

LOOKING BEYOND THE TRENCHES: THE FIRST WORLD
WAR HOME FRONT IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

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Abstract

Looking Beyond the Trenches: The First World War Home Front in Contemporary Fiction by Angela Thurstance

This thesis explores how contemporary fiction provides new perspectives on the First World War by engaging with narratives which unfold on the Home Front and considering the ways in which they contribute to debates on the representation of conflict and trauma. In this study I will show how contemporary conflict and its impact on society are negotiated through interpretations and re-imaginings of the First World War since, despite their historical settings, these novels are underscored by contemporary preoccupations and reflect current issues and concerns.

I will show how contemporary authors engage in debates about the role of literature in representing war. Across the literary spectrum, from the popular to the more literary, they use intertextuality and different genres to build on earlier literature to insert themselves into ongoing dialogues about the war. Through an appreciation of their position within a wider literary tradition they consider the power of literature, and more broadly that of language and the written word, to influence and inform and thus self-reflexively critique their own role in attempting to convey historical events and their protagonists' experiences of them

By turning to the Home Front, the thirteen novels included in this study draw on aspects of the war not usually foregrounded in its earlier representations. They show the impact of the First World War on those previously considered more peripheral or outside the main war effort, such as family members and conscientious objectors. In doing so they show how the experiences of contemporary society facilitate a re-evaluation of how war is remembered and represented. I will show how contemporary authors scrutinize the ways in which conflict can, and cannot, be adequately represented and thus challenge the possibility for any one version of history, or form of representation, to effectively convey the experience of war.

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Introduction

Those guns may have fallen silent eighty years ago, but their echoes neither die nor even fade away.¹

These words from former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, written in 1998, emphasize the extraordinary endurance of the First World War in the public memory. It is a viewpoint which was endorsed by historian Dan Todman in 2008 when he stated that: ‘the First World War remains a key reference point in contemporary British culture [and it] does not seem to be a war that is fading away’.² It is clear that the First World War retains the ability to provoke strong emotional responses even today. As we enter the war’s centenary years its prominent position in popular discourse has strengthened further, as interest in the war is heightened both by the need to mark the anniversary and by the increased media coverage of commemorative events and publications. The immense public interest in the First World War is reflected in the quantity of literature which continues to be written about it and by the important role that literature has played in how the war is remembered. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) Paul Fussell observed that: ‘[s]ometimes it is really hard to shake off the conviction that this war has been written by someone’,³ suggesting a history which has been textually constructed. Moreover, James Campbell argues that for many people the ‘primary mode of access [to the war] remains the literary text rather than the historical one’⁴, emphasizing the influence that literary texts have exerted on how the war is remembered.

Conversely, the influence that the war had on literary and artistic representation cannot be underestimated. Addressing Ford Madox Ford’s comments after the war that: ‘All novels are historical ... but all novels do not deal with such events as get on to the pages of history’, Samuel Hynes observes: ‘But after the war, many novels did; those

¹ Andrew Motion, ‘Lest We Forget.’ *New Statesman*, 127 (1998), 36-38 (p. 38).

² Dan Todman, ‘The First World War in Contemporary British Popular Culture’ in *Untold War: New Perspectives on First World War Studies*, ed. Heather Jones, Jennifer O’Brien and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 417-442 (p. 418).

³ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 241.

⁴ James Campbell, ‘Interpreting the War’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261-279 (p. 266).

events seemed unavoidable in fiction, because they had changed reality'.⁵ Hynes described the First World War as the 'great *imaginative* event' of its time and insisted that: 'It altered the ways in which men and women thought not only about war but about the world, and about culture and its expressions'.⁶ He argued that the war 'changed reality' to such an extent that it could not be ignored: 'Men and women after the war looked back at their own pasts as one might look across a great chasm to a remote, peaceable place on the other side'.⁷ This draws attention to the significance of the First World War as a catalyst for the construction of modern society. As I will show in this study, this recurring image of the war as a great divide after which people's lives were indelibly changed is sometimes represented in contemporary literature by the division of narrative into two distinct parts, so that the structure of the novel emphasizes the First World War's positioning at the centre of change.

The need to record and convey the enormity of war is a strong one but doing so is neither straightforward nor easily achieved. Kate McLoughlin asserts that all war resists representation whilst simultaneously producing an obligation to do so: 'Yet, even as it resists representation, conflict demands it'.⁸ She goes on to suggest a number of reasons why representing war is important:

to impose discursive order on the chaos of conflict and so to render it more comprehensible; to keep the record for the self and others (those who were there and can no longer speak for themselves and those who were not there and need to be told); to give some meaning to mass death; to memorialise; to inform civilians of the nature of battle so as to facilitate the reintegration of veterans into peacetime society; to provide cathartic relief; to warn; and even, through the warning, to promote peace.⁹

The extraordinary and disorientating nature of war trauma means that it lacks the familiarity which allows experiences to be easily communicated. Yet, as McLoughlin

⁵ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), p. 327.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Kate McLoughlin, *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*

suggests, the benefits of doing so can be substantial. The imperative to represent the horrors of war was keenly felt by those who experienced it first-hand. The First World War was an enormous global event but for its participants it was also a peculiarly personal experience. George Parfitt highlights the use of First World War literature as a way of recording and communicating that experience:

Men and women who write about the Great War are seeking, for whatever reasons, to present some kind of truth about a conflict which was fought in several theatres, across thousands of miles, over several years and with vast armies. But it was also a war of which most combatants saw very little and over which they had almost no control.¹⁰

Writing their memoirs did not give them any more control over the war but it did give them some power over how their own involvement in it would be remembered and it gave them the opportunity to convey the experience of war from their own perspective.

While this is not an issue which is related only to the First World War, the dilemma of how to convey the enormity and horror of that particular conflict has remained a preoccupation for those who seek to represent it. Parfitt argues that representing the war as a whole is impossible: 'The scale of the war made any idea of a novel which could be an adequate overview absurd'.¹¹ In response to this, he identifies a 'marked tendency to fragmentation' and 'books frankly offered as records of moments and aspects of war experience'.¹² Authors thus respond to the incompleteness and fragmentation of traumatic memory by applying similarly disorientating tactics in their narratives. This can be seen in one reaction to the imperative to represent the unrepresentable, the advent of modernism. Trudi Tate argues that 'Modernism after 1914 begins to look like a peculiar but significant form of war writing'.¹³ The innovation and fragmentation of texts such as Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-1928) were particularly notable as an attempt to convey the experience of war to those who had not experienced it first-hand and contemporary narratives continue to draw on modernist techniques such as

¹⁰ George Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War: A Study* (London: Faber, 1987), p. 7.

¹¹ Parfitt, p. 5.

¹² Parfitt, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 12.

fragmentation to convey traumatic experiences. Finding a way to adequately communicate trauma became the overriding preoccupation of First World War narratives and the conflict of war thus became analogous with the crisis of representation. Malcolm Bradbury argues that many novels saw the war ‘as an apocalypse, a crisis moment in the history of civilisation and culture’ which they took ‘as a crisis for artistic form itself’.¹⁴ As a result of this, he observes ‘that many of the novels written about the First World War did more than report it, debunk it, or expose its horror or inhumanity’.¹⁵ Instead, they realised that straightforward narrative might prove inadequate in their quest for effective representation and began to look for new and more creative ways to achieve their objectives.

Early First World War literature

The imperative to convey the trauma of the First World War remains strong, and as I will show throughout this thesis, contemporary fictional narratives continue to draw on genres traditionally associated with war representation, such as memoir and autobiography, to represent the experiences of their protagonists. The literary response to the First World War occurs in roughly three waves: the first took place during the years immediately following the War in the 1920s and 1930s; the second occurred around the time of the fiftieth anniversary in the 1960s and 1970s; and the third wave of First World War literature began during the 1990s and has continued into the twenty-first century.

During the first wave, the work of those who had experienced the war for themselves was particularly valued and the critical emphasis on fictional and semi-fictional texts focused almost exclusively on narratives which sought to represent the experiences of those fighting in the trenches. For this reason, the work of the soldier poets and autobiographers such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden, tends to be foregrounded when thinking of the literature written in response to the war. Semi-autobiographical texts such as Graves’ *Goodbye to All That* (1929) and Sassoon’s *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930) are at the heart of how the war is portrayed in its

¹⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, ‘The Denuded Place: War and Form in Parade’s End and USA’ in *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Holger Klein (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

early literature and, as I will show in this thesis, they continue to exert influence over how the war is represented in later texts. Most of what is now considered classic First World War literature was originally written in English and by those on the Allied side of the conflict. Eric Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), providing a German perspective of life in the trenches, is, I would argue, the only German text which ranks alongside those of the Allied soldier poets in its influence on British memory, although others such as Ernst Jünger's memoir *Storm of Steel* (1920) were also translated into English.¹⁶

In addition to the body of work by combatants there is also a significant amount of writing by non-combatants who sought to represent their experiences of the war. There are texts by women who participated in the conflict through roles such as nursing and ambulance driving, for example Evadne Price's semi-autobiographical novel *Not so Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (1930) and Vera Brittain's memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933). Sharon Ouditt argues that these texts also represent an important aspect of wartime experience since: 'Where there is total war, the full range of experience, rather than seeing enemy action alone, may be construed as war experience'¹⁷ and David Trotter asks: 'How better to grasp the nature of the physical and mental damage done by a particular form of combat than through the eyes of the women whose task was to help repair it?'¹⁸ However, this is not a concept which is universally accepted, as Janet S. K. Watson states:

During the war, the power of the trench could be diffused, and women were still represented as having a role in that process. In the years after the Armistice, however, women and non-combatants were pushed out of the history of the war

¹⁶ *All Quiet on the Western Front* first appeared in serialised form in the *Vossische Zeitung* from 10th November to 9th December 1928 before being published in book format in January 1929. It was translated into English and French the same year. See Modris Eksteins, 'All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), 345-366 (p. 353). *Storms of Steel* (also published in English as *The Storm of Steel*) was published privately in 1920 but was revised several times with the latest revision taking place in 1961. See Eliot Y. Neaman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature After Nazism* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 26. The first English language edition was published in 1929. See Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 187.

¹⁷ Sharon Ouditt, *Women Writers of the First World War: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

¹⁸ David Trotter, 'The British Novel and the War' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34-56 (p. 36).

which remains extensively a “soldier’s story,” incomprehensible to everyone else.¹⁹

David Trotter suggests that the work of non-combatants tends to provide a generalised view of the consequences of war which lacks the ‘unique flavour’ of the First World War captured in the novels of combatants.²⁰ This highlights the value placed on the work of combatants as providing a more authentic representation of the First World War. To some extent, this reflects the particular relationship between the First World War and the trenches of France and Belgium. Literature which did not include the trench experience risked the accusation of not addressing issues specific to the First World War. The horror of the trenches is what set the First World War apart from previous, and subsequent, conflicts. The association between the two is firmly established in the popular imagination and the use of trench imagery continues in contemporary literature about the First World War. Ouditt argues that there is good reason for this:

Late twentieth-century reimaginings of the war ... return us to familiar terrain: northern France, trenches, gas, rats, lice, moldering corpses, incompetent generals, chlorinated tea, and the all-devouring mud. There are, of course, compelling reasons why these images recur. They were, after all, accurate reflections, both literal and metaphorical, of actual physical and mental conditions. The image of the individual struggling against the effects of a mechanized, dehumanized force is a powerful one.²¹

She draws attention to how contemporary narratives such as Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* (1991), Sebastian Faulk’s *Birdsong* (1993) and Kate Atkinson’s *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), all continue to invoke images of the suffering in the trenches in order to represent the war. The reason for this is that the trenches are more than just unpleasant ditches; they emblematised the carnage of war. As Dan Todman explains:

¹⁹ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 10.

²⁰ Trotter, p. 37.

²¹ Sharon Ouditt, ‘Myths, Memories and Monuments: Re-imagining the Great War’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245-260, (p. 245).

For here mud stands for much more than a mere amalgam of water and soil. It is made up of excrement, dead soldiers and animals, shrapnel, barbed wire and the remnants of poison gas. . . This mud bears the terrifying potential to engulf the soldiers who struggle within it, to suck them down – spluttering, choking, drowning – and to convert their corpses into yet more mud.²²

Although they have come to encapsulate the First World War, images of the trenches cannot provide a complete representation of the war experience. In her study of women's writing of the First World War, Angela K. Smith argues that relying solely on the writing of combatants provides too narrow a view of the effects of war: 'The trench experience was one encountered by less than half the total population; consequently these texts provide an unrepresentative record of the impact of the war'.²³ While a preoccupation with the trenches is undeniably present in many early and contemporary novels about the war, there are also many texts which look beyond that experience. Virginia Woolf's portrayal of Septimus Smith, a traumatised war veteran, in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Rebecca West's portrait of Chris Baldry in *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) both take place on the Home Front as they seek to represent the difficulties faced by veterans as they attempt to re-integrate back into the community. The increasing critical attention on those early texts which portray war experiences beyond the trenches highlights the need to represent a wider arena of war encompassing civilians and support workers as well as combatants.

A new generation of First World War fiction

The Second wave of literature about the War started to emerge during the late 1950s as the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict approached. The number of texts produced was considerable. Dan Todman reports that 'In the period 1959 to 1968, nearly two hundred new books on the war were published in Britain, more than in the previous two decades put together',²⁴ although not all of them were works of fiction as he includes history texts in these figures. In fact, very few of the fictional texts produced during this period

²² Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 1.

²³ Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 3.

²⁴ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 29.

have retained their popularity as representations of the war. Much more widely remembered than the novels of the period are representations such as the BBC television series *The Great War* (1964) and Joan Littlewood's stage musical *Oh What a Lovely War!* (1963), which was also made into a film in 1969, directed by Richard Attenborough.

Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting* (1971), the title is taken from a poem by Wilfred Owen, is probably the best-known novel from this era. Although it has attracted limited critical attention it is included on the AQA A level reading list for First World War literature, alongside a number of prose texts from the post war period including those of Siegfried Sassoon, Helen Zenna Smith and Rebecca West, and other contemporary texts such as Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and Sebastian Faulk's *Birdsong*.²⁵ Another novel from this period, Jennifer Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon* (1974) portrays the relationship between two Irish men of different classes before and during the war. There is a strong intertextual element to Johnston's work. Silvia Diez Fabre describes how Johnston draws on the work of poets, particularly Yeats, to '[analyse] the role of literary history in providing a connecting link with the past' as she 'examines the implications of the imprint of the past on ... traditional notions ... of war as a universal historical phenomenon'.²⁶ Johnston's text has continued to enjoy popular success, having been adapted for television by the BBC in 1982 and later as a stage production. More recently, in April 2013, it featured on BBC Radio Four's *Book at Bedtime*.²⁷ Slightly later, William Boyd's *An Ice Cream War* (1982) provides a rare fictional representation of British East Africa during the First World War and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 1982.²⁸

The third wave of literature about the First World War, and the one with which this thesis is directly concerned, began in the 1990s as the last remaining veterans died. The First World War has always been a popular theme for fiction but the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen a notable increase in the number of texts

²⁵ <http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/a-level/english-literature-a-2740/subject-content>

²⁶ Silvia Diez Fabre, 'Questioning the Past Among Echoes of Literary History' in *Back to the Present: Forward to the Past: Irish Writing and History Since 1798 Volume 1*, ed. Patricia A. Lynch, Joachim Fischer and Brian Coates (Amsterdam; New York: Rodolphi, 2006), pp. 109-118 (p. 109).

²⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qtlx/episodes/guide>

²⁸ See <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/books/ice-cream-war>.

produced as its last remaining witnesses were lost. In her discussion of neo-Victorian fiction, Kate Mitchell observes that:

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that neo-Victorian fiction achieves momentum at around the time when personal memory of the Victorians was slipping away. By the 1980s there could be few, if any, Victorians left; at least, very few who were born early enough to have any personal memory of the period itself.²⁹

The same relationship can be seen between the increasing amounts of fiction written about the First World War and the loss of its last remaining veterans. As the veterans of the war die their ability to bear witness is restricted to those texts and recordings already produced. Fictional representations, both explicitly and implicitly, take the form of literary witnesses, maintaining the war in popular consciousness and offering new ways of engaging with the conflict. In 1991 Pat Barker published *Regeneration*, the first of a new wave of novels about the First World War, written by a new generation of authors, none of whom had been participants in the war themselves. At this time those few veterans of the war who remained alive were very elderly. Any soldier who had reached the age of 18 by 1918 when the war ended would have been 90 years old by 1990. The last surviving First World War veteran, Florence Green who enlisted with the Women's Royal Air Force, died in 2012 and the last survivor to have seen active service in the trenches, Harry Patch, died in 2011.³⁰ Sharon Monteith asserts that: '*Regeneration* was a watershed text, but its popularity reflects a change in direction not for Barker's writing but, more accurately, for the ways in which the popular-cultural history of the war has superseded its social history'.³¹ In the trilogy, Barker engages not only with the First World War but with the way it is popularly remembered. She brings a twentieth-century perspective to those on the edges of representation, such as conscientious objectors and those suffering the effects of shell shock, and by re-examining their experiences she gives them a voice with which to articulate their suffering.

²⁹ Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 12.

³⁰ See Richard Hall, 'Last First World War veteran dies', *Independent*, 8 February 2012, and Tracy McVeigh and Mark Townsend, 'Harry Patch, Britain's last surviving soldier of the Great War, dies at 111', *Observer*, 26 July 2009.

³¹ Sharon Monteith, *Pat Barker* (Devon: Northcote House, 2002), p. 4.

A great deal has already been written about the representation of war in Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and this thesis does not seek to repeat it. Instead, I intend to contribute to literary scholarship by considering a further thirteen novels which engage with the First World War and explore the ways in which these narratives, published in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, bring new perspectives to the representation of the war.

It is particularly noticeable that a large body of First World War literature was critically ignored for many years because it was written by women. During the late twentieth-century the growing imperative to reveal previously hidden and ignored voices within English literature meant that women's writing gained critical attention and the wealth of work by women writers who sought to represent the First World War became apparent. Challenges to the way that women's writing in response to the war has been received, illustrate how bringing new perspectives and ways of thinking to First World War literature can broaden our understanding of its events and impact. Lynne Hanley argues that whereas what constitutes the canon for other fields of literature has generally expanded and become more inclusive, the canon of war literature has remained much more restricted and continues to be dominated by the work of 'white English and American men'.³² She identifies the literature of the First World War as symptomatic of this trend in the way that 'a various and diverse body of literature was constricted to the literature of a few'.³³ She cites Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* as particularly influential in constructing a canon of First World War literature and notes that it relies heavily on the texts of veterans from the Western Front.³⁴ In particular, Hanley draws attention to the absence of women's narratives in Fussell's study: 'They are not at the front, they are not in the rear, they are not tending the home fires, they are not writing their memoirs'.³⁵ However, she also takes issue with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's study of women's war writing in *No Man's Land* (1988) in which she argues, the only people suffering are 'women of letters' and, because 'the metaphorical war between the sexes is so foregrounded, one loses sight of the real wars, of the massive, global human slaughter actually going on in the world outside these duals of

³² Lynne Hanley, *Writing War: Fiction, Gender and Memory* (Amherst, NY: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), p. 20.

³³ Hanley, p. 20.

³⁴ Hanley, pp. 23-24.

³⁵ Hanley, p. 31.

the pen'.³⁶ Such diversity of opinion within the field of women's literature itself further emphasizes the potential for exploring First World War literature beyond the limited boundaries of male combatant texts.

Narrowing the scope of which texts constitute its literature restricts the range of voices and perspectives which are involved in constructing lasting public perceptions about the war and ignores wider cultural implications. With this in mind, the texts in this study are not restricted to those which have won critical acclaim but have been chosen because they introduce new voices and perspectives to the way in which the First World War is remembered. They offer something new in the representation of the war by taking as their focus those who are often side-lined or neglected in other texts. While this thesis does not seek to explore the literature of women alone, nor to do so solely from a feminist viewpoint, many of the previously unrepresented perspectives which the contemporary novels in this study give voice to are those of women, the mothers, sisters, wives and girlfriends whose involvement in the war is inextricably linked to that of the men.

Of particular significance to this study is Hanley's assertion that although a body of literature written by women about the First World War does exist, it still focuses primarily on the fighting and the trenches even when the narrative is situated on the Home Front. My argument is that contemporary literature has begun to address this issue and that the representation of war from the perspective of the Home Front offers a new way of looking at the legacy of war, particularly its cultural implications. Sharon Ouditt argues that 'women were defined by the ideology of the day as war's "other"'.³⁷ I would argue that a similar claim can be made for the pacifists and conscientious objectors and indeed anyone who was not actively involved in the combatant aspects of war. It is with the representation of these new voices that this thesis seeks to engage.

³⁶ Hanley, p. 34.

³⁷ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 217.

The Home Front

Although the impact of the First World War was global, there has been a tendency both in popular culture and literature to focus predominantly on the Western Front in France and Belgium so that the trenches of Flanders and the Somme have become a synecdoche for the entire war. Unlike the Second World War when the danger on the Home Front was openly acknowledged, during the First World War it was perceived to be a safe haven. While the risk of suffering an attack on British soil was considerably less than during the Second World War, attacks did occur. As A. D. Harvey states: ‘the war intruded physically into the Home Front to a much greater extent than the French wars had done’.³⁸ There were a number of attacks on coastal towns from ships at sea and later in the war Zeppelin airships carried out bombing raids as well. Although not comparable to losses on the Western front, civilian casualty numbers were considerable. Arthur Marwick details this intrusion of the war onto the Home Front:

Bomb attacks, obviously, were one of the most direct manifestations of the destructiveness of this total war. And even before bombing became serious there was the attack by a German cruiser force on a number of English east coast towns on 10 December 1914 which resulted in 137 civilians being killed and 592 injured...there came, on 13 July 1917, the worst round of the whole war, when 162 citizens of London were killed and 432 injured: in the autumn that followed many Londoners took to sheltering in the tubes...Altogether between January 1915 and April 1918 there were 51 Zeppelin raids causing nearly 2000 casualties, and between December 1914 and June 1918 there were 57 aeroplane raids, causing nearly 3000 casualties.³⁹

However, it is not just in direct attacks that the war extended its influence to embrace those at home. As Clive Emsley states:

War is not something discrete and separate from society. We don’t have society in one position, and war as a separate entity acting upon society. Societies are

³⁸ A. D. Harvey, *A Muse of Fire: Literature, Art and War* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1998), p. 74.

³⁹ Arthur Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: a comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 60.

themselves involved in war; without societies there would be no war. If there is change, even temporary, that change comes not from war acting upon society, but from society's being involved in war, experiencing war.⁴⁰

The impact of the First World War was not contained within the trenches of France and Belgium but instead encompassed those on home soil and to ignore this is, as Sharon Ouditt states: 'a travesty of the finely grained complexities of the home front experience'.⁴¹ While the vast majority of novels were focused on the combatants' experiences, there are also some early texts which represent the Home Front during the war and in a recent study Ouditt explores a number of these narratives, including Rose MacCauley's *Non-Combatants and Others* (1916) and Rose Allantini's *Despised and Rejected* (1918). In contemporary literature, representations of the Home Front are no longer in the minority. As I will show, there is a growing tendency in contemporary fiction to widen the scope of representation of war beyond the trench experience and, as a result, an increasing number of authors are choosing to situate their narratives on the Home Front.

In this study I intend to take this new aspect as my focus and look at those texts which represent the First World War from the perspective of the Home Front. To do this, I have chosen novels which are predominantly set in Britain during the war and which deal with issues which are directly relevant to the Home Front and which show the extent to which the impact of war expanded its range of influence to intrude into the lives of those at home. Those which are set predominantly in the trenches, or which have little or no interaction with the Home Front, have not been included. Nevertheless, several of the novels which form part of this study do include representations of life in the trenches, which is inevitable since, as I will argue throughout this study, the separation between war and home is not easily achieved. This only serves to underline the continuing impact that the fighting taking place abroad had on the lives of all those involved, both active participants and those left at home, or returning home, as the

⁴⁰ Clive Emsley, *War, Peace and Social Change: Europe 1900-1955 Book II: World War I and its consequences* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), pp. 41-42.

⁴¹ Sharon Ouditt, 'Debatable Ground: Freedom and Constraint in British First World War Prose Fiction', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-century British and American War Literature*, ed. Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 31-39 (p. 31).

impact of the war projected well beyond the confines of the trenches. Pat Barker's *Life Class* (2007), in particular, does include a substantial amount of action in Belgium but it has been included in this study because it deals predominantly with the representation of war through art and the changing lives of its protagonