as active refusals of the world-norms of their age.

In this sense, they are always also social and conceptual constructs, as well as formal and affective” (Hayot 2011, 137). Not unlike Williams’ structures of feeling, literary worlds move between a process of “world-relating” and “world-producing,” between a representation of the “real” world and a presentation of something supplemental to that world. Experiments in form, as I will show, play a crucial role in literary world creation, especially in texts that portray the world wars. Formal innovation opens up for modernist works another route by which they might re-imagine the narration of history, individual and collective experience, temporality, and relationship. These forms, I will contend, are often inspired by the various experiences of time and manners of relationship that arise within wartime small groups.

The central argument of my dissertation is that twentieth-century British and Anglophone writers depict, challenge, and supplement the worlds created by total war with their own partially mimetic, partially imagined literary “war worlds.” While heavy reminders of the violence, devastation, and social regulation that characterized life in England and its colonies is ever-present in these texts, so too are small groups that move within the rubble. I will pay particularly close attention to the expansive, fragmented senses of time these enclaves experience, from the disorganizing of the temporal order of the workday and the near-reversal, during the Blitz for example, of diurnal life, to the present- and future-driven focus of anticolonial revolt and the transhistorical encounters of the spiritualist séance. The manifold senses of time portrayed in the literature of the war years—diverse war worlds—seep into the various experimental forms of the texts themselves. Conventions of narrative and poetic time are warped and refashioned to

account for not only the disaster of war but the peculiar experiences of time that structure the lives of the wars' beleaguered enclaves. As Williams has written, with a sentiment echoed by Perry Anderson and Jameson, the modernist emphasis on medium, form, or technique and the desire to contest or overturn older literary conventions is always an attempt to transform a social relation, to present an alternative possibility of collective life. However, the texts I read do not attempt to imagine a grand social project or to resolve the world-historical contradictions of the twentieth century with their formal innovations, as Jameson might argue. Rather, by separating themselves from official discourses, they reveal these contradictions as irresolvable in worlds arranged by the modern British state and its imperial motivations.

Following this introduction, my second chapter, "'Indeterminate fable': *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the Queer Times of Revolt, and Modernist Form," addresses the convergence of anti-imperial rebellion during World War I and modernist writing in T.E. Lawrence's convoluted account of the 1916-1918 Arab Revolt. Advertised in global media outlets during the interwar years as an epic history of a war hero, justly disparaged by Edward Said, Patrick Deer, Priya Satia, and many other postcolonial theorists as a personalized Orientalist fantasy, and redeployed in contemporary British and U.S. military circles as a handbook for counterinsurgency operations across the Arab world, *Seven Pillars* has lived many lives. This chapter shifts the critical discussion away from questions of Lawrence's heroism or villainy and toward his book's vexed depiction of the Revolt's small group in wartime. Of the Haitian Revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture,

C.L.R. James once wrote: “Toussaint did not make the revolution. It was the revolution that made Toussaint. And even that is not the whole truth” (James 1989, x). Rather than making the Arab Revolt (as Western official histories, popular media, and the 2006 Joint Forces *Counterinsurgency Manual* would claim), Lawrence was at once unmade and refashioned by the fellowship he found there. Early in his text, Lawrence describes the Revolt as an experience of possession and cultural performance that “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” (Lawrence 1991, 31).

As if in recognition of this disorientation, *Seven Pillars* shifts constantly between first-person singular (“I”) and plural (“we”) pronouns, between the desires to narrate a general history of the Revolt and to produce an autobiographical account of Lawrence in it. Wandering between memoir, travelogue, epic novel, and war history, Lawrence’s text presents the rebellion as a distinct, hybrid social world, an inter-tribal, transnational assemblage bound by its anti-imperial undertaking rather than European-style regimentation or even the clear promise of a subsequent Arab nation-state. Living in a revolutionary time where both the past and future seem remote, the Revolt’s participants, according to Lawrence, are directed toward being in an improvised but deeply collective present. Passionate friendship, unbridgeable difference, an ad hoc moral code, ardent physical and emotional intimacy, and queer sexual practices provide what Lawrence calls (anxiously, buoyantly) the “sensual co-efficient” for the Revolt’s political work (Lawrence 1991, 30). The possibilities of the self, at least in Lawrence’s case, can’t help but be undone and multiplied by these new forms of being together. While the rebellion

contests both Ottoman and European (British, French) colonial powers and aspires for freedom beyond all empire, its members establish a volatile, violent form of collective life in the field, a sociality that Lawrence's text at once distrusts, yearns for, and quietly celebrates.

The physically brief but psychologically lasting intimacy of precarious lives lived in close quarters (where "Man in all things lived candidly with man" [Lawrence 1991, 30]), the uniquely present-centered sense of time experienced during the Revolt, haunts Lawrence's text from cover to cover. The group's erotics of dissidence and its queer sense of time, I contend, animate the formal properties of *Seven Pillars*, encouraging its generic multiplicity and multimedia aesthetic. Refusing to stick to the plot of conventional autobiographical, historical, and even novelistic discourse, Lawrence's text brings together classical and modernist genres and forms from lyric poetry and epic prose to satire. Moreover, distrustful of his own powers of representation, Lawrence dots *Seven Pillars* with visual art commissioned to a group including Augustus John, Eric Kennington, and Paul Nash; their cartoons and Post-Impressionist portraits interrupt, parody, and supplement Lawrence's already disjointed narrative. In its unabating complexity and unwholeness—indeed its unwholesomeness—Lawrence's text formally manifests the disruptive insistence of past, collective desire in the present of its composition. At the same time, I argue, *Seven Pillars'* distinctive form unsettles the duplicitous language of postwar British diplomacy and official history, those claims of progress and peace that served to rationalize the newly colonial Mandatory system in the Middle East and elsewhere. This chapter ends by turning to two contemporary thinkers,

Gilles Deleuze and Wu Ming 4, both of whom have sought to recover the cautionary complexity of Lawrence's work.

Moving from the contested colonial periphery during World War I to the besieged imperial metropole in World War II, my third chapter, "The Blitz, the Séance Circle, and H.D.'s 'Spiritual Realism,'" examines the effects of popular spiritualism on the social and literary practices of wartime London. Often sources of derision—and yet the cause of considerable anxiety—for home ministry leaders and literary figures alike (including Winston Churchill, Orwell, and Eliot), séance-goers re-imagined social ties with their this- and otherworldly communications. Because spiritualism found a new popularity in England during the war, its practitioners—especially its mediums, by and large women—were subjected to police inquiry, arrest, and occasional imprisonment. Under old and new legislation like the 1735 Witchcraft Act, which criminalized fraudulent mediums (again, mostly women), and the 1939 Emergency Powers Act, which gave the British government near totalitarian control of everyday life across the Empire, unsanctioned forms of communication and community were persecuted, no matter how dubious they may have appeared.

Rather than being skeptical toward the legality and scientific or religious validity of spiritualist practices, this chapter investigates the ways séances gather—or claim to gather—diverse members from across the globe and throughout history, rethinking what it might mean to be at home (or not) in a devastated place. The séance's collective form of conjuration—the strange intimacy of people encircled, their hands spread across the top of a table, registering vibrations from otherworldly frequencies—moves across

territorial and temporal borders, even if the journeys undertaken by the small group gathering in the present provide no social or political guarantees for what the future holds. Writing in her wartime epic poem *Trilogy*, H.D. (who, like Lawrence, moves back and forth between the first-person singular and plural pronouns when describing her group) proclaims:

we know no rule  
of procedure,  
  
we are voyagers, discovers  
of the not-known,  
  
the unrecorded;  
we have no map;  
  
possibly we will reach haven,  
heaven (H.D. 1974, 543).

At once a form of psychic scientific research into the “not-known” and a ritual development of belief, Blitz-time séances ventured out into other, unseen worlds as the known world fell to pieces.

Though briefly touching on the ghost-rife writings of Eliot and Graham Greene, my chapter uses the work of H.D. as a primary guide through this haunted world. For the American expatriate and poet participated in London séances throughout World War II and used her experiences there as a source for her poetics. In her wartime roman-à-clef *Majic Ring*, H.D. describes her “home circle”—a small spiritualist group that included H.D.’s partner Bryher, the Eurasian medium Arthur Bhaduri, his mother May, and a table once owned (and still haunted) by William Morris—as a “receiving station” that collected “live-messages” from the living and the dead (H.D. 2013, 135). Despite, or perhaps

because of, what David Trotter has described as the British War Office's requisitioning of both communications and representational technologies (from the telephone to the television), H.D.'s home circle gathers to comprise a human and non-human machine that might open lines of communication with other lives in this world and the next. As poet, H.D. is given the task of deciphering the spirit language collected during the séance and putting its counsel into practice. In *Majic Ring* and *Trilogy*, both of which were composed during the war, she alchemizes the social experiences—and especially the discourse—of disaster into a new form of writing, into a new vision of the world. Influenced by the séance's table rapping, a simplified, Morse-code-like form of occult and coded communication, H.D.'s work from this period turns the violence of the war, as well as the violently masculinist forces of Western symbol and myth that accompanied it, into something potentially recuperative and (from the perspective of the British state) treacherous: a syncretic, inter-historical, and transnational language of mutual aid and care.

Chapter four, "An 'image of the enemy': Colonial Enmity, Black Social Life, and the Novel as Social Form in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*," turns from the séance circles of the Blitz to impromptu discussion circles comprised of colonized children in the World War II Caribbean. Set in Barbados in the years surrounding the war, Lamming's novel explores the relationship between narrative, the denigration of black life, and British colonial practice in the late imperial period. In similar fashion to fellow Caribbean novelists Wilson Harris, Sylvia Wynter, and Austin Clarke, Lamming uses experiences of the war on the ostensible peripheries of empire to return to occluded

histories of transatlantic slavery and to disclose continuing colonial violence. My chapter thus begins with an account of the British Colonial Office and the Barbadian plantocracy, whose shared, longstanding ownership of Barbados' resources (from lumber and land to labor) was reinforced during World War II. As local lives and materials are siphoned away from the island to aid in the war effort elsewhere, the violent reality of colonial exposure and asymmetrical dependency is made manifest. This disclosure, further clarified for Lamming's characters by the increased racist sentiment of local colonials during the war, the sale of rented land, and direct or implicit accusations of the treachery of the colonized, inspires what Frantz Fanon called the Caribbean's first "metaphysical experience," an engagement with colonial constructions of white supremacy and alleged black subhumanity that seeks "an axiological activity in reverse" (Fanon 1994, 23-24), the transvaluation of value with respect to black life.

The increasingly precarious lives of the colonized, and Lamming's attempts to perform his own "axiological activity in reverse," direct *In the Castle* toward its anticolonial politics. Significantly, Lamming's text centers itself on small groups of children who assemble illegally on private property and at the beach—one of the island's few public spaces—to discuss their predicament. In their palaver or idle talk (which writers as different as Fanon and Martin Heidegger have denigrated), they begin a critique of British colonialism, envisioning life outside of occupation and the whims of private ownership. Indeed, *In the Castle*'s children gather to imagine decolonization in a transnational sense, perceiving themselves to be citizens within a global community of oppressed villages. As they convene on the margins of a marginal world, their speech

calls into question British colonial law, education, morality, and ritual forms that situate the colonized as enemies within the empire, in “peacetime” as well as in periods of officially-declared strife. In their rhetorical deposition of power, they practice as well as imagine social forms structured by local and translocal collective values.

Structurally, *In the Castle* follows the boys’ lead. In order to account for the insistently generative lives of children in the wartime colony, the novel sketches what Anthony Bogues calls “collective characters of place” rather than a single developing protagonist (Bogues 2011, xvii). In its play with narrative time—where past enslavement and colonial violence survive to structure but not determine the present and to disrupt stories of development or progress—*In the Castle* at once invokes and explodes the conventional, linear plotlines of the European genre of individual growth, the *bildungsroman*. As the novel splinters into a polyvocal text, a social study of the colonized arises in its stead, offering a vision of those living on the edge of what seems to be a world-historical political transformation: decolonization. Together, the novel’s children and unique form articulate a provocative thought: that even in the total war colony, communities escaped the imperatives of imperial power with alternative social desires and practices. Anticolonial politics, for Lamming, begins here, with the grand thought of these small groups, no matter where or how it ends.

In similar fashion to *In the Castle*’s disruption of the *bildungsroman*, recent British and Anglophone historical novels, marked by a century of total war, genocide, and decolonization, have moved away from the genre’s classical conventions influentially theorized by George Lukács—their bourgeois character types, nationalist

politics, and narratives of progress. My fifth chapter, “Intimacies of Resuscitation: Pat Barker and the Time of the Historical Novel,” traces how contemporary historical fiction that portrays the world wars often supplements and troubles familiar narratives of British nationalism and overwhelming social coercion with enclaves of unassimilated life. These novels recover a sense of the social and political multitudes, the structures of feeling, that comprised the total war state and empire, even at the height of governmental regulation. Claiming Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy as an exemplary case, this chapter demonstrates how a queer counterhistory set during World War I chips away at official British narratives and cultural tropes of the war (how it proceeded, how it ended, how it is remembered) with depictions of unreason, affect, touch, associative and dissociative thought. Using historical figures such as Sassoon and Wilfred Owen alongside characters of her own invention, Barker portrays a queer “solidarity of the shaken” (in Jan Patocka’s terms), the often-illicit intimacies and few sexual comforts of institutionalized, “shell-shocked” soldiers. In her novels, a critical approach to late imperial power and the total war state arrives not through reason alone, but alongside these other “aberrant” modes of relation. By staging desire as well as thought, flesh (or less) as well as bodies, Barker’s texts ask their readers to consider small lives and ungrieved deaths, to reevaluate the social and political worlds—as well as the stories we tell about them—that arise during periods of strife.

Furthermore, her novels—like many other recent examples—examine the ghosts of total war and empire that haunt global cultural memory and contemporary politics, awakening readers to histories that, though often occluded or hidden, survive to shape the

struggles of the present. My dissertation closes with a brief meditation that links Barker's work to Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*. Both works, I argue, look back to the social forms that arose during the world wars in order to address the social and political impasses of globalization and the rule of global capital, or what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called "Empire." By returning to the world wars and locating familiar, still-current, if partially transformed problems there, these writers gesture toward the sometimes subtle contemporary mingling of war and politics that can trace a number of its roots back to the first half of the twentieth century. Facilitated by traditional and state-of-the-art military operations, diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, and ostensibly humanitarian aid, this martial-political development remains inimical to alternative forms of social life, even if it is not yet fully constitutive of that life. Contemporary writers like Barker and Ondaatje continue to expose both this imperial enmity and its dissident targets in our ostensibly postcolonial age.

## 2. “Indeterminate fable”: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the Queer Times of Revolt, and Modernist Form

I had one craving all my life—for the power of self-expression in some imaginative form—but had been too diffuse ever to acquire a technique. At last accident, with perverted humour, in casting me as a man of action had given me place in the Arab Revolt, a theme ready and epic to a direct eye and hand, thus offering me an outlet in literature, the technique-less art. Whereupon I became excited only over mechanism. The epic mode was alien to me, as to my generation.

T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

Isn't it just faintly possible that part of the virtue apparent in the book lies in its secrecy, its novelty, and its contestability?

Lawrence, in a 1923 letter to Lionel Curtis

### 2.1 “open-eyed, not obedient”

Late in his account of the 1916-1918 Arab Revolt, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, T.E. Lawrence describes the amative bonds that connected the coalition of rebels: “Fear, the strongest motive in slothful man, broke down with us, since love for a cause—or for a person—was aroused. For such an object, penalties were discounted, and loyalty became open-eyed, not obedient. To it men dedicated their being, and in its possession they had no room for virtue or vice” (Lawrence 1991, 466). Using typically abstract, overwrought, and shifting language (is it the “cause” or “a person” that becomes “an object” here, or both? Do the men in this object’s “possession” become objects, possessions, themselves?), Lawrence illustrates how “love” for and in the Revolt broke down not only the fear of death but moral rigor and the bounds of the self-possessed subject. In dedicating their lives to something other than individual fulfillment, Lawrence suggests, these rebels offered themselves up for use, for the love of a cause which—or for a person who—remained immanent to the Revolt itself, to its peculiar small group. This

state of being possessed (sexually, socially, politically) constantly interrupts *Seven Pillars*' thematic movement and its formal properties, distorting any easy lesson or moral that might be learned there. And yet readers have never stopped using the text as a handbook that might guide them in diverse, often contradictory, forms of thought and action, from literary and filmic production to statecraft and contemporary asymmetrical warfare. This chapter traces how a modernist text became—and has been repeatedly refashioned as—a tool, despite (or perhaps because of) its untold complexity, a complexity that, I argue, can be traced back to the small, dynamic social group of the Revolt itself.

## **2.2 Modernism from Insurgency to Counterinsurgency**

The history of *Seven Pillars*' prolonged drafting and subsequent reception cannot be separated from the ways the text has been used since even before its publication. One of World War I's signal narratives, Lawrence's book seemed to offer the postwar British public a heroic and adventurous foil to the Western Front's imaginary of gruesome, futile trench combat. It solidified Lawrence's place as "the first media legend" within British popular culture and helped to establish a veritable industry of Orientalizing cultural production across the Atlantic (Satia 2008, 181). Along with the narrative framework for David Lean's Academy Award-winning biopic *Lawrence of Arabia*, the text has also provided thematic material for writers as diverse as George Bernard Shaw, Victoria

Ocampo, and Wu Ming 4 and fueled philosophical investigations of imperial and state power in the work of Hannah Arendt, Edward Said, and Gilles Deleuze.<sup>1</sup>

With the publication of numerous Lawrence biographies and revisionary histories in the last few decades, *Seven Pillars* has found something of a new life.<sup>2</sup> In addition to its popularity within transatlantic culture, the text has recently been taken up by a generation of U.S. military officers trained in the humanities and social sciences at institutions like West Point and Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Turning their attention from the Cold War to the so-called "War on Terror," this group has attempted to interweave the traditionalist strands of the U.S. military with a more "progressive" understanding of social life, working at the convergence of war, politics, and economics. Their collective return to Lawrence and other guerrilla theorists culminated in the 2006 Joint Forces *Counterinsurgency Manual*, co-authored by an interdisciplinary set of officers and academics including David Petraeus and John Nagl of the U.S. Army. Outlining the current style of asymmetrical warfare practiced across the Middle East and Afghanistan, the *Manual* openly traces the roots of its counterinsurgency theory back to "the small wars of the nineteenth century that were so critical an element in shaping the culture of the British army" (qtd in Kaplan 2013, 42-43). These "small wars," of course, were those fought across the British Empire

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<sup>1</sup> According to Satia, Shaw modeled Private Meek, a character in his 1932 play *Too Good To Be True*, on Lawrence (Satia 2008, 186). See also Ocampo; Arendt 1968; Said 1979; Deleuze 1986 and Deleuze and Guattari 1997; and Wu Ming 4 2012. I will return to Deleuze's work and Wu Ming 4's novel in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> For two of the most recent Lawrence biographies, see Korda and Scott Anderson.

well into the twentieth century, including various conflicts on the colonial periphery during World War I. *Seven Pillars*' depiction of a particular type of guerrilla combat adjusted to suit desert environments—animated by popular images of Lawrence as a white savior at the unusual nexus of imperial loyalties and insurgent operations—permeates the U.S. military's aspiring "learning organization" and its handbook (*Counterinsurgency* 2006, ix).<sup>3</sup>

The *Manual*'s scouring of *Seven Pillars* and other Lawrence texts for contemporary "insights" (particularly their accounts of a war waged with tactics like disengagement, intelligence and propaganda, the destruction of enemy materiel rather than human life, social flexibility, and the decentralizing of military authority) reemphasizes the political aspects of the U.S. military's current warfare paradigm. But while Lawrence's text effectively theorizes anti-imperial revolt from the perspective of an insurgency, the *Manual* sets out to annex and "institutionalize" guerrilla tactics for counterinsurgency operations, to categorize "recognizable revolutionary campaign plans" with the hope of combating and redirecting them toward U.S. political and economic objectives. Counterinsurgents are envisioned as "nation-builders" who both contest insurgencies with direct force and seek to (re)establish local order, institutions, infrastructure, and the rule of law. By blending traditional military and political means, this new type of commander attempts to win the support of a local populace, to become a

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<sup>3</sup> Quick to distance Lawrence's work from anti-colonial and anti-capitalist guerrilla theory and practice (especially those worldwide "wars of national liberation" "spawned" by the "Bolshevik takeover of Russia"), the *Manual*'s co-authors write: "Lawrence's experiences in the Arab Revolt made him a hero and also provide some insights for today" (*Counterinsurgency* 2006, 1-4). The authors trace Lawrence's "heroism" back to his purported attempt "to organize Arab nationalism during World War I" (*Counterinsurgency* 2006, "Annotated Bibliography" 1).

“legitimate authority,” and to establish “legitimate government” (*Counterinsurgency* 2006, 1-1). In an ideal scenario, counterinsurgency would replace one form of unsettled local politics, the “recognizable revolutionary campaign” whatever its sympathies, with a government inspired by U.S.-style neoliberalism. Reactivating the centuries-old Orientalizing language of local belligerence, cultural backwardness, and rogue or failed states, the *Manual* portrays the West as the single motor of a progressive global history. It treats the narrative aspects of the history it tells as if they were inconsequential while at the same time clearly understanding—and seeking to exploit—the ideological ballasts that always frame historical discourse.

While the U.S. military’s selective use of *Seven Pillars* is perhaps not surprising, it is nonetheless instructive, not least for those invested in the study of modernist literary production and the relationship between how texts are read and what these texts (or their interpreters) seek to *do*. The redeployment of Lawrence’s book elicits a number of questions regarding how modernist works operate in our moment and how contemporary readers approach them: what, in these works, still signifies? What stands out in texts full of scattered narrative lines, cul-de-sacs, and contradictions? What is passed over, perhaps never noticed or quickly forgotten? And finally, what is at stake in the acts of reading, interpreting, and in some cases retooling such modernist texts, both within and outside contemporary educational institutions?

As the *Manual*’s co-authors heroize Lawrence and reference the more “digestible” aspects of *Seven Pillars*’ guerrilla theory, they overlook the fact that Lawrence repeatedly presents his book as a floundering document portraying multiple, catastrophic failures—

personal, military, political, and literary.<sup>4</sup> They mute the text's detailed descriptions of wartime disorientation, exhaustion, illicit desire and pleasure, love, exploitation, torture, massacre, betrayal, shame, and trauma. They omit Lawrence's intimate but vexed affiliation with the Revolt's insurgent social form and his consequent feelings of unease toward the consolidation of its political power in any single imperial or national direction. They simplify *Seven Pillars*' indeterminacy, its play with literary conventions and versions of truth. Their focus on Lawrence's military theory and his account of its battlefield realization perilously edits out the bulk of the text's nearly 700 pages, which, if read in another light, repeatedly warns against imperial-military intervention and the violence of Western "nation-building."

Claiming *Seven Pillars* as a literary text with great contemporary relevance, recent scholars in the fields of international relations, history, and modernist studies have begun just such a reading, even if their focus often remains Lawrence's modernist vision of the battlefield. Career U.S. diplomat Charles Hill has described *Seven Pillars* as "a vast modernist experiment," indeed a novel, which is ultimately "about the making of the modern Middle East" (Hill 2010, 254-255). In his reading, Lawrence's heavily stylized, "Machiavellian" work provides "a compendium of guidelines for getting and keeping power under conditions favorable and unfavorable"; it is "a book about statecraft" (Hill

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<sup>4</sup> In his epigraph to *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence enmeshes the political and literary failures of his text: "Men prayed me that I set our work, the inviolate house, / as a memory of you. / But for fit monument I shattered it, unfinished: and now / The little things creep out to patch themselves hovels / in the marred shadow / Of your gift." Later, he discusses the Revolt's political failings: "To the clear-sighted, failure was the only goal. We must believe, through and through, that there was no victory, except to go down into death fighting and crying for failure itself, calling in excess of despair to Omnipotence to strike harder, that by His very striking He might temper our tortured selves into the weapon of His own ruin" (Lawrence 1991, 412-413).

2010, 259). More convincingly, Priya Satia argues that in “a typical modernist move,” Lawrence tries “to look beyond attrition and the fixed positions and massive supplying of modern warfare . . . by searching backwards in the medieval past. . . . Formulating a theory of irregular warfare [is] part of his effort to enact the epic in Arabia, to recover the poetic, now mythic, past in contemporary practice” (Satia 2008, 152). Patrick Deer echoes this sentiment, asserting that Lawrence imagines the Arab Revolt “as a kind of modernist vortex,” a gyring zone at the confluence of “an archaic, Orientalized realm, a nomadic order of experience, and the place of a futuristic mobile guerilla war” (Deer 2009, 67). By attempting to realize and document an epic and/or science fictional ideal on desert battlefields, Lawrence’s modernism enters a long lineage of colonial violence and postcolonial exploitation that has not yet ceased.

With the example of the *Counterinsurgency Manual* at hand, it would be dangerously naïve to contest the point that *Seven Pillars’* Orientalism or Lawrence’s aestheticized revamping of classical military science with tactical/technological ingenuity maintains disturbing contemporary relevance. Few applications of Pound’s imperative to “make it new” have extended their reach through the last century with such disastrous consequences. My hope, here, is to think with and reframe Satia’s and Deer’s readings of Lawrence’s battlefield modernism by reintroducing another crucial, antagonistic modernist strain within his text. Derived, I contend, from the dissident small group and queer temporality of the Revolt, *Seven Pillars’* multimedia structure, its peculiar discursive style, and its play with narrative time offers a critical lens onto Western imperial and military encroachment, now as well as then. The shifting literary features of

Lawrence's indeterminate fable dampen if they don't undermine triumphant postwar narratives of imperial or national development, statecraft, and proclamations of peace. Indeed, after the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, which broke British promises of Arab national self-determination, instituted a Mandatory system in Middle Eastern territories, and laid many of the "post"-imperial foundations for contemporary strife, Lawrence's "perverse work" announced to Western audiences the Revolt's enduring struggle (Lawrence 1941, 161). While *Seven Pillars* has been a tool in many hands, it was first a tool in Lawrence's hand, a volatile device that allowed him to invoke the Revolt's disparate social and political energies in the troubled present of his writing.

In order to investigate the many ways that the Revolt's social practices resonate throughout *Seven Pillars*, this chapter considers the assemblage of male intimacy and desire roughly sketched and thinly veiled in Lawrence's book. This reading complicates, while not erasing, the most persistent critical claims made about *Seven Pillars*—claims that stretch from more traditional Lawrence scholarship to contemporary readings of his modernism—that it is propelled solely, its force exhausted totally, by either the author's subjective fantasy and desire or a post-World War I British culture that sought to normalize particular forms of imperial violence and control. While *Seven Pillars* quite clearly moves between these poles, I contend that the tenor of its critique and its peculiar modernist style are also inflected by the sociality of the Revolt's small group, by communal desires and practices that cannot be reduced to the language of self-possessed individual fantasy, epic heroism, postwar cultural norms, or familiar political categories.

In section one of what follows, I investigate *Seven Pillars*' depiction of the Arab Revolt's social form. According to Lawrence's Orientalizing text, the Revolt remained a largely amorphous group during the war, often directed by its destructive undertaking rather than a single prefabricated imperial or national politics. Despite persistent European intrigue, its intertribal and international forces contested Ottoman *and* European imperial powers, as well as Western civil and state constrictions of individual and collective experience. As Lawrence recounts it, the Revolt's practices undermined standards of propriety and temporality that limit notions of the proper and of time to a socially normative or temporal schema. Lacking the secure promise of a political future, even at times jettisoning it to the margins, the Revolt's "near-sighted multitudes" turned to social production in the present (Lawrence 1991, 549); they sometimes grouped around discrepant forms of male intimacy and queer pleasure that served as a "sensual co-efficient" for their dynamic anti-imperialism (Lawrence 1991, 30). This splitting of the present from a clear vision of the future, of an Arab nation or otherwise, opened up various possibilities for collective life and, as Lawrence acknowledges with bitterness and shame, for Western political and military exploitation.

The Revolt's dissident small group, its temporality, and its eventual betrayal modify Lawrence's notion of subjectivity within his text as well as his understanding of lived and represented time.<sup>5</sup> By formally and thematically invoking its methods of social production throughout *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence suggests that the Revolt's assemblage

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<sup>5</sup> I refer to three versions of time that operate within Lawrence's text: Western historical time's progressive movement from past to future; British military time's strictly regimented and timetabled rhythms; and the Orientalizing ideal of unchanging Arab time theorized by Said in *Orientalism*.

and its insistent present subsist in the time of his testimony. Even while Lawrence enters the violent world of post-World War I military science, British imperial policymaking, and R.A.F. policing in the Middle East (a transition that Deer and Satia luminously detail), his text offers points of resistance to the normative social and temporal orders it exists within and often re-inscribes. Desiring a continued association with the Revolt's all-but-vanquished sociality, *Seven Pillars* proposes, to use Elizabeth Freeman's words, "other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others" (Freeman 2010, xxii). Between pain, shame, and pleasure, Lawrence writes from a present where the Revolt's social form still resonates.

Section two explores how the Arab Revolt's sociality and its time mark the formal properties of Lawrence's text. Overburdened by the Revolt's social and political force, *Seven Pillars* comes to resemble what Freeman calls "erotohistoriography," an account of past, embodied life felt within the present that registers both a melancholy attachment to lost objects and the "centrality of pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, in queer practices of encountering and documenting the past" (Freeman 2010, xxiii). Heretofore lacking an artistic technique that might have given shape to his lifelong desire for imaginative expression, Lawrence becomes a defective relay for the Revolt, "partly that no one mistake for history the bones from which some day a man [sic] may make history, and partly for the pleasure it gave me to recall the fellowship" (Lawrence 1991, 24). He finds in the Revolt's past but still residually present life a model for its uniquely modernist narrativization, a purportedly "technique-less art" that would replace discursive

craftsmanship with a collection of methods, a fellowship of art forms brought together via bricolage (Lawrence 1991, 549).

This “technique-less art” is more than simply an aesthetic experiment, however. Like many of its modernist contemporaries, Lawrence’s teeming book—compiled after his return to Europe and repeatedly revised between 1919 and 1926—foregrounds and calls into question the linguistic and generic materials of its construction. In the process, it at once affirms and resituates Vincent Sherry’s thesis that various modernist writers became disillusioned with the logic, language, and institutions of British Liberalism during World War I. Within the total war state, Sherry contends, the cultural products of Enlightenment reason were instrumentalized by governmental powers, often serving to justify rather than prevent slaughter. In similar fashion to works by Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Woolf, Lawrence’s text reenacts “the disestablishment of a rationalistic attitude and practice in language, in the verbal culture of a war for which Liberal apologies and rationales provided the daily material of London journalism” (Sherry 2004, 14).

Lawrence, however, experienced the war on its colonial periphery amid imperial subjects where rationalist justifications of violence and exploitation long had been (and would continue to be) the order of the day. Alongside the postwar disillusionment that Sherry and many others articulate, the Revolt’s social assemblage and the political violence of its betrayal further impel Lawrence’s critique of Liberalist language. “Instead of facts and figures,” he admits, the text is “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" (Lawrence 1991, 563). The Revolt's small group and its queer sense of time—both its acute sense of being in the present and its residual presence in the time of *Seven Pillars*' writing—encourage a different treatment of language and its forms, one that brings together classical and modernist discursive styles, and even a group of modernist visual artists, as need requires. The text's often antagonistic collection of genres (epic, tragedy, and pastiche) and forms (poetry, historical discourse, fiction) unsettles the duplicitous yet plainspoken language of postwar imperialist diplomacy and rationales. Its dynamic collage brandishes a concentrated skepticism toward Liberalist historical and political narratives and their progressive understanding of time, their logic of inevitability, completeness, and eventual peace. Though calling out for the participation of a present and future readership with its fragmentary, contradictory depiction of an unfinished Revolt ("the bones from which some day a man [sic] may make history"), *Seven Pillars* demonstrates the violent limits of Western military intervention, political advocacy, and aesthetic representation, especially within imperial (and neo-imperial) situations.

### **2.3 "out of harmony with the normal": The Sociality of the Revolt**

When not approaching the Arab Revolt with patronizing skepticism, Entente military and political leaders viewed the movement as a possible adjunct to victory on World War I's Middle Eastern Front. However, wary of ceding oil-rich and geopolitically strategic territory to potentially hostile competitors, British and French officials sought to

separate the Revolt, as a tool of war, from its anti-imperial politics.<sup>6</sup> Though verbal assurances of Arab national self-determination helped to maintain the Revolt's alliance throughout the war, Entente leaders never intended to fulfill their vow. The clandestine Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 promised to divide Ottoman territory, from present-day Turkey to Yemen, between the British and French empires following Entente victory.

For a time, Lawrence maintained slim hope that postwar diplomacy might win for the Arab peoples what the betrayed Revolt had not, that the continued vigor “of the Arab Movement would prevent the creation . . . of unduly ‘colonial’ schemes of exploitation” (Lawrence 1991, 132). Following the war, he hoped, Arab forces would be established, “with arms in their hands, in a position so assured (if not dominant) that expediency would counsel the Great Powers a fair settlement of their claims” (Lawrence 1991, 26). As translator and advisor for Faysal ibn Husayn (soon to be king of Syria and, after being ousted by the French following the Franco-Syrian War, Iraq), Lawrence participated in the Paris Peace Conference with the intent of helping to lobby for free Arab territories. However, in a move that “had not only affirmed the basic structure of the Sykes-Picot Agreement but gone beyond it,” David Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau abruptly put a halt to the dialogue, making the executive decision to cut up the Middle East into Mandatory portions (Anderson 2013, 485). After experiencing combat in the flesh, Lawrence bore witness to the martial power of words, to a Schmittian politics that would

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<sup>6</sup> The 1908 discovery of easily accessible oil in present-day Iran and Iraq reemphasized the increasing material and economic significance of the region for imperial and capitalist interests. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company, now known as British Petroleum or BP, was founded in 1909 to capitalize on the Middle East's petroleum resources. Lawrence notes in *Seven Pillars* that Arab independence following the war would render British petrol royalties in Mesopotamia “dubious” (Lawrence 1991, 100).

rearrange borders according to national or imperial categories of friend and enemy. Lacking a recognized national territory, Arab delegates—neither legitimate allies nor symmetrical enemies in this schema—were refused a voice in the council chamber.<sup>7</sup> Like the violent myths of benevolence varnishing European empires across the globe, the Mandatory system would open a path for Arab peoples toward “responsible” government and economic “development.” As World War I drew to a close, the forms of violence enacted for the capture of territory—war, in other words—were transformed rather than terminated.

In response to European diplomatic perfidy and the Middle East’s uncertain postwar present, *Seven Pillars* returns to a politics of another sort, to the Revolt’s intertribal and transnational life. Comprised of Arab and Bedouin tribesman from across the crumbling Ottoman Empire and North Africa, as well as regular British and French soldiers, the Revolt’s social arrangement exceeded imperial, military, and national forms of belonging. Its “ideal of national union,” according to Lawrence, was “combined resistance to an intruder,” resistance to all colonial claims within Arab lands and a Liberalist politics that would reshape rather than abolish imperial influence in the region. An “organized state, an extended empire, were not so much beyond [the Revolt’s] sight as hateful in it” (Lawrence 1991, 100). Despite the efforts of Entente military commanders and their promises of national self-determination or, more immediately,

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<sup>7</sup> On the figure of the Arab as the enemy of Western politics, indeed as the enemy that provides the conditions of possibility for not only Western politics but for the very idea of the West, see Anidjar.

gold coin, Lawrence depicts the Revolt as a small group allied by shared resistance rather than a single ideology or politics.

At the same time, Lawrence portrays the Revolt as an ever-shifting local and international coalition that briefly opened up other possibilities for collective life. Writing of the Western Front, Sarah Cole has argued that World War I “produced highly visible reconfigurations of male community and . . . made the war seem to many contemporaries like a transformative event in the logic of masculine intimacy” (Cole 2003, 7). The charnel house of the trenches and the socially vexed, makeshift relationships it generated between officers and soldiers disfigured Victorian and Edwardian ideals of friendship. The war displayed a particularly modern truth: that intimate friendships and institutional comradeship do not mix well, that the wartime state produces tenuous and unsustainable sites for male relationship (Cole 2003, 6). Though far removed from Cole’s Western Front examples in many ways, the Revolt’s participants, as Lawrence’s text depicts them, often live in and exploit similarly beleaguered sites of male community. They negotiate the precarious, ever-changing links between friendship, comradeship, and desire.

Early in *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence offers a vague but nonetheless startling account of the Revolt’s small group:

We were drained of morality, of volition, of responsibility, . . . we lived always in the stretch or sag of nerves, either on the crest or in the trough of waves of feeling. This impotency was bitter to us, and made us live only for the seen horizon, reckless what spite we inflicted or endured, since physical satisfaction showed itself meanly transient. Gusts of cruelty, perversions, lusts ran lightly over the surface without troubling us. . . . We had learned that there are pangs too sharp, griefs [sic] too deep, ecstasies too high for our finite selves to register. . . . [O]ur youths began indifferently to slake one another’s few needs in their own clean bodies—a cold convenience that, by comparison, seemed sexless and even pure.

Later, some began to justify this sterile process, and swore that friends quivering together in the yielding sand with intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace, found there hidden in the darkness a sensual co-efficient of the mental passion which was welding our souls and spirits in one flaming effort (Lawrence 1991, 29-30).<sup>8</sup>

At once entering into and transforming a popular theme within Orientalizing discourses, Lawrence characterizes the Revolt in abstract but suggestive terms as a site beyond conventional morality and Western notions of subjectivity.<sup>9</sup> In effect, the Revolt becomes for Lawrence a “techno-primitivist” ensemble, to use David Trotter’s terms, a social confluence that allows him, as an Orientalizing thinker, to imagine “the archaic in the contemporary, the raw in the cooked” (Trotter 2013, 26).<sup>10</sup> With typical presumptuousness and an imprecise acknowledgment of complicity, Lawrence’s text wanders between ambiguous pronouns, “we,” “us,” “their,” “some,” the narrative voice never quite removed from the “cold convenience” or the “intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace.” Though Lawrence neither admits to taking part in, nor straightforwardly

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence’s abstract and obscure language here might be attributed to his fear of treasonous and violent activity during the Revolt, and/or to the denigration of queer sexualities in England before and during World War I. The high profile Roger Casement treason case—alongside the alleged discovery of his so-called “Black Diaries”—and the Noel Pemberton Billing libel trial (which I will discuss at length in chapter five of this dissertation) contributed to a vehemently homophobic environment in London before, during, and after the war. For more, see Ó Síocháin; Hoare; and Medd.

<sup>9</sup> In this passage, Lawrence brings to mind two roughly contemporary arguments: 1) that, as Fussell and Foucault (1998) have argued, the sites of early twentieth-century war leave open spaces for a certain queer intimacy that includes, but is not limited to, the sexual, which Western societal norms typically disallow and 2) as Said argues in *Orientalism*, the “Orient” often was imagined as a zone of licentious sexual fantasy by Europeans, a space where, “one could look for sexual experience that was unattainable in Europe” (Said 1979, 188).

<sup>10</sup> As Trotter writes, primitivism was often used by modernist writers to imagine a way back to subjective wholeness, a vitalist self at one with its sexuality and being. Additionally, “Primitivist ideas also mediated the construction of queer sexual identities in the years after the First World War” (Trotter 2013, 88). For more on the persistent relationship between Orientalism and queer sexual imaginaries, see Puar.

endorses, the queer sexual practices that his text half-divulges—indeed, he often uses them to mark the distinction between the “manly loves” of the Arab rebels and the more prudish camaraderie of “Westerners of this complex age, monks in our bodies’ cells” (Lawrence 1991, 237 and 509)—he doesn’t condemn them either. Rather, his text seeks to document those social relations that produce affects too “sharp,” “deep,” and “high” for the individual to register. Regardless of how Lawrence feels about these “lusts” and “perversions”—sometimes he’s taken by them, sometimes disconcerted, often both at once—they “justify” themselves to the Revolt’s group as the “sensual co-efficient” of its “mental passion” (Lawrence 1991, 30). Struggle against imperial and state power, in this instance, obliges struggle against the strictures of the body as well as the mind.

As a consequence, life often concentrates around the present, at most around the “seen horizon.” Future projects, whether personal, military, or political, even the fear of future ramifications for present action, are obscured by the Revolt’s activity. “We lived for the day and died for it,” Lawrence writes (Lawrence 1991, 31), for “Posterity was a chilly thing to work for, no matter how much a man happened to love his own, or other people’s already-produced children” (Lawrence 1991, 191). The temporal vision of what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism”—the Western political investment in fostering “generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence” via the discourses and practices of sexual reproduction—is cast into doubt by Lawrence’s portrayal of this immanent being (Edelman 2005, 60).<sup>11</sup> Relationship finds its warmth in

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<sup>11</sup> Lawrence’s language here bears a certain resemblance to Edelman’s claim at the beginning of *No Future*: “Queerness names the side of ‘not fighting for the children,’ the side of outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism” (Edelman 2005, 3).

the local present, paradoxically as something like *jouissance*, not grafted onto a single imagined future. Because the twin promises of Western heteronormative friendship and “repro-futurity” find little lasting purchase here, a form of social production, the generation of a queerly intimate community, arises from within the “sterile” present.

Late in *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence further details the social energies that, at least in its early stages, had churned within the Revolt: “we felt we had assumed another’s pain or experience, his personality. It was triumph, and a mood of enlargement; we had avoided our sultry selves, conquered our geometrical completeness, snatched a momentary ‘change of mind.’” And in addition, we “seemed like the cells of a bee-comb, of which one might change, or swell itself, only at the cost of all” (Lawrence 1991, 550-551). Becoming a participant in the Revolt elicits a more expansive feeling and thinking in relation. By Lawrence’s estimation, the Revolt breaks down the barriers of the self and rebuilds individuals collectively in a cellular structure quite distinct from the West’s allegedly monkish, atomized “cells.” Tellingly, *Seven Pillars’* subtitle, *A Triumph*, is repeated here in reference to this process. A. Clare Brandabur and Nasser al-Hassan Athamneh have argued that the text’s subtitle “can only be read as ironic,” a response to the Revolt’s political failure, Lawrence’s anguished duplicity toward its cause, and his unearned legend as liberator (Brandabur and al-Hassan 200, 329). But I would venture to supplement this reading. “Triumph,” in this passage and perhaps in the subtitle, refers not only to the forsaken national political gains of the Revolt and Lawrence’s sardonic acknowledgement of his own participation in its betrayal, but also to the possibilities unlocked, however briefly, by the Revolt’s “mood of enlargement.” It refers to the

opening up of the subject beyond perceived “geometrical completeness,” to experiencing the always-mutating individual or group as reciprocally influential.

Despite the Revolt’s loosening of familiar Western forms of relation, its sociality isn’t entirely antinomian by Lawrence’s account. Rather, the Revolt creates its laws situationally, with a shared desire for “freedom” serving as these laws’ shifting basis. Freedom, here, is not simply something to be achieved in or for the future, for “cold posterity”; it is to be practiced in the present, communally. Its common, anti-imperial thrust notwithstanding, Lawrence believes the desire for freedom is thought and felt differently by each member of the group, a dissensus that inspires congregation:

To our strained eyes, the ideal, held in common, seemed to transcend the personal, which before had been our normal measure of the world. Did this instinct point to our happily accepting final absorption in some pattern wherein discordant selves might find reasonable, inevitable purpose? Yet this very transcending of individual frailty made the ideal transient. Its principle became Activity, the primal quality, external to our atomic structure, which we could simulate only by unrest of mind and soul and body, beyond holding point. So always the ideality of the ideal vanished, leaving its worshippers exhausted: holding for false what they had once pursued (Lawrence 1991, 467).<sup>12</sup>

Lawrence describes a social form in process, a “structure of feeling,” where the ideal of freedom is not yet fully captured or directed by a unitary social or political project, or what Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Williams would call a “fixed form.”<sup>13</sup> Though it

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<sup>12</sup> In the first paragraph of his introduction, Lawrence similarly describes the Revolt’s almost all-consuming ideal of freedom: “We were a self-centered army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man’s creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare” (Lawrence 1991, 29).

<sup>13</sup> In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes the social form of rebellion—what he calls the “fused group”—as “a shifting and ceaselessly developing totalization.” Its political form “is not that of a being or of a state, but that of a developing action; and it can be conceived only as the ubiquity of

may be lived differently by each member, the group constructs the ideal(s) of freedom collectively. This dynamic, social production renders the ideal itself transient, constantly forcing the Revolt's participants to practice and rethink it in the moment. The central contradiction of the Revolt's social form, as Lawrence's text understands it, is that freedom can only be thought or practiced from within the insecure constraints of an always-changing sociality that serves as freedom's condition of possibility.

However, as the Revolt moves toward its seeming terminus in Damascus and further intertwines with British and French military objectives, Lawrence becomes disillusioned by political realities. He comes to see that the "hot though transient satisfaction" of the Revolt's social form is "bred" increasingly by the "false investiture" of European military commanders. The Revolt's ideal of a community in and toward the practice of freedom has been mobilized by imperial power to perform its dirty work on the Middle Eastern Front. In the process, its political thrust has been redirected if not quelled. A knowing participant in this grand deception and "theft of souls," Lawrence begins to repent his entanglement in the movement but continues his increasingly untenable work nonetheless (Lawrence 1991, 550). At the same time, the contrasting experiences of the Revolt's "mood of enlargement" and its deflation by imperial intrigue "destroys" Lawrence's vision of British national life. Now "quitted of [his] English self," he looks at the West "with new eyes" (Lawrence 1991, 31). The Revolt's social multiplicity, shifting values, and Lawrence's feelings of shame elicited by British deceit

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freedom positing itself as such" (Sartre 1976, 401). For a reading of Williams' account of "fixed forms" as they relate "structures of feeling," see this dissertation's introduction.

(especially his own) provide a critical vantage from which he glimpses the violence of imperial and state power, of the rule of a singular law or assumed social code. Lawrence will spend the rest of his life failing to work through the agonizing boon of this disclosure (with *Seven Pillars* standing out as one attempt to do so), even while he reinserts himself into the transforming networks of British imperial power in the interwar Middle East.

The Revolt's complex social form and its betrayal by European powers haunt *Seven Pillars*, pervading everything from its military theory to its historical, autobiographical, and literary particularities. Lawrence's text is fascinated by the short-lived, pre-state time of rebellion, a time whose future is always in doubt, a time, perhaps, without a future that wouldn't betray its heightened presents. This is no vision of utopia, but of a sociality, "out of harmony with the normal," which violently resists extrinsic political determinations and does so without firm promises of posterity.<sup>14</sup> Fearing a constituting politics or a developmental narrative that would mark the Revolt's end and its final absorption into an imperial or state status quo, Lawrence searches for some other way to advocate for the transforming Arab Movement after his return to Europe. He does so with a unique modernist practice that brings with it new dangers and new violence.

#### **2.4 "a perverse work": The "technique-less art" of *Seven Pillars***

When Lawrence sat down in 1919 to distill *Seven Pillars* from his wartime journal and a flood of memories, the political outcome of the Revolt remained

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<sup>14</sup> Winston Churchill uses this phrase ("out of harmony with the normal") to describe Lawrence after his death. He also writes that Lawrence was a man for whom "Home, money, comfort, fame, power itself—meant little or nothing" (Churchill 1937, 173).

unresolved. When he sat down to revise and republish the text in 1926 and again in 1927 (published, in condensed form, as *Revolt in the Desert*), he was haunted by a series of questions that had only become more insistent since the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Had the Revolt simply acted as a military pawn for the Entente powers, reached its terminus in Damascus, and become little more than a footnote to European histories of the war? Had the time of the Revolt's social form passed? What was its political future? And how, from within what Sherry describes as the disaffected climate of postwar England, yet precariously buoyed by (memories of) the Revolt's sociality, might one render this war experience in language?

Lawrence's attempt to grapple with these questions inspires a new style of writing. Encouraged by the Revolt's heterogeneous sociality, its queer sense of time, as well as its eventual betrayal, *Seven Pillars* practices a kind of multimedia bricolage that brings together various disciplinary and generic forms. The text's forays into history, fiction, poetry, ethnography, and military science, as well as its photographs, cartoons, landscapes, and portraits (commissioned to artists like Augustus John, Paul Nash, and William Roberts), collect points of view from which the Revolt's situations might be approached. Together en masse but in varying registers, this assemblage of perspectives frequently breaks up narrative time and any illusion that there is a single, conclusive story of the Revolt (or even of Lawrence's own work there) to be told.

*Seven Pillars'* fragmentation, then, is more than an aesthetic preoccupation or an expression of individual and collective disillusionment following the war. The convulsive multiplicity of Lawrence's text calls attention to the intimate relationships between

Western aesthetic conventions (like genre, form, and medium) and state or imperial power, to social and political institutions whose discourses promote and distribute unduly circumscribed understandings of history, time, truth, law, or value.<sup>15</sup> With and through its frequent disruptions, *Seven Pillars*' erotohistoriographic method scrutinizes imperial narratives of conclusive peace, progress, and the often spurious promise of national self-determination. It urges readers recovering from the strictures of the British total war state and its Liberalist rationales to stop and question those linear and ostensibly nonfictional narratives that inform the post-World War I world. It also suggests forms of melancholic and pleasurable intimacy that may be shared between the past and present, the living and the dead, not so much as models to follow, but as a reminder that life was and might be lived, its stories told, differently. Here, as Freeman writes, "style neither transcends nor subsumes culture but pries it open a bit, rearranges or reconstitutes its elements, providing glimpses of an otherwise-being" (Freeman 2010, xix). Indeed, *Seven Pillars* encounters the Revolt's past life—especially its "sterile," queer hopes and vanquished potentials—as still somehow resonating in, and in various hidden and apparent ways, giving shape to, the present.

Wandering between a largely subdued past remembered from the present and a present still patterned by its encounters with the past, *Seven Pillars*' narratives are plural

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<sup>15</sup> As Freeman argues in *Time Binds*, "the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction," and so on (Freeman 2010, 4). According to this schema, "having a life entails the ability to narrate it not only in these state-sanctioned terms but also in a novelistic framework: as event-centered, goal-oriented, intentional, and culminating in epiphanies and major transformations" (Freeman 2010, 5).

and often at odds with one another. Over the course of two pages in the text's introduction, Lawrence promises to account for only a general, and then, only a particular, set of events. He states: "this book is just a designed procession of Arab freedom from Mecca to Damascus," an account of "an Arab war waged and led by Arabs for an Arab aim in Arabia" written by an individual whose "proper share was a minor one" (Lawrence 1991, 23). The Revolt's military and political activity would be *Seven Pillars*' primary subject. The life of the first-person plural "we" that often corrals the Revolt's participants in the text, and even more abstractly, the ideal of freedom that loosely unifies them, will be plotted as a "designed procession," its time and development directed by a clear, progressive, if aestheticized, teleology. And yes, after delaying the narrative with an epigraph, an author's preface, a chapter by chapter synopsis of the text, a brief note on the text's illustrations, another preface written by his brother A.W. Lawrence, an introductory chapter with a postscript (again by his brother), and five chapters presuming to outline the history of the Arab peoples (about sixty pages of text in total), *Seven Pillars* proceeds in rough, chronological order from the Revolt's early stages to the taking of Damascus and Lawrence's mooted return to Europe.

However, as if catching himself in the act of oversimplifying a mangled, complex socio-political situation (not to mention an expansive history whose intricacies clearly escape his Orientalizing vision), Lawrence revises things significantly on the subsequent page: "In these pages the history is not of the Arab movement, but of me in it" (Lawrence 1991, 24). Now, Lawrence will play protagonist in his text, with "history" as the writing of a subject calling to memory his past, a memoir cataloging a particular set of

impressions. “Arab freedom,” it appears, will take a back seat to yet another Orientalist adventure tale, where the alien Westerner experiences various freedoms for the first time in the desert’s open spaces. And indeed Lawrence as a character, an “I” in the past tense, an often-middling protagonist, receives much of the text’s attention.

Take as one example his account of a battle at Aba el Lissan, which suspiciously resembles Andrei Bolkonksy’s wounding and subsequent epiphany at the Battle of Austerlitz<sup>16</sup>:

Suddenly my camel tripped and went down emptily upon her face, as though pole-axed. I was torn completely from the saddle, sailed grandly through the air for a great distance, and landed with a crash which seemed to drive all the power and feeling out of me. I lay there, passively waiting for the Turks to kill me, continuing to hum over the verses of a half-forgotten poem, whose rhythm something, perhaps the prolonged stride of the camel, had brought back to my memory as we leaped down the hillside: ‘For Lord I was free of all Thy flowers, but I chose the world’s sad roses, / And that is why my feet are torn and mine eyes are blind with sweat.’ While another part of my mind thought what a squashed thing I should look when all that cataract of men and camels had poured over. / After a long time I finished my poem, and no Turks came, and no camel trod on me: a curtain seemed taken from my ears: there was a great noise in front. I sat up and saw the battle over (Lawrence 1991, 304).

Lawrence’s narrative turns deeply personal as he recalls a past self wandering in some liminal realm of consciousness. The battle unfolds around his helpless body, accentuating for the moment his “minor” role in the Revolt (the lines he quotes from the “minor” British poet Ernest Dowson also serving to stress this sentiment). The concern of his narrative shifts from the martial task at hand (the Revolt’s “designed procession”) to a consciousness split between the past, the present, and a potentially foreshortened future.

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<sup>16</sup> See Tolstoi. Bolkonsky’s wounding and epiphany take place in the final chapter of the novel’s first volume.

This split consciousness both recites Decadent poetry recalled by the rhythms of the camel's "prolonged stride" and fears for its survival. Eric Kennington's satirical, two-page illustration that accompanies this scene presents Lawrence as a decidedly unmasculine, indeed infantilized, figure who alights from the reality of a dying camel and his own injury with "the world's sad roses" in hand (fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. Eric Kennington, "A Forced Landing," line drawing from *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926)**

The drawing demonstrates how, in his strange but not exactly novel depiction of individual vulnerability on the battlefield, Lawrence's lifelong aesthetic "craving" meets the brute facts of biological existence on the other side of consciousness; a head wound occasions a flight of lyrical fancy as Lawrence "passively" waits for death. With memories sparked and death imminent, the text seems to implode into an excessively stylized memoir.

But rather than solely portraying either the ordered development of the Arab movement or an individual life in some way participating in it, *Seven Pillars* presents a movement and a life together thrown off course, both irreparably changed by the Revolt's social form and the war's aftermath. This failure to live up to its stated intentions illuminates the central problematic of Lawrence's text, the exposure of a subject to a social movement that disrupts it and the writing of a disrupted subject that continues to encounter the Revolt's disruptive force—dissipated now by imperial haggling and Lawrence's own vacillating loyalties—in the present. In similar fashion to the modernist subgenre that Jed Esty has called “antidevelopmental fiction,” a form that comes to particular prominence within modernist texts set in colonial zones (and which I will discuss further in chapter four), Lawrence's narrative of individual and collective experience wavers, stalls, and scatters (Esty 2003, 2). Its times are here synchronized and there out of joint.

The confusion of Lawrence's initial statements of intent, the dual, often dueling narrative objectives of a “designed procession of Arab freedom” and the history “of me in it,” frames the subsequently disoriented and disorienting text. *Seven Pillars*' lenses zoom in and out incessantly, shifting their focus from the Revolt's general movements and Lawrence's splintered impressions to the rock formations in Wadi Rum and ethnographic vignettes that Orientalize the tribes of Syria. Often, the narrative doesn't seem to go *anywhere*, much less to travel in a straight line. In a 1922 letter to his English editor Edward Garnett, Lawrence writes:

[I]t's a perverse work. I shy off all the 'popular' moments. For instance one night I went down to destroy a bridge, and found it occupied by a

working party. We had the nearest shaves: I leave them to be inferred. Creeping back I stepped (bare-foot) on a snake. The fact is mentioned, in one line: and the next four lines give a precise and elaborate description (done with the finicky perfection of an arm-chair sitter) of the reflection of star-light on rocky ground. That's what I mean by perversity: the shying off the obvious and personal, and the stressing detached points. . . . It makes the book unearthly in feel (Lawrence 1941, 161).

Here, Lawrence admits his inability to stick to the plan of historical discourse and memoir. Facts stand as points of departure for meditation and lyrical flight (the scene referenced above and Kennington's illustration again come to mind) rather than linked, verifiable moments in a chronological or developing narrative. *Seven Pillars'* "perversity," stressing "detached points" and eschewing "the obvious and the personal," defamiliarizes the temporal progression of those nonfictive discourses the text has claimed as its own. With its itinerant focus, the book expresses a social complexity that might feel "unearthly" to those seeking a conventional narrative of individual or collective life. It *feels* exalted and sublime, as "unearthly" is often defined, its idealized world at once ancient (Deer: "an archaic, Orientalized realm, a nomadic order of experience") and science fictional ("the place of a futuristic mobile guerilla war"). But the text also *feels* ghostly, haunted by the Revolt (as "unearthly" may also be defined), as if the latter's lingering appeals might reawaken a more recent past that briefly opened other ways of being.<sup>17</sup> The formal "perversity" of the text, its erotohistoriographic work, elicits a feeling of uncanny relation as if attempting to figure those "pangs too sharp, griefs [sic] too deep, ecstasies too high for our finite selves to register" (Lawrence 1991, 29). Aesthetic conventions bend to the multiplicity of the Revolt's social form and

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<sup>17</sup> See *OED Online*, s.v., "unearthly, adj."

feeling, to its queerly residual time. “[W]ar was, for us who were in it, an overwrought time,” Lawrence writes in a letter to George Bernard Shaw, “in which we lost our normal footing. I wrote this thing in the war atmosphere, and believe that it is stinking with it” (Lawrence 1941, 151). Depicting an “overwrought time” induces an overwrought narrative style, “stinking” with “war atmosphere.” It forces or facilitates an encounter with the Revolt’s deviant, present-directed past—as well as those imperial and state forces that would quell it—in the present of writing.

*Seven Pillars*’ poetic epigraph, “To S.A.,” and the commissioned illustrations scattered throughout the text perhaps best exhibit Lawrence’s diverse use of forms and his queering of narrative time. The text’s free verse epigraph doubles as dedication and narrative, a fugal microcosm of *Seven Pillars* itself, half-telling a half-private story, a confession and then statement of purpose that ends as an elegy and apology. The poem begins with Lawrence’s typical hyperbole, revealing for the first time his delusions of grandeur: “I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands / and wrote my will across the sky in stars / To earn your Freedom, the seven pillared worthy house.” The mixed metaphors and imprecise language of these lines initiate a carousel of revelation and secrecy, narration and near silence. Of whom and of what does Lawrence here speak? Lawrence scholarship has speculated on the identity of the poem’s addressee, “S.A.,” for nearly a century. It has tended to presume that the latter is a single person, probably a lost love named Salim Ali (nicknamed Dahoum) who was killed during the Revolt and to whom the book, and Lawrence’s participation in the rebellion, is dedicated. This scholarship often has turned a blind eye to the epigraph’s fervent equivocality, however,

to Lawrence's strange symbolism and his mobilizing of ambiguous pronouns, the "you," and later in the poem, the "we," that might just as well signify love for a community or a place.<sup>18</sup>

Refracting *Seven Pillars*' focus and complicating its time before the narrative properly commences, the epigraph claims to demolish, even disavow, the monument that the text might have erected: "I set our work, the inviolate house, / as a memory of you. / But for fit monument I shattered it, unfinished." Intimating a correlation between the potential national achievement of the Revolt and the text that would memorialize it ("the seven pillared worthy house"), Lawrence presents both as "shattered," "marred," and in the "shadow" of their disintegrated designs. Reinhart Koselleck has argued that war

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<sup>18</sup> In its entirety, Lawrence's epigraph reads:

"To S. A."

I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands  
and wrote my will across the sky in stars  
To earn your Freedom, the seven pillared worthy house,  
that your eyes might be shining for me  
When we came.

Death seemed my servant on the road, till we were near  
and saw you waiting:  
When you smiled, and in sorrowful envy he outran me  
and took you apart:  
Into his quietness.

Love, the way-weary, groped to your body, our brief wage  
ours for the moment  
Before earth's soft hand explored your shape, and the blind  
worms grew fat upon  
Your substance.

Men prayed me that I set our work, the inviolate house,  
as a memory of you.  
But for fit monument I shattered it, unfinished: and now  
The little things creep out to patch themselves hovels  
In the marred shadow  
Of your gift.

memorials serve a political function. They “promulgate a demand for identification. The dead embody an exemplary status; they died for a reason, and survivors are supposed to find themselves in accord with this reason so as not to allow the dead to have died in vain” (Koselleck 2002, 295). With the Revolt’s politics betrayed, the discursive edifice that would commemorate it, that would rationalize its deaths and draw survivors into accord with this reason, is replaced by a ruined but open form document that is still being revised by an ongoing political struggle. Rather than erecting a monument “so as not to allow the dead to have died in vain,” Lawrence’s text fragments itself, punctuates and protracts its narrative time, in order to tarry with the dead and the vanquished, to be intimate with them again, and to announce the Revolt’s continuing life as it impinges upon the present.

*Seven Pillars’* cartoons, photographs, landscapes, and portraits further emphasize the disruptive afterlife of the Revolt. Hoping to avoid a narrative that merely gathers “a scatter of featureless puppets,” Lawrence commissions the work of several artists (among them John, Nash, and Roberts) to help him represent “a group of living people” (Lawrence 1991, 23). The Revolt’s past life is embodied in a sense by this art, encountered from and inflected by variously present points of view. The production of the text itself becomes explicitly a social project. But as Kennington’s cartoon illustrations make clear, the book’s visual art not only fills out Lawrence’s text but also interrupts it and, in the process, offers a critical lens onto the problem of artistic

representation.<sup>19</sup> One cartoon in particular parodies (while paralleling) Lawrence's writing, satirizing its author for undertaking the reductive task of characterization (fig. 2).

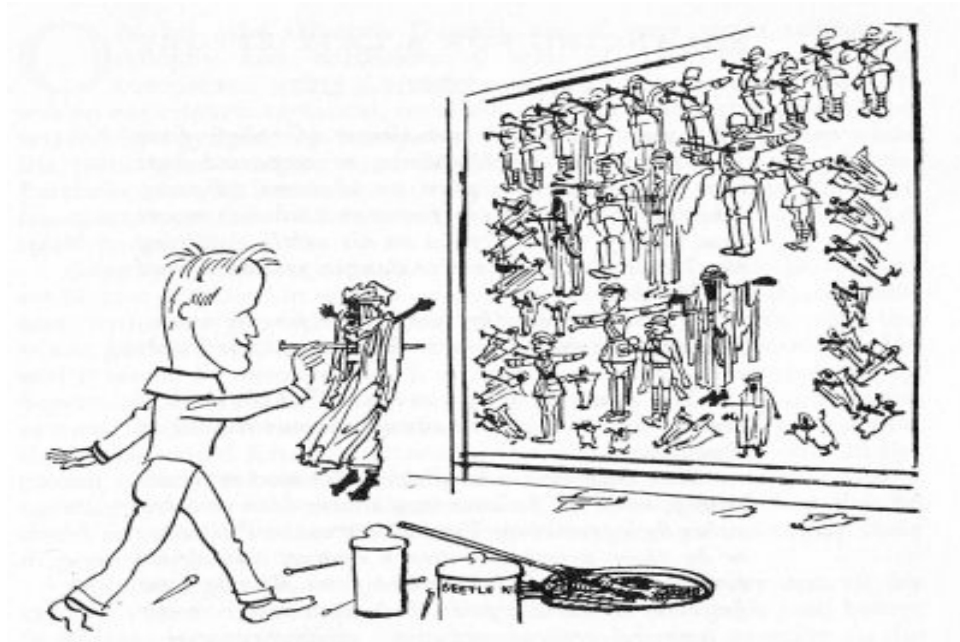


Fig. 2. Eric Kennington, "A Literary Method," line drawing from *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926)

Unsubtly titled "A Literary Method," Kennington's drawing caricatures Lawrence doing precisely what he'd wanted to avoid while writing *Seven Pillars*. Here, Lawrence pins

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<sup>19</sup> Late in *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence provides more insight into his use of portraits: "[M]y impotence of vision showed me my shape best in painted pictures, and the oblique overhead remarks of others best taught me my created impression. The eagerness to overhear and oversee myself was my assault upon my own inviolate citadel" (Lawrence 1991, 563). Robert Graves echoes this sentiment with respect to Lawrence's relationships with painters and sculptors: "He used to offer himself as a model to see what they made of him. He knew a good deal about himself and wanted to know more. The various portrait treatments they made of him he found informative both about himself and about artists. Nobody painted the same man" (Graves 1937, 291).

puppet-sized Arab, European, and Turkish caricatures (including an image of himself as he had been popularized, wearing keffiyeh, bisht, and thobe) to a mounting board, all with arms spread as if crucified or displayed like butterflies. While clearly playing with the little comic potential latent within Lawrence's narrative, Kennington's caricature illuminates the necessary circumscription of Lawrence's literary method and hints at something much darker. It suggests that representing historical experience in the limiting frames of language (and other media) not only forces one to encounter past life in the present, but also in some sense to "kill," preserve, display, and diminish it, to produce something other than what was. Simultaneously, the drawing reminds readers of the unsettling realities that undergird the production of Lawrence's narrative, namely, his complicity in the deaths of others during the Revolt and their unquiet presence within his text.

Unwilling to rely solely on language tinged by British Liberalism's plainspoken but duplicitous rationalizations of war and empire, spurred by memories of the Revolt's dissident social practices and imperial deceit, Lawrence assembles a multimedia erotohistoriography. As Freeman notes, in encountering the lost object of affection in the present and in the process of recording this encounter, erotohistoriography treats itself as an aesthetic and temporal hybrid (Freeman 2010, 95). *Seven Pillars'* suturing of history, memoir, and fiction, of narrative and visual arts, does not seek to make the past sociality of the Revolt whole. Nor does it claim to accurately depict or to give new life to the Revolt's participants. Rather, the text encounters the Revolt in its past and present incompleteness and spottily, often ruefully, figures it. "Our life is not summed up in what

I have written (there are things not to be repeated in cold blood for very shame),” Lawrence admits early in his text, “but what I have written was in and of our life” (Lawrence 1991, 31). Propelled by its anguished imperfections and queer temporality, Lawrence’s “indeterminate fable” opens out into an uncertain postwar present and future. Its story continues to be read, retold, and retooled.

## **2.5 Coda: The Lawrence Machine in Deleuze, Guattari, and Wu Ming 4**

The many contradictions of Lawrence’s text and its failed attempts to resolve them through alternating historical, memoiric, and aesthetic methods carry the past forward in time. The history of imperial violence and exploitation that *Seven Pillars* begins to depict lives on in our moment even as it transforms. As I’ve outlined above, the examples of Lawrence’s life and his text continue to play their parts in this. Regardless of what his initial social and political intentions may have been (they appear to have been multiple and often at odds with one another), the more “digestible” aspects of Lawrence’s guerrilla theory have been accentuated by and put to work for the current U.S. counterinsurgency paradigm. Scrutinizing this active link between a modernist text and its contemporary military readership reframes both *Seven Pillars* (a history or memoir or novel becomes a handbook for “nation-building”) and the “endless war” it has helped to perpetuate (the present’s historical, indeed imperial, precedents are further revealed). Anderson, Deer, and Satia all have illustrated this adeptly. However, there is no single legacy to be traced through Lawrence’s text. Other readings and uses of it have lingered, even if their influence has not been as widely felt. To conclude, I will offer two of them,

both of which have guided my own reading here by tracing alternative lines within or around *Seven Pillars*. They do so not out of mere historical curiosity or to dredge the past for heroes and villains, but in order to restore some of the critical complexity and lost dissidence moving throughout Lawrence's text.

From a position antagonistic to state power and its institutions, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (no strangers themselves to recent military appropriation<sup>20</sup>) read *Seven Pillars* as a work that at once figures and enacts their intertwined concepts of the "war machine" and "minor literature." Taking its cue from an abstract vision of nomadic life influenced by Lawrence's writings, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* describes the war machine as a social assemblage exterior to state (or imperial) apparatuses, to governmental demands of a single sovereignty and law. Relations of becoming and mutation rather than stable notions of being or community link this multiplicity of lives. Indeed, the war machine works against rigid individual and collective boundaries. It seeks "to undo things," to "deterritorialize" itself (its members as subjects, the frontiers of its grouping) in space and time, though its methods are always at risk of being caught and mobilized by the state's binding, parasitic power (Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology* 1986, 84). Like Lawrence's guerrilla theory, Deleuze and Guattari's concept does not necessarily have war—as the total capitulation and annihilation of an enemy—or a clearly delineated political project as its objectives.

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<sup>20</sup> Writing specifically of the Israeli Defense Forces, Eyal Weizman has described a recent turn in Western military thought to the works of writers like Deleuze, Guy Debord, and Bernard Tschumi. Here, in an ironic appropriation and refashioning of Deleuze's "war machine" concept, state institutions effectively requisition theory that, either implicitly or explicitly, is directed against the edifices of state power (Weizman 2007, 187).

Rather, its intent is to spread and populate, to give ground for diverse forms of desire. Its destructive force is always only supplemental, always also creating something else, “if only new, non-organic social relations” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology* 1986, 121).

*Seven Pillars*’ account of the Arab Revolt’s small group, its queer forms of social production, takes precedence (if in different conceptual terms) in Deleuze and Guattari’s reading. At the same time, however, Lawrence’s text portrays the process whereby British state and imperial powers redirect the force of the war machine. “For almost half of *Seven Pillars*,” Deleuze writes elsewhere in his own idealized, indeed Orientalizing, language, “we are made to witness the long obliteration of the partisan period—the camels are replaced by automatic machine guns and Rolls-Royces, and the guerrilla chiefs by experts and politicians” (Deleuze 1997, 121). Regarding both Lawrence’s depiction of the Revolt’s small group and his autobiographical account of life within it, Deleuze and Guattari read *Seven Pillars* as a kind of “antidevelopmental fiction,” to again use Esty’s term. Its enmeshed protagonists, the Revolt’s war machine and Lawrence himself, devolve rather than develop under the increasing influence of Entente martial and political forces.

The narrative of this devolution and its curious treatment of language steps in to relay the betrayed political thrust of the Revolt. In this way, *Seven Pillars* produces a “minor literature,” an enunciative strand of the war machine (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 1986, 25). Practiced by writers with styles as diverse as Kafka and Joyce, minor literatures are modes of articulation that take up, disrupt, and find avenues of escape within a major language. Against claims of modernist autotelism, these minor literatures

are never removed from collective value. By deterritorializing language, they connect the individual to a political immediacy and produce “collective assemblage[s] of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 1986, 18). For Deleuze, *Seven Pillars* stands out as one example of this process. Endowing language “with new powers,” Lawrence’s text generates “an English that does not flow . . . but is granular, uneven, constantly changing regime, full of abstractions, stationary processes, and frozen visions” (Deleuze 1997, 119). In Deleuze and Guattari’s estimation—which tends to simplify Lawrence’s shifting, often contradictory positions with respect to the Revolt and the British Empire—*Seven Pillars* opens up lines of flight from state and imperial power with its “minor” English even while the political motor of the Revolt’s war machine is requisitioned and largely redirected.

Arriving almost thirty years after Deleuze and Guattari’s “nomadology” and during the ongoing “War on Terror,” Wu Ming 4’s recent historical novel, *Stella del mattino*, takes a different tack, reframing Lawrence’s text by returning to the queer times of its composition.<sup>21</sup> Resembling in many ways the modernist formal ensemble of *Seven Pillars* itself, the novel exemplifies what the Wu Ming collective has called an “unidentified narrative object,” a form of writing that moves among fictional and nonfictional genres and between historical periods. Characterized by a “maximalist” approach to geographical scope as well as local detail, these texts stage past lives and

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<sup>21</sup> Wu Ming is the pseudonym for an originally five (now four) member Bolognese writer’s collective. Moving between fictional and nonfictional genres and various media, the group is perhaps most famous for its collaboratively authored novels *54*, *Manitauna*, and *Altai*. *Stella del mattino* is Wu Ming 4’s (the pseudonym for Federico Guglielmi) first solo novel.

events as uncanny allegories of the present. As Claudia Boscolo has argued, “Desire lies at the basis of this type of narrative and works as a primary impulse towards the construction of a narrative corpus whose aim is to investigate history in search of the roots of today’s social and political impasse” (Boscolo 2010, 19). Past lives and events serve as multifaceted, contradictory symbols that resonate across time. Moreover, these unidentified narrative objects use “alternative history and alternative realities to force our gaze into imagining the future” (Wu Ming 1 2008). The novels of the Wu Ming collective look backwards in time toward failed potentials, fragmented visions, and political possibilities in order to remind readers that alternatives to yesterday’s “social and political impasses” existed and might still be called on in the present. *Seven Pillars’* modernist erotohistoriography thus finds a contemporary relay.

*Stella del mattino* conjures Lawrence’s life before, during, and after World War I.<sup>22</sup> The novel addresses Lawrence’s postwar trauma, melancholy, and complex sexual life, as well as his tormented attempts to transmit the experience of the Arab Revolt into writing. The main narrative line depicts Lawrence after his 1919 return to Oxford and its postwar milieu of soldiers and soon-to-be-well-known writers. With differing degrees of participation and commitment, Robert Graves, J.R.R. Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis comprise Lawrence’s loose postwar set, another form (diluted to be sure) of the small group sociality Lawrence cherished during the Revolt. Indeed, the novel takes great pains to re-imagine each of its fictionalized historical figures socially as members of a dynamic and

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<sup>22</sup> Wu Ming 4’s novel, written in Italian, has not yet been translated into English. I’ve relied on Leila Pailhès French translation. The translations from French to English above and below are my own.

occasionally intimate group of drifters overwhelmed by their respective experiences of the war. Rather than a narrative of individual heroism or villainy, then, Wu Ming 4 presents a kind of collective—though not unproductive—helplessness where the wounds of past violence and unspeakable loss are still fresh. The novel insinuates that without the presence of such a group, without the prodding of David George Hogarth or the editing of Graves (especially of Lawrence’s eventual epigraph, “To S. A.”), without the sometimes pleasurable, often painful memories of Dahoum (Salim Ali) and the Revolt’s community, without even the astounding kiss of a young, not-yet-converted C.S. Lewis, Lawrence’s book might never have been written. Or at least it wouldn’t have been written in quite the same way. Wu Ming 4, a member of an (at one time) anonymous writing collective, portrays the collaborative production of *Seven Pillars*, whose named author was anything but anonymous even before the text’s publication.

*Stella del mattino* at once accentuates popular narratives of Lawrence’s wartime exploits and calls them into question by representing the worlds in which these narratives, and even versions of Lawrence himself, were composed. In different places and times, to different characters, Lawrence is alternately “T.E.,” “Ned,” “colonel,” “El Urens,” or “Lord Dynamite,” every name or title designating a set of relations between an identity under reconstruction and those others who help to reconstruct it. Unable to escape these external influences, Wu Ming 4’s Lawrence writes *Seven Pillars* to complicate his own myth as well as British narratives of triumph and peace. He writes, in Hogarth’s words, to “disrupt the order in the history of the victors, to continue guerrilla war by other means”

(Wu Ming 4 2012, 69).<sup>23</sup> Markedly unfree from the demands of the past and the scrutiny of those whose lives were lost there, he writes with the “absurd pretention to free the dead” (Wu Ming 4 2010, 223).<sup>24</sup> The war has ended and the war continues. Lawrence fails to successfully mourn back in England, coping in a limited way with his writing and occasional intimacy with similarly wounded survivors and many ghosts.

More than a narrative of post-trauma or postwar melancholy, *Stella del mattino* demonstrates that the contradictions of Lawrence’s life and modernist work are still urgent; they call out for critical re-examination. Cribbing Joseph Campbell, Wu Ming 4 claims in a 2008 lecture that his novel deconstructs “the hero’s mask, tracing his thousand faces.” In the process of encountering this complexity, the text seeks to initiate “a step forward in a walk of knowledge and liberation from the rhetoric of the clash of civilizations that rules the present” (“From Camelot”).<sup>25</sup> Wu Ming 4 renders Lawrence symbolic and multiple, at once investigating and disrupting his central position amid the new but old “rhetoric of the clash of civilizations.” As I have argued, *Seven Pillars’* erotohistoriographic method, its modernist collage, had already begun this task. As interpreter and collaborator in a greater Lawrence machine, Wu Ming 4 reactivates the indeterminacy of *Seven Pillars’* “fable,” for which a conclusive moral has yet to be written. By tracing many of the strands of contemporary Middle Eastern strife back to the

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<sup>23</sup> “Troubler l’ordre dans l’histoire des vainqueurs, continuer la guerilla avec d’autres moyens.” See also the following conversation between Robert Graves and Lawrence. Graves: “You are going to write the history of the Revolt. That too is combat.” / Lawrence nodded. / “That is the sole reason I agreed to do it.” (“Tu es en train d’écrire l’histoire de la révolte. Ça aussi, c’est combattre. / L’autre [Lawrence] acquiesça. / C’est l’unique raison pour laquelle j’ai accepté de le faire”) (Wu Ming 4 2012, 135).

<sup>24</sup> “Je n’ai que la prétention absurde de libérer les morts.”

<sup>25</sup> A brief synopsis of the lecture (from which I quote) can be found at [reloadingimages.org](http://reloadingimages.org).

Revolt's betrayal and the establishing of the Mandatory system, his historical fictional method and allegory of the present reminds readers of the continuing political stakes of Lawrence's text, that Lawrence's modernism is still being put to violent use, but that it might be put to use otherwise.

### 3. The Blitz, the Séance Circle, and H.D.'s "Spiritual Realism"

My feeling is that you are at work on these very notes, as I write them.

H.D., *Majic Ring*

It is the unalterable purpose of the poem to convert the War to its own uses.

Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*

#### 3.1 "a sort of receiving station": Visionary Machines

In 1920 (while Lawrence wrote *Seven Pillars*), American poet H.D. and her companion Bryher, only recently acquainted, traveled together to Greece with the hope of rescuing each other from "the drift and obliteration" of postwar London (H.D. 1968, 124). For H.D., they agreed, the trip would offer an opportunity to convalesce after a series of personal shocks that had amplified for her the more general distresses of the British home front: a still-born child in 1915, the deaths of her brother Gilbert (killed in action in 1918) and her father Charles, a psychic breakdown, the separation from her war-traumatized and unfaithful husband Richard Aldington, a near-fatal bout of war influenza, and, in the middle of this illness, the birth of her daughter Perdita. For Bryher, still mired in wartime torpor and battling a breakdown of her own, the trip offered an alternative to suicide.

Their travels would prove more than recuperative. For as H.D. and Bryher wandered the Mediterranean between unexploded naval mines and the ruins of Doric order, they shared two otherworldly visions in the Hôtel d'Angleterre on the Greek island of Corfu that would vindicate their growing intimacy and direct the rest of H.D.'s career as a writer. As H.D. would later make plain, these shared "fantasies" (one a series of

images projected upon a wall, the other a case of possession and glossolalia) would never have occurred if she had traveled without company: “we were ‘seeing’ it together, for without her, admittedly, I could not have gone on” (H.D. 1984, 49). According to the poet’s account, the two women were given access, if only in brief, privileged moments, to another plane of existence. Together, they beheld something like theosophy’s Akashic records, as H.D. recalls in her *roman-à-clef* *Magic Ring*, “random projections from that great store-house where we are told, all the past is rolled and neatly filed and edited, like endless store-rooms of film, waiting for the suitable moment to be projected” (H.D. 2013, 137). By the logic of H.D.’s metaphor, the women became both the projector of and the audience for a film of an occult past, a global cultural history that, however furtively, survived to influence life in their postwar present.<sup>1</sup>

Though H.D. would spend much of the rest of her life speculating on the first vision, which she later would name “the writing on the wall” episode, the second was significantly longer and in many ways more astonishing. Written from Blitz-besieged London, *Magic Ring* recounts this experience in detail, describing it as a unique case of spirit “inspiration,” an incomplete possession of both body and mind. Moving between

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Foltz describes H.D.’s relationship to film via a study of her film criticism in *Close Up* (a journal she helped to found with Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson, the first English language magazine dedicated to the study of film) from 1927-1933: “If film sustains sociality through the creation of or reference to common memory, this utopian aim can only be ambivalently aided by H.D.’s sense that ‘classicism’ is the name for this shared form of remembrance. The vocabulary of classicism may only be a name for what is most ‘universal’ in cultural memory, but it highlights the naiveté of a desire to consolidate the world in the image of the West. What is powerful about her writing on film, however, is the eloquent imbalance between a language that prioritizes universality—and so turns everything and everyone into symbols—and a language that nevertheless emphasizes the allure of the film’s broken details” (Foltz 2011, 11). A similar movement between the desire for universality—the founding of a new religion through a kind of syncretic classicism—and formal fragmentation takes place, as I will show, in H.D.’s World War II writings.

first-person singular, plural, and third-person perspectives—momentarily disrupting the more or less first-person point-of-view that otherwise pervades her text—H.D. recalls a past self (now thinly fictionalized as “Delia Alton”) who, in the hotel room in Corfu, suddenly was not entirely herself: “This was me speaking, this was Delia but it was Delia speaking as another; another had taken her, entered her and controlled her.” Unlike popular descriptions of spirit controls, trances, and out of body experiences, Delia claims that her “head was not severed from [her] body” during this performance; she maintained her cognitive faculties in a type of “inspiration” that she had “never heard spoken of nor read about” (H.D. 2013, 113).<sup>2</sup> Possessed, but somehow still positioned with a critical view toward her possession, Delia dances, sings in languages not her own, and interprets her performance with the aid of Bryher (fictionalized in *Majic Ring* as “Gareth”), who watches with great interest and commentates occasionally from the hotel room’s single bed.

Moving between past and present verb tenses (which lace the 1920 vision to the World War II present from which she wrote), H.D.’s text repeatedly turns to the language of media technology to describe the collaborative effort of vision and interpretation taking place here. However, the vehicle of the metaphor, the form of technology that serves as a figure for the collective production of the vision itself, often shifts, remains unstable and multiple:

We have a sort of receiving station, I, the positive receiving agent that gave off the sounds as a gramophone record repeats songs and words from

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<sup>2</sup> In *Majic Ring*, H.D. will make numerous attempts to describe the experiential specifics of her “inspiration.” Later, she writes: “Though I was ‘possessed,’ I in turn possessed the mood, was aware of my surroundings” (H.D. 2013, 114).

operas and plays. But I am not the whole machine. Gareth's intense psychic quality is concealed, she is like the inner springs and wheels, or the careful wrapping around live-wire. / I have been the live-wire, I received the live-messages (H.D. 2013, 135).

The switch of vehicles from the film projector described above to a gramophone and radio splices media technologies, giving one the impression of an expansive audio-visual experience,<sup>3</sup> a reorientation of perception that extends beyond sight and sound and throughout the body. At the same time, the mixing of metaphors positions the performance somewhere between the active projection and passive reception of these “live-messages,” between transmission, observation, and interpretation, and finally, between sound and sense, knowledge and feeling. Though Delia and Gareth do not immediately understand the lyrics to Delia's songs or the choreography of her dances, they do their best to speculate together and “translate” the feeling or tone of the experience into their own terms. In other words, they do not simply suffer the vision but further it with their shared “mediation” of its possible significance. That they become—in *tandem*—like both connective (telegraphy, telephony, radio) and representational (film, gramophone, radio) technologies seems to be a large part of the message. For Delia, as for H.D., there would have been no vision without companionship.

Like the rough make-up of this ensemble and the shifting metaphors H.D. uses to describe it, the possession that *Majic Ring* depicts is not singular. It is not conducted by one spirit alone but rather by a series of partial beings, impressions of past lives from

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<sup>3</sup> In terms more appropriate for 1939 than 1920, H.D.'s figurative language gestures toward the fledgling technology of broadcast television. As David Trotter has shown, the BBC's fledgling television service was suspended on 1 September 1939 “because of fear that the transmissions might guide enemy bombers to the center of London” (Trotter 2013, 283-284).

vanquished civilizations that have been largely omitted from Western histories of progress. Initially, Delia channels the spirit of an American “Indian girl” from eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. No longer simply herself but not entirely someone else either, Delia sings and dances with a melody, rhythm, language, and movement that remains inscrutable to her and Gareth but whose deeper meaning becomes almost legible to them nonetheless. As the vision and performance unfold, the historical moment, geography, and gender of Delia’s spiritual guide changes. Indeed, she is spirited away on a journey that moves westward across the United States (from the eastern seaboard to “Spanish” California) and then to an unnamed Pacific Island before European contact, to pre-Meiji Japan, and eventually, “pre-Vedic India” (H.D. 2013, 133). These “past lives,” Delia believes, are “strung together on one thread, that thread myself” (H.D. 2013, 114), even as they stretch across the globe and backward into the deep past. Corfu, Pennsylvania, and the Himalayas, 1920 and the pre-Vedic era in India, all intertwine.

The globe-trotting, time-traveling movement of this possession/performance and its nearly simultaneous interpretation invokes a variety of primitivist and Orientalizing stereotypes. In language typical of many European and American modernist writers, Delia and Gareth ascribe “a-morality” and “naturalness” to the American Indians Delia “becomes,” while using terms like “purity” and “wisdom” to describe the “pre-Vedic Indian.” Each life that Delia stages and/or that uses her body as a stage remains limited, incomplete, and ultimately unknowable in its difference, exacerbated by temporal and geographical distance and the limits of the vision itself. And although each life serves as a partial, caricatured, representative of its alleged local culture, each life is also

positioned within a global, intercultural, and alternative or occult tradition. Rather than simply using stereotypes to imagine some ontological or developmental distance that would hierarchize lives across time and space, Delia's performance brings lives together as equally necessary parts of a transnational affective and imagined community.

In their shared construction of a global "chart of comparative ecstasy" (H.D. 2013, 123), Delia, Gareth, and their spirit guests gather figures from various "dead civilizations" that, through an untranslatable song, proclaim a similar teaching. Although the message is ciphered through and intended for each community visited along the journey, it melds two brief commandments from the Old and New Testaments: "love your enemies and thou shalt not kill" (H.D. 2013, 133). Conceptually simple if impracticable in a world constantly at war, this radical consolidation of the Christian bible—an ethical and political revision that will have significant effects on H.D.'s work to come—attempts to think beyond a single religion or historically situated culture and toward an occluded, millennia-old tradition of imagination, relation in difference, and peace. Exactly how this communication might be represented in language and transmitted to a wider audience does not become clear to H.D. until World War II, when the message itself seems to be most threatened and, indeed, most radical.

This chapter reads H.D.'s World War II writing and its return to past events as an insistent engagement with total mobilization and its Western cultural precedents.

Traumatized by the events of World War I but buoyed by the visionary experiences that followed it, H.D. entered the second conflict like many modernist writers, as if into a

present that she had already lived and whose return she had long foreseen. This, she regards in *Tribute to Freud* as her “constant pre-vision of disaster” (H.D. 1984, 139), a kind of anticipatory resoluteness stoked by horrific memories of the first war, the fear of wars to come, and her bearing of an alternative message of relation in difference and peace. Indeed, when she traveled to Vienna in 1933 to become a student under Freud’s tutelage, she did so in order to “fortify and equip herself to face war when it came, and to help in some subsidiary way . . . with war-shocked and war-shattered people” (H.D. 1984, 93). Having once been one of them, facing the prospect of becoming one of them again, H.D. envisioned herself as a healer of mind and spirit influenced by—but ultimately moving outside of—the psychoanalytic tradition. She believed “that the particular contradiction of modernity lay in the opposition of ephemeral moments of being and the engines of death epitomized by war,” and that the work of healing, her war work, would begin with a return to—perhaps even trigger in the present—heightened moments like those she experienced with Bryher in Corfu (Freidman 1991, 8). Such encounters at the limits of being, on the threshold between life and death, might power engines of an alternative life, epitomized by relation in difference.

H.D.’s World War II texts engage, relay, and, in the process, participate in the other modes of being and being together that these ephemeral moments allow. Her writing at once arises from and seeks to reproduce the communal foundation of these experiences amid the daily violence and social regulation of wartime England. Indeed, as Robert Duncan argues, it was only here, “where in the actual bombings life and death were so mixed, hope and despair, that the time ripened, the things of the poet’s own inner

life came due. The day of bombardment, the trials and crucible of the war, furnish a crucible of the poem” (Duncan 2012, 211). After twenty years and the arrival of a second global conflict, H.D. had learned to interpret and transmit the message of her 1920 visions. As it had then, this interpretation and transmission of an occult line stretching from the ancient past to the present and into the future required the participation of a small group, a social machine comprised of various parts. Again with Bryher’s assistance, H.D. turned to the spiritualist séance during World War II in another attempt to move within, to even convert to her own purposes, the violence of mass war as well as the politics and culture that produced and sustained it.

Rather than treating H.D.’s interests in spiritualism as an irrational break from reality (as Freud had done) or as one of many “Pastimes and drugs” of a desperate wartime populace (as Eliot had written in “The Dry Salvages” [Eliot 1963, 198]), this chapter attends to the temporally, indeed ontologically, complex social life and aesthetic stimulation that the poet discovered in the séance. As H.D.’s séance circle was comprised of the living and the dead, the human and the non-human (four living members in London, countless spirit guides, a table once owned by William Morris), it required a different mode of communication, a different language and form, to announce its aesthetic and political vision. It is my contention that H.D. used the dynamic social forms of the collective vision and the séance as the chief sources for her wartime poetics (which she will call “spiritual realism”), a poetics that was always also a politics, a means of widening thought and perception through both collective representation and connection. On the home front, where social life was strictly regulated and almost all means of

communication were directed toward the war effort, H.D.'s writing sought to rediscover and/or create other aesthetic, social, and political values, opening out into a world without enemies.

### **3.2 British War Culture, Aerial Bombardment, and War Writing**

To be sure, H.D. was swimming precariously against the cultural current of World War II England. Building upon its work during World War I, Patrick Deer has argued, the British Empire harnessed representational and connective media technologies within inchoate propaganda networks to produce “a fully fledged British war culture” between the wars. Both at home and abroad, this elaborate cultural apparatus offered “the vision of a fully mobilized island fortress, loyal empire, and modernized war machine.” England and its colonies were imagined as a united assemblage of social, economic, political, and military forces that would together confront the fascist threat. By the end of World War II, Deer writes, “the official war culture's scope had widened to encompass an extraordinary range of contradictory elements: Churchillian pastiches of martial valor, imperial propaganda, ‘war socialism,’ Shakespeare and the Royal Family, Home Guard guerilla warfare, and the stoic heroism of the English ‘Tommy’ projected onto the entire civilian Home Front” (Deer 2009, 3). With and through its attempts to resolve the contradictions of modern state and imperial power, the Empire’s increasingly consolidated war culture sought “to monopolize representations and interpretation of the conflict.” This governmental appropriation and use of culture galvanized the more material aspects of martial power, its weapons systems, technologies, and greater

warfighting operations. Britain's war effort depended "vitaly on writing, speech, and social . . . activity," Deer contends. "Strategic fantasy" played "a crucial role in reimagining conflict at crucial moments" (Deer 2009, 4). With the production of this fantasy—which at once arose and persisted in relation to designated "enemies within" the Empire as well as enemies outside of it—this war culture sought to manage populations by normalizing forms of life (and ways of dealing with death), exemplified perhaps by the still-famous 1939 propaganda poster urging British citizens to "keep calm and carry on."

Despite the far-reaching influence of this war culture, the Blitz (stretching from 7 September 1940 to 21 May 1941) and subsequent German bombing campaigns tested the capacity of England's officials and citizens to maintain social order. Civilians had become not only occasional victims of collateral damage, but targets of bombardment. As Sven Lindqvist contends, Europe's de jure and de facto ethics of war that had protected "enemies of the same race, class, and culture" (but that had left the colonized, "the foreign, and the alien without protection" [Lindqvist 2001, sect. 5]), were essentially revoked by World War II. The methods of bombing and terror that had been used in various colonial territories between the wars came to serve as a model for inter-European strife (Lindqvist 2001, sect. 180).<sup>4</sup> The front lines were made mobile via the airplane and brought almost everywhere, a harrowing scenario predicted, in large part, in H.G. Wells'

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<sup>4</sup> As Deer writes, "Much of the rationale for Britain's pre-war civil defence planning and for the British Strategic Air Offensive against the German cities was based on an unswerving faith in the moral effect of bombing against 'native' populations in the colonies. Britain's working classes were expected to behave like the colonized masses" (Deer 2009, 75).

*The War in the Air*. As Wells would proclaim in his preface to the 1921 edition of the novel: “with the flying machine war alters in character; it ceases to be an affair of ‘fronts’ and becomes an affair of ‘areas’: neither side, victor or loser, remains immune from the gravest injuries” (Wells 2005, 278).<sup>5</sup> As the linear model of front combat transformed to one of three-dimensional space, the destruction by air of European cities—hitherto largely the stuff of dystopian science fictions—became frighteningly real.

It wasn’t the newly widespread possibility of direct violence by bombardment, however, that most troubled British officials. As Lindqvist notes, “panic [was] more dangerous than any other effect produced by air raids” (Lindqvist 2001, sect. 172). The problem of aerial bombing, from the perspective of the British state, was not chiefly that it would take life, but that it would disrupt social order and industrial production by instilling collective terror. And although the potential “anarchy” and industrial paralysis resulting from air raids on British metropolitan centers—which Churchill, J.F. Fuller, Lord Balfour, and other interwar officials feared—would never come to pass, the repeated, even ritualized, bombing of London and many other English cities did recircuit social life in many ways, linking individuals and groups in unstable networks of communal peril. With the home-front conscription of citizens as well as the aid of developing radar and air-to-ground radio-telephony technologies, a civil defense industry quickly sprung up to combat air raids and their aftermath. Nightly bombings in London and their effects on the labor force disrupted urban infrastructure and social activity. The

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<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 1922, Brigadier General P.R.C. Groves, the British air advisor to the Council of the League of Nations, would publish a remarkably similar statement in the London *Times*: “Owing to the development of aviation, war has altered in character. Hitherto primarily an affair of ‘fronts,’ it will henceforth be primarily an affair of areas” (qtd in Saint-Amour 2014, 434).

temporal order of the workday, transitional hours, and nights was prone to change and rearrangement.

Moreover, as Paul K. Saint-Amour has argued, the Blitz triggered symptoms of a “pre-traumatic stress syndrome” that had emerged amid early twentieth-century experiences of aerial bombardment in colonial and European metropolitan zones. Due in large part to the combined sense of past violence and the anxiety toward possible (and possibly worse) future bombings, individual and “collective psychoses” sometimes arose while *anticipating* the trauma of air raids to come. This pre-traumatic stress reconfigured the chronology of trauma stemming from Freud: the symptom, in this case, preceded its cause; the repressed returned from the future as well as the past to influence present life. As Saint-Amour avers, this experience of temporal disorder wielded a heavy influence on Britain’s war culture and the literature that arose alongside (or enmeshed within) it. Indeed, Saint-Amour contends that “to write seriously of the city after the first bombs had fallen on civilians was necessarily to write of the city in and as a state of total war” (Saint-Amour 2005, 156). From *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* to Stevie Smith’s *Over the Frontier* and Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air*, many post-World War I literary depictions of the city at once remembered and foreshadowed urban disasters.

The dialectic of traumatic memory and anticipatory anxiety, as well as the cultural contest between the celebration and critique of air power, became even more significant as World War II began. After “the initial euphoria of the Battle of Britain” in 1940 and the horrors of the Blitz, Deer writes, “these contradictions were forced into the open. . . . In propaganda and the official war culture, air power offered the panoramic vision of

war,” one that tended to overlook the reality of an often “visionless present,” of home front life “cut off from the strategic view and subjected to an exhausting disciplinary regime” (Deer 2009, 84). In many World War II literary texts, the anxious, totalizing view of the city that had been at least gestured toward in works by writers like Joyce and Woolf gave way to depictions of a besieged and fragmented metropolis. Here, according to Marina MacKay, urban inhabitants instead experienced “compelled communality, diminished privilege, and obligatory stasis” (MacKay 2010, 14). The late modernist city became an apocalyptic space of unrelenting danger and severe social regulation.

From the center of the Blitz and England’s war culture, H.D.’s writing discloses the wartime transformations of private and public life, of time, history, and memory, and of any literary approach that might register this shift. On the home front that had become the front lines, the intimacies of private life, its seemingly small and unthought-of objects, its walled rooms, are blasted into public view. In her epic poem *Trilogy*, written during the latter stages of the war, ruined London apartment buildings expose the recently used “poor utensils” of everyday life, as if these spoons and bowls and glasses are “rare objects in a museum” (H.D. 1986, 510). A temporal and ontological breach separates the old private world (which was here just yesterday) of these objects and rooms from the public aftermath of their partial destruction. Present experience is shot through with images of life in the near past that appear ancient:

Ruins were all around us. So maybe, this obsession with past civilizations was simply a matter of our own imminent danger and constant preoccupation with the dead and with dead cities. Rotterdam, Warsaw, London—it was all one. Geographic boundaries were bombed away, so perhaps were the boundaries of time. Past, present and future became one. The distant past and the near past merged (H.D. 2009, 64).

One no longer has to travel to Greece or the British Museum to see remnants of the past, H.D. shows. Just as bomb blasts bring down or rearrange boundaries in space, the past, present, and even the future are drawn together, constellated, by the figure of these modern ruins. Historical consciousness remains, even intensifies, but one's sense of time—linear, progressive, routinized, or otherwise—is thrown out of joint.

As if the holes left by bomb blasts perform some kind of psychological as well as archaeological digging, the bomb, the ruin, and their recircuiting of the experience of time bring with them a profusion of memories. “A barrier had been broken,” H.D. writes in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, the second *roman-à-clef* she wrote during the war years. “The debris that cluttered the streets of London, sometimes left a half-house open, like a doll-house or a stage-set. One looked into rooms in another dimension. So I think this externalization of people's lives, somehow in the end, sliced open one's own house. One looked into one's own interior private life, a life shut off until now, even to oneself” (H.D. 2009, 57). The “externalization of people's lives,” the literal breach of the private or domestic sphere, pulls memories heretofore forgotten or repressed to consciousness. Thoughts so private that they aren't even fully known to the self reenter circulation, turning the individual's experience of time into something almost amorphous.

With this temporal disruption and the externalization of private life, sociality alters. In H.D.'s case, the Blitz occasions the return of past friends, colleagues, and acquaintances (alive as well as dead) to the present. As the privacy of home and self succumb to violent external conditions, various figures from the past reenter consciousness through the breach in time. In *The Sword*, set in the war's latter stages,

H.D.'s protagonist Delia Alton explains this process: "I opened a door, or a door was opened by a V-2 that fell in Hyde Park," she states. "[T]hey just came in. The less than fifty men and women, I have mentioned in this narrative, were not chosen by me. They came into the story with the V-2. They walked through the wall. They hid in the books in the book-case" (H.D. 2009, 60).<sup>6</sup> And further:

There was a swarm of people. They lived every where [sic]. They were like a swarm of bees, without a King or a Queen to gather them together. They gathered beauty where they found it. But they had no bee-hive in which to store it. . . . They were defenceless. In order to live at all, most of them succumbed to the rigour of whatever regime was in power, in their own country. They had no country. But they didn't know it. . . . [W]ithout some outward sign of nationality, they are at the mercy of prison warders or hospital attendants. They may express themselves up to a point, but beyond a certain recognized boundary, they can not go (H.D. 2009, 62).

With the V-2 (and before that, with the Blitz and the V-1), the characters in H.D.'s wartime texts, figures of past and present life, real and fictitious friends, lovers, and artists, enter into Delia's company, loosely congregate. Without nation or secure home, "defenceless" before the prison warders, hospital attendants, and falling bombs, the members of this group—a "swarm" at once similar to and very different from that which Lawrence describes in *Seven Pillars*—gather together in secret to imagine another kind of life, other kinds of cultural production.<sup>7</sup> H.D.'s writings from throughout the war seek to

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<sup>6</sup> In *Majic Ring*, H.D. writes: "Sometimes if the door to terror is suddenly swept open, the opposite door, or the other side of the usually closed door, opens up in an opposite direction—to again undefined regions, but regions of clearer being, the super-conscious. The terror is complimented or companioned by a little demonstration of the super-normal" (H.D. 2013, 40).

<sup>7</sup> This "swarm" of lives moves throughout H.D.'s work during and after World War II. In *Helen in Egypt*, Achilles attacks Helen, seemingly with the intent of assaulting her or of neutralizing her Hecate-like powers of conjure, but mysteriously falls back: "why did he let me go? / did he hear the whirr of wings, // did he feel the invisible host / surrounding and helping me? / was he afraid of the dead?" (H.D. 1974, 40). Helen has the dead on her side, a retinue of unquiet ghosts: "a cloud in the night, / a swarm, encircled me . . .

articulate a language for this collective appeal, and they do so by turning to another, non-violent form of making the past present, the séance.

### **3.3 Popular Spiritualism, “Spiritual Realism,” and Occult Communities of Feeling**

Although popular spiritualism had maintained a steady influence in England from the late nineteenth century to the interwar years, its cultural reach widened during World War II.<sup>8</sup> In a period of deep uncertainty and widespread grief, its “rituals of mourning fostered connections within and between different communities,” as Rachel Connor has argued (Connor 2004, 111). For many, the border between life and death no longer seemed inviolable (“life and death where so mixed,” as Duncan wrote). Groups of séance sitters from across England circled to communicate with one another and with those recently (or long ago) dead for consolation, wandering at the limits of this world and the hereafter.

Because many spiritualists desired to remain outside of (or, in some cases, between) traditional religious orthodoxies and a single national tradition, both the Church

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. the one name for the thousand lost, / Eros, the Hawk Horus” (H.D. 1974, 41), “an infinite number, / yet one whole, one cluster of bees // as a trail or a Galaxy / of numberless stars, / that seem one but are many” (H.D. 1974, 43).

<sup>8</sup> During the interwar period, various historical and theological accounts of popular spiritualism were published, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The History of Spiritualism*, which (somewhat idiosyncratically) traces the genealogy of the movement from Emanuel Swedenborg to the post-World War I present in England.

of England and the British state maintained a vexed relationship to spiritualist practices.<sup>9</sup> For Churchill and other civilian authorities, the home front ought to have been “a modernized space, exorcised of the ghosts, spirits, and séances that haunted and comforted the survivors” (Deer 2009, 152). Churchill’s war ministry found something especially threatening in the relations (real and/or imagined) that spiritualism opened up across national borders, its occasional claims of statelessness, reflecting “a paranoia about official secrecy and an anxiety about private and unofficial mediations of the relation between soldier, state, and public in a time of war.” From the perspectives of the church and the state, there was a right way and a wrong way to mourn, and even “the superstitions of those who turned to shady mediums and clairvoyants in times of inconsolable grief came under a regulatory order” (Deer 2009, 152). As mediums became more and more available for consultation with grieving relatives and anxious citizens, and thus came to wield some small but purportedly dangerous socio-cultural power, the British government increasingly invoked the 1735 Witchcraft Act (where one could be charged with even the pretense of practicing witchcraft and punished with fines or imprisonment) alongside the broader regulation of the Emergency Powers Act to

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<sup>9</sup> In 1939, the Anglican Committee on Spiritualism convened to officially outline the Church’s relationship to spiritualist practices. The committee did not dispute whether or not communications with the dead take place, but whether or not spiritualism’s stressing of knowledge over faith and its insistence on scientific proof (its “psychical research”) was a religiously valid aspiration. The verdict was non-unanimous and the publication of the committee’s majority report was suppressed until after the war. William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury from 1942-1944, wrote of spiritualism’s limited possibilities for grieving: “the foundation is precarious, and there is always the risk, at least, of stopping short at the stage of self-centered consolation” (qtd in Kollar 2000, 146). Spiritualism, in short, had the potential to diminish the Anglican fellowship in Christ.

prosecute potentially fraudulent or treasonous activity.<sup>10</sup> The home front's strictures enkindled, in H.D.'s words, "a recrudescence of intolerance that found legal support" in both old and new legislation (H.D. 2009, 63).<sup>11</sup>

Despite the best efforts of the British state and the Anglican Church, the influence of spiritualist practices—its séances, materializations, and general belief that life continues in some way, in some place, after death—can be felt throughout texts written during the war. While writers like Freud, Eliot, Orwell, and Greene questioned spiritualism's religious and/or scientific validity (as well as its legality) along with its "lowbrow associations," others were fascinated by its metaphysical possibilities and "potential to challenge ontological boundaries" (Connor 2004, 111-112). If air war produced a situation where "life and death were so mixed," then spiritualism offered a means of examining—whether inspired by brief, skeptical curiosity or rigorous psychic research aspiring to science—this mixture in solution while it was still being lived in.

Although H.D.'s treatment of spiritualism was often more generous than that of other modernist writers, she too maintained a complex relationship with the séance and

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<sup>10</sup> As Deer writes, the "wave of prosecutions against spiritualists climaxed in the naval town of Portsmouth in March 1944," when the celebrated medium Helen Duncan was charged with the fraudulent conjuration of spirits. Unsurprisingly, "Duncan had been investigated in 1941 for possible breaches of the Defence of the Realm Act after she had revealed in a private séance the sinking of a British battleship, HMS *Barham*, inadvertently disclosing a military disaster that was kept secret for another three months. During the run-up to the D-Day invasion in 1944, Duncan was found guilty under the Witchcraft Act and sentenced to nine months in prison after a seven-day trial. Much like the Hugh Pemberton-Billing libel case during World War I [which I will discuss in this dissertation's concluding chapter], the event was a public scandal and media event" (Deer 2009, 154). The Witchcraft Act was repealed and rewritten as the Fraudulent Mediums Act in 1951.

<sup>11</sup> H.D. was certainly attuned to the increasingly illicit, potentially treacherous work of psychic research: "There had been trouble, at this time," she writes in *The Sword*, "about various clairvoyants, fines, imprisonments and an unsuccessful effort to repeal the old Witchcraft Act which was still functioning in England" (H.D. 2009, 9).

its diverse set of practitioners. Her work, Adalaide Morris contends, “oscillates constantly between an impulse to transmit the egalitarian values of spiritualism, . . . to ‘recast’ broad areas of heterodoxical knowledge, and the desire to restrict such knowledge to an elite and privileged circle” (Morris 2008, 119). Although at times H.D. joined her fellow modernists in scrutinizing the “low brow associations” of popular spiritualism, her work (sometimes openly, sometimes unconsciously) often affirms spiritualism’s expansive understanding of collective life. As her war writing indicates, H.D.’s spiritualist practice not only sought to connect the living to the dead, but to bring the living into differently intimate, indeed spiritually and socially productive, forms of relation. The séance offered a site of spiritual or ontological experiment, where the seeds of a new, non-dogmatic religion might be gathered.

Reading H.D.’s wartime writing against the backdrop of devastating violence and official religious and governmental hostility, one can begin to trace the braided movements of her spiritual, aesthetic, and quiet political response, which she evocatively names, in “The Walls Do Not Fall” (*Trilogy*’s opening volume), “spiritual realism” (H.D. 1986, 537). Returning to measured enchantment and the possibility of communication with the dead, H.D. understands the “real” in broad, supra-natural terms, setting out to defend against the British war culture’s imperative for a total mobilization of the spirit. As Rachel Blau Duplessis writes, H.D.’s work “engages in a critical spiritual politics, where not only acts of imagination, but the dimensions, regions and materials to which these acts give access, respond to political terror with a domain of meta-knowledge” (Duplessis 1986, 77). This giving of “access” not only provides the grounds for a critique

of political and military power in H.D.'s writing, but it opens up other possibilities for social and political thought and practice, for traditions outside the circumscribed borders of the nation-state or empire, the national canon, or religious orthodoxy. These unconventional forms of relation—which often stretch from queer desire to decidedly non-sexual and unsexy forms of intimacy and friendship—persist in discomfort, exile, and exposure before the more violent forces of the world. The “Extravagant” Mary of Magdala, the thwarted, lovesick Sappho, eighteenth-century Native Americans, and dead R.A.F. pilots all find a place in this vulnerable but “unpredictable” company (H.D. 1986, 588). Indeed, to have community with other people at all, Duncan notes in his reading of H.D., “is to become a member of a communal peril beyond our individual fate” (Duncan 2012, 644). H.D.'s work, marked by the destruction of two wars, addresses a world where “communal peril” only seems to repeat itself even as the methods and tools of violence transform. As a consequence, the content of H.D.'s writing is often repetitive or, to use Gertrude Stein's crucial inflection, insistent, recursive, indicating her belief in the spiraling movement of history, of an occulted past that survives in and shapes communities in the present, the violent politics of modern states and their empires notwithstanding.

With past life and events punctuating, if not permeating, the present, H.D.'s World War II texts reveal at least the possibility of a re-enchanted and ghostly domain. From within a modern world often characterized by the language of rationalization and disenchantment (after the lead of Max Weber), H.D. reminds her readers that haunting (as Avery Gordon refracts Raymond Williams) “is a shared structure of feeling, a shared

possession, a specific type of sociality” that forestalls the retreat of Weber’s “ultimate and most sublime values, of community and art,” to both the private and the totally-mobilized public sphere (Gordon 1997, 201). H.D.’s experiments with spiritualist practices, her belief that the dead communicate with the living, and her texts’ tarrying with this belief, might be understood as an extension of the production and practice of community beyond (but still in many ways rooted in) embodied subjectivity or citizenship, beyond presence and private or mobilized life. At the same time, her work discloses the always prior haunting of subjects and citizens, the embodied, linguistic, and wider cultural forms that give rise to an individual’s understanding of her subjecthood or citizenship.

As Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos has argued, H.D.’s war writings are inspired by spiritual and political practices that are not “institutionalized into dogma.” Instead, her work turns to—while enacting—a radical syncretism, where the poet (metaphorized as a medium, a scientist, and/or a kind of “live wire” between worlds) serves as “vehicle or reception point combining the esoteric with the exoteric—mystical or visionary with objective or scientific” (Tryphonopoulos 2013, xxi and xxiv). Much like the collective aspirations of spiritualist or occult groups from Madame Blavatsky’s theosophists to the Society for Psychical Research—but without the dogmatic baggage attached to both—H.D.’s writing seeks to think and be with forms of life (and afterlife) that have been disregarded, discarded, or forgotten in a secularizing culture. Her “spiritual realism” at once displays and theorizes a method for wandering between ontological categories (life/death, body/spirit, being/unbeing, the apparent/the hidden), where the “real” is

constantly in a state of flux, a shifting nexus of the seen and the unseen, the known, the unknown, and the felt.

This visionary work, as I've already suggested, required in H.D.'s case more than the individual artist: it demanded the collaboration and guidance of living and dead "like minds," what Duncan would later call a "community of feeling."<sup>12</sup> It also required a concept of sociality developed from this inter-historical, transnational support system. Like many modernist writers, H.D. found much life and inspiration in past lives and the classical texts that depict them. However, as Edward Comentale argues, she turned to history, tradition, and classicism in order to fashion an alternative "aesthetic politics" to the individualist strains of modernist art. Imagining herself as a member of an age-old and radically diverse community of feeling, she "defined the social as a ceaselessly creative medium, one that conditions, and is conditioned by, multiple identities and relations." She envisioned spiritualist and occult ritual practice as an experience that "both activates and defines subjects in relation to one another. It functions as part of a generative process in which a community as a whole can create and understand its condition" (Comentale 2001, 473). Even though her work at times seems to approach a

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<sup>12</sup> In *The H.D. Book*, Duncan provides an expansive reading of H.D. (and her generation), especially with respect to her experience of World War II. Writing from the U.S. during the Vietnam War, Duncan argues that poetry's engagement with strife establishes "communities of feeling," an alternative cultural lineage that extends across time: "The first person plural—the 'we,' 'our,' 'us'—is a communal consciousness in which the 'I' has entered into the company of imagined like minds, a dramatic voice in which the readers and the man [sic] writing are gathered into one composition, in which we may find kindred thought and feeling, an insistence, in Plutarch or Dante, Plato or D.H. Lawrence, closer to our inner insistence than the thought and feeling of parents or neighbors" (Duncan 2012, 156). Nathaniel Mackey has argued that the production of poetry and "sublime community" coincide for Duncan: "One of the cornerstones of Duncan's poetics is the idea of language, both written and spoken, as a communal, community-making act" (Mackey 2009, 93). I would contend that the same might be said of H.D.'s writing, especially the works she composed during World War II.

certain cliquish elitism (which Lawrence Rainey goes to great lengths to vilify in *Institutions of Modernism*), H.D.'s war writing also demonstrates an impulse toward a democratic, dynamically-collective engagement with both a local community and the wider world. In similar fashion to Woolf's "Outsiders' Society" of women (which has no nationalism to unite it, no oaths, no war, remains largely anonymous, maintains a critical yet creative attitude to power [Woolf 1966, 109]), H.D.'s texts present an alternative social imaginary and practice that would start small and move outward, seeking to build from the new ruins of Western order.

### **3.4 *Majic Ring*: The Sociality and Techne of the Séance**

H.D. joined the International Institute for Psychic Research (IIPR) at Walton House on 10 November 1941. After attempting, unsuccessfully, to sit with the séance circle of Lord Dowding (Hugh Caswell Tremenheere),<sup>13</sup> H.D. formed a "home circle" of her own comprised of the medium Arthur Bhaduri (fictionalized as "Ben Manisi" in both *Majic Ring* and *The Sword*), his mother May ("Ada Manisi"), and Bryher ("Gareth").

Using a three-legged table that had once belonged to William Morris as a spiritual

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<sup>13</sup> Lord Dowding had been the R.A.F.'s Chief Air Marshall during the Battle of Britain. As Cynthia Hogue and Julie Vandivere note in their introduction to *The Sword*, Dowding was considered by many to be England's savior after his "innovative introduction of the wireless in planes, to communicate between the air and ground, whereby a pilot could transmit mile by mile via stations set up along the coast for 'air to ground radio-telephony'" (Hogue and Vandivere 2009, xlv). After being forcibly removed from his position by the Home Ministry following the battle, he turned to spiritualism in order to communicate with his deceased wife Clarice and "his boys," dead R.A.F. airmen. Although Dowding rebuffed H.D.'s attempts to join his séance circle, the two corresponded intermittently throughout the war until, in February 1946, he repudiated the messages her circle had received from R.A.F. pilots. Of this relationship, H.D. would later write: "We may have a physical affinity and another intellectual affinity, even a spiritual, psychic, or 'philosophical' affinity. Only once in a lifetime we are told (even that rarely happens) do we meet the three together. That happened miraculously to me in the Lord D. contact in War II London" (H.D. 2012, 193). In both *Majic Ring* and *The Sword*, Dowding is fictionalized as "Lord Howell."

charge, the group conducted weekly séances throughout the war in H.D.'s flat at 49 Lowndes Square, Belgravia. In *Majic Ring*, a *roman-à-clef* that draws from séance notes and a series of letters exchanged between Lord Dowding and herself, H.D. describes this “rather mongrel circle” and its collective aspirations in detail (H.D. 2013, 44): “Our work has been conditioned, as all group-work is, to our particular status, our degree of development, our temperaments and our aims or ambitions. / Our aim has not been fundamentally, to help anyone. We are more like painters or poets, intent on the creation of something out of nothing” (H.D. 2013, 64). Here, H.D. inverts the vehicle and tenor of a common metaphor (one that she often employs herself): the writer as medium who channels the language of both the living and the dead. Instead, these séance-sitters become like artists, creating both an intimate group and a narrative to relate that group’s activity. They produce a “world in miniature” from within the compelled communality of wartime London, a quartet inspired by, seeking out, a wider community of living and dead “like minds” (H.D. 2013, 31).

The group of four, however, is only the most local embodiment of the séance circle in H.D.’s texts. As Delia Alton, the first-person narrator of both *Majic Ring* and *The Sword* explains, “our round-table is a very tiny circle, yet it consists of more than ‘two or three’” (H.D. 2013, 38). And later, the “whole point seems to be, at the moment, that we four here, the two Manisis, Gareth and myself, are working with an inner group or core. . . . But a point is the dot in the circle; it is the tiny pebble that may set up ring on concentric ring, may set up circles that gradually become larger” (H.D. 2013, 61). In much the same way as H.D. “travelled the world” with the help of Bryher in her 1920

vision in Corfu, the home circle taps into greater frequencies from across global history. Amongst other spirit contacts, the group communicates with a dead soldier from Detroit, a warrior from the Lakota (or “Teton Sioux”) tribe referred to as “K.,” and “Zakenuto,” a man from the Aztec or Mayan civilization who lived in the Yucatan.<sup>14</sup> The point of this otherworldly communication is not simply to converse with the dead or play with primitivist stereotypes, but to seek out perspectives from the other side of the grave and transcribe into some kind of narrative whatever guidance these spirits might offer. With Manisi now “seeing the pictures, speaking as from the other-world but in his own character” (H.D. 2013, 10), Delia, Gareth, and Ada act as interpreters of the spirits’ language. Delia transcribes as much of the messages as possible, one hand on the Morris table and the other writing in a new form of shorthand within her notebook.

In H.D.’s texts, the séance circle moves with and through a haze of speculation and unknowing. It is unclear to the group what form of narrative they at once participate in and bear witness to, as they channel, transcribe, and attempt to decipher its meaning. Fact and fiction (or narrative more generally), creation ex nihilo and interpretation, blur. Under the influence of both a “psychic strain and indeed the subtle joy and exhilaration of this form of evocative creation” (H.D. 2013, 7), the group assembles a rough narrative or “picture” of esoteric and exoteric life. The collective act of assembly and the work being assembled, the “dancer” and “the dance” in W.B. Yeats’ terms, also become impossible to separate (Yeats 1996, 218). As Delia claims, “I feel that all the things that

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<sup>14</sup> Here, the imaginative or speculative aspect of the group’s séance communications becomes apparent. Delia and Ben Manisi repeatedly refer to Zakenuto as an Aztec living on the Yucatan peninsula, even though the Aztecs inhabited a large region in what is now central Mexico.

contribute towards the making of the picture or the sending of a message are of such value, though I do not for one moment ‘rationalize’ away the fact of the picture” (H.D. 2013, 9). No matter its position on the spectrum between fact and fiction, “in progress” or completed, Delia repeatedly acknowledges the “value” of the narrative’s social construction, “social” here referring to group life in an ontologically expansive but perceptually and significantly uncertain sense. The séance, like Avery Gordon’s understanding of haunting, produces and performs a particular kind of sociality, one that cannot be limited to life or presence in the living world.

Because of its positions between or among worlds, this peculiar sociality requires a peculiar type of communication. The séance proceeds, for the most part, like a group call and response, where the sitters ask yes or no questions and the spirits, embodied in Manisi, answer by rapping the table: “one tap for yes, two taps for no” (H.D. 2013, 53). This seems simple enough. However, the form of the spirits’ communication often obscures the meaning of their messages. For the spirit contacts also produce rappings that do not align with any language, sounds beyond sense: “Manisi’s ‘guide’ then tapped out a little ‘tune’ or rhythmic ‘beat’ which possibly ‘they’ who ‘gather here’ were tapping out on their drums. He said, ‘Get used to beat.’ (I have recorded it but do not insert it here)” (H.D. 2013, 16). Intermingled with any linguistic message they hope to send, the spirits transmit a kind of music, a beat, or rhythm that Delia, at least explicitly, refuses to “insert” within her text. As the group will come to discover, the “vibrations” of the messages are often as important as the meaning of the words they convey.

As transmission and technique, sound and sense, blur, H.D., through Delia, once again turns to technological metaphors to describe the “machine” of the home circle and the work it produces. The group is like a “little private wireless station” (H.D. 2013, 14). Again, one thinks of H.D.’s account of the Corfu possession, where Delia and Gareth had set up “a sort of receiving station” somewhere between the gramophone, the radio, and television. Here, however, the shift in technology to a “private wireless station” indicates the group’s desire to keep whatever distance they can from England’s greater war culture and its social regulations. In order to circumvent the intrusions of the British Secret Service (which, Delia believes, has tapped into her private phone line “to follow conversations” [H.D. 2013, 63]), the group opens up other lines of untraceable communication. In a period where the mobile privatization of the 1920s and 1930s was redirected toward the objectives of the British state and empire,<sup>15</sup> the home circle gathered to search out other modes of connectivity, both between its living participants (now as component parts of the séance machine) and the living dead with whom they are in contact. World War II’s changing “ontology of the enemy,” which Peter Galison has located in the hybrid, human/non-human networks of bomber, radar, and anti-aircraft (and which gave rise to Norbert Wiener’s cybernetics), might also be traced to less obvious realms: to the hybrid, human/non-human network of telegraphs and telephones that connected Britain’s “enemies within,” for example, or to the séance machine that purports to move outside of official or national networks of communication.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “[T]he system’s full capacity was required for civil defense and other military functions,” Trotter writes. The war “rationed the supply of connectivity, among much else” (Trotter 2013, 283).

The séance's position outside or beneath the Home Ministry's gaze, its peculiar form of communication or social exchange, is embodied not only in the relations between the group and its spirit contacts but also its objects. Indeed, the group's non-human appendages seem to possess lives of their own. Recalling the "magic and necromancy" that makes of Marx's commodity (a table, in his example) a motive, "mystical" object, the William Morris table around which the sitters congregate often moves on its own:

The table danced about a bit and kept bumping us separately in greeting as if very glad to have us again, after the brief separation. Manisi asked the table if it liked this hour better than the later one and it danced with joy. It stands on one of its three feet and twirls in a remarkably graceful and expressive way. Our hands slip and slither about and the table-antics make us laugh (H.D. 2013, 52-53).<sup>17</sup>

H.D. literalizes Marx's table-turning metaphor, recuperating the spiritualist belief that both perceptible and imperceptible forces (Marx's "fantastic forms") not only influence but help to produce networks of relation. The Morris table, as H.D. depicts its, is no simple object of exchange in materialist terms, a thing that, as Hannah Arendt maintains, has "lost its power to gather" people together, "to relate and separate them" (Arendt 1998, 53).<sup>18</sup> Rather, the table facilitates a kind of social or cultural exchange across

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<sup>16</sup> In Greene's World War II novel *The Ministry of Fear*, both the séance circle and the telephone provide opportunities for the members of a fifth column group, the titular "Ministry," to communicate with one another. The telephone also serves as a tool of detection and policing for the novel's civilian protagonist, Arthur Rowe, as he is slowly conscripted into the war effort by Scotland Yard.

<sup>17</sup> In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx uses the metaphor of spiritualist "table-turning," a trend among the mid-nineteenth century European aristocracy, to demonstrate his theory of the commodity fetish.

<sup>18</sup> Arendt extends Marx's use of the séance table as a metaphor for commodification to mass society generally, where all the political promise of the public realm, the "common world," vanishes as if by some "magic trick" (Arendt 1998, 52-53). The vanishing (rather than dancing) table no longer mediates between

boundaries of life and death, the past and the present, subject and object, friend and enemy. H.D.'s account of the séance object "re-fetishizes" the table, or fetishizes it differently and anew, drawing out the history of social production and use the object contains: the lineage of its consumers, Morris, the British novelist Violet Hunt (who had inherited the table from Morris), the sitters who purchased the table from Hunt's estate after her death, and so on. This lineage continues to mark, even possess, the table and influence those who congregate around it. Whereas for Marx objects are transfigured via commodification into abstract values, and in turn must be re-incorporated, possessed, and controlled, Morris' table acts as a cipher that connects past and present lives. Its value isn't self- or market-determined but rather socially determined by the small group that uses it. The table provides the very material foundations upon which associative relations with past and present life might be re-networked and potentially renewed.

To sit in a séance, then, is not to reproduce social and political alienation and the collapse of difference (as Arendt might argue) but rather to participate in another kind of social and potentially political exchange. The difference is that the séance seeks to relate lives across time and space, to begin with a volatile local group and foray outward into the wider world. Gathering a tradition of major and minor cultural figures, stalwarts and stragglers alike, a motley lineage of poets, seers, Moravian acolytes, scholars, Native American women, and artists, H.D.'s wartime texts forge intimate and often volatile ties

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the members of mass society (figured, in Arendt's metaphor, as sitters at a séance). They lose both the critical distance from, and tangible relation to, one another required for an active political life. For H.D., alternatively, social and political life might begin again, rather than end, here.

with a global community. In turn, her writing spirals through genres, styles, and forms as if to approximate the practice of the séance itself, to relay each moment of these this- and otherworldly encounters from multiple perspectives, in different, often indecipherable, terms. The formal inventiveness of H.D.'s wartime texts reveals the social aspects of literary production and value creation, a truth that the poet sees as both troubling and full of possibility.

### **3.5 *Trilogy: Time, the Fragment, and the Alchemy of Form***

In “The Walls Do Not Fall,” H.D. repeatedly gestures toward the social aspects of her work during the war, the necessary presence of living and dead interlocutors for her literary production. “I speak of myself individually,” she writes, “but I was surrounded by companions // in this mystery” (H.D. 1986, 520). In the same poem, H.D. refers to this community of friends, fellow poets, mediums, séance sitters, and spirit guides as “the latter-day twice born” (H.D. 1986, 521), to whom the violence of the Blitz reveals social values distinct from those promulgated by the British total war state. Collective creation and creative relation between this and other worlds, this and other times, stand out against the state’s demands for national loyalty and the total mobilization of the labor force, of its time, energy, and political commitments. In their wartime practices of popular spiritualism, occult study, artistic production, and even the mere observation of the otherwise overlooked, H.D.’s “twice born” half-encounter and half-devised other values by which—and other sites in which—they might continue to exist together. Channeling the generative power of this small (but potentially widening) group, H.D.’s writing offers

an invitation to gather for those on the outside of England's (and indeed the world's) war culture(s). Speaking with and to fellow outcasts across the war's unhomelike realms, H.D. tentatively concludes "The Walls" by entering into the first-person plural: "we know no rule / of procedure, / we are voyagers, discovers of the not-known, / the unrecorded; we have no map; / possibly we will reach haven, / heaven" (H.D. 1986, 543). Ending without closure from amid this drifting voyage, both ancient and modern in its hope for discovery and arrival somewhere other than here, the task of continuing to imagine, perhaps even continuing to live, social life in ways not entirely determined by the West's martial politics is put forth, practiced, in the syncretic space of the poem.

During the war, H.D.'s poetry, like her prose, becomes something like a crucible for her alchemical engagement with social relations, values, and the language that depicts them. Comentale argues that her "verses foreground a dynamic intersubjectivity. . . . Her ritualized poetry does not avoid political responsibility; rather, it raises possibilities for a community that always already incorporates the marginal, the feminine, and the poetic" (Comentale 2001, 483-484). This dynamic intersubjectivity (which, it must be remembered, also incorporates the dead) extends beyond content or theme and into the structures of her writing. The shared, collaborative aspects of H.D.'s venture into the "not-known, the unrecorded" help to complicate any sense of a clearly delineated genre or form. *Trilogy* brings together various poetic traditions, from the lyric and the epic to moments of imagistic attention, in order to demonstrate an expansive yet almost ad hoc approach to form. The poem opens in a loosely rhymed terza rima, the form (and indeed the content of "Apocryphal fire" and the "eternity" that "endures" [H.D. 1986, 510 and

509]) calling to mind Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Except that in wartime London, experiences of the Inferno, purgatory, and paradise interpenetrate in the same space and at the same time rather than proceeding consecutively. After its initial stanza, the poem mostly arrives in brief, two-line bursts. Here, the lyric, Imagism's residual diligence toward the everyday, and the poem's overarching narratives take place alternately and together, disturbing any singularity of attention or diegetic pattern. And yet one still gets the sense that these shifting forms relate to each other contrapuntally, if not dialectically, helping one another along. Here, the infinitely minute image, the brief light gleaming from a woman's unshawled hair, for example, might open out into an epic vision of eternity.

In its use of various poetic forms and its attempts to commune with past, present, and even future life, H.D.'s wartime writing "shatters conventional notions of linear temporality," as Helen Sword has argued. At times, it confounds "history by collapsing past, present, and future into a single 'spectral moment': a temporal unit" that no longer belongs to chronological or developmental time, that can no longer be plotted (Sword 2002, 127). At others, it multiplies and scatters the movement of history into heterogeneous moments, strange correspondences across time, and fractured, occult narratives. The spatial and temporal disruptions of H.D.'s war experience and the shape of the collective life that arises within it combine to generate a temporal multiplicity and measured fragmentation in her work.

Indeed, H.D.'s writing from this period—especially in *Trilogy*—resembles in many ways the séance notes she kept during the war, which use brief word bursts

connected by dashes, a kind of syntactical Morse Code that forms constellations of sound and significance rather than a straightforwardly linear story. Take, as an example, the opening section of her note from the home circle's final séance (including a colloquy with Freud), which she transcribed on 19 October 1944: "My best work was trodden in dust—[(Freud)]—crucifiction. Eyes know everything—marriage fulfillment—father of many—Professor (?) work put away—real gems—inspiration—Master soul helping" (qtd in H.D. 2009, 222). The broken, portmanteau ("crucifiction"), and almost ideasthesic ("Eyes know everything") language here gestures toward various meanings but settles on none. The non-syntactical structure, as well as the movement between past and present verb tenses, introduces the possibility of significant openness, manifold interpretations, and the scattering of time. As Elizabeth Willis has argued, H.D.'s writing redefines, indeed revalues, the modernist trope of fragmentation during the war, positing the trope "not as a symptom of psychic derangement but as a precondition for physical and emotional survival" (Willis 2007, 128). If poetry could offer an answer at all to the social and political breakdown of the war years, "it would be an answer outside reason, emerging from fragmented and even non-verbal elements into language" (Willis 2007, 91). Just as World War I modernists like Lawrence, Pound, and Stein had turned against the rationalist and rationalizing language of British Liberalism, H.D. exposes while also seeking to move beyond the British war culture's mobilizing of linguistic power with the rhythms of this rapped language and the odd discursive structures that arise from it.

Her methods of incessant movement between genres or forms and generative fragmentation provide the structural foundations for a new poetics. Written from 1942 to

late December 1944, *Trilogy* illustrates H.D.'s striving for a kind of *alchimie du verbe*, where the delirious, often surreal experience of London at the front lines—its Dantean atmosphere—gives ground for a wider understanding of what constitutes “reality”: “Let us substitute / enchantment for sentiment,” she writes, “re-dedicate our gifts / to spiritual realism” (H.D. 1986, 537). In similar fashion to her prose works from the period, H.D.'s poetics seek to broaden the fields of perception and representation, of spiritual experience and the discursive provinces of symbolism and myth. In order to reconstruct the frame of the real, her writing turns to the possibility of continued existence beyond life, beyond the visible, physical plane, and to the influence of an occult past upon the present. If this widening and renovating of experience and representation is to be accomplished, H.D. argues, language itself—oversaturated by the rational, disenchanted plight of Western life—must be broken apart and remade.

The alchemical work of H.D.'s spiritual realism thus takes place on various planes at once, from the level of the sentence, the word, even the syllable, to narrative and the construction of cultural value. H.D. does so most strikingly in *Trilogy* with her multivalent recovery of the feminine from ancient and modern misogyny and objectification, from—at the very least—the stock roles women have tended to play in Western mythic, religious, and historical discourse. In the poem's second volume, “A Tribute to the Angels,” H.D. sets out to “steal,” “plunder,” “collect,” “melt down and reintegrate,” “re-invoke, re-create,” the language of various religious traditions, from Christianity and Judaism to the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Cult of Isis (H.D. 1986, 547). Her poem becomes both crucible and alchemic practice, vessel and action, a site

where words are melted down into their roots and sounds so that they may be fashioned anew. H.D. critically engages the mythical position of Venus, for example, paying particular attention to the etymological lineage that has sprung from the goddess' name:

O swiftly, re-light the flame  
before the substance cool,  
  
for suddenly we saw your name  
desecrated; knaves and fools  
  
have done you impious wrong,  
Venus, for venery stands for impurity  
  
and Venus as desire  
is venereous, lascivious (H.D. 1986, 553).

“Venus” and “venery” have come to signify a kind of bad impurity and desire in the Western world. This process of meaning making has turned impurity and desire into something negative, dirty. The task for H.D.’s alchemists—the shared nature of their work implied by the poet’s use of the imperative (“O swiftly, re-light the flame”) and made explicit by her return to the first-person plural “we”—is to transform the derogatory cognates stemming from the root word into something else entirely, “to venerate, / venerator” (H.D. 1986, 554). The language of Western myth, which in Greek and Roman traditions often works violently at the expense of feminine sexuality and desire, is melted down into its component parts and rearranged, resulting in a different crystallization of terms, the beginnings of a language of reverence and care. Crucially, H.D.’s poem uses the infinitive verb (“to venerate”) and active noun (“venerator”) forms to move toward a dynamic practice of adoration and love. Adjusting the focus of her poetics from the minute (the syllable) to the grand (value, myth), moving backward and forward through

time, H.D. draws together material for her crucible and begins the task of producing new language and values, revisionary myths.

Working from within and toward this alternate dispensation, *Trilogy*'s third and final volume, "The Flowering of the Rod," goes so far as to rewrite the Gospels by cutting them up and emphasizing small occurrences and minor characters. As H.D.'s poem restructures and fills out biblical narrative with hidden or imagined detail, it transforms the New Testament almost beyond recognition.<sup>19</sup> Escaping Europe's bombed-out world ("the smouldering cities below" [H.D. 1986, 578]; "The-place-of-a-skull" [H.D. 1986, 579]), its narratives of manmade destruction and violent death as well as any claims of social or political progress, the poem travels to Mount Hermon and its layered history, a site visited in literary texts at least since the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the place often thought to be the location of Jesus' transfiguration.<sup>20</sup> By shifting scenes from London to a setting where, according to the Synoptic Gospels, the prophets Moses and Elijah appeared next to and spoke with Jesus, H.D.'s poem calls to mind the séance's otherworldly communications. And as much as the poet's flight to the Levant represents a voyage eastward, it also occasions a migration back through time, a perilous journey of historical memory and imagination that points back to the 1920 vision H.D. shared with Bryher in Corfu. H.D.'s attempt to re-route a war culture with poetic means returns to

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<sup>19</sup> H.D. long had been interested in "filling out" the Gospels from the perspective of Western Christianity's often denigrated, sanctified, or forgotten women. In *Pilate's Wife* (a historical novel completed in 1929), she tells the crucifixion story from the perspective Veronica (the titular wife of Pontius Pilate), a woman in search of a new religion who turns, much like H.D., to a syncretic classicism inspired by the radical teachings of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence's *Seven Pillars* also ends in Syria, in Damascus, about fifty kilometers from Mount Hermon.

“what we once knew” (H.D. 1986, 580), a return (probably ill-fated and even impossible) to “love’s ecstasy // that turns and turns and turns about one centre, / reckless, regardless, blind to reality” (H.D. 1986, 583). Seemingly in dialogue with Yeats’ famous 1919 poem “The Second Coming” as well as his own version of syncretic mythology, H.D.’s poem gets caught up in an alternative—or subsequent—storm to the “widening gyre” of modern catastrophe (Yeats 1996, 187). It is only here, on the other side of the real, indeed with a more expansive sense of what constitutes reality, that a new life might begin again.

H.D.’s speaker insists that such poetic flight is no mere coping mechanism devised in the ruins of London:

No poetic phantasy  
but a biological reality,

a fact: I am an entity  
like bird, insect, plant

or sea-plant cell;  
I live; I am alive;

take care, do not know me,  
deny me, do not recognize me,

shun me; for this reality  
is infectious—ecstasy” (H.D. 1986, 584).

No matter how it is viewed from the outside (shunned, forgotten, unrecognized), the spatial and temporal migration of her spiritual realism—like her experiences of the séance and other shared visions—has “biological” effects, produces such ecstasy.

And it is open, this route, first and foremost, to those in the margins, as Jesus had promised in Matthew:

He was the first to say,

not to the chosen few,

his faithful friends,  
the wise and good,

but to an outcast and a vagabond,  
to-day shalt though be with me in Paradise

...

So the first—it was written,  
will be the twisted or the tortured individuals,

out of line, out of step with world so-called progress;  
the first to receive the promise was a thief;

the first to actually witness His life-after-death,  
was an unbalanced, neurotic woman,

who was naturally reviled for having left home  
and not caring for house-work (H.D. 1986, 586-587).

Harkening back to the “rather motley” community produced in spiritualist practice, H.D.’s re-reading of biblical narrative places the criminal, the reviled, the impure, the outcast, and the “neurotic” within a space of shared belonging. Indeed, she argues, their place here is always prior to the normative, to the letter of the law or religious dogma, which comes after and seeks to suppress it. As Comentale notes, H.D.’s aesthetic politics is defined by “a romantic metaphysic in which authority exists only by way of dissent, the center by way of margins, the self in and through the other” (Comentale 2001, 471). *Trilogy* exposes and seeks to move passed the paradox or “rough beast” of modern state politics and sovereign power, a politics and power that cannot exist without the lives and populations the state designates as inimical to its constitution.

The speaker’s own existence on the margins leads her to this band of outsiders, a

“community of feeling” (to return to Duncan’s term) figured in the poem by the “unbalanced, neurotic woman,” Mary Magdalene, and an interlocutor known as Kaspar, an Arab merchant. The choreography of H.D.’s dance before Bryher in Corfu, the vibrations and communication of the séance sitters in London, link to this meeting of like-minds at the conclusion of *Trilogy*. In H.D.’s re-versioning of the biblical story, the course of events seems to be straightforward enough: Mary visits Kaspar to procure a jar of myrrh with which she plans to anoint Jesus’ feet at a gathering of his disciples. Mary asks for the product; Kaspar denies her; Mary, in a fashion most unwomanly, persists; Kaspar relents. That is the extent of the narrative’s action.

And yet this brief, seemingly ordinary encounter occasions a major shift in perception, at least for Kaspar. Mary’s actions break conventions of femininity, but not in the sexually “extravagant,” “venereous,” or “Siren”-like ways with which Christian traditions have tended to describe her. Rather, she is “willful” and “unpredictable,” characteristics that have made her unwelcome among Jesus’ disciples. Despite, or perhaps because of her movements outside of convention, Mary’s presence before Kaspar in his shop, her unseemly (because insistent and therefore unfeminine) demand for the jar of myrrh, provides the merchant with a moment of vision right out of William Blake. Stooping to pick up a scarf that Mary has dropped, again in unseemly fashion (“it is unseemly that a woman / appear disordered, disheveled, // it is unseemly that a woman / appear at all” [H.D. 1986, 604]), Kaspar sees, in a glint of light reflecting off of Mary’s hair, “the whole secret to the mystery. . . . the whole scope and plan // of our and his civilization on this, his and our earth, before Adam,” a vision of paradise before the fall

(H.D. 1986, 601-2). But Kaspar's vision exceeds the optic. Like H.D. in Corfu and the séance sitters in World War II London, he hears an alien sound that he nonetheless understands, "words neither sung nor chanted / but stressed rhythmically" (H.D. 1986, 602). Although these syllables conform "to no sound / of no word he had ever heard spoken," the hardly audible vibration "translated itself / as it transmuted its message // through spiral upon spiral of the shell / of memory that yet connects us // with the drowned cities of pre-history" (H.D. 1986, 602-603). The vibration or rhythm channeled by the séance circle, whose significance is felt if not known by the sitters, is superimposed upon a minor biblical story, indeed upon two characters that never meet in the gospels. Nonetheless, a kind of apocalypse (in both of its meanings, a destruction and uncovering) takes place as Kaspar's previous understanding of the world, of men and women within it, fragments in a moment of time. Mary slides out of the shop with the myrrh in the crook of her arm and the world continues in its ways, but Kaspar's perception of it is changed forever. A vibration, a rhythm, an inaudible sound underlies everything that is known and passed down, and its echo heralds relation, peace.

H.D.'s refashioning of language and her retelling of the Mary Magdalene narrative in *Trilogy* at once presents and enacts the alchemical process of her wartime poetics, of a spiritual realism that seeks to widen her readers' understanding of the real. Her poem, like the rest of her writing from this period, argues that vision and its translation to language and value or story cannot occur without relation, however transient or limited or illegible it may be. Vision is not an autotelic or solipsistic experience. Like the séance, a kind of social machine that connects the one with the

other, the living with the dead, the present with the absent, the factual with the fictional, is needed. The couple, the small group, the séance circle lay the ground for its occasion. Language and those modes of representation the group re-constructs—poetry, narrative, myth—must bend to the strange, start/stop, dot/dash communications tenuously linking life in this world and the next. H.D.’s war writing is the product of such a machine, a group of human and non-human “parts” that gather together to not only imagine but create new social possibilities. As the bombs fall on a closed and claustrophobic London, this machine opens out into the world again, seeking not only a more expansive experience of relation but to change the way it thinks about and practices collective life. This, for H.D., is spiritual realism’s dynamic and indefinable politics, the wartime articulation of an unpopular message of connection and peace, a community of feeling that seeks greater membership and, perhaps, wider influence.

## **4. “to be a different kind of creature”: Blackness, Colonial Enmity, and the Novel as Social Form in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin***

### **4.1 “Only rotting cargo”**

On 11 September 1942, in the harbor near Bridgetown, a German U-boat torpedoed the Cornwallis, a merchant ship carrying food and other provisions to war-ravaged Europe. “The city shook like a cradle and the people scampered in all directions,” as George Lamming has recalled. After three years of escalating preparation, rumor, and anxious waiting, World War II “had come to Barbados” (Lamming 2010, 223). For Lamming and the other black residents of the British colony, this rare scene of spectacular violence and its aftermath was significant, but not exactly for reasons typical of twentieth-century wartime. There were no casualties. The ship didn’t immediately sink. Rather, the attack on the Cornwallis demonstrated the importance of the island’s resources and, critically, their unequal distribution. As the Barbadian novelist Austin Clarke has written, the explosion “let the poor people know that all this time during the rationing of the war, food was coming in and going out of the harbor, to be fed to those people who were ‘contributing to the war effort’” (Clarke 2003, 96). A violent act of disclosure, the attack revealed that from the perspective of the British Colonial Office, the chief contribution of the colony’s poor, predominantly black inhabitants—denizens of what David Lloyd George famously called “the slums of the Empire”—would be to go without, to serve loyally if called upon, and to help maintain local law and order. On the colonial periphery, indeed on the peripheries of Western conceptions of the human, the

colonized in Barbados were to take what little the Empire gave and to accept what the Empire took.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the Cornwallis' ill-fated voyage doesn't end with its torpedoing, however. The food that the ship had been transporting to Europe, now mostly spoiled, couldn't simply be left to rot in the hold. Instead, as Clarke recalls, the "authorities" transferred the decaying and unsalable provisions to the middle of his neighborhood, establishing a landfill on the small, interconnected plots of the poor: "The food and other goods that the people could not buy were dumped in a large hole right in their back yards, now completely useless. We caught a smell of the war. And its stench. There were no rotting bodies. Only rotting cargo" (Clarke 2003, 96). As the war further permeated Bridgetown through the stench of the cargo's decay, the vulnerability of the colonized was again displayed. "Staying" on colonial land without owning it, without even a contract of lease, permitted the public invasion of what little privacy the poor were allotted on the island.<sup>2</sup> "If Barbados said she was Little England," Lamming writes sardonically, "she had to put up with what she got for being what she was" (Lamming 2010, 223). Big England's war trash was Little England's war trash too.

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<sup>1</sup> In an account of both colonial and neo-colonial constructions of the normal and their geographical implications, Katherine McKittrick has written: "Life, then, is extracted from particular regions, transforming some places into inhuman rather than human geographies. Or, those who have lived outside what is considered normal and those who continue to inhabit the uninhabitable are so perversely outside the Western bourgeois conception of what it means to be human that their geographies are rendered—or come to be—inhuman, dead, and dying" (McKittrick 2013, 7).

<sup>2</sup> As Saidiya Hartman writes in *Lose Your Mother*: "Staying is living in a country without exercising any claims on its resources. It is the perilous condition of existing in a world in which you have no investments. It is having never resided in a place that you can say is yours. It is being 'of the house' but not having a stake in it. Staying implies transient quarters, a makeshift domicile, a temporary shelter, but no attachment or affiliation" (Hartman 2008, 88).

Without the possibility of environmental remediation or relocation, life continued in the waste. In small bands, children of the island's black tenants foraged among the ship's garbage for "goods": balls of thread, tins of canned meat, and fountain pens. As Clarke notes, the children even pulled from the wreck of the vessel a new expression to describe their situation: "a new term was added to our always-increasing lexicon. If you were hit suddenly, if you were exposed, if you had an odor, if you were not really up to scratch, you were *cornwallised*" (Lamming 2010, 98). To be "cornwallised," in other words, was to feel helpless, inferior, or vanquished in whichever way, and to be living with the results of that feeling.

Clarke's and Lamming's narratives of dispossession, pollution, and making do with the British Empire's rubbish disclose how the war had primarily impacted life in the colony: by increasing the extraction of the island's already depleted supply of resources and greater amplifying its deep-seated social (classed as well as racial) asymmetries.<sup>3</sup> With the attack on the Cornwallis, the spectacular violence of World War II may have "come to Barbados," as Lamming writes, but the explosion also exposed the structural and "slow" violences of colonization—war in a quieter form—that had long preceded the global conflict. This chapter begins to unpack what it might mean to inherit, and to re-encounter during twentieth-century wartime, a longer history of being "cornwallised," of

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<sup>3</sup> The island's poor had recently been the subjects of the 1939 Royal Commission on West Indian labor unrest and the region's appalling living conditions. The written record of the Commission's findings, known as the Moyne Report, was prepared in 1939. However, the British War Office, fearing that the Report's descriptions of malnutrition and neglect across the colonial Caribbean might be used by enemy powers for propaganda, suppressed its publication. The Report was not published in full until after the war, in 1945.

being hit, exposed, not really up to scratch in the ex-slave archipelago.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, I will ask what it might mean for a small group of children or adolescents, gathering on the cusp of the decolonial era, to invent such a word to communicate a shared colonial predicament. I will ask how their collective poesis—idle talk that imagines and even perhaps produces a world—infects the form of the novel that depicts them.

Alongside critics like Simon Gikandi, Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, Anthony Bogues, Tavia Nyong'o, and Katherine McKittrick, this chapter moves within a series of contemporary debates in the fields of black studies and narrative—more specifically novel—theory. Reading Lamming's seminal anticolonial fiction, *In the Castle of My Skin*, it asks how the forms of novelistic discourse traveled (or not) to the Caribbean in the late colonial moment. What becomes of the novel—perhaps the most modern of literary forms—when it arises from within one of modernity's many material and cultural sources, from within a region “intended exclusively for production,” in Lamming's terms, and therefore “not designed for social living” (Lamming 2011, 52).<sup>5</sup> How do the anticolonial politics of early Caribbean fiction—the social life of those living within a colonial world that fosters only their social and political death—engage novelistic conventions? To ask these questions, as Sylvia Wynter and many after her have shown, is

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<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to read the name “Cornwallis” and not to think of the victories and defeats of the ship's namesake, the Marquess Charles Cornwallis, whose violent military and administrative efforts were influential across the British Empire (especially in the American colonies, India, and Ireland) during the late eighteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Writing of the Caribbean, Lamming continues: “Men and women and children were common hands summoned or ordered to create wealth, a source of fortune for hostile strangers. They were a reservoir of cheap labor, the material base on which kingdoms of luxury or convenience could be constructed elsewhere. . . . To be black was to be a commodity identified with the cheapest of labor” (Lamming 2011, 52).

always also to ask how Caribbean texts encounter the history of what or whom European novels have left out, their silenced or marginal voices and small lives, the enslaved or colonized “done-tos who had made possible the deed,” the project of modernity itself. It is to at least half-imagine those lives that inhabited—and often still inhabit—the “blank spaces between the lines” of European literary, historical, and political discourse, those who live “in the dashes, the pauses between commas, semicolons, colons, in the microcosmic shadow world between full stops” (Wynter 2010, 55).<sup>6</sup>

Scrutinizing this “microcosmic shadow world,” as Gayatri Spivak and Nyong’o contend, requires a return to the problem of representation in both senses of the word: as the aesthetic (or more generally, discursive) depiction of a world, on the one hand, and the act of speaking or deciding for another in political or historical terms, on the other.<sup>7</sup> This chapter thus queries the rough but productive nexus drawing together the work of history, politics, and fiction in one crucial novel of the Caribbean “enterprise zone.”<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>6</sup> For somewhat divergent but equally luminous critiques of the Western Enlightenment’s position on race, see Goldberg; Robinson; Buck-Morss; and Chandler. Robinson perhaps best sums up the Western construction of the “Negro”: “The construct of Negro . . . suggested no situatedness in time, that is history, or space, that is ethno- or politico-geography. The Negro had no civilization, no cultures, no religions, no history, no place, and finally no humanity that might command consideration” (Robinson 1983, 81).

<sup>7</sup> Before glossing Spivak’s work, Nyong’o introduces the terms of her argument, *vertreten* (to speak for) and *darstellen* (to depict): “From Spivak’s postcolonial feminist Marxist perspective, it was the unthinking equation of speaking for (*vertreten*) with depicting (*darstellen*) that allowed ideology to operate unchallenged, for it is through this conflation that control over the means of portraying something becomes naturalized as a mode of political authority” (Nyong’o 2014, 72).

<sup>8</sup> Echoing Lamming’s own formulations, Vincent Brown describes the “enterprise zone” as “a territory organized by the government on behalf of business interests, where profit taking prevail[s] over civic investment” (Brown 2011, 16). Here, violence is durational, accretive, and ordinary as much as it is swift or spectacular. Or, as Edouard Glissant has written of the Caribbean enterprise zone: there are not “great catastrophes that are like monumental phenomena in the history of the world, but the shadowy accretions of misfortune, the unseen erosion of a cornered people, the unnoticed disappearance, the slow loss of identity, the suffering without consequence” (Glissant 1999, 169).

Lamming's case (but also in many others), to write fictions of twentieth-century Caribbean life at all is also to think alongside the violent pasts of enslavement, empire, and world war. It is to look forward, uncertainly, to decolonization and the possibilities (liberatory, oppressive, and/or differently violent) of postcolonial futures. Furthermore, to write fiction in or of the late colony—which is to say, to invent and emplot the lives of characters who have been left out of the official historical record or the European novel's purview—is always also to speak of some other way(s) of being human, to not only reveal but participate in the social forms of those who have been and are still denied their humanness and political agency by such intertwined powers as empire, Enlightenment intellectualism, white supremacy, and global capital. As I will show, fictional narrative and representation (both aesthetic or discursive and political) too become sites within which the anticolonial energies that always seethe within the Empire are experimented with and given form.

#### **4.2 War, Colonial Violence, and the Novel**

Many twentieth-century critical and postcolonial theorists have scrutinized the increasing convergence of Western politics and war over the course of modernity, arguing that organized violence often exceeds the more limited definition of war as directly destructive force.<sup>9</sup> These thinkers draw attention to the subtle, unevenly distributed violences—from the structural inequalities re-entrenched by the transforming

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<sup>9</sup> See especially Benjamin (1978); Schmitt; Césaire (2000); Adorno and Horkheimer; Fanon (2004 and 2008); Arendt (1968); Foucault (2003); Hardt and Negri (2001 and 2005); Mbembe; and Nixon.

global capitalist economy to the temporally-diffuse, “slow violence” of ecological disaster—that shape everyday life, even in times of purported peace. This mingling of politics and warfare through structural and slow means is especially acute in colonial situations. Despite Western myths of benevolence and the alleged “gifts” of economic and political development, colonial regimes only perpetuate economic and political inequality. Bolstered by discourses that seek to naturalize racial hierarchies, these systems also foster the potential for unbounded physical violence directed toward colonized peoples and the rampant exploitation of their local environments.<sup>10</sup>

By turning to the convergence of British colonialism and World War II at the ostensible periphery of the war’s concern, this chapter will show how the diffused time of the Empire’s martial politics transformed in the late colonial era. One of many twentieth-century struggles over territories exterior to Europe, World War II braided interstate and inter-imperial conflict. Worldwide, colonies again became contested zones, whether over land, resources, labor, or maritime supply lines. The participation of colonized populations in the war effort—so many “Little Englands” that, in various ways, had to put up with what they got for being what they were—was compulsory in one form or another. Alongside this history of forced alliance and labor, I will also trace a common narrative that posits this era as a central motor of increased anticolonial resistance across the globe. With the militarization of many colonies during the war, the conscription of

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<sup>10</sup> “Colonialism cannot be understood,” Fanon writes, “without the possibility of torturing, of violating, or of massacring,” even if more diffuse forms of violence keep this possibility mostly tacit and superfluous (Fanon 1994, 66). Following the work of Fanon and Du Bois, Mbembe emphasizes the importance of these diffuse forms of violence within the colonial zone, arguing that the colony is a site where sovereignty consists of power outside the law and peace is war without end (Mbembe 2003, 24).

colonial forces in the fight against fascism, and these soldiers' often heightened sense of alienation from the empires they fought to protect, as well as the freshly perceived vulnerability of colonial regimes, the history of decolonization often has been told as if it were a result of European disasters.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter complicates notions of World War II's primary influence on decolonization by examining the collision of disparate conflicts—colonial and anticolonial, capitalist and anti-capitalist, global and local—that took place in the Caribbean colonies before and during the war. To do so, I will turn to Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, which explores how, for nearly a decade before the war, rebellions, riots, and the general unrest of an exploited but increasingly organized labor force had stoked anticolonial resistance throughout the Caribbean.<sup>12</sup> Rather than simply adding fuel to a social and political conflagration, the war in many ways thwarted and transformed the political gains of this discord, facilitating, in the case of Barbados, the transition from a semi-feudal British colony to a neo-colonized node in the post-war world system. During the war, as Lamming would later tell David Scott, “any kind of political activity was sedition or thought to be. So the forces that were aligned and worked there became diverted, detoured into the defense of something else, in fact, the defense of what they were about to dismantle in 1937” (Lamming 2002, 88-89). *In the Castle* demonstrates

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<sup>11</sup> For more, see Fanon, “West Indians and Africans” in *Toward the African Revolution*; Macey; and Glissant (1999). Donna V. Jones has recently argued that the colonized world, especially the Caribbean, first encountered European weakness and decay during and after the First World War.

<sup>12</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o has argued that *In the Castle* is the first anticolonial novel to take seriously the “entry of the masses into history.” For Ngugi (cibbing Alfred North Whitehead), Lamming's novel is to the literature of decolonization what Plato was to the history of philosophy: everything written after is merely a footnote (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 2011, xi).

how anticolonial and anti-capitalist practices often were redirected toward colonial and capitalist aims, toward the “defense of the free world” from fascist and then socialist threat and the expansion of the island’s commercial economy into global capitalist markets in the post-war, pre-independence years.<sup>13</sup>

Compared to representations of catastrophic destruction in Europe or the Pacific, Lamming’s account of the war years appears to be muted. With the exception of the Cornwallis incident, life in Barbados seems to continue in much the same way as it had between the wars. But as *In the Castle* adjusts its focus to the British Empire’s accelerated extraction of life, labor (workers and soldiers), and resources (land and lumber, scrap iron and oil) from its colony, the island’s long but largely submerged history of oppression quickly bubbles to the surface. The wartime setting of Lamming’s novel repeatedly evokes the past (but still resonant) brutalities of chattel slavery while foregrounding the persisting insecurities of the present—the violent socio-political structures of colonial institutions, whether in semi-feudal or commercial capitalist mode—and auguring a bleak future of dependency, social stratification, and ecological disequilibrium. Indeed, as Lamming’s text reveals, the total war conditions that England would impose upon itself during World War II had been lived, in some sense, in

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<sup>13</sup> As Hilary Beckles has written, the interwar years in Barbados witnessed the origins of monopoly capitalism on the island through the establishment of two corporate bodies: 1) the 1917 consolidation of planter business interests into the Plantations Company Limited, created to “pilot the planters’ entry into the commercial sector” by capitalizing on investment funds being accumulated in non-sugar sectors and 2) the formation of the Barbados Shipping and Trading company in reaction to the planters’ corporatization. These companies “competed for trade, arable land, and control of governmental policy” throughout the interwar years until, in response to dockworker’s strikes in 1934, they merged into the Barbados Produce Exporters Association, signaling “the triumph of corporate organization within the economy” (Beckles 2003, 133).

Barbados for so long that they seemed almost ordinary: “It seemed Europe had taken a fancy to war,” Lamming’s characters collectively think. “It seemed a perfectly natural thing” (Lamming 2010, 221).<sup>14</sup>

As Lamming has stated, however, the Empire’s nearly limitless use of Barbados during the war and its attempt to redirect all dissident social and political energies toward the war effort also nourished a “critical attitude” that arose among the colonized in the interwar years. Barbadians became increasingly “skeptical about the authenticity of the establishment, about the truth of the people who were in charge” (Lamming 2002, 78). As it had for many European, American, and Anglophone modernist writers during and after the world wars, the colonial institution of language—its truth-telling capacities and the genres or forms of its transmission—became an object of intense scrutiny and, crucially, of both political and aesthetic potential. While the past and present worlds that *In the Castle* portrays may be bleak, the novel mobilizes this “critical attitude” to explore improbable sites for social, political, and aesthetic experimentation, circling around the experiences of small groups within the black tenant class. Though overburdened by the British colonial system and the local plantocracy it undergirds (figured in Lamming’s text by segregated villages and Foucauldian schools that resemble the barracks or the prison, even the slave ship), Lamming’s tenants and their children make communal space to think and act against the political structures that mark their lives. From an uncertain present, they undertake a collective return—via rumor, dialogue, idle talk, fragmented

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<sup>14</sup> Linking events in World War II Europe to the history of enslavement and colonization, Wynter writes: “The techniques of terror which will be brought to perfection under Hitler and Stalin against Europeans, in Europe itself, are perfected in the emporium-emperium, plantation units” (Wynter 1971, 98).

memory, dream, popular narrative, and myth—to the mutating forms of violence that had shaped colonial life since its inception.<sup>15</sup> Congregating in secret on the island's few public grounds (its small-plots-become-landfills, its beaches) and operating on the fringes of British colonial reason, they practice anticolonial life, a kind of social and historical study, in the total war colony.

In turn, these small-group gatherings, and the palaver they inspire, animate the form of *In the Castle* itself. Lamming's text, I will show, employs a kind of social formalism to depict the shifting, collective practices of Barbadian life. Enclaves within the colonial village, rather than individual characters, become the principal—if inconstant—objects of the novel's attention. Indeed, the book shatters many of the European novel's conventions, which often figure in their protagonists and approximate in their tidy narrative arcs the principles of bourgeois individualism and directed growth. As *In the Castle* shows, there can be no Western style of development in the racially-segregated colony, no clean or final individual acculturation into a nation of fellow citizens or a society of self-possessed subjects. Therefore, there can be no ordered narrative of that development, no *bildungsroman*. Moreover, Lamming's text makes plain that these modes of representation (subjectivity, citizenship, *bildung*) often complement the decadent colonial project, its political and educational institutions, its violent regulation and discipline. Thus in order to undertake the alternative task of narrating past and present life from the perspective of the Caribbean's poor, *In the Castle* employs a

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<sup>15</sup> Caribbean literature often brings together the ghosts of slavery, post-emancipation colonialism, and World War II. See Selvon (1952); Césaire (1983); Naipaul; Wynter (2010); Glissant (2001); Cliff; and Walcott.

motley crew of genres and forms. Moving among fiction, poetry, and historical discourse, tragedy, epic, and picaresque, this multitude eschews a single narrative arc and easy resolution, indicating that genres and forms must be picked through and refashioned if they are to depict the protracted violence and resistance of this colonial world.<sup>16</sup> To be “cornwallised,” then, is also to be thrown into the midcentury wreck of the English language and its forms and to find one’s way amid the refuse.

#### **4.3 The “image of the enemy”: Barbadian Anticolonialism and World War II**

*In the Castle of My Skin* examines a dynamic and obscure core sample of 1930s and 1940s Barbadian society, a society that differed in crucial ways from other Caribbean islands within the British Empire. Between the world wars, Crown colony government prevailed in all British West Indian territories *except* Barbados and the Bahamas (Hart 1999, 109). With little oversight from the Colonial Office, Barbadian sugar planters and merchants (or their local representatives) maintained a social, economic, and political structure of partition and dependency resembling feudalism. As Bonham Richardson has put it, “a tiny white elite dominated a numerically dominant, technically free, largely

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<sup>16</sup> In *Conscripts of Modernity*, David Scott argues that anticolonial narratives about the past, present, and future are typically plotted in the form of the Romance, as “narratives of overcoming, often narratives of vindication,” salvation, and redemption that project a “certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving” (Scott 2004, 8). From the postcolonial perspective of many failed revolutions, Scott, alternatively, reads anticolonial resistance through the lens of tragedy, which embodies the historical movement of crisis and failure in its individuals and questions notions of historical development and rationality. It is my contention that Lamming’s text moves between Romance and tragedy, in some less defined space of conflict, irresolution, and hope-against-hope.

landless, black laboring class” (Richardson 1986, 23).<sup>17</sup> The post-emancipation inheritance of landlessness was a principal source of poverty, social marginalization, and disenfranchisement among descendants of slaves. But further, without Crown colony status and with almost all land under the private ownership of planters, Barbados lacked a commons upon which the landless might plant, hunt, and otherwise subsist. As a result, much of the black laboring class rented small plots on planters’ less arable land in exchange for their labor. As property began to change hands in the interwar years from the increasingly insolvent plantocracy to local and international speculators, the precariousness of the tenantry was exacerbated rather than allayed. Without ties of filiation linking them to, or sufficient capital to invest in the purchase of, what little available private property existed on the island, black Barbadians struggled to maintain even the capacity to rent from planters and merchants.

The contesting social arrangements of the decadent plantocracy (quietly backed by the Colonial Office until the outbreak of World War II), the rising commercial sector, and the dependent labor force loosely structure the central settlement of *In the Castle*, Creighton’s Village. Lamming’s representation of the village’s geography resembles Fanon’s racially compartmented colony, its environment of “atmospheric violence” (Fanon 2004, 31). Vertical and horizontal distance, as well as strategically placed stone walls, fences, ditches, and policemen, separate the “Great” white landlords (figured by Mr. Creighton, the village’s namesake) from the “low-down nigger people” of the

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<sup>17</sup> In order to be guaranteed enfranchisement in Barbados in 1911, a man needed to own land that yielded at least five pounds per year in revenue, to earn fifty pounds per year in salary, or hold a university education. This demographic accounted for less than 2,000 of the island’s 200,000 residents, or less than one percent of the total population.

village: renters, squatters, day-laboring dockworkers, seasonal agricultural laborers, the unemployed, and the unemployable (Lamming 2010, 27-28). The village's partitions are more than physical. Black tenants have been cast by the landlords, plantation overseers, and police as the "image of the enemy," an unremitting threat to the colonial order of things. As a police constable thinks to himself while on night patrol:

He did not come to explain, inform, interpret or share experience like other men in the ordinary run of social intercourse. He came to arrest. The village might have been asleep, but floating somewhere about, around, perhaps within himself was the large, invisible threatening phantom, the image of the enemy. . . . Whenever the constable appeared there was apprehension. People who all the while were relaxed and composed became fidgety, began to suspect themselves. . . . Nothing seemed wrong, but something must have been" (Lamming 2010, 27).

From the perspective of the Empire, the plantocracy, and their shared law enforcement, black life always contravenes colonial law and order, even when asleep.<sup>18</sup> In a world inundated by such "atmospheric violence," there needn't be any explanation for this vision of things, no interpretation of the law or sharing of experience. The constructed "image of the enemy" cuts so "sharp and deep through every layer of the land" that its equating of black and poor with that which must be "destroyed or placated" has been assumed as truth (Lamming 2010, 27). The black and the poor are tolerated only insofar as they remain useful or at least pacific.

Through its portrayal of the spatial and discursive structures that the producers of

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<sup>18</sup> Selvon's 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners* expresses similar sentiment. Henry Oliver, renamed Galahad after his arrival in London, thinks: "Again he panic, though he ain't do anything against the law. Still is so people does feel in Trinidad when police near them, as if, even though they ain't commit a crime, the policeman would find something wrong that they do and want to lock them up" (Selvon 1989, 43). As Jared Sexton has recently written, "black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized" (Sexton 2011, 28).

this image seek to maintain, Lamming's text discloses the subtle violence and hypocrisy of British colonial peacekeeping: "The make-believe was impressive. The landlord. The overseer. The villager. The image of the enemy. The limb of the law, strict, fierce, aggressive. These had combined to produce an idea of the Great" (Lamming 2010, 28). Planters, overseers, and police, as well as those villagers who have begun to "suspect themselves," use the "image of the enemy" to construct an opposing notion of "the Great," of white supremacy, colonial benevolence, and even the gift of inter-racial harmony. Where there is no overt violence in a segregated world, this myth reasons, there is no violence at all; where there is no violence at all, there must be peace and contentment. The image of the enemy and the idea of benevolent colonial rule combine paradoxically to justify the system of power and structural violence that keeps order on the island. In Barbados, in short, colonial peace is the interminable pacification of the enemy within, the construction and policing of an image of blackness that has very material consequences for those on the wrong side of the color line.<sup>19</sup>

*In the Castle* draws out and scrutinizes this myth of benevolence and the violent reality it thinly veils by representing resistant life on the other side of the law and its claims for political legitimacy that British colonial power and the local plantocracy "peacefully" condemn. Labor disputes and small uprisings throughout the 1930s expose the dubiousness of colonial narratives of peace, while in a strange way affirming the image of the "low down" as the enemy to colonial order. After a dockworker's strike, the

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<sup>19</sup> As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote after World War I, with respect to the so-called Pax Britannica: "There was not a single year during the nineteenth century when the world was not at war. Chiefly, but not entirely, these wars were waged to subjugate colonial peoples. . . . What the peace movement really meant was peace in Europe and between Europeans" (qtd in Lamming 2009, 40).

first of such kind in the village, Mr. Creighton deigns to approach Ma, the village's social matriarch, in an attempt to procure information about the island's increasing unrest:

He wanted to know whether she could explain why things had changed so greatly in the village. . . . Disrespect, strife and the threats [were] silent but sensed on all sides. . . . The changes had meant a threat to his power. The old man hated violence too, but the changes that were taking place didn't involve violence. Nobody assaulted. Things simply happened and people seemed to understand more (Lamming 2010, 184-185).

Mr. Creighton fears the village's historical and political coming to consciousness through a Fanonian "metaphysical experience" (where the deprivations of colonized life become foundational for anticolonial thought and practice), even before this resistance becomes directly violent. Unsurprisingly, Creighton remains blind to the violence of "his power," the structures of poverty, dependency, and exploitation that the colonial system has established and that the plantocracy has maintained. From his perspective, the strike represents a form of mass greed, a set of unfounded political and economic claims that are potentially devastating for village order. Despite the "image of the enemy" and incessant colonial fears of the image's violent realization, the "low down" were never imagined to be capable of something like this. The strike disrupts the presumed harmony of the colony and suddenly "Anything could happen" (Lamming 2010, 187).

The strike is followed in quick succession by Lamming's thinly fictionalized account of the Bridgetown riots of late July 1937. After the expulsion from the island of Clement Payne, a leader of the Caribbean trade union movement, rioters attacked the heart of ruling class power, the commercial district of the city. The first overt and collective resistance practiced by the island's colonized for over sixty years drew out the latent, direct forms of violence that colonial martial politics always carries within itself.

Over the course of the three-day conflict, British colonial and local police killed fourteen people and wounded forty-seven. Bridgetown declared martial law and the HMS Goliath, a requisitioned tug, shelled the city.<sup>20</sup> Though Creighton's Village sits outside of Bridgetown in Lamming's text, the rioters and police slowly seep into the community, first as relay and rumor, and then as armed groups. A "war had started" (Lamming 2010, 201), the narrator exclaims, the first of two that will cut through Lamming's text. Everything seems uncertain as the disrespect, strife, and threats that had been silent but sensed by Mr. Creighton are voiced and acted upon. The spirit of these events, "an expression of the incompatibility between black Barbadians' rising expectations . . . and the anachronistic system of white planter control," quickly dissipates, however (Richardson 1986, 233). Labor unrest and anticolonial resistance soon collide with another conflict, one demanding allegiance from colonizer and colonized, rich and poor, alike.

The arrival of World War II in Barbados—signaled by the attack on the Cornwallis but felt in many other ways prior to this event—serves as a historical pivot within Lamming's novel. Local scrutiny of, and even attempts to alleviate, the "atmospheric violence" of the colony is, for a time, redirected. Media coverage and rumors of the war worry, entertain, and excite the islanders. But then France falls and the mood changes. The villagers "didn't know anything about France, but they knew that France was on the side of England, and Barbados was Little England. Three hundred

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<sup>20</sup> Warships and marines were dispatched to the Caribbean throughout the "interwar" period to aid against labor unrest and to protect British investments. They were used in Trinidad (1919, 1937), St. Kitts and St. Vincent (1935), St. Lucia (1936), Jamaica (1938), as well as in Barbados.

years of unbroken friendship, they thought. They understood what that meant and the fall of France became their fall as well” (Lamming 2010, 221). The vicarious national life of the colony finds its apogee in times of imperial crisis, or at least it is supposed to. The structural violence of the colonial relation—and any local attempt to criticize or curb it—is overshadowed by the unchosen “alliance” (here presented again in the language of national filiation, “Big” and “Little” England) of empire and colony.<sup>21</sup> When the empire’s allies are at war, the empire is at war. When the empire is at war, and you live within its borders, you are at war too. There is no choice in the matter. Refusal is sedition. The “low down nigger people,” those who are marked by and as the “image of the enemy,” are conscripted into the fight, to soldier, to labor, or simply to behave. The war exposes a world of disproportional duties without rights as the colony is further militarized.

Soon after the fall of France, a course in military training begins at G.’s (the novel’s sometimes protagonist) high school. The boys are taught to use Sten guns, to crawl with rifles slung to their backs, to fight hand-to-hand. The fervor of the school’s parades—a martial feature of colonial education from primary school upward that, Lamming repeatedly underscores, precedes World War II—becomes terribly rigid. As Austin Clarke recalls: “During these tough war days, my life became more organized”; “School now became a regiment” (Clarke 2003, 40-41). Bomb drills replace cricket as physical education in the curriculum. Rumors of German spies and intrigue begin to

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<sup>21</sup> Though the imperial call may have been for unity with the Allied cause, the island remained compartmented according to race and class. Austin Clarke recalls having witnessed a New Year’s Party through the partition of a window, experiencing the marked difference and distance between inside and outside: “All of us outside counting in a year that would bring us more war, and nothing like what it would bring the ladies and gentleman on the other side of the wall” (Clarke 2003, 33).

circulate; Lord Haw Haw claims to know “the layout of the land,” where the island’s surplus and soon-to-be exported food is stored, making the war, the shared enemy, seem closer, almost palpable. “This war wasn’t history,” Lamming’s narrator states. “It was real, and we walked out every morning on the civil exercises saying farewell to the classroom. We expected to hear a bomb fall” (Lamming 2010, 222). War becomes real, here, when its violence is expected, when life and its social activity is directed toward this expectation and toward security amid the prospect of future disaster.

But the war becomes real in other ways too. Barbados’ “unbroken friendship” with England demands not only the patient allegiance of colonial bodies, but also the materials that sustain their lives. The village’s resources are the Empire’s resources; the villagers merely stay on and within a land they must work but to which they cannot lay claim. During the war, the “gifts” of Barbados’ limited infrastructure are taken back; rail lines are dug up and sent to the Continent because some unidentified “countries needed scrap iron”: “Some business man had bought the lines and had had them sent across the sea” (Lamming 2010, 230). It almost goes without saying that the profits for this enterprise aren’t shared by those affected most by the rail’s demolition. Then many of the island’s trees are felled: “Not a tree in sight within the village. There were no trees at all. . . . We didn’t know why or where they had really been taken, but the customary explanation was the war. Everything had happened because of the war” (Lamming 2010, 229).<sup>22</sup> In place of known destinations and the names of those benefiting from the

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<sup>22</sup> Deforestation—or in the case of Barbados the conversion of forest and scrubland into organized sugar plantations—had been a colonial project in the Caribbean from the beginning. In order to make space for

stripping of the land, the “war” stands in as explanation and cause for the island’s transformation.

This explanation and this cause, the social disruptions and ecological destruction it rationalizes, survive to structure colonial life throughout the remainder of, and after, the war. Structural and slow violence seep into the future like some form of social and ecological post-trauma. As the village continues to transition from a semi-feudal plantation economy to something resembling monopoly capitalism during the war, Mr. Creighton makes the decision to subdivide and sell his land, land that the villager’s have rented for generations. The new owners, members of the civil service and partners in a local bank run by the unobtrusively named Mr. Slime (who had been a teacher and labor leader within the village), come to claim what is now theirs by law. The villagers turn, in the time it takes to sign a real estate contract, from renters to squatters. During this transfer of ownership, the precarious position of the villagers, those who often own the chattel houses they live in but not the land that their houses rest upon, once again becomes manifest.

A member of the new land-owning class, in the village to pass on the news of eviction himself, questions the ties that bind the poor to land that they do not own:

Why did people respect land as they did? He didn’t understand, but it was a kind of visitation that assisted or terrified, an infectious disease which money made imperative for the rich to inherit. The poor understood the same issue in a different way, and since they couldn’t own it, they rooted

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sugar plantations (which replaced tobacco), Barbados’ forests were almost entirely cut down by the end of the seventeenth century.

themselves into it. Dirt was cheap as the villagers often said, and sand was free; but land was the land, priceless, perennial and a symbol of some inexplicable power (Lamming 2010, 241).

The poor have established roots in land that is not theirs, in land they believe to be beyond price, but the transformations that take place during the war years introduce the prospect of another forced deracination. When all property is private, when one merely stays and does not own, one's roots can be pulled up without consent or consultation. As the new landlord exclaims to the unbelieving and newly evicted: "It's perfectly legal, and that's all that matters. It is a question of who owns what" (Lamming 2010, 239). Mr. Creighton's paternalism, his small plots and meager gifts, had provided an illusion of security that the war and the socio-economic transformations it triggers quickly uncover and dissolve.

#### **4.4 "Their legacy has not yet been determined": Lamming's Children**

Despite the world-historical events that take place across the Atlantic and the social and economic transformations that accompany World War II in Barbados, *In the Castle* remains attentive to overlooked lives, to those who stand outside of citizenship, enfranchisement, and ownership. Like many writers in the Caribbean anticolonial tradition (from Césaire and Wynter to Kamau Brathwaite and Jamaica Kincaid), Lamming directs his focus toward those who do not, or are not supposed to, make history happen, toward its nameless actors and crowds, clusters of small lives that nonetheless have political investments, that—here and now—matter. Away from the imperial politics of the Colonial Office, the island's plantocrats and merchants, its civil servants and

police, collective life arises in Lamming's text within shared spaces of dispossession and abandonment.

Significantly, *In the Castle* often turns to small groups of children in these spaces, those who may be young but are under few illusions about the realities of colonization. Despite the various violences they daily experience, these children have not yet totally succumbed to the distorting strictures of colonial adulthood. As Lamming will claim of one such group in his second novel, *The Emigrants*: "Their legacy has not yet been determined, their choice still is unformed. An area of consciousness is still free from the logic that makes curiosity its disease and understanding its cure" (Lamming 1994, 96). Lamming does not undertake some fast and loose defense of innocence against experience in his novels. Nor does he promote a straightforward glorification of anticolonial curiosity and imagination at the expense of reason. Rather, his novels depict life that is—despite what violence it has experienced already in the colonial situation, what precocious knowledge it may have gained—open to radical change. There may be no clear future in the colony, but there is still this present whose hazardous nows are full of possibility. Amid the nearly collapsed categories of innocence and experience, Lamming's children commune. Together, they experiment with language and thought voiced with a different phonetics, a vernacular philosophy and poetics that, for Lamming, aren't lesser for being so.

What Lamming calls the "cultural curiosity of children" is the first principle of *In the Castle* and the condition of possibility upon which he imagines anticolonial life

(Lamming 1992, 16).<sup>23</sup> Through their wandering, seemingly idle chatter and open or surreptitious resistance to Barbados' status quo, Lamming's children expose and sometimes thwart the violence of colonial institutions. They drift back and forth across the island's segregated compartments, treating all land as common and available for use. At school, they break the order of the day with their unwillingness to conform to the militarized rigors of colonial education. During drill exercises on Empire Day, for example, overseen by the colony's chief education inspector, a group of boys can't help but let out "a loud giggle from one corner of the school," putting a halt to the march (Lamming 2010, 42). Such laughter and parody, aberrant movement and delay, feigned and real confusion, non-knowledge and other unsanctioned forms of knowledge, continually push the regular rhythms of the British colony, its lockstep educational and social structures, off beat. Lamming's children know full well what's expected of them (they are trained with the whistles and switches of the Empire, after all). They just don't always say or do it. Above all, they seek knowledge with a critical eye and feeling curiosity that cannot be removed from a sense of wonder before the complexities of the world, before that which cannot be known and named. It bears repeating that this is no easy nostalgia or utopian vision of life amid colonial brutality. But sometimes an experience, an idea, or even a history of something as inscrutable as enslavement or world war, might be approached communally and studied critically with what limited materials become available. As G. explains early in the novel, those whose ties of

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<sup>23</sup> Lamming's oeuvre consistently makes space for the youthful small group, the local and/or transnational but always collective site that grounds any politics from below. Though each of Lamming's texts addresses the social potential of youth, see especially *The Emigrants* and *Of Age and Innocence*.

filiation have been cut by forced diaspora and whose affiliations are therefore always under threat must replace “memory” with a collective “inquiry” of the past and its influence on the present (Lamming 2010, 12). And as Lamming writes in his introduction to the novel, this collective inquiry begins with but extends beyond local concerns. It seeks to take part in “a global war to liberate [. . .] villages, rural and urban, from the old encirclement of poverty, ignorance, and fear” (Lamming 2010, xlvi).

Throughout *In the Castle*, Lamming stages scenes of assembly among children, the most extensive of which takes place on a desolate beach. Here, G., Trumper, Bob, and Boy Blue’s dialogue represents, in Sandra Pouchet Paquet’s words, “a philosophical exchange” between four early adolescents who are “obsessed with language as a mechanism for explaining and understanding their environment. It is the basis for games and metaphysical inquiry. Removed from the constraints of adult watchfulness, their imaginations roam freely over the fundamentals of village life” (Paquet 2010, xviii). The critique of colonial structures, especially in its educational, linguistic, and epistemological valences, finds voice in the youthful victims of its violence. Already, Lamming’s children exhibit the “critical attitude” toward British colonial rule that was cultivated among the wider population during World War II.<sup>24</sup> They co-produce forms of thought and sense adjacent to those proscribed by colonial logic (the “image of the

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<sup>24</sup> In *Of Age and Innocence*, writing of a similar group that inhabits the fictional Caribbean island of San Cristobal, Lamming describes the social practice of another children’s collective: “They had come together as a little Society which worked in secret, and the unity which the speakers were urging San Cristobal to achieve was for them a fact. It seemed that they had, in some way, surpassed their elders; so that they behaved, during these expeditions, as though they were no longer dependent on the decisions which others were making for them. It had made their age irrelevant, compared with the wasted experience of those who were so much older. . . . It was . . . a secret experiment” (Lamming 1958, 115).

enemy,” the idea of the “Great”) and its adult world. For the boys, indeed for Lamming’s text itself, sense and nonsense resound in many different directions, toward and away from topics like the disconnect between the promise of freedom and the reality of colonial institutions, love and enmity, madness and reason. Away from the watchful eyes of their parents and schoolmasters, the boys talk about things that “ain’t real for people, or they ain’t what they call practical” (Lamming 2010, 168). These aren’t simply lies or delusions or fancies, but rather social-empirical approaches to the unexplained, to forms of experience that do not fit neatly within normative colonial categories.

Take for one example the following dialogue from the beach scene. Trumper, the eldest of the group, narrates the half-mythical local history of Bambi, Bots, and Bambina, a polyamorous (but crucially, not polygamist) love triangle that begins in goodwill at each vertex. When a European anthropologist arrives “to take some notes ‘bout the people” of the village as if they were “pigeons an’ rabbits an’ that kind of creature,” their triangulated relations become an object of Western scrutiny. Inspired by whichever form of Christianity she brings with her, the anthropologist suggests that Bambi marry one woman or the other so as not to live in “mortal sin” (Lamming 2010, 135). Unwilling to choose between lovers, Bambi finally capitulates by flipping a coin. It lands heads; he marries Bots. Though this turn to chance and its result initially raises no ire, something soon goes “wrong in Bambi’s head.” His subsequent descent into heavy drinking, domestic violence, and eventually, “madness,” causes “enmity” between the two women (Lamming 2010, 138). Bambi soon dies of a heart attack; Bambina and Bots fight over

where to bury his body. The colonial government soon intervenes, sends the corpse to the mortuary, and gives Bambi a poor man's funeral.

Another tale of failed marriage and premature death in the colony, it appears. But the boys do not leave it at that. Rather, they together scour Trumper's story for hidden and apparent meaning. Boy Blue argues that "whenever you get that sort of trouble, is at the bottom of it a woman an' man," universalizing the theme of rocky heterosexual relationships. The "enmity" between men and women, at bottom, is the problem. Trumper quickly shifts the conversation from male/female partnerships to the institution that consolidates and, to his mind, stultifies them: "An' not so much a man an' a woman . . . but the thing they call marriage. . . . It don't matter who marry who, as soon as they is that marryin' business, everythin' break up." The marriage "business" erects a social partition within and around a relationship, separating the couple from the larger community and at the same time destroying the initial bond between them. Boy Blue then re-reflects Trumper's critique of marriage by widening it beyond the singular example: "[I]t seem it don't belong to certain people, meanin' a lot of people put together, like the village for instance. . . . [T]here's always that said same breakin' up when marriage makes his appearance" (Lamming 2010, 141-142). Marriage, here anthropomorphized as a male figure, arrives like the grim reaper or some priest or officer of the law, stifling the relationship it is meant to validate. As the domestic scene falls apart, the lives of its participants follow suit.

Trumper's story and the boys' collective unpacking of it displays the contradictions of colonial identity and sociality. Though they understand that there is

little space for other forms of belonging or affiliation in the colony (polyamory, in the case of Trumper's narrative, or small group study outside the confines of the school, in their own case), the boys' analysis—both its content and its collective practice—reminds them that experience comes in various modes. By their account, logic or reason or narrative cannot fully register the idiosyncracies of this world, of desire, of community, whether these modes of thought and organization work alone (which, of course, they never do) or in tandem. Indeed, local life cannot be caught by any attempt to schematize or narrate its history, to make it make sense: “The things that happen in that village,” Boy Blue concludes, “histr’y ain’t begin to start to know yet” (Lamming 2010, 141). The official history of the British Empire and its discourse doesn’t have eyes to see everything, and its insufficiencies exceed even its limited choice of subject. To not be seen or known by this history, then, to be of little or no account according to its ledger, is to be in a state of precarious potential, abandoned to the whims of arbitrary violence and yet open to other imaginings, ways of being together before colonial law.

From this exposed, unstable position, Lamming's children exhibit a humility before the world and the task of naming or knowing its processes, “sort of tryin’ to say what [they] mean without knowing the right words to say” it (Lamming 2010, 143). Knowing language, and knowing how to use it properly, which is to say rationally and with correct grammar in the British colonial situation, brings with it a certain kind of power that they do not yet fully possess or trust: “we had talked and talked and talked,” G. recounts near the conclusion of the beach scene. “We had talked a lot of nonsense perhaps. . . . We weren’t ashamed. Perhaps we would do better if we had good big words

like the educated people. But we didn't. We had to say something was like something else, and whatever we said didn't convey all that we felt" (Lamming 2010, 153). These children in language, as Lamming portrays them, have to think associatively and metaphorically as well as logically, all of which remains limited before feeling and desire. Indeed, education as they know it, learning with and through language at the behest of colonial institutions, is an instrument that "slaughters" feeling: "You could do away with feeling. That's why everybody wanted to be educated. You didn't have to feel. . . . You had language to safeguard you. And if you were beginning to feel too strongly, you could kill the feeling, you could get it out of the way by fetching the words that couldn't understand what the feeling was all about" (Lamming 2010, 154). Language, Lamming's children believe, at least a certain type of rational discourse, operates in much the same way as the institution of marriage in the colony, as an instrument of control that kills feeling and social exchange.

The giving and taking of, the partaking in, language as a form of knowledge is a potentially treacherous gift, particularly in the colonial situation within which this language arises. Already aware of this, Simon Gikandi notes, the boys "struggle to produce an alternative view of things using dialogue and speech (rather than the formulas and clichés used in school), but their discourse skids about aimlessly, seeking—but not finding—a center of authority" (Gikandi 1992, 88). It is this aimlessness, the failed search for an authoritative center, a curiosity without the full capture of knowledge, which distances the boys' speech from the language of colonial institutions. And it is also this sense of aimlessness and curiosity, palaver and idle talk, I contend, that propels

Lamming's critique of Western aesthetic forms. The children's demotic speech, to quote Fred Moten, could be understood "as the language of the playground if the playground is more accurately understood as a laboratory. This means considering 'palaver' or 'gobbledygook' not as degraded forms of the standard but rather as modes of linguistic experimentation, modes of linguistic theory given in experimental linguistic practice" (Moten 2013, 761). Moten, contre twentieth-century thinkers from Heidegger to Fanon, positions the speech acts of palaver, pidgin, and idle chatter as modes of linguistic, and larger cultural, production: "what's at stake, in the very newness of pidgin, is precisely its improvisatory refusal, rather than use, of 'a certain syntax' so that the given is given over to its poetic alternative; its construction, rather than assumption, of a culture; its burial under the weight of civilization and the unlikely, paradoxically animative, exhaustion of such inter(n)ment" (Moten 2013, 759). Palaver and pidgin expose while producing the constructions of culture, both in its given and oppressive forms and in potentially liberatory vectors, in the flight of improvisation itself. Barbadian children—the not-yet and never-fully-educated wretched of the earth—see oppression and talk against it, together practicing a new way of engaging with their world. To have been written out of the Western historical narrative, in Lamming's case, to have suffered from political death, demands different ways of relating to sociality and to history, which are explicitly tied to the imagination, to critical thought, and to the vernacular.

#### 4.5 Novels without Subjects, without Citizens

By taking youth seriously in its own right and blurring the boundaries between innocence and experience, *In the Castle* addresses the British colonial desire for proper subjects and acculturated individuals. Indeed, Lamming's novel exposes the violence of such a desire and the practices that contribute to its compulsory, impossible project in the colony. This investigation requires a critical attention to form and genre as well as theme. Though *In the Castle* is in some sense a narrative of growing up in the wartime colony (with G. situated, at times, as the text's protagonist), it is important to distinguish Lamming's text from the Western narrative of development it calls into conversation, the *bildungsroman*.

Especially in its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century iterations, from *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* to *Northanger Abbey* and *Great Expectations*, the *bildungsroman* represents the process of an individual's development and acculturation within a greater national society. As Franco Moretti contends in *The Way of the World*, the *bildungsroman* is the exemplary genre of European modernity, staging the latter's structuring contradictions: the rift between maturity and youth, tradition and the new, order and disorder. Coextensive with the transforming capitalist mode of production, the genre at once symbolizes the development of the bourgeois individual within the world and the transformations of the modern world itself. Jed Esty has recently supplemented Moretti's reading by locating the *bildungsroman* within the increasing tension "between the open-ended temporality of capitalism and the bounded, countertemporality of the nation," a contradiction that "plays out in fictional or symbolic form as a vivid struggle

between youth and adulthood” (Esty 2012, 5). In Moretti’s European case studies, where the genre’s chief vocation is to “manage the effects of modernization by representing it with a safe narrative scheme,” something has to give in the contest between youth and maturity, uncharted individual (as well as social or economic) change and the (illusorily) secure confines of the nation. “The young protagonist’s open development is ultimately and rather artificially contained by the imposition of a static state of adulthood” (Esty 2012, 4). In the end, the nation stands firm as that social and political receptacle within which the child fully becomes an adult, a subject, and a citizen.

Exchange thus marks the genre and its convention of acculturation, where the individual must give up something, namely its youth and freedom, in order to enter happily into a national society. However, the *bildungsroman*, according to Moretti, performs a kind of sleight of hand in order to veil this process of exchange or compromise; it suggests that the socio-cultural values that the protagonist discovers on his or her path toward adulthood and citizenship had been from the beginning his or her own. The Child is father of the Man or Woman in this sense; the germ had always contained the components of the tree. Through this imagined harmony of nature and culture, both individual and societal values (indeed, a society that values individualism perhaps above all else) are affirmed. In this process, which comes to resemble a project, social and political norms are reproduced and celebrated by the *bildungsroman* and its relatively settled—if not always happy—endings. The nation, or at least some local subset of national society, explicitly becomes again what it always actually was, a sight for unstilted, proper—which is to say normal—growth, a home. And the individual

comes to correspond to or compromise with both standard bourgeois and national images of individualist propriety. According to this reading (which, as Esty writes and I affirm, is always much simpler in theories of the novel than in the complex unfolding of the novels themselves), Goethe's Wilhelm drops the sentiment and the dreams of an aesthetic vocation. Austen's Catherine Morland puts down the gothic novels, learns to stop populating the world with fantasy, and enters domestic life with Henry Tilney. The individual, bucking through youth and adolescence, comes good socially, at once entering into and embodying a bourgeois, national spirit.

No matter its salience with respect to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, Moretti's theory falters, Esty argues, when the *bildungsroman* enters the twentieth century and travels outside of Europe. As the solidity of national imagined communities melts into the global air of imperialism, expanding markets, and world war, narratives of individual development simultaneously deliquesce.<sup>25</sup> By Esty's account, colonial novels like Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Olive Schreiner's *The Story of An African Farm*, and Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark* may clothe themselves in the genre's conventional vestments, but only to bring to light their ill fit on the edge of the world. Set in "colonial contact zones where uneven development is a conspicuous fact of both personal and political

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<sup>25</sup> Moretti has admitted as much, writing that "each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story. There is no picaresque of the border, or Bildungsroman of the European in Africa: this specific form needs that specific space—the road, the metropolis. Space is not the 'outside' of narrative, then, but an internal force, that shapes it from within" (Moretti 1999, 70). Because the peculiarities of space structure narrative at least in part, literary form must change to account for geographical—as well as social, political, and ecological—difference. For Moretti, the novel of the British colonial periphery at once resembles and diverges from novels of the metropole: "its plot remains constant (and 'British')—while its characters change (and become local)," a contradiction of form and content that underscores the "solidity of the symbolic hegemony and the flexibility of the local" (Moretti 1999, 193). As I will argue, this is a tradition from which Lamming's text diverges.

life,” these writers produce “*antidevelopmental fictions*” that at once play with, critique, and resist conventional European narratives of self, empire, and nation (Esty 2012, 2; my emphasis). In so doing, they present development as an open—potentially insoluble—problem on the “never-quite-modernized periphery,” which bears the brunt of global capitalism’s always-transforming social, economic, and political asymmetries (Esty 2012, 7). In these novels, the conflict between the early twentieth-century’s global and open-ended phase of imperial capitalism and the permanent deferral of self-rule in British colonies is condensed “into the language of character and plot” (Esty 2012, 14). The time and narrative of development jumps, stalls, scatters, or reverses as characters struggle to come to terms with the transforming contradictions of colonial life. The telos of development, the rise to adulthood, proper subjectivity, and citizenship within the ostensible haven of the European nation or wider empire, is present only as an absent ideal or impossible model.

*In the Castle* fits, but only loosely, within the genre of antidevelopment that Esty names. The novel’s shifting colonial scene disallows individual development and acculturation for the black and poor. Race and class—as both markers of difference and collective vehicles of performance—are crucial in this text and force a kind of supplement to Esty’s theory of antidevelopmental narrative. Alongside the persistence of economic disadvantage, the “low down” in Lamming’s stratified world are marked by the continually reproduced and circulated image of denigratory blackness. This is the “image of the enemy” that I unpack above, an inimical relation that serves to “justify” colonial violence and exploitation. In Lamming’s text, black life—on the one hand the experience

of being treated as an internal enemy on the borders of the human, and on the other, the performance of other, different forms of sociality—is alienated from a place that is at once home and unhomelike.

*In the Castle* depicts this alienation as the product of a colonial logic that equates racial difference with developmental distance. As Wynter writes in an account of Fanon’s notion of colonial “subject” formation, the problem

with respect to the black man's alienation, was that it is not an individual question, and cannot, therefore, be explained in the [purely phylogenetic terms of the evolutionary organic paradigm or the] purely ontogenetic terms of the psychoanalytic paradigm. Rather, the black man's alienation calls for another explanatory model, one based on the hypothesis that besides “phylogeny and ontogeny there stands sociogeny”—i.e., the always socialized nature of our modes of being human, and thereby of our experiencing what it is like to be human (Wynter 1999, 12).

Socialized within the colonial system as a peculiar subset of the human, Lamming’s characters are split between two types of being: the proper British subjects that colonial society instructs them to become (not only white and English but middle class, what Fanon calls the “white masks” of the colony) and the image of “low down,” inimical blackness that, from the perspective of British power, they always already exemplify. In Lamming’s Barbados, “sociogeny” not only differentiates between and distances one form of being human from another, but it forces the black residents of the colony to try to be both. In this situation of cleaved being, individual development and acculturation, as understood in a British context, are outside the realm of possibility. In the Caribbean colony—where the very possibility of becoming a bourgeois subject and citizen is deferred if not denied to those who are poor and black, where there can be no ordered

development or streamlined acculturation of individual life—there can be no customary narrative of such a life.

In Lamming's text, the novel and its conventions becomes a site of unresolved (potentially irresolvable) conflict, much like the colony itself. Written of and from a world without subjects and citizens, character (or imagined life that presupposes the possibility of subjecthood and citizenship) must be rethought. In his introduction to *In the Castle*, Lamming explains the almost kaleidoscopic social vision of his text, which is rarely concerned with the "prolonged exploration of an individual consciousness." Rather, "it is the collective human substance of the Village itself which commands our attention" (Lamming 2010, xxxvi). This "collective human substance," or, to use Anthony Bogues' terms, "composite and collective characters of place," interlaced humans and nonhumans that come together to comprise a landscape, replace the *bildungsroman*'s typically self-possessed and developing protagonists (Bogues 2011, xxvii-xxviii). Instead of following a seamlessly chronological trajectory through time and bearing witness to the life of a single character, Lamming's text compiles a village-wide set of impressions that only roughly cohere. Here, all characters—even the seeming protagonist G.—are minor characters who move in a social space prior to British subjectivity and citizenship, embodying the contradictions of colonial life.

Early in the novel, G. watches his mother and her friends, members of a sociality without clear bounds: "It seemed they were three pieces in a pattern which remained constant. The flow of its history was undisturbed by any difference in the pieces, nor was its evenness affected by any likeness. There was a difference and there was no

difference” (Lamming 2010, 24). Characters, selves, move between individuation and loose impression in some common social scene. The pattern of life seems to remain constant and yet its history flows. Repetition and difference constitute one another mutually. Number, demographics, the count of individuals doesn’t seem to matter, to alter the pattern of lives in relation: “Outside where the roads crossed there were more [people]: thirteen, thirty. . . . In the broad savannah where the grass lowcropped sang in the singeing heat the pattern had widened. Not three, nor thirteen, but thirty. Perhaps three hundred. Men. Women. Children” (Lamming 2010, 25). The pattern of village life widens and suffuses with numerical uncertainty and only the faintest sense of individual character. Lamming’s syntax starts and stops in rhythmic, poetic bursts (“where the grass lowcropped sang in the singeing heat”), moving back and forth between repetition and difference. Three, thirteen, or three hundred, men, women, and children, as the scene unfurls from G.’s yard to the savannah. But never only one man, one woman, or one child.

As it is in character, so it is in setting and theme. The villagers’ treatment of property, of land (which, again, they do not own) and privacy (which, to a great extent, they do not have) figures the shifting movement of Lamming’s collective human substance. With the exception of the wall that surrounds Mr. Creighton’s “great house” (which rises above the village and is visible from “any point of the land” like some panoptic reminder [Lamming 2010, 25]), the fences that split tenant’s plot from tenant’s plot in the village wobble and fall: “The two yards merged,” Lamming writes in the scene quoted above. “The barricade which had once protected our private secrecies had

surrendered” (Lamming 2010, 18). Crucially, it is not “us” or “our private secrecies” that surrender here, but the fence, as if the shoddy “barricade” had been the enemy to some other kind of life. This surrender of the fence, and the gathering of life on private ground that follows, gives the villagers a sense of “limitless suffusion over the land” (Lamming 2010, 24-25). The collective human substance of the village, living within the space marked out by Creighton’s surveyors, spreads between and beyond its plots. Yards interpenetrate and form patterns whose geometrical arrangements exceed the limitations marked off by fences or the lines where these fences once stood. For better and for worse, the villagers share what they do not possess. Despite being in—but not being full citizens of—the world as the British Empire constructs it, they practice a commons where public land isn’t supposed to exist.

*In the Castle*’s “sociogenic” sense of character, setting, and theme inspires a hybrid (one might say “social”) text. The novel uses not only multiple points of view to depict the collective human substance of the village (shuttling from the first-person singular and plural to third-person omniscient perspectives), but various genres and forms. The text mobilizes prose narrative—including, in one arc that runs throughout the book, G.’s stifled *bildungsroman*—drama, and poetry, allegory, satire, and tragedy. Each genre and form introduces different arrangements of plot, different chronotopes voiced in diverse registers, from the Standard English of the educated local officials and teachers to the pidgin of children.

Lamming uses satirical prose verging on the picaresque, for example, to represent, critique, and disrupt the “progressive” time of British imperial history. The narrative of

“Big England” and “Little England” that peppers the text demonstrates the imagined paternalist relation of metropole and periphery: “Three hundred years, more than the memory could hold, Big England had met and held Little England and Little England like a sensible child accepted. . . . Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England’s children, and may it always be so. . . . Big England had only to say the word and Little England followed” (Lamming 2010, 37). The perpetuation of the “image of the enemy” and the wartime extraction of resources from Barbados, which I’ve discussed above, exposes such claims as little more than legal fictions or poor metaphors: “The village was contributing to the victory which would be Big England’s as well as Little England’s. No one seemed sure whether it was a matter for pleasure or protest” (Lamming 2010, 229). Lamming’s satire evokes the smoothed-out history lessons of the colonial schoolroom (where chattel slavery happened a long time ago and elsewhere, in other empires, or not at all) and returns its focus to the violence and exploitation that this history overlooks.

Alternately, a dream sequence that narrates the submerged (“more than memory could hold”) transatlantic history of enslavement and its mark on the living population is written in a surrealist but vernacular stream of consciousness prose, as if the fluidic abyss of the oceanic crossing infused the discourse itself:

And strange was the time that change my neighbor and me, the tribes without gods and the one tribe without. The silver of exchange sail cross the sea and my people scatter like clouds in the sky when the waters come. . . . I make my peace with the Middle Passage to settle on that side of the sea the white man call a world that was west of another world (Lamming 2010, 210).

The language used to describe this history or this experience or this feeling resembles the orature of the tale, of living myth. What stands out in this passage, however, is the strangely communal experience of the dream. As the character Pa dreams of a West African world, of a violent dislocation from it, of Middle Passage, of enslavement, of new social combinations and collectives, both his partner Ma and the reader bear witness; even dreams aren't private affairs. With passages like this and many others, no single narrative of individual development finds purchase in Lamming's text. The dialogue of pattern and suffusion forces the barricade of the novel to surrender to other narrative, linguistic, or simply sonic forces. Though it is no utopian vision, *In the Castle* presents lives, forms, and genres in relation, a version of social life built precariously on occupied territory.

#### **4.6 Coda: "to be a different kind of creature"**

The social experience of Creighton's Village provides the conditions of possibility for an alternative imaginary to those myths of inimical black life constructed by imperial and local planter power. During a time of world war and colonial instability, this alternative, which Lamming names "blackness," provides a ground for the reconsideration of Western narratives of development from the *bildungsroman* to a Kantian republican vision of perpetual peace or a Hegelian philosophy of history.<sup>26</sup> It is significant, however, that the novel's ostensible protagonist, G., does not discover

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<sup>26</sup> Echoing Wynter's sociogenic understanding of blackness, Lamming has written: "when we say 'black,' it has no biological meaning, nor is it used in the service of racial applause. When I say black, it is the name of a profound and unique historical experience, borne by a particular group of men and women" (Lamming 2011, 66).

“blackness” until the conclusion of *In the Castle*, and that its disclosure is only partial. Lamming’s novel doesn’t present some grand realization at the end of a process of individual development, but instead a secondhand narration of displacement and revelation that for G. triggers a feeling like nausea.

During World War II, Trumper had visited the United States. He has returned—on the night before G. departs to become a teacher in Trinidad—to offer his reflections on the weird world there, its lights and noise and money and poverty. While in the States, Trumper had witnessed overt racism for the first time, something the “polite” English colonizers, “the great administrators,” have largely kept hidden from view in Barbados (Lamming 2010, 295). In the U.S., explicit violence and exploitation suppress black life to no end. No one—at least among the black population—is under any illusions about this. At the same time, however, the victims of American white supremacy share in a kind of protracted, Fanonian “metaphysical experience,” the construction of a collective and critical consciousness. They socialize through common persecution. The world, whether in the colony, the Jim Crow South, or elsewhere, Trumper proclaims, “is a world o’ camps, an’ you got to find out which camp you’re in” (Lamming 2010, 288). He has seen the world split this way, seen which camp he has been placed within, and chosen this beleaguered community as his own. He has returned to Barbados with a dynamic race consciousness—and a correlative politics—that neither his elders nor his friends can yet understand.

For Trumper, one side of the experience of “blackness” is the experience of presumed subhumanity in the West, an ideological or sociogenic set of principles that

have material, psychological, and even physiological effects. The other side is learning to live in and to struggle with those who inhabit the camp of socially-constructed but nonetheless violently real difference. Language, like the knowledge that it enunciates, carries serious power here. Reminiscent of the boys' philosophical and linguistic inquiry on the beach, Trumper outlines how things have been and might still be done with words:

One single word make a tremendous difference, that's why you can never be too sure what a word will do. I'm a nigger or a Negro an' all o' us put together is niggers or Negroes. There ain't no 'man' an' their ain't no 'people.' Just nigger an' Negro. An' little as that seem 'tis a tremendous difference. It make a tremendous difference not to the whites but the blacks. 'Tis the blacks who get affected by leavin' out the word 'man' or 'people.' That's how we learn the race. 'Tis what a word can do. Now their ain't a black man in all America who won't get up an' say I'm a Negro an' I'm proud of it. We are all proud of it. I'm going to fight for the rights o' the Negroes, and I'll die fighting. That's what any black man in the States will say. He ain't got no time to think 'bout the rights o' Man or People or whatever you choose to call it. It's the rights o' the Negro, 'cause we have gone on usin' the word the others use for us, an' now we are a different kind o' creature. . . . If the rights o' Man an' the rights o' the Negro was the same said thing, 'twould be different, but there ain't 'cause we're a different kind o' creature. That's what a simple word can do" (Lamming 2010, 297).

As Wynter will later make plain, "Man" and "Rights," in the West presuppose whiteness. No matter the social or legal promises of the post-emancipation world, the experience of blackness, racialized language, and racist ideology still separate the Rights of Man from the Rights of the "Negro." The problem, for Trumper, indeed the problem for blackness as figured in Lamming's text, is the formation of individual and collective life despite being denied entry within the imagined community of "Man." To that end, Trumper seeks to "become a Negro," to enter into an image (of the enemy, of the "low down") and a myth and examine its violent make-up. Indeed, he seeks to make of himself "the

blackest evidence of the white man's denial of conscience" (Lamming 2010, 299). By coming to accept the sociogenic construction of blackness, to live with while also attempting to move beyond it, Trumper consents "to be a different kind o' creature."

G. is suddenly confronted with the problem that the social form of Lamming's novel has addressed since its opening pages. He struggles to understand what this claim, this paradoxical choice of enforced difference, this feeling of shared history and dispossession, might mean: "To be a different kind of creature. It was difficult to think" (Lamming 2010, 299). Indeed, G. fears being alienated from even this possibility of difference, imagining himself to be a singularity removed from the potential of black (or, for that matter, any) social experience. He worries over "the thought of being a part of what you could not become." Trumper, though insistent that G. must discover this "being a part" out in the world, tempers his fears, claiming that the feeling of being "alone in the world" can only be overcome by someone who has come to know and feel and claim a position outside the Enlightenment category "Man" (Lamming 2010, 301). There is no "being a part of" without consenting to enter into the parlous, non-linear or progressive, camp of becoming outside of "Man."

G. is not yet ready for this coming to consciousness. It arrives all too suddenly in a perplexing blink of an eye. The novel, following suit, ends in disarray. Indeed, it returns, or rather, recurses through memory and feeling to its calamitous beginning. The book concludes by returning to a village-wide flood that had marred the celebration of G.'s ninth birthday and foreshadowed a narrative where any sustained depiction of an individual character would be flooded out (for better and for worse) by the collective

character of the village: “Twus a night like this . . . nine years ago when those waters roll without end all over this place” (Lamming 2010, 302). Though much has changed in the village since that night, G.’s position in the world, as subject, as citizen, or as a “different kind of creature,” has not been made plain. Feelings of vertigo, of immediate nostalgia (“The feeling had seized me again. You had seen the last of something” [Lamming 2010, 303]), of déjà vu (“Twus a night like this . . .”) wash over G. as he looks forward to the next day’s departure to Trinidad. As his position in time wavers, as his position in space seems to have been uprooted, the text retreats to his consciousness. Since Trumper’s astounding enunciation of radical blackness, G.’s thoughts have been almost liquefied. They have become a soup of words and ideas beyond a merely first-person perspective: “The village/my mother/a boy among the boys/a man who knew his people won’t feel alone/to be a different kind of creature. Words and voices falling like a full shower.” The disruption of other ideas, others’ ideas, elicits insecurity, helplessness, and confusion, as when nine years ago it had rained enough to flood. Now, the flood of the social world of the village (family, friends, people, or creatures, both past and present) prevents his arrival at some stable sense of self. Indeed, the text ends with an acknowledgement of leave taking, a cut that could be read as either/both a capitulation to failed development or/and an opening out into the larger world, to other narratives of life and growth: “The earth where I walked was a marvel of blackness and I knew in a sense more deep than simple departure I had said farewell, farewell to the land” (Lamming 2010, 303). The temporal breaches of the text, a narrative told at points in the past tense by G. himself and imbued with times other than those being narrated, suggests that his departure at eighteen

from Barbados will open him up to both the violence and possibility of being a different kind of creature.

By bracketing the development, education, or acculturation that G. fails to accomplish, by making it clear that from the perspective of British colonial power these processes are supposed to be taking place but cannot, *In the Castle* discloses the violent insufficiencies of Western myths of historical progress and individual development in the colony. As this chapter has argued, this inconvenient truth had been apparent in the colonies well before the disasters of the world wars, though it was certainly reaffirmed by them. At the same time, Lamming's text provides itself the space to imagine different forms of being together within—but not entirely determined by—such narratives. It thinks, with great difficulty and no little anxiety, the possibility of being a creature constructed out of the contested and therefore dynamic matrix of social determination and agency, violence and consent. The castle of G.'s skin, his lived experience of blackness, is at once under siege and fugitive, violent, violated, and formative, and Lamming's text builds from these embattled ramparts. To do so, the novel too must become a different kind of creature.

## 5. Intimacies of Resuscitation: The Contemporary Historical Novel, World War, and the Beleaguered Little Community

### 5.1 “A hundred years from now they’ll still be plowing up skulls”

In her 1991 historical novel *Regeneration*, Pat Barker depicts the brief companionship of two of World War I’s principal literary figures, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. In their first conversation as fellow patients at Edinburgh’s Craiglockhart War Hospital (where Owen is being treated for symptoms of war neurosis, Sassoon for a distinctly political “anti-war neurosis” [Barker 1993, 15]),<sup>1</sup> Barker’s fictionalized soldier-poets discuss the relationship between historicity, group life, and the staggering violence of a conflict that they have thus far survived. The war has both compressed and expanded their conceptions of sociality in time. Owen describes a feeling of nearly powerless continuity with the past:

Sometimes when you’re alone, in the trenches, I mean, at night you get the sense of something ancient. As if the trenches had always been there. You know one trench we held, it had skulls in the side. You looked back along and . . . Like mushrooms. And you know, it was actually *easier* to believe they were men from Marlborough’s army than to to to think they’d been alive two years ago. It’s as if all other wars had somehow . . . distilled themselves into this war, and that makes it something you . . . almost can’t challenge. It’s like a very deep voice saying, *Run along, little man. Be thankful if you survive* (Barker 1993, 83; Barker’s emphasis).

Owen’s experience of trench warfare resembles some parody of an archaeological dig where soldiers have been killed, buried, and disinterred over the course of only a few

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<sup>1</sup> As Barker’s novel demonstrates, Sassoon was essentially quartered in Craiglockhart as an alternative to incarceration after writing “Finished with the War: A Soldier’s Declaration.” This document condemning the war, read in the House of Commons on 30 July and printed in the *London Times* on 31 July 1917, was seen as treasonous and grounds for court-martial, if not imprisonment.

years. While the trench offers a cross section of a very recent and familiar history, the continuing turbulence of battle and its aftermath disarranges any cleanly distinguishable strata within the ground. The unearthed and decomposed remains of those killed in action confuse the poet's sense of time, troubling his ability to relate to his dead fellows. He imagines skulls that recently held life as if they had been buried for two centuries; if there is a Yorick here, Owen could not identify, let alone know, him.<sup>2</sup> In his vision, the distant past, the near past, and the present, the old and newly dead, converge on the Western Front to comprise an imaginary but also material assemblage of voices and remains. This distillation of past and present strife, of life and death across centuries, frames Owen's understanding of the war as if it were outside of human agency, "something you . . . almost can't challenge."

"Almost," perhaps, because Sassoon—who *had* publically challenged the war with his "Soldier's Declaration"—is in the room. For Sassoon, the warped time of the trenches had seemed quite different: "I was going up with the rations one night and I saw the limbers against the skyline, and the flares going up. What you see every night. Only I seemed to be seeing it from the future. A hundred years from now they'll still be ploughing up skulls. And I seemed to be in that time and looking back. I think I saw our ghosts" (Barker 1993, 84).<sup>3</sup> Artillery carts and flares elicit something like the reverse of

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<sup>2</sup> That Barker, via Owen, should choose the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and particularly John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, as her historical index points toward a still further distillation of modern war that Owen, in 1917, could not have foreseen. For Marlborough, in some sense, would survive to influence British politics during World War II, if only through the political power of his descendant (and biographer) Winston Churchill.

<sup>3</sup> Barker's source for Sassoon's experience of time appears to be the latter's slightly fictionalized *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930). After participating in the Battle of the Somme, Sassoon's protagonist George

Proust's *moments privilégiés*, the trigger images shooting Sassoon to the future rather than the past. As if from a vantage one hundred years hence (roughly Barker's, and our, present), he envisions the war like it were already history. This leap in time splits Sassoon's perspective in two. He momentarily exists as both an observer of the war's dead, looking backward in time from some future, and as a member of the war's ghostly retinue, a remnant of the past lingering in a time to come. Preempting future annalists (epic poets or historical novelists for example) through this vision and the act of recounting it, Sassoon begins to tell the story of his own death alongside the narratives of those who have already passed and those whose deaths are soon to come. Encountering the present as history, Sassoon also implicitly imagines a future where swords have been beaten into ploughshares (or writing implements, as the case may be), as well as a "they" among whom he might still move then.

Together in Craiglockhart, Owen and Sassoon produce a version of history, one that, in the crisis of their scattered present, cobbles together at least two notions of time. In one moment of vision, the past condenses into the present disaster via an encounter with human remains (skulls). In another, the present disaster expands into a future via the objects of human destruction (limbers and shells). As John Brannigan has argued, the poets' collective narrative articulates a "sense of history transforming into myth, of a war which is the distillation of all wars, of a war which is already the ghostly imitation of itself" (Brannigan 2005, 117-118). In other words, Owen and Sassoon conceive of "the

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Sherston writes: "it was as though I had watched an army of ghosts. It was as though I had seen the War as it might be envisioned by the mind of some epic poet a hundred years hence" (Sassoon 2013, 84).

radical heterogeneity—the hauntedness—of their own time,” the skulls of the dead and their ghosts arriving from the future as well as the past to accompany the living (Brannigan 2005, 118). The poets are not simply subjects exposed to the whims of history, then, but historians or theorists of war and the numerous temporalities, the assorted forms of social life, that modern warfare exposes and introduces. By being in and narrating their different conceptions of time to one another, they discover some small amount of critical agency and limited sociality, if not exactly relief. For, as if caught in the middle of some great transgression, Owen and Sassoon are soon stunned into silence by this exposure of personal trauma and collective thought outside official historical narratives of British imperial triumph or progress and military-psychiatric narratives of recovery: “They’d gone further than either of them had intended,” Barker writes, “and for a moment they didn’t know how to get back” (Barker 1993, 84). Their mutual offering of past and potential future experience, their reluctance to mourn, heal, and move on, and the consent to intimacy that their truant company requires, draws the men together almost immediately and sets the stage for their paradoxically transient, life-long poetic partnership that will follow.

Continually spotlighting just such relationships, accentuating the haunted plurality of the couple, the two that is always more than just two, Barker’s historical fiction attends to the strange, parlous social dynamics of small groups in wartime. In her *Regeneration* trilogy (*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door* [1993], and *The Ghost Road* [1995]), beleaguered little communities—rather than grand collective projects—become the focus of historico-political inquiry and fictional supplement. Confronted with inscrutably large

social and political disasters (in the contemporary moment of their composition as well as in the pasts that they portray), Barker's novels turn to enclaves scraping by on the fringes of English and (post)colonial societies. As critics from George Lukács to Ian Baucom and John Marx have shown, this focus on groups and "alternative sorts of assemblage" has been a feature of the historical novel since its early nineteenth-century inception (Marx 2011, 193).<sup>4</sup> In Barker's late twentieth-century work, however, small groups carry an even heavier social and political load. Accounts of their diverse, often obscure practices stand in for those distrusted grand narratives of national consolidation and historical or social development that one might find (if one were to read like Lukács) in novels by Walter Scott or Leo Tolstói. While Barker's small groups may still connote larger worlds, as Mark Rawlinson has argued in a Lukácsian vein, they are never simply vehicles for the general (Rawlinson 2010, 13). As this chapter will show, the manifold and shifting ways of life that these groups establish predominate in Barker's texts, asking readers to rethink familiar twentieth- and twenty-first-century conceptions of what constitutes sociality and politics.

Published in a period after the purported victory of global capitalism and the so-called "end of history," where war had (or has) taken on a "generalized character" inimical to all social life (Hardt and Negri 2005, xii), the *Regeneration* trilogy turns its attention to a motley array of groups (among them shell-shocked soldiers, pacifists, queer

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<sup>4</sup> Marx argues that Scott's novels, alongside texts like Dickens' *Bleak House*, Woolf's *Orlando*, and Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy, "demonstrate the novel's abiding interest in the workings of groups, especially those groups whose internal relations involve participants from different cultures, classes and regions of the world" (Marx 2011, 199).

men and women), all of whom construct spaces and times in which they might continue their often illicit social and political practices. Often, Barker's groups use their common precariousness before both the law and civil society as an incitement to gather. In turn, these enclaves and their practices inspire Barker's late twentieth-century experiments in narrative form. At once moving among and moved by the residua of vanquished, collective life, the trilogy draws together a forum of past (and present) voices and remains. As critical anthologies of group formation and collaborative cultural production, Barker's texts stress the inter-historical sociality of Owen's "Almost," where to challenge narratives of the past is always also to challenge narratives of the present, and to seek out the unacknowledged forms of intimacy that might connect—or stubbornly separate—them.

The chapter that follows is split into four sections. In section two, I provide a brief genealogy of the historical novel and the various theoretical responses to the genre that have arisen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I do so not only to place Barker's work within the two-hundred-year lineage of British historical fiction, but also to demonstrate how the *Regeneration* trilogy revises that tradition in the late twentieth century. While critics continue to argue over the exact form or genre of Barker's texts (are they realist? symbolist? postmodern? revisionist histories? "historiographic metafiction?"), few have sought to read her work alongside other historical novels or

theories of them.<sup>5</sup> This section provides the groundwork for such a task. The trilogy, however, cannot be adequately approached by simply turning to preceding theories of historical fiction from Lukács to Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon. As I will show, Barker's texts invite their readers to rethink the historical novel—not only what or how the genre depicts past (and present) life but what it *does*, what kinds of social, political, and historical work it performs—at the end of the twentieth century.

In section three, I theorize Barker's retooling of the genre. It is precisely Barker's focus on outsider, dissident, and inimical small groups, I contend, that allows her to reconceptualize the historical novel and its relationship to war, temporality, and collective life. Barker's almost forensic texts present ways of knowing, imagining, or being with others in the past and present that cannot be contained by their allegiance to British law and civil society, official histories, the documentary record, witness testimony, or popular narrative. More than identifying, restoring, or making a case for lost or forgotten lives, the novels seek out a kind of intimacy with the groups that they depict, one that might resonate in (if not seamlessly transfer to) the present.

Section four hones in on one of the trilogy's small groups, a queer community living underground in London during the war. Here, I will show how Barker's novels portray besieged enclaves as they establish means of survival and even challenge the social and political coercion consolidated by the Defence of the Realm Act and other wartime legislation. The fifth and final section of the chapter continues this study of

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<sup>5</sup> For a significant exception, see Diana Wallace who places Barker at the tail end of an alternative line of twentieth-century women's historical fiction. For more on the debate surrounding the form and genre of Barker's texts (which I will discuss further below), see works by Monteith (2002); Brannigan; Renard; Knutsen; Rawlinson; Westman; Waterman; and Moseley.

queer life, exploring the uncanny, inter-historical forms of sociality that Barker's characters experience on the frontlines and the home front. Borrowing, while slightly revising, Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "erotohistoriography" (which I discussed, in reference to Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, in chapter one), I will argue that these characters, and Barker's novels more generally, extend the often painful but also sometimes pleasurable intimacy of small groups that assemble in wartime beyond the present of their gathering, even beyond the lives of the characters themselves. The trilogy does not simply recover another set of lost narratives for public consciousness or the historical record, however. It accentuates the inaccessible, unassimilable aspects of the past, of the dead, that nonetheless punctuate the present, that trouble the absorption of difference into collective memories of the violent twentieth century and, more recently, World War I's centennial. This chapter's coda briefly speculates on the continued significance of Barker's texts in light of the ongoing public commemoration of the "Great War," a program that Barker has actively participated in as an appointed member of the British Department of Culture's centenary advisory board.

## **5.2 The Historical Novel and Modern War**

Beyond providing historical fiction with its "prototypical content," war has stimulated the production of historical novels from the genre's early stages (Jameson 2013, 266). The standard chronology of the historical novel begins with Walter Scott's *Waverley*, set amid the Jacobite Uprising of 1745 and published just after the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, when the whole of Europe had become a "war arena" (Lukács 1983, 24).

In his seminal study of the genre, Lukács—still the touchstone for most critical accounts—argues that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, mass conscription, alongside a new mobility for the European peasant and nascent working classes, as well as a burgeoning romantic nationalism, created a curious aesthetic problem: how could one represent the increasing size and heterogeneity of this unprecedented social and political complexity?<sup>6</sup> The spatial expansion of bourgeois life and the rise of European nationalisms during wartime, the attempt to register the place of the individual among various social groups and within a greater national totality, motivated the production of new historical narratives. During its brief, fifty-year lifespan, the classical historical novel, from *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe* (1820) to Manzoni's *The Betrothed* (1827) and Tolstoi's *War and Peace* (1869), gave expression to this rising historical consciousness, resuscitating the life of the nation's past in order to help explain the social and political conflicts of its present. Vitaly, for Lukács, these texts maintained a dialectical relation between times and the groups that populate them. The amorphously national and contested past (mid-eighteenth-century England and Scotland in *Waverley* for example) was interpreted as the prehistory of the national present; the present contained within itself the struggles of the past, remnants of those groups—both victors and vanquished—whose conflicts had helped to constitute the nation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lukács' argument is structured around a somewhat dubious chronology, beginning with *Waverley*. Gothic novels from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Sophia Lee's historical romance *The Recess, or a Tale of Other Times* (1783) and Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) present a burgeoning concern, before the Napoleonic wars, with the link between history and fiction.

<sup>7</sup> Scott's *Ivanhoe*, as Marx has noted, portrays "a historical moment when power was sufficiently disseminated such that no ruler could dominate a world populated by multifarious packs and teams: a

The classical historical novel's dialectical method short-circuited, however, almost as soon as it began, according to Lukács. The mid-nineteenth-century consolidation of bourgeois hegemony, whose emergence the novel coincided with and sought to explain, quickly brought about the decline of the genre's critical force. In large part, this decline rested on a bourgeois false consciousness that sought to individualize experience, and on gross historical inaccuracies beyond the "necessary anachronism" that all historical novels must employ in order to maintain the legibility of the past to the present. Characters were no longer constructed as products, types, or markers of their particular socio-historical situation, but instead were represented as if they were self-sufficient and historically transposable. In Lukács' account, Flaubert's 1862 novel *Salammô* exemplifies this tendency, populating Carthage in the third century BCE with modern subjects and disconnecting its protagonist from the social and political concerns of her time. Modern psychology, the ideology of bourgeois interiority, serves as "the only source of movement and life in this frozen, lunar landscape of archaeological precision" (Lukács 1983, 189). Rather than a rigorously dialectical method, *Salammô* employs an Orientalist time-travel narrative whose times and genres (ancient and modern, historiographic and science fictional) are fantastically spliced. Here, and elsewhere in works like Alexandre Dumas' *d'Artagnan Romances* (1844-1850) and Robert Lewis

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comprehensive list would include bands of Knights Templar, 'large gangs' of woodsmen, nobles 'each fortified within his own castle,' and myriad other forms of 'petty' sovereignty" (Marx 2011, 195).

Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886), the historical novel becomes a mere playground for bourgeois fantasy and historical tourism.

Despite Lukács' concerns that the genre had succumbed to the archaeologizing nostalgia of modernity—to conservative historicism or culture industry—and, later, to the alleged solipsism of modernist experiment, the historical novel survived into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In a recent article in the *London Review of Books*, Perry Anderson picks up, chronologically, where Lukács (writing from Stalin's Russia in the 1930s) left off, seeking to explain the continued relevance of the increasingly global genre (as well as its formal transformations) in the modernist and post-World War II periods. Anderson narrates the twentieth-century fate of the historical novel as if it were a kind of generic comedy whose U-shaped trajectory, its rise, fall, and resurrection, can be measured at once in terms of its market popularity, literary capital, and political or critical force.

After a period of relative commercial success and high literary flirtation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (its representative writers including Anatole France, Ford Madox Ford, and Joseph Conrad), the historical novel became “déclassé” in the interwar period, at least in Europe, “falling precipitously out of the ranks of serious fiction.” The genre suffered from the twin shocks of World War I (“which stripped the glamour from battles and high politics,” leaving the war's survivors with a “terrible hangover” from historical melodrama) and modernism's primacy of perception, which was incompatible with the classical historical novel's totalizing retrospect (Anderson 2011). Despite the attempts made by writers like Alfred Döblin (in *Wallenstein* [1920])

and Virginia Woolf (in *Orlando* [1928]) to enact a formal and attitudinal transition within the genre—one marked by a “modernizing spirit” and distrust of social, political, and aesthetic totality—this change did not immediately improve the historical novel’s European prospects. In Anderson’s narrative, the catastrophe of World War II reinforced the genre’s fall from the heights of “serious fiction.” Its meager existence in the post-war years was nourished only by a motley group of outliers including Marguerite Yourcenar, Guiseppi Tomasi di Lampedusa (whose novel *The Leopard* was published posthumously in 1958), and Naguib Mahfouz. Nearly thirty years after the war, however, the historical novel’s fate again changed abruptly “in one of the most astonishing transformations in literary history.” During the early 1970s, as the genre approached a Cold War and newly postcolonial world, it returned to the “upper ranges of fiction, more widespread than it was even at the height of its classical period in the early nineteenth century” (Anderson 2011). And in these so-called “upper ranges,” according to Anderson, with a sweepingly global reach, it has remained.

In a postmodern age that is alleged to have forgotten how to think historically, that has witnessed, in Eric Hobsbawm’s terms, the escalated destruction of the social mechanisms linking the past to the present (religion, the nation, tradition, and so on), the increased literary presence of the genre around the turn of the century appears to be a paradox.<sup>8</sup> Postmodern and especially postcolonial historical novels have undergone significant mutations to address this problem of forgetting. As Anderson argues, the

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<sup>8</sup> For Jameson, postmodernism and the West’s “forgetting how to think historically” signal a distinctive shift in the representational capacities of historical fiction: “The historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only ‘represent’ our ideas and stereotypes about the past” (Jameson 1991, 25).

conventions of the classical form outlined by Lukács—its middling protagonists and character types, its thoroughgoing nationalism, its progressive vision of history—are often flouted in late century texts and in some cases reversed. As if in parodic response to Lukács’ generic imperatives, novelists as geographically and politically distinct as Alejo Carpentier, Günter Grass, Abdelrahman Munif, Toni Morrison, and A.S. Byatt “freely mix times,” “propose counterfactuals,” and “strew anachronisms” (Anderson 2011). Resembling Hutcheon’s “historiographic metafiction” in content if not always in form or tone, such writers are obsessed with the “ravages of empire” and “impending or consummated catastrophe,” with the twentieth-century horrors of “Military tyranny; race murder; omnipresent surveillance; technological war; and programmed genocide.”<sup>9</sup> Rather than awakening their readers *from* the nightmare of history, in Stephen Dedalus’ often-quoted phrase, these novelists “desperately attempt to waken us *to* history, in a time when any real sense of it has gone dead” (Anderson 2011, my emphasis). Before even seeking to explain present conflict by dipping into its historical precedents, fin-de-siècle novels work to reestablish contact with the volatile, often silenced, but still formative past so that the present and future may again be seen as the social and political struggle that they continue to be. A revived consideration of the past, then, would also resuscitate the politics of the present.

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<sup>9</sup> For Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is the characteristic mode of postmodern fiction. The genre uses irony and parody to subvert classical narrative patterns and question readers’ assumptions about historical knowledge. Moreover, it possesses a “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs,” working within both historical discursive and novelistic conventions in order to subvert them (Hutcheon 1988, 5).

Anderson speculates further that part of the impulse behind postmodern and postcolonial historical fiction also may lie with Walter Benjamin's "angelus novus" and its utopian desire to redeem history, to "stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed" (Anderson 2011). If these novels do maintain the desire to recover lives or objects lost to history, however, they do so self-consciously, almost ruefully, wary—after the staggering violence of the last century—that the language of redemption and "making whole" (and its social and political realizations) often has been employed by tyrannical (and even so-called democratic) powers and their various war machines. Perhaps more significantly, many late twentieth-century examples of the genre seek to awaken their readers to histories of struggle that are partial because fragmented or forgotten, that are often minor and written out of official historical narratives. As critics like Diana Wallace, Norman W. Jones, Keith Byerman, and Jerome De Groot have shown, historical fiction continues to provide a space of radical critique for writers depicting those individuals and groups who have been marginalized or worse (whether because of gender, sexuality, race, or class) by the production of state-sponsored and imperial historical narratives.

The historical novel's social and political preoccupation with besieged enclaves only persists—and in some cases intensifies—in the age of the ostensible end of history. Indeed, in a time "when the rhetoric of the nation has largely been supplanted by that of small groups" (a tendency that Jameson identifies and bemoans), British and Anglophone novels, from Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) to Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) and Richard Flanagan's *The*

*Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013), often turn their focus to small, outlying social assemblages as they encounter the nearly overwhelming strictures of wartime state and imperial powers (Jameson 2013, 261). Rather than simply moving between two historical periods at once—the time of the text’s composition and its historical setting, of its present and its past—many recent novels portray minor scenes of group life within the accumulating wreck of modern and postmodern history. Informed by the experiences of total war, late imperialism, decolonization, globalization, and ecological disaster, as well as the complexity of modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, these texts plumb various archives to depict the precarious existence of those subjected to and surviving (or not) the twentieth century’s many violences.

### **5.3 Collective Memory and the Memory of Collectives: The For(u)m of Barker’s Fiction**

Written during a period of British national and global political change and cultural contestation over the production of historical narratives, Barker’s novels critically intervene within this late century novelistic vein. Barker composed the *Regeneration* trilogy amid a “widespread and ideologically reactionary (re)turn to history” that began in the 1980s, “a return signaled in Britain by the Conservative victory in 1979.” Seeking to “restore Britain to imperial glory by reasserting Victorian values” and the state-sponsored collective memory of the twentieth century, Thatcherites and the culture they promoted revived a smooth narrative of historical continuity and national identity (Wallace 2005, 176-177). By attempting to cleanse the past of its seedier details and reweave the various strands of British imperial history into a unified story, this movement also sought to

sanitize and simplify the present, to “manufacture consent and to neutralize resistance,” particularly in relation to the Falklands conflict and the First Gulf War (Wallace 2005, 181). During the 1980s and early 1990s, the relationship between British identity and its imperial (after)life, and especially the military power that has always been necessary to maintain that relation, helped to guide the production of national narratives.

Unsurprisingly, the history of World War I became an important site of contest and revision during this time. British official histories and state-sponsored memory projects often returned to familiar narratives of the “Great War” as a harrowing but ultimately triumphant and nationally unifying crisis. And as Jay Winter and Virginie Renard have shown, this late twentieth-century concern with past (and present) war had a deep but complex influence on British cultural production. The last two decades of the century witnessed “an explosion in historical writing about the First World War, but also in popular representations of the conflict,” from television documentaries, films, and novels to museum exhibitions and commemorative ceremonies (Renard 2013, 14).<sup>10</sup> While looking back to an event that had “made history visible in ways that were remarkably similar to the effect of the Napoleonic wars as described” by Lukács (Wallace 2005, 25), this war culture boom also coincided with the collapse of the communist bloc (signifying, for some, the aforementioned “end of history”) and the redrawing of the official map of Europe that had been more or less in use since the Paris

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<sup>10</sup> As Renard writes, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a “war books boom,” the last of three that occurred during the twentieth century. The first took place between 1926-33 and included writings by a number of Barker’s characters, including Owen and Sassoon. The second occurred in the 1960s. The third, which took place in the last two decades of the twentieth century, heavily relied on the “emblematic images inherited from the 1920s, 30s, and 60s” (Renard 2013, 88).

Peace Conference in 1919. A sometimes anxious, sometimes triumphant sense of not only the end of things but an end of the complexity of things, of an almost seamless British national history that had survived the twentieth century (even perhaps history itself) and would continue into the twenty-first, threatened to smooth over the violent disruptions of World War I—its disfiguring of Victorian values, national identity, imperial justifications, and so on. It also served to quiet the war’s multitudinous, often contradictory stories, those which depicted social and political enclaves that did not march in lockstep.

As Winter point outs, however, some participants in this late century “memory work . . . focused on other collectives too” (Winter 2006, 54). Along with fellow novelists like Ondaatje, McEwan, and Sebastian Faulks, Barker reminds her readers that collective memory, the historical labor that continually refashions it, and the groups that populate it, are always in excess of state-sponsored or national narratives. Her texts return to this period of heightened historical visibility to awaken their readers to histories of struggle, to the production of historical narrative itself as a struggle with potential violences of its own. As Sharon Monteith has argued, Barker’s novels—written when questions of gender, class, race, and sexuality had become unfashionable again (figured most obviously by John Major’s vision of a meritocratic, classless society)—prompt their readers to remember that “the British cultural landscape was cleaved open by the war,” that the war was preceded and accompanied by conflictual class relations and political upheaval (Monteith 2002, 4). In response to the political use and abuse of history by the late twentieth-century British state and the insufficiency of any discursive account of that

history, Barker's texts partially-disinter, partially-conjure a few of the war's lost or marginal groups and their respective narratives. Perhaps to depict the struggle that always frames the narration of history, her novels attend to the materiality of social life, not just as the present returns to the past to rewrite it, but as the past seeps into the social and political arrangements of the present.

To perform this work, the *Regeneration* trilogy produces a forum of and for human remains, for the residua of human life and narrative, what might be called a narrative forensics.<sup>11</sup> Barker's novels gather documents (published and unpublished textual sources), witnesses, and material evidence in their forum, the records of historical events that will be filled out by fictional supplement. Unlike contemporary forensic science, however, Barker's forum operates (and in some cases, *stops* operating) in modes of narrative indeterminacy, incompleteness, impotence, and silence. The fragmented historical record, the deficiencies of testimony, and the appropriation of historical discourse by state or commercial powers unsettle her texts, motivating their self-reflexive skepticism. Intermingling historical and fictional voices, bodies, and forms of relation, Barker's trilogy speaks with the powerless, the surveilled, the criminalized and incarcerated, the wounded, and the dead, while crucially acknowledging that this

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<sup>11</sup> Eyal Weizman has noted that the term "forensics" is derived from the Latin "forensis," meaning "forum" (Weizman 2012, 8). By using this term, I do not mean to suggest a causal relationship between forensic science and the historical novel, but rather to demonstrate their correlative trajectories in the late twentieth century. Though forensic science and the forums of historical fiction share various characteristics—their mutual interest in the material residua of the past as well as the documentary record and witness testimony, their presentation of a past or historical case—they differ in many crucial ways, not least in the ends of their respective investigations.

dialogue only exists at the borders of the unknown and the unspoken, in other, often inaccessible, registers.

The complexity of this narrative assemblage or forum of lives and voices in relation has led to one of the central critical debates surrounding Barker's novels, namely the repeated attempts to theorize the trilogy's genre or form. According to John Brannigan, Barker revisions "the formal characteristics of post-war social realism to accommodate the unrepresentable trauma of twentieth-century mass warfare." Her work seeks to provide a "more complex realization of the constructed and intersubjective experience of the real" (Brannigan 2005, 5). This "critical realism" follows "in the wake of postmodernism, and has learned from the postmodern critique of nineteenth-century realist forms, as well as the negative aspects of postmodern reflexivity" (Brannigan 2005, 174). It uses narratives of World War I as "an index of contemporary social, cultural, sexual and political debates" (Brannigan 2005, 94). Mark Rawlinson argues that the trilogy presents a "revisionist historical construct, which deliberately encounters extant visions of the war to reveal a secret history, the dimensions of 1914-1918 which have been overlooked because of the different pressures created by official remembrance, the literature of protest, and an abiding strain of popular militarism in Britain." The novels are not only about the past, then, "but also about the ways we apprehend the past" (Rawlinson 2010, 65). For Karen Patrick Knutsen, Barker approaches the past through the lens of so-called 1990s preoccupations (those of gender, class, and sexuality, among others), even if the trilogy appears to be a set of realist historical novels. Barker's dialogic works function as interactive links "in an intertextual chain of communication

about the Great War,” where a multiplicity of voices challenges monological versions of war experience (Knutsen 2010, 17). While I do not have the time to rehearse this discussion in full, it should be clear from just this brief summary that, despite the lack of consensus vis-à-vis the trilogy’s genre or form, Barker’s work moves among genres and forms, assembling and even putting them on trial within its critical forum.

As I will show, Barker’s social and generic assemblage, depicting small groups of damaged soldiers like the aforementioned Owen and Sassoon and queer men like the fictional Billy Prior, chips away at the war’s standard cultural tropes with various forms of resistance and “unreason,” affect, sentimentality, touch, associative and dissociative thought. The novels collect and roughly suture other, variously deviant ways of being together, practiced precariously during the home front and frontline experiences of total war. In turn, these past social forms offer a bridge to the late twentieth-century present of Barker’s composition, her work picking up and extending a relay passed forward by many World War I writers and those who wrote during the first war books boom (Owen and Sassoon among them). The forum of Barker’s historical fiction is thus inter-historical in theme and in form, illuminating small lives and groups that were persecuted during the war, that were and often still are kept out of British national narratives. The establishment of a critical consciousness toward Britain’s war culture—now as well as then—arrives not through reason alone, but alongside and through these other modes of relation and, crucially, their irregular experiences of temporality. For the *Regeneration* trilogy not only depicts but moves in, is moved by, a queer sense of time.

Guided by its assembling of various social and generic forms, the trilogy constructs (to return to Freeman's term) an "erotohistoriography." This temporally-hybrid mode of engagement with past life produces a counterhistory of history itself, using "the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter." Much like Owen's and Sassoon's uncanny confrontations with skulls and flares, Barker's novels demonstrate that contact with historical materials or discourse, from objects to documents to popular narratives, can elicit bodily responses "that are themselves a form of understanding." They insist that it is possible to apprehend and represent "collective experiences from the past in avowedly embodied, not always painful ways" (Freeman 2010, 95 and 99). Barker's erotohistoriographic texts are deeply influenced by times, traumas, and even pleasures that maintain a certain social and political volatility. Her novels risk—indeed often surrender—the authority of their historical work on the production of their jaggedly-sewn but intimate forums, their small, motley groups that again might feel, think, and speak, that might be felt, thought, and listened to. Critically, Barker's texts do not simply seek acceptance within the official record of the war years, the regime of the normal or the socially acceptable. Rather, they give form to dissidence, creating space to appeal against both assimilation into a larger British national narrative and the continued silencing of abject life.

#### **5.4 Queerness and the Small Group in Wartime**

From small groups of hospitalized soldiers and pacifists to incarcerated suffragettes and munitions workers, the *Regeneration* trilogy depicts many forms of licit

and illicit social life interconnecting during World War I. Here, I will focus on a group that receives much of Barker's attention, an underground, queer community whose participants move precariously within the increased strictures of British society. This loose social formation congregates around practices of male intimacy, a wartime theme that scholars from Paul Fussell and Michel Foucault to Sarah Cole have luminously detailed, particularly with respect to life on the Western Front. Rather than focusing on the trenches, however, Barker's texts examine how male intimacy and queer desire move back and forth—jaggedly to be sure—between the front lines and the home front.

In a time when queer sexualities were persecuted and sexual contact between men was criminalized in the United Kingdom, the practice of queer sex and sociability became a fugitive, even treacherous, act.<sup>12</sup> In the latter years of the war,

British public life was saturated with anxious debate about the social problem of 'homosexuality' in general and metropolitan queer culture in particular. The 1918 'Black Book' libel trial at the Old Bailey, following scarcely veiled allegations of lesbianism aimed at the actress Maud Allen by the proto-fascist member of Parliament (MP) Noel Pemberton-Billing, drew the reading public's attention to the characteristic spaces of queer London. In those pubs, bathhouses, and cruising grounds where men found sex and sociability, Pemberton-Billing saw Britain's corruption by German 'vice' and espionage—a threat to the nation's very existence (Houlbrook 2005, 10).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> As Matt Houlbrook writes of wartime London: "the law criminalized a series of discrete social, sexual, and cultural practices in which men might participate. . . . The British state was unwilling to tolerate any expressions of male same-sex desire, physical contact, or social encounter" (Houlbrook 2005, 20). Section 11 of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, made famous by the Oscar Wilde trial, outlawed "any act of gross indecency" between men within the United Kingdom and Ireland. Additionally, the Vagrancy Law Amendment Act (1898) and the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1912) "introduced to the public order offence of 'persistently importuning for an immoral purpose,' which attempted to suppress queer men's use of public space for 'cruising' and social interaction" (Houlbrook 2005, 19).

<sup>13</sup> Pemberton-Billing's publications claimed to have access to a "Black Book" containing the names of 47,000 sexually deviant British citizens. The story broke in the 26 January 1918 edition of the *Imperialist*: "In the beginning of the book is a précis of general instructions regarding the propagation of evils which all

Homosexuality, in Pemberton-Billing's screed and, in its aftermath, within the London public sphere, was imagined as a particularly continental "pathology" that German intelligence had used to infiltrate British social circles, to "effeminize" them, exploit their "inherent vice," and to turn the allegiances of culturally vulnerable British citizens. Queer sexualities, in short, were envisioned as a threat to national unity. In turn, queer men and women were subjected to a developing culture of surveillance within England that sought to use past and present legislation to curtail the liberties of the state's ostensible "enemies within" (Renard 2013, 122). In police as well as public consciousnesses, queer individuals and groups were almost always framed by their engagement with the operations of the law. They were reported in the news, as Houlbrook writes, only when under arrest, on trial, or perceived as an imminent social or political danger (Houlbrook 2005, 222).

The Black Book libel trial and the public hysteria surrounding it serves as the backdrop for much of Barker's trilogy, with many of the texts' characters—even soldiers on the Front—maintaining interest in its drama. Barker's fictionalized version of the

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decent men thought perished in Sodom and Lesbia. . . . There are the names of 47,000 English men and women, . . . Privy Councilors, wives of Cabinet Ministers, even Cabinet Ministers themselves, diplomats, poets, bankers, editors, newspaper proprietors, and members of His Majesty's Household. . . . [These men and women have been] prevented from putting their full strength into the war by corruption and blackmail and fear of exposure. . . . Wives of men in supreme position were entangled. In Lesbian ecstasy the most sacred secrets of State were betrayed. The sexual peculiarities of members of the peerage were used as a leverage to open fruitful fields for espionage" (qtd in Hoare 1997, 1). Pemberton-Billing published a second article (after renaming his journal the *Vigilante*) entitled "The Cult of the Clitoris" on the 16 February. Here, he claimed that Scotland Yard would discover several of the "47,000" at Maud Allan's private performances of Wilde's *Salome* in London. Allan sued Pemberton-Billing for libel in March 1918 and, in a trial that was little more than a farce, Pemberton-Billing was acquitted. For detailed accounts of the build-up to the trial and its proceedings, see Hoare and Medd.

British psychologist W.H.R. Rivers believes that the public obsession with the case stems from the need to mark out proper forms of intimacy during wartime. As he explains in the trilogy's second volume, *The Eye in the Door*: "In war there's this enormous glorification of love between men, and yet at the same time it arouses anxiety. Is it the right kind of love? Well, one way to make sure it's the right kind is to make public disapproval of the other thing crystal clear" (Barker 1995, 155). State and societal management of proper forms of relationship must be maintained and the easiest way to assert authority in sexual politics is to make the "wrong kind of love" the enemy. "[P]eople didn't want reasons," Rivers thinks, "they wanted scapegoats" (Barker 1995, 160). Queer men like Sassoon and Robbie Ross (Wilde's literary executor) and the fictional Billy Prior are thus closely watched, publicly shamed, and, in some cases, put on trial and institutionalized.

Prior, particularly, embodies many of the social and political contradictions of World War I England, acting as Barker's unwitting guide to the various small groups that arise during, or are marked by, wartime. He keeps both male and female sexual partners, both queer and straight allegiances. He is a product of the Manchester working poor who has risen to the rank of lieutenant, a non-commissioned officer, in the British army. While on home leave, suffering from war neurosis and an increasingly acute dissociative disorder, he becomes a spy, a native informant of sorts, for the recently established Ministry of Munitions. He is tasked with infiltrating sites of labor unrest and political dissidence among the working-class Mancunians with whom he grew up. His loyalty to the intelligence work he performs is deeply complicated by his sexual openness, his sympathies for the labor cause, and his "affinity with places where the established order

has been violently assailed” (Barker 1995, 9). As his childhood friend Patrick MacDowell (now a labor leader and one of Prior’s intelligence targets) will say of him—an opinion with which Prior can only agree: “*Low* friends. Officer’s mess one night, back streets of Salford the next. Equally at home or . . . [e]qually *not* at home, in both” (Barker 1995, 110). Moving between posh central London flats and Manchester’s slums, Prior is a wanderer between many, often oppositional groups, a man without clear loyalties.<sup>14</sup> He navigates a home front world where social distinctions have been shuffled a little and become increasingly open to exploitation, performance, and play.

Throughout the trilogy, Prior passes through various spaces of belonging, various small and makeshift groups, often within sites of past or impending disaster. Barker’s novels use Prior’s performances within these spaces—indeed his very production of these sites of performance—to question, sometimes parody, and reconfigure normative notions of Edwardian domestic life. Prior’s productions of space make room(s) for queer desire, for both transient and precariously committed relationships between civilians and soldiers, friends and comrades, on leave and in the trenches.<sup>15</sup> In other words, Prior and the small groups he finds himself in refuse to conform to the split that Rivers posits between the right way and the wrong way to be intimate with one’s fellows. The one is

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<sup>14</sup> As Rawlinson notes in reference to the trilogy, Barker depicts the home front as “a social world that is continuously dividing and reforming, in the interplay between radical groupings—unionized labour, pacifists, and the authority of the political and financial interests. War complicates questions of sides” (Rawlinson 2010, 83).

<sup>15</sup> As a character for whom group allegiances shift, multiply, and often contradict one another, Prior’s relationships throughout the trilogy trouble the distinction that Sarah Cole has drawn between friendship and comradeship during World War I. Personal relationships and group solidarity cannot be kept separate for him, the former always already marking the latter, and vice versa.

already bleeding into the other. Furthermore, intimacy, even illicit sexual intimacy between partners, is always more than an encounter between just two for Prior. Past, present, and future relations—both personal and societal, even national and transnational—continue to find their way in.

Let me provide a few examples here. On a bench in Hyde Park, Prior meets Charles Manning, a fellow officer (though, crucially, a bona fide gentleman, Oxbridge educated, and therefore commissioned) and a family man. Both men are, in their own ways, cruising, a not uncommon practice in the West End.<sup>16</sup> After a brief flirtation, they retreat to Manning's flat off Piccadilly, which has recently suffered bomb damage. To Prior, it seems that the assault on Manning's household had already begun. They enter the flat beneath a cracked doorframe. Prior examines photos of Manning's wife and two children, away in the safety of the country. They share some whiskey, some small talk, and some exploratory glances. Ever conscious of his working-class roots and the atypicality of his rise to the officer class, Prior reads Manning as "one of those who cannot—simply cannot—let go sexually with a social equal." Prior removes his tie, his tunic with lieutenant's stars, and his shirt, shedding the military markers of class distinction. Further, he roughens his accent and transforms himself "into the sort of working-class boy Manning would think it was all right to fuck. A sort of seminal spittoon" (Barker 1995, 11). In order to fulfill his own desires, he turns himself into an

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<sup>16</sup> As Houlbrook notes, the West End was the center of queer life in early twentieth-century London (Houlbrook 2005, 45). It would become a "remarkable queer enclave, attracting men like Hugh Walpole and dress designer Reggie de Veulle" (Houlbrook 2005, 114), as well as Robbie Ross: "Always precarious, always profoundly divided along lines of class, this was, nonetheless, a vibrant world that belied queer men's nominal exclusion from private space" (Houlbrook 2005, 134).

object of Manning's desire. This is not simply a moment of subaltern acquiescence on Prior's part (although the violence of such a relation resonates throughout their time together), nor is it one of those brief moments of class equality that the war has been alleged to produce. As Monteith has noted, this sequence "entangles class expectations and cross-class transgressions" (Monteith 2002, 66). Even while playing his working-class role, Prior maintains his anger toward the social hierarchy, "thinking he'd probably never felt a spurt of purer class antagonism than he felt at that moment" (Barker 1995, 11). And yet he lingers.

After the men share war wounds and war stories and have sex, Manning's mind goes to work categorizing, deeply aware of how "persistent . . . class distinction was," no matter the intimacy of the circumstances: "At first, noting Prior's flattened vowels, he'd thought, oh yes. Temporary gentleman" (Barker 1995, 19). Manning had caught Prior in the act. However, as the evening progressed, the description "temporary gentleman" had come to seem less and less appropriate. Although he embodies many contradictions, Prior is no simple Lukácsian type representative of his class. With his calm and hints of social parody, he spirals away from easy categorizations, as Manning soon realizes: "the basic truth was the man was neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. Socially. Sexually too, of course, though this was a less comfortable reflection" (Barker 1995, 20). It is less comfortable because Prior refuses to be tied in the bands of typology, monogamy, or exclusivity, and because Manning's control over this aspect of things is almost null, no matter his class position or commission. With this encounter, almost on his own terms, Prior has entered into the exclusive, queer underground of London, among Manning,

Robbie Ross, and some of the other 47,000. As Prior admits, he feels at home here in “this rather beleaguered little community,” a furtive (because now potentially criminal) small group comprised of “Soldiers who aren’t militarists, pacifists who aren’t prigs” (Barker 1996, 109). Almost as soon as he enters into it, however, this group life is disrupted as he is called up to the Western Front for the fourth and final time.

Interestingly, Prior experiences a similar sense of belonging after he returns to the frontlines, as if at least the feeling of London’s “rather beleaguered little community” were mobile. As Prior travels with his company through devastated France in the summer and fall of 1918, he feels a “joy perhaps not unconnected with the ruinous appearance of . . . Solid bourgeois houses” that once had harbored in security the lives of people who had “been sure that certain things would never change” (Barker 1996, 140). Notwithstanding his continued resentment toward elite and bourgeois life, Prior briefly lives another sociality atop the ruins of French society. His unit (which includes Owen) requisitions an abandoned house in Amiens, renovating new spaces with the materials of the old, creating “a fragile civilization, a fellowship on the brink of disaster” (Barker 1996, 143). Domestic life is refashioned. Furniture is taken from other abandoned houses; roses are picked from surrounding gardens and arranged in stolen bowls; wine is scrounged up. The soldiers experience this group life as if it were almost idyllic:

Hundreds of men, billeted as they were in these ruined houses, had broken down every wall, every fence, forced a passage through all the hedges, so that they could slip unimpeded from one patch of ground to the next. The war, fought and refought over strips of muddy earth, paradoxically gave them the freedom of animals to pass from territory to territory, unobserved (Barker 1996, 146).

The war unexpectedly opens for this “fragile civilization” something like a state of grace, or at least an improbable, insecure commons. After the unspeakable violence of the Somme, Prior had not been surprised by any of his war experiences, no matter how horrific they ought to have been. But a sense of wonder returns with this peculiar, collective calm. Here, his company has been “forgotten” by the war: “They had nothing to do. They were responsible for no one” (Barker 1996, 142). Without property lines, enemies, or duties, they become like explorers in a new land, where even myth is refashioned—and lived—within the community they have established.<sup>17</sup>

The war soon remembers them, however, and their small group—like most others across Barker’s trilogy—quickly comes to ruin. After the company returns to battle, Prior dies alongside Owen near the Sambre-Oise Canal, just one week before the signing of the Armistice. Stemming from such devastation, an almost overwhelmingly melancholic mood runs throughout Barker’s texts. There is little healing—then or now—from the physical, psychological, or social damage of the war, no opportunity for Perry Anderson’s Benjaminian historical novelist to “stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed.” There is little place for a vision of lasting politics built out of the transient queer communities—or most of the other dissident groups—in London or at the Front. Brannigan has argued that Barker’s fiction, from *Union Street* (1982) to the

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<sup>17</sup> The Actaeon and Diana narrative, famously depicted in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, is one myth that is rewritten here. In a “typical pastoral bathing scene of the British homoerotic tradition” (Knutsen 2010, 123), Prior and Owen stumble upon Hallet, a young private figured as Ovid’s Diana, and stand in Actaeon’s position of voyeur. As “Owen pushed aside an elderberry branch at the entrance to their own garden, his ears caught a slight sound, and he held up his hand. Hallet was in the garden, undressing. Dappled light played across his body, lending it the illusion of fragility, the greenish tinge of ill-health, though he was as hard and sun-tanned as the rest of them. As they watched, not calling out a greeting as by now they should have done, he stepped out of his drawers and out of time” (Barker 1996, 146-147).

trilogy and *Double Vision* (2003), instead has “constituted an attempt to imagine forms of social solidarity through the work of mourning. Barker’s communities are usually besieged and under threat, sometimes on the verge of extinction, and often haunted by loss” (Brannigan 2005, 8). While I clearly agree that Barker’s small groups are “besieged and under threat” as well as “haunted by loss” in the trilogy, I contend that it is the very fact of their being besieged and haunted, alongside this deep melancholy—precisely the inability or refusal to mourn—and the small pleasures taken from within a ruined, haunted world, that allows Barker to imagine forms of social solidarity across time, even as the sociality of the text’s present setting falls to pieces. Barker’s texts do not set out to perform the work of mourning (her characters do not do so either), but rather to depict forms of group life that take place across social and even temporal boundaries, for good or ill.

Like the vision of history that Owen and Sassoon co-construct at Craiglockhart, the dead and the living, the past and the present, blur in Barker’s novels. Forms of relationship cannot help but be affected by this haze. Sassoon, in his poem “Survivors,” had been right about this, Prior admits: “‘Cowed subjection to the ghosts of friends who died.’ That was it exactly, couldn’t be better put. Ghosts everywhere. Even the living were only ghosts in the making. You learned to ration your commitment to them. This moment in this tent already had the quality of remembered experience” (Barker 1996, 46). For Prior, the present becomes the past, as it had for Sassoon before the limbers and flares. His thought not only exposes the historicity of the present, but gathers the past,

present, and future into figures of the living dead, “ghosts in the making” who convene with different expectations and in a different time.

### **5.5 Erotohistoriography and the Queer Touch of Time**

The trilogy’s often melancholic portrayal of queer desire and beleaguered sociability is complicated by its—and its characters’—erotohistoriographic encounters with residues of the past that linger in the present and its correlative engagement with atypical temporalities. The war’s many violences, as Barker depicts them, resituate the relationship between time and bodily material, flesh (“the zero degree of social conceptualization,” as Patricia E. Johnson, after Hortense Spillers, avers [Johnson 2005, 309]), or less. Staging various embodied, fleshly, imagined, and discursive modes of being together across time allows Barker and her characters to index “how queer relations complexly exceed the present” and to witness how “queer social practices . . . produce form(s) of time consciousness, even historical consciousness.” Barker’s fiction and its characters tarry with damaged lives, objects, and narratives lost or hidden to history, also sometimes positing “the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times” (Freeman 2005, 59). However, the trilogy does not offer these moments of pleasure and fulfillment “against pain and loss,” as Freeman would have it. In Barker’s portrayal of besieged small groups, such interruptions and momentary pleasures occur alongside or intertwined with pain and loss. Transient and sometimes violent, these social practices are seemingly unassimilable within a triumphant

British national narrative, within even a narrative of mourning or commemoration, whether the latter takes place in 1918, 1991, or 2015.

Once again, Billy Prior guides Barker's texts through much of their erotohistoriographic endeavor. His experience of sociality in time, of melancholy, pain, and pleasure, is often manifested during sex. As I have already shown, Prior's intimate relationships, shuttling between the fleeting and the lasting, disrupt normative notions of sexual life, of how the latter ought to unfold in a wartime nation attempting to defend itself from perceived internal as well as external enemies. But that is not all. Prior's experience of time, of relation to other lives in the past, present, and future, expands with sexual contact, however brief and violent it may be. His encounters with various partners extend intimate exchange beyond just the two who are present in them, but at a cost that Prior is neither willing nor able to measure. It is never clear to him who (if anyone) presides over these exchanges, and what exactly is being given, what taken.

Let me articulate this notion of an expansion of sex beyond the couple and beyond the present through a reading of one of the most perplexing scenes in Barker's trilogy, a scene that comprises the third chapter of *The Ghost Road*. Before returning to the Western Front for the final time, Prior solicits a prostitute, Elinor, on a Scarborough pier, bringing along (like Manning had in London) the baggage of social privilege and gendered stereotype. Officers (commissioned or not) are x, prostitutes are y, and together they do z. This will be another replaying of a standard cultural trope about the war, traceable in texts as historically and aesthetically diverse as Frederic Manning's roman à clef *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929) and Tom McCarthy's recent historical novel *C*

(2010). But the scene in Barker's text does not unfold according to type; other pasts and past relations perforate the present.

While undressing in Elinor's room, Prior smells gas, "faint but unmistakable," which triggers the symptoms of his war neurosis, panic, sweats, dry mouth, and a tight scrotum. The scent of gas is the olfactory bridge, through time and space, between the Somme 1916 and here, North Yorkshire 1918. But Elinor persists and Prior momentarily recovers, puts two quid on her table. This seemingly simple transaction is quickly disturbed by another exchange, however. For what had been an almost imperceptible odor merges with something more tactile: "He got into bed, telling himself the cold damp patch under his left buttock was imagination. He put his hand down. It wasn't. Dotted here and there on the sheet were tiny coils of pubic hair." Prior lays in post-coital residua, a faint but palpable material link with "the men who'd passed through, through Scarborough, through her, on their way to the Front. . . . And how many of them dead?" Semen stains mark and incite, violently gender and sexualize, a vague, sub-national imagined community: "He wondered whose spunk he was lying in, whether he knew him, how carefully she'd washed afterwards. He groped around in his mind for the appropriate feeling of disgust, and found excitement instead, no, more than that, the sober certainty of power" (Barker 1996, 40). Rather than the revulsion he expects to feel, Prior finds not only pleasure while laying on the soiled bed sheet but a sense of erotic relation across time and, stemming from that sense, a feeling of violent power. Like Owen's discovery of the skull or Sassoon's vision elicited by limbers and flares, Prior's encounter with the sexual waste of fellow soldiers makes the dead present, and overwhelmingly so;

they arrive from the past to possess him. He feels “them gathering in the hall, thronging the narrow stair, pressing against the door. . . . His hands were their hands, their famished eyes were his. . . . He was aware of their weight on him, his arms were braced to carry it” (Barker 1996, 40-41). As he had with Manning (but there, crucially, by choice), Prior becomes an object of sorts, a sexual instrument for a group whose touch is “the queer touch of time, of past bodies palpably connecting with present ones” (Freeman 2005, 60). The power of this ghostly group, triggered by a negligible material source, seems to direct Prior’s actions, which are now concentrated upon Elinor, who also has been refashioned, violently, as an object.

But then something else goes wrong. As Prior gazes into Elinor’s face, he sees himself as an adolescent, “for he too had lain like this, waiting for it be over,” the object of a parish priest’s sexual abuse and, eventually, as a prostitute. This nearly empathetic relation between Prior and Elinor, linking a different past to the present, elicits in the former a remorse of consciousness, one that cannot stand; the “only way not to be her was to hate her,” he thinks (Barker 1996, 41). Prior’s next maneuver is to imagine Elinor as something other than (like) himself, imaginatively merging her features with the “snarling, baby-eating boche” that had been pinned to the British Army’s revolver targets. With this move, the spectral group of fellow soldiers withdraws like a wave from the scene, for “they didn’t want that, the men who used his eyes and hands as theirs.” For the receding ghosts, propaganda has no place in bed; their community seems to extend beyond or beneath stereotype, however violent their intentions may be. So now it is back to the two of them, Prior and Elinor. But before he can exert his power over her, use the

“snarling, baby-eating boche” as a target again (Barker 1996, 41), she dampens her finger, sticks it into his rectum, and brings him to climax with shock as well as pleasure, “bursting, spilling, falling towards her, gasping for breath, laughing, gasping again, tears stinging his eyes.” Elinor resorts to an old “trick” Prior had used in his adolescence “to speed the unreasonably lingering guest” (Barker 1996, 42). While Prior wandered between the past and the present, he had overstayed his welcome here; he had run out of time.

Barker’s depiction of this encounter and the temporal uncertainties to which it gives rise is certainly an atypical rendering of history, what Freeman might call “an index of temporal nonsynchronicity—specifically, of dead bodies persisting in the present and the future, of non-reproductive, yet still insistently corporeal kinship with the departed” (Freeman 2005, 60). Residua of how many lives, how much violence, reminders of how many deaths, are kept on that soiled bed sheet? Prior discovers—or is discovered by—another unstable grouping. While dressing, however, he decides that he will not do this again; the feeling of shared sexual power is too much for him to bear: “He hadn’t been sure at the end who was fucking who.” He her? She him? The ghosts fucking them both? “Even the excitement he’d felt at the idea of sliding in on another man’s spunk was ambiguous, to say the least. Not that he minded ambiguity—he couldn’t have lived at all if he’d minded *that*—but this was the kind of ambiguity people hide behind. And he was too proud to hide” (Barker 1996, 42-43). Sex like this, extending beyond the couple in the present of their entanglement, is not secure. It is not quite hetero or homo, top or bottom, but otherwise and elsewhere. Even for a character who could not have lived without

ambiguity, who seeks to slide between and across boundaries identity and sociality, this uncanny, unwieldy group sex reintroduces some limits to his movement.

In a reading of a similarly ambiguous encounter involving Prior and another prostitute, a Frenchman in his late teens, after Prior has returned to the Front, Monteith argues that such episodes represent “sardonically sick memory” indicative of the increasing brutality of sexual relationships across the trilogy (Monteith 2002, 75). While I do not challenge this assertion, I contend that these exchanges—brief, violent, painful, pleasurable, nearly empathetic, ghost-ridden, “sardonically sick”—are crucial for the social, political, and historical consciousness of Barker’s texts. Elicited by material, imagined, and spectral forces, these strangely communal encounters represent moments not so much outside of time as out of step with normative time, on a different rhythm, where past, present, and future lives for better or worse convene. More than merely asking whether the past—its violence and pleasures, its hopes and failures—survives to influence the present, Barker’s novels query *how* past life moves (in) the present, even when abject, quiet, or unacknowledged. Her texts seek out or imagine the histories of small groups that have remained hidden to official historical or fictional narratives and perhaps cannot be assimilated into a unified national story. In this sense, the trilogy speaks as much to the contemporary moment as it did (and still does) to the 1980s and 1990s period of its composition.

## 5.6 Coda: The Limits of Commemoration

The war books boom that Jay Winter has located in the last two decades of the twentieth century continues into the present moment. Alongside many popular films and television series, one could mention any number of recent British and Anglophone novels that have looked to the world wars for their historical setting.<sup>18</sup> In the 2010s, this prolonged cultural engagement with the violence of the early twentieth century has coincided with the public commemoration of the First World War's centennial in England. In 2012, Barker, along with fellow historical novelist Sebastian Faulks, was appointed to the British Department of Culture's Centenary Advisory Board. Chaired initially by the British Culture Secretary, Maria Miller, the Board was established to give guidelines to and oversee the Government's national program of events to mark the one-hundred-year anniversary of the conflict. Among other things, the program will include national events to commemorate the first day of the Battle of the Somme (in July 2015) and Armistice Day (in November 2018), the opening of the refurbished World War I galleries at the Imperial War Museum in London, as well as various educational initiatives within every maintained school in England. "Our duty with these commemorations is clear," proclaimed Prime Minister David Cameron in his 2012 announcement of the government's plans for the centenary: "to honor those who served; to remember those who died; and to ensure that the lessons learnt live with us for ever"

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<sup>18</sup> To name just a few British and Anglophone historical novels that have depicted the wars in recent years: McEwan's *Atonement* (2001); Sebastian Berry's *A Long Long Way* (2005); Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006); McCarthy's *C* (2010); Thomas Keneally's *The Daughters of Mars* (2012); Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2014); and Barker's two most recent novels, *Life Class* (2007) and *Toby's Room* (2012).

(United Kingdom Dept. of Culture 2012).<sup>19</sup> But who exactly, Barker's novels compel their readers to ask, is Cameron's "us," his "those," and these "lessons learnt?"

The "us" of this statement seems to signify an imagined community, a united kingdom, whose national and imperial bonds—as well as its rationalizing discourse—were called into question by the mass violence of World War I and the governmental steps taken to justify it.<sup>20</sup> As Barker's Prior thinks to himself just before his death, abstract and manipulable words like duty, honor, patriotism, courage "didn't mean anything any more." But "there's another group of words that still mean something. Little words that trip through sentences unregarded: us, them, we, they, here, there. These are the words of power, and long after we are gone, they'll lie about in the language, like the unexploded grenades in the fields, and any one of them'll take your hand off" (Barker 1996, 257). Not unlike the Thatcherites before him, Cameron uses both abstract language and little unregarded pronouns to smooth out the history of the war, implicitly re-positing a unitary narrative, a single line connecting the past to the present, the dead to the living. Commemoration would celebrate and fortify this line in the present. As Reinhart Koselleck has argued, war memorialization does not only commemorate the dead; "it also compensates for lost lives so as to render survival meaningful" (Koselleck 2002, 287). Memorials and commemoration ceremonies "promulgate a demand for identification. The dead embody an exemplary status; they died for a reason, and survivors are supposed

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the public commemorations, see the Department of Culture's website ([gov.uk/government/topical-events/first-world-war-centenary](http://gov.uk/government/topical-events/first-world-war-centenary)) and the Imperial War Museum's First World War Centenary website ([1914.org](http://1914.org)).

<sup>20</sup> For more on the modernist critique of rationalist Liberal policy during World War I, see Sherry.

to find themselves in accord with this reason so as not to allow the dead to have died in vain” (Koselleck 2002, 295). But while the dead are imagined to have stood for the same causes or reasons as those who survive them (“Our duty with these commemorations is *clear*”), the meaning of survival and the war itself is established by the survivors. The “dead have no say in whether it is the same cause or not” (Koselleck 2002, 288).<sup>21</sup> One wonders, even with Barker’s participation as an advisor for the centenary’s commemorative events, if the socially and politically ambiguous Billy Prior and the queer groups he briefly lived among would find a place within Cameron’s “us,” if their causes or reasons would have been the same. Would they—could he—be commemorated?

Though intertwined with British national concerns, Barker’s novels use characters like Prior and small groups like his partially-fictional queer community to ask their readers to reassess the social and political categories that often structure twentieth- and twenty-first-century accounts of World War I. As historicity and temporality open out into plurality during war through repetition, accumulation, and the constellating of events, small groups—local and transnational, living and dead—too arise in constellation, haunting the social and political (un)conscious of the late twentieth-century historical novel. Regardless of Barker’s political intentions, now or then, these groups comprise a forum that is irreducible to a single time, history, law, language, or direction. Barker’s forum is exceeded by the materials of the victim and the witness, by the materials’

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Koselleck’s understanding of war memorials and its relationship to literary production, see the account of Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in the first chapter of this dissertation.

witness, by a humility before that which cannot be known or assimilated into narrative. The object of the historical novel, in Barker's hands, is less to know than to try to be with, to speak to, but also to touch and to be touched by, those lives that have been left out of historical discourse, to not only briefly, partially resuscitate them but, in some sense, to be resuscitated by them, to be given new life by the most unlikely of sources. Neither utopian nor apocalyptic, Barker's work risks intimacy with many enemies—internal and external, past and present—in wartime.

## 6. Epilogue, “Mongrel Company”: Heterotopia and Novelistic Tableau in *The English Patient*

His own life was no longer a single story but a part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices. Patrick saw a wondrous night web—all of these fragments of a human order, something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day. A nun on a bridge, a daredevil who was unable to sleep without a drink, a boy watching a fire from his bed at night, an actress who ran away with a millionaire—the detritus and chaos of the age was realigned.

Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of A Lion*

But now there is hardly a world around them and they are forced back on themselves.

Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

### 6.1 “citzened by their friendship”

If Michael Ondaatje’s 1992 novel *The English Patient* can be said to take place within a single or collective present—the book portrays characters from multiple pasts that briefly gather in wartime before scattering into various futures—it is set near the end of World War II in the Villa San Girolamo, a onetime nunnery, war hospital, and recently abandoned German office of operations on the northern edges of Florence. Once the target of Allied bombardment and still riddled with live mines, the villa is little more than a ruin, a historically layered site of past and impending disaster. However, for the novel’s four central characters, the villa has become a home, even a world unto itself, a kind of wrecked Garden:

The Villa San Girolamo, built to protect inhabitants from the flesh of the devil, had the look of a besieged fortress, the limbs of most of the statues blown off during the first days of shelling. There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth. To Hana the wild gardens were like further rooms. She worked along the edges of them aware always of unexploded mines. In one soil-rich area beside the house she

began to garden with a furious passion that could come only to someone who had grown up in a city. In spite of the burned earth, in spite of the lack of water. Someday there would be a bower of limes, rooms of green light” (Ondaatje 1992, 43).

Here, Ondaatje’s “seems” exposes the limits of perspective, particularly of those not living within the villa’s ruined walls. The house, as seen by someone on the outside, has “the look of a besieged fortress” and *seems* to have melded with the damaged landscape. “From outside, the place seemed devastated” (Ondaatje 1992, 14). For those on the inside, the place *is* devastated and yet it is not. Hana, a twenty-year-old Torontonion and war-traumatized nurse deserting from the Canadian Army, discovers a limited peace here. Along with her motley crew of housemates (David Caravaggio, an Italian-Canadian thief whose typically deviant talents have been requisitioned by the Allies; Kirpal “Kip” Singh, a Sikh sapper in the British Army; and László de Almásy, the mysterious—and, until late in the text, unidentified—“English patient,” a Hungarian desert explorer and Nazi sympathizer), Hana is imperfectly protected by the house’s ruination; the villa’s forbidding aspect covers it like the spiked shells of H.D.’s mollusks. Her small group, “forced back on themselves” in a place where “there is hardly a world around them,” finds a strange kind of haven in this damaged and dangerous place (Ondaatje 1992, 40).

Calling to mind the dystopian pastoral inhabited by H.G. Wells’ Bert Smallways and Pat Barker’s Billy Prior, Hana, squatting amid the “tentative safety” of the villa and “living like a vagrant,” gardens a “miniature world” here in “spite of the burned earth, in

spite of the lack of water” (Ondaatje 1992, 14 and 47).<sup>1</sup> Linked by metaphor and also the quite literal connections of deep dwelling amid catastrophe, the gardens, for Hana and the novel itself, are like further rooms to the bombed-out but inhabited villa, are like an extension of the damaged but surviving little community they house and help to sustain. The gardens, in Ondaatje’s novel, are a world set apart within the world, an instance of Foucault’s garden “heterotopia,” a “contradictory site” and a “sort of microcosm” bringing “together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world” (Foucault 1986, 6).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Ondaatje’s residential ruin interweaves Foucault’s “crisis heterotopia”—those “privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (Foucault’s examples are the boarding school and the military barracks)—and a heterotopia of “deviation,” “those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed,” such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons (Foucault 1984, 5). The community of the Villa San Girolamo is populated by characters in various states of crisis (they are soldiers, sufferers of post-trauma, the war’s casualties) and deviance (a deserter, a thief, a Nazi sympathizer, a colonized and,

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<sup>1</sup> Ondaatje’s novel imagines (without detailing) a wartime landscape dotted by communities more or less removed from a greater sense of nationhood or world history: “And now, on this continent, the war having travelled elsewhere, the nunneries and churches that were turned briefly into hospitals are solitary, cut off in the hills of Tuscany and Umbria. They hold the remnants of war societies, small moraines left by a vast glacier. All around them now is the holy forest” (Ondaatje 1992, 92).

<sup>2</sup> Or at least a Canadian, an Italian-Canadian, a Sikh from Lahore, and a seemingly English Hungarian. From *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) to his most recent novel, *The Cat’s Table* (2011), Ondaatje has maintained his interest in the possibilities of heterotopias and the small groups that briefly inhabit them. Although she does not use Foucault’s language, Aarthi Vadde has pointed out Ondaatje’s fascination with “how irregular collectives form in the midst of crisis and how the circumstances of such relations might have as much to offer as the empirically deducible precisely because of their inaccessibility to empirical analysis. Here, the archives left by disaster conjure effects that are powerful for their brevity and inarticulateness” (Vadde 2012, 268-269).

eventually, anticolonial sapper). Indeed, it is this twinned sense of crisis and deviation that provides the rough social cohesion for the novel's small group, the weak knot that, for a time, keeps them huddled together in a space that seems secure.

Guided by a visual imaginary linked to the aesthetic writings of Walter Pater, Natania Rosenfeld has argued that "space matters more than time" in *The English Patient* (Rosenfeld 2006, 359). Like some chiaroscuro by Caravaggio (the link Ondaatje draws between the early Baroque painter and his character is of course telling), where human figures are lit starkly but incompletely by faint candlelight, time, she argues, seems to stand still in Ondaatje's work. The question for the novel is what can be done, what can be represented, in the confined space of the timeless villa. But, as Ondaatje never ceases to show, space (and, as I will argue below, the spaces of visual art) is always shot through with and even structured by various times, particularly within sites of heterotopia. Much like Foucault's gardens, Ondaatje's too open out into "heterochronies," multiple senses or experiences of temporality that function at full capacity when people arrive at an "absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 1986, 6). Time has not stopped in the villa then, even if it has appeared to. Rather, it has broken down and scattered into multiplicity. As a site of crisis and deviation, Ondaatje's heterotopia is also one of both "indefinitely accumulating time," in which the past "never stops building up" like the wreck of history gazed upon by Benjamin's angelus novus, and of "time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect," the fleeting instant, the blink of an eye, the irremediably mortal (Foucault 1986, 7). The community at the Villa San Girolamo is at once suffused and sustained by a long history and marked by transience.

As in all of the texts this dissertation has addressed, Ondaatje's novel quickly makes it clear that this improbable group of four, their unstable and itinerant heterotopia, is never only four, but a collective widened by the hauntings of manifold pasts and various presents, insistent ghosts or fellow travelers from across time and from across the globe.<sup>3</sup> Hana has lost her father and an unborn child to the war, as well as many of those wounded soldiers to whom she has attended. The trauma of her war experience manifests itself on the surfaces of her body and mind, symptoms of "Partial shell shock probably," and leads to her eventual desertion (Ondaatje 1992, 28). Kirpal Singh has lost his mentor in bomb disposal and surrogate imperial father, Charles Howard, 20<sup>th</sup> Earl of Suffolk. More starkly, his position (or non-position) as an invisible subaltern, a victim of British colonial violence and hypocrisy, leads him toward a vision of anticolonial community. The "English" patient, Almásy, moves between a romantic, ultimately tragic life in the past and the charred present, alternating between the first and third person as he relates his story of forbidden love and personal disaster. Burned beyond recognition in a plane crash, effectively reduced to a breathing and speaking husk, he is possessed by what once had been his life and by those, now dead, who had populated it. Indeed, it is Almásy who articulates the surprisingly full world that these four characters live within and help to establish: "We are communal histories, communal books," he proclaims to Caravaggio.

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<sup>3</sup> In his 2007 novel *Divisadero*, Ondaatje metafictionally addresses his method as well as his vision of inter-historical collectivity: "Everything is collage, even genetics. There is a hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border that we cross." And later: "They have stepped into this friendship the way solitaries in medieval times might have bundled together for the night before journeying on towards a destination of marriage or war" (Ondaatje 2007, 16 and 76).

“We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience” (Ondaatje 1992, 261).

While still haunted by the individual and collective traumas of the war (and of the lives that preceded it), Hana and crew carve out a brief time and a small space of relative autonomy from world events and the grand designs of twentieth-century martial politics: “Coming out of what had happened to her during the war, [Hana] drew her own few rules to herself. She would not be ordered again or carry out duties for the greater good” (Ondaatje 1992, 14).

It would be a mistake, however, to call Hana’s proclamation of *non serviam* (which is shared by each character at different stages of the novel) a retreat from the realm of politics. The political imaginary and activity of this little community is to live, at least for a time, as if they were self-sufficient and more or less removed from the war’s greater violences.<sup>4</sup> Here, like Barker’s Billy Prior and Wilfred Owen billeted outside of war-ravaged Amiens, Ondaatje’s characters are momentarily forgotten by the conflict, even if they cannot escape its residual effects or its still present dangers. Joseph R. Slaughter has argued that Ondaatje’s 2000 novel *Anil’s Ghost* “offers somewhat idyllic visions of alternative, ghostly publics that haunt the destabilized nation-state and that

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<sup>4</sup> In his novel *In the Skin of A Lion* (1987), which precedes *The English Patient* chronologically (both in terms of the time of the texts’ respective settings and when they were written) and introduces readers to younger versions of Hana and Caravaggio as they move in and on the outskirts of Toronto between the wars, the character Patrick Lewis (Hana’s adoptive father) thinks of the possibilities of small groups: “He feels more community remembering this than anything in his life. Patrick and the two women. A study for the New World” (Ondaatje 1987, 79). While Patrick later will claim that he does not believe in “the language of politics,” but that he will “protect the friends [he has],” he begins to devise another language for collective life with these very words. He does so using the image of the “mural,” a “falling together of accomplices,” a “wondrous night web,—all of these fragments of a human order, something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day,” which I have quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Rhyming with *The English Patient* and later novels, *In the Skin of a Lion* offers a moving tableau where “the detritus and chaos of the age was realigned,” if only momentarily (Ondaatje 1987, 145). Late in the novel, Ondaatje refers to this form of sociality as “mongrel company” (Ondaatje 1987, 238).

serve their associates as temporary discursive safe-havens. The spontaneous generation of these ephemeral, paranational publics represents a withdrawal from the conventional terrain of politics” (Slaughter 2007, 195). On a smaller scale, perhaps, *The English Patient* offers its own paranational public, although (as Slaughter himself implies) the small group’s “withdrawal from the conventional terrain of politics” does not represent a withdrawal from politics tout court. Rather, this is a haunted politics of refusal and alternative sociality, of crisis and deviation, an attempt to make do collectively on both the territorial and discursive outskirts of what Vadde has called a “bounded communal form,” whether the latter be a nation or an empire (Vadde 2012, 260).<sup>5</sup> In other words, Ondaatje’s novel is interested in what those who have little power, who are without property, prospects, and even bodily health, nonetheless have, individually and in concert. The novel probes the forms of improbable relationship and collective living—a microsociality and a micropolitics that is global or transnational despite its smallness and its transience—that arise in heterotopic spaces and heterochronic times.

In differing ways, for instance, each member of the villa’s small group discovers an ephemeral but “comforting love” outside of family and national or imperial commitment, “the platonic intimacy, or at times the sexual intimacy, of the stranger,” a kind of “affective community” in Leila Gandhi’s terms (Ondaatje 1992, 226). Almásy describes his relationship with Kip as a shared unmooring in the wider world of citizens

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<sup>5</sup> In her discussion of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Anil’s Ghost*, Vadde articulates Ondaatje’s interest in “global collectivity, a formation in which many groups might be said to intersect with one another but cannot be said to cohere within any single model of identity or community” (Vadde 2012, 273). It is my contention that this interest in global forms of collectivity is also present, if in a microcosmic way, in *The English Patient*.

and subjects, friends and enemies: “Kip and I are international bastards—born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives” (Ondaatje 1992, 176). Here, Almásy articulates a desire for a world without maps and national boundaries, one that Kip, for a brief time, also seems to be seeking. Referring of his past life as an explorer in the North African desert, and the community he found there, Almásy states:

We were German, English, Hungarian, African—all of us insignificant to them [the Bedouin]. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. . . . I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation (Ondaatje 1992, 138-139).

In this attempt to explain the reasons for his collusion with the Nazis, Almásy at once reduces his actions to the level of the personal and widens them within a world without national borders. As Slaughter contends, again in reference to *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje's “surrogate micropublics” cross “national, political, linguistic, ethnic, class, and gender boundaries” and “offer a counterperspective on the nation-state. . . . The disarticulation of grand historical narratives is reflected in the temporal and spatial disjunctions and unconventional conjunctions that plot Ondaatje's novel and that replay, at the level of literary form, the recombinant associations that spawn counterpublics” (Slaughter 2007, 192). *The English Patient's* social and political vision of the small group, of the “recombinant associations” that avail themselves in wartime, breaks up any narrative of British imperial unity or national belonging. The progressive, linear time of empire is shattered both by the chronic violence of mass war and the heterochronies that emerge within it. As Slaughter notes, this vision of narrative multiplicity and difference also

plays out in—and is even perhaps responsible for—Ondaatje’s experiments in literary form.

## **6.2 The “tremor of Western wisdom”: Tableaux Vivants and the Violence of Empire**

Almásy’s vision of a nationless space and time where lives from across the globe gather is in some sense approximated by the “miniature world,” the peculiar heterotopia, of the Villa San Girolamo. Indeed, situated just outside of Florence and among variously damaged Renaissance frescos, the novel’s small group co-creates this world as a kind of moving tableau, life approaching and intermingling with art: “A villa romance. What would Poliziano have thought of this 1945 tableau, two men and a woman across a piano and the war almost over” (Ondaatje 1992, 64). In the space of a fresco by Masaccio or Fra Angelico (or a painting by Caravaggio), a point of time, a gathering of lives, is captured. The scene appears to be set and immobile, as Rosenfeld contends. However, Ondaatje’s novel argues, this capture is incomplete, fragile, and mutable, a reality made apparent by wartime; changes in the surrounding world frame and reframe the life depicted in tableau. The motion of a novel—as a variously flowing and ebbing relay of words, a narrative assembling of community, and a text approached differently depending upon the circumstances of its reception—illuminates the surprising fluidity of visual art. Indeed, all tableaux are vivante, living, layered by the accumulation of past and present events, by the perspectives of those viewing, and in that way participating in, the transforming scene. While what I am claiming here is nothing new, I think taking Ondaatje at his metafictional (if playful and ironic) word on the links between visual and

language art helps to explain the formal properties of *The English Patient* and many of Ondaatje's other novels.

As Vadde avers, Ondaatje has become known for his “trademark paratactic style,” his novels collecting pieces of history and fiction, discourse and artifact, to produce an “aesthetics of the fragment” rather than representing “history as either an impersonal social force or a recoverable totality.” And as Foucault’s understanding of heterotopia and heterochrony teaches us, the spatial aspect of parataxis always also includes a temporal or historical aspect. Neither classical historical fiction in Lukács’ understanding of the genre nor historiographic metafiction in Hutcheon’s terms, this “archival method,” which gives shape to collective pasts that move across multiple, global traditions rather than backward to a single tradition (disturbing the sense of national cohesion present in Lukács’ reading of historical fiction), gives Ondaatje’s novels an “open-ended, unsynthesized, and shape-shifting quality” (Vadde 2012, 257 and 258). Almost all of Ondaatje’s texts move between various times, spaces, and perspectives, whether of multiple characters (speaking in the first- or third-person) or narrators or points-of-view. In the spaces and times of his novels, contextual or individual difference and concordance is given voice and drawn into conversation. It is my contention that if, as Roberto Schwarz has argued, “forms are the abstract of specific social relations” (qtd in Slaughter 2007, 7), then a crucial source for Ondaatje’s paratactic style and archival method—drawing global networks into intensely localized and intimate social relations, a veritable social text—is the politics of the small group, most often imagined and practiced by

characters on the underside of national or world history.<sup>6</sup> Much like his character Anna (rhyming, of course, with Hana) in *Divisadero*, an academic “who discovers archival subtexts in history and art, where the spiraling among a handful of strangers tangles into a story,” Ondaatje discovers or creates narrative from tangles of outsiders, small lives and events, and their various histories (Ondaatje 2007, 137). These stories of brief entanglement I am calling, after Ondaatje, novelistic tableaux vivantes, multidimensional narratives gathering odd lives, objects, and events.<sup>7</sup> “A book, a map of knots, a fuze board, a room of four people in an abandoned villa lit only by candlelight. . . . From a greater distance there was nothing here that belonged to the outside world. . . . Just fifty yards away, there had been no representation of them in the world” (Ondaatje 1992, 111-112). At once framed or contained and yet sprawling, global as well as intimately, newly, local, Ondaatje’s tableaux depict both alternative worlds and the process of world-making, the small sociality of war worlds.

Ondaatje is never shy about articulating his method thematically within his texts, a metafictional gesture that is at once ironic and sincere. Late in *The English Patient*, for example, Kip thinks back to an experience in Naples at the damaged Church of San

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<sup>6</sup> As Slaughter argues, “genres emerge and become conventional (both publicly common and formally regular) to the extent that they make collectively legible—if sometimes distorted—both actual and possible (desirable and undesirable) social formations and relations” (Slaughter 2007, 10).

<sup>7</sup> Tellingly, Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of A Lion* shares an epigraph with Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, a line from John Berger’s 1972 novel *G.*: “Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one.” This sentence might serve as an epigraph for all of Ondaatje’s work. As he writes in *The Cat’s Table* (the “cat’s table” being the least privileged place in the dining room of an ocean liner): “What is interesting and important happens mostly in secret, in places where there is no power. Nothing much of lasting value ever happens at the head table, held together by a familiar rhetoric. Those who already have power continue to glide along the familiar rut they have made for themselves” (Ondaatje 2011, 75).

Giovanni a Carbonara that rhymes with his time at the villa. After the Germans had fled the city and armed it with heavy explosives, thirty of the best sappers from the British engineering corps had been flown in to disarm mines and booby traps. While they had moved from site to site across the city, a captured German soldier warned the Allied authorities that thousands of bombs had been hidden in Naples' harbor section, and that they had been wired to the city's dormant electrical system. "When the power was turned on, the city would dissolve in flames" (Ondaatje 1992, 276). With this information, the British army had evacuated the harbor and its residents. Only a small group of sappers—"a city of twelve" citizenized by their shared war work (Ondaatje 1992, 278)—had remained behind to disarm the explosives.

At this point in the narration of Kip's memory, the text suddenly shifts from the past to the present tense, a common move throughout Ondaatje's oeuvre which often indicates that past experience is still very much present, a kind of temporal parataxis or layering of chronotopes. One of the twelve, Kip moves from bomb to bomb in the city. At one p.m., two hours before power is to be restored to the harbor regardless of the sappers' success, Kip finds his way to the Church of San Giovanni. For he "had been walking through the church a few evenings earlier when lightning filled the darkness, and he had seen large human figures in the tableau" of the Church's chapel of the Rosary (Ondaatje 1992, 279). The sculptural scene had been momentarily illuminated by a strange kind of natural light, as if it had been briefly rendered a painting or photograph. Kip reenters that corner of the Church now. He notices that the terra cotta figures, "painted the colour of white humans," are larger than life; an angel's (probably Gabriel's)

raised arm reaches fifteen feet into the air as he speaks to Mary. Despite the statues' disconcerting size and seeming lifelessness, "Still, for Kip, they are company. It is an inhabited room, and he walks within the discussion of these creatures that represent some fable about mankind and heaven" (Ondaatje 1992, 279). Christianity is for a moment provincialized. Although Kip does not recognize the scene, it is the Annunciation, a fable that momentarily links humankind and the Christian heaven. At about one-forty p.m., Kip lies down on the floor amid the statuary, adding a foreign, unknowing body to the scene and *revising* the story, giving it new life, in this hazardous present. "Soon one of the sappers will turn on the city's electricity, and if [Kip] is going to explode he will do so in the company of these two. They will die or be secure. . . . At least he has found these parental figures. He can relax in the midst of this mime of conversation" (Ondaatje 1992, 280). An invisible, quiet presence at what might be said to be to Christianity's primal scene, he falls asleep with a smile on his face as he thinks back to his childhood in Lahore, where he had slept, in similar comfort and among family, on the floor.

Perhaps because Kip has fallen asleep, the narrator then pulls back entirely from his perspective: "The colour of his turban echoes that of the lace collar at the neck of Mary. / At her feet the small Indian sapper, in uniform. . . . There seems to be no time here. Each of them has selected the most comfortable of positions to forget time. So we will be remembered by others. In such smiling comfort when we trust our surroundings" (Ondaatje 1992, 280). *Seemingly* outside of and forgetting time, the scene turns into a tableau suggesting a heavenly debate—between Mary and the angel Gabriel—over Kip's fate: "The raised terra-cotta arm a stay of execution, a promise of some great future for

this sleeper, childlike, foreign-born. The three of them almost at the point of decision, agreement” (Ondaatje 1992, 281). While Kip sleeps and yet somehow nears a point of decision or agreement with the statues nonetheless, the electricity is turned on by someone somewhere else in the city. Lights illuminate the room. This tableau and its living, carved, or inscribed icons have been spared, and a new narrative had been written. Later, at the Villa San Girolamo, Kip will think: “Perhaps this villa is a similar tableau, the four of them in private movement, momentarily lit up, flung ironically against this war” (Ondaatje 1992, 278). This improbable small group, too, with which Kip “seems casually content . . . as some kind of loose star on the edge of their system,” briefly constructs a moving tableau of its own, a world in wartime (Ondaatje 1992, 75).

Soon after Kip wanders the labyrinth of this memory, however, the wider world and its national and imperial markers crowd into the villa. Over the radio, Kip hears news of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All at once, Kip’s willingness to abide as an almost invisible being, a colonial subject quietly laboring with and for the British empire, is jolted by a radical turn of thought. To the “English” patient Almásy, he proclaims:

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from your country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. . . . Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had histories and printing presses? / You and then the Americans converted us. With your missionary rules. And Indian soldiers wasted their lives as heroes so they could be pukkah. You had wars like cricket (Ondaatje 1992, 283).

The pastoral, if always also precarious, calm of the villa, its wartime tableau, is finally shattered by global events. Kip has come to understand that he is here, aiding the Allies in their war effort, under false pretences. He is a collaborator (not unlike Almásy) with a global empire that is essentially at war with him. And this is more than a British problem: “American, French, I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you’re an Englishman” (Ondaatje 1992, 286). Before it has even concluded, World War II transforms into another set of conflicts, a Cold War and a series of hot wars between colonizer and colonized, Global North and South. Kip thus foresees the new globality of post-war violence, or what Hardt and Negri have come to call “Empire,” where war has taken on a “generalized character” and become inimical to all social life, particularly that which is unassimilable within the Imperial war machine (Hardt and Negri 2004, xii). Rather than martial contests between states that take place, only in exceptional circumstances, when diplomacy breaks down, post-45 warfare (and, as many have argued, state politics itself) becomes perpetual civil warfare where sovereign powers combat non-sovereign powers within a single territory, the globe (Hardt and Negri 2004, 3). Unable and unwilling to stay in this Western place and its transforming vision of Empire, Kip suddenly departs the villa for Lahore: “He has left the three of them to their world, is no longer their sentinel” (Ondaatje 1992, 286). He returns to India to be an active participant, which is to say, more than a sentinel, in another battle.

While looking back to World War II as well as its national and imperial historical precedents, *The English Patient*—like Barker’s trilogy and many similar postcolonial novels of history—also speaks to the present, facilitating an inter-historical exchange that

Ondaatje labors to make plain with his formal and thematic use, his re-imagining of, tableau. More than dressing problems of contemporary life in the costumes of the mid-century, Ondaatje's novelistic tableau vivante traces the martial and political residua of World War II that survives to shape the postwar, ostensibly postcolonial, moment. In a world still governed asymmetrically by nation states and global capital, by an Imperial impulse that transforms rather than abolishes older forms of imperial violence and exploitation, the small group of whatever kind, of whatever politics, is always at risk of encroachment; its politics are often not enough.<sup>8</sup> And yet, as the text's that I have addressed all maintain, these small groups are always also there, or at least there to be constructed, at the most unlikely of times and in the most unlikely of places.

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<sup>8</sup> As Daniel Immerwahr has argued, with respect to the use of the small group as a sociological concept by U.S. and British governmental and business interests in the post-war era: "The intimate scale can be just as oppressive as the large scale, and not every village is a garden of fellowship" (Immerwahr 2015, x). Following a period marked by "global war, economic depression, famine, violent revolutions, the rise of totalitarian governments, and the threat of worldwide nuclear annihilation," the midcentury (particularly in the U.S.) was "a time of newfound appreciation for small-scale social solidarities, from the small group to the faraway village. . . . Across the political spectrum, thinkers joined the quest for community, the attempt to reembed social, economic, and political forces with small-group life" (Immerwahr 2015, 8). For Immerwahr, the small group "commanded no partisan faction, and thus has little place in our political histories. It was more like a field effect, a magnetic pull from which few were completely free" (Immerwahr 2015, 39).

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## **Biography**

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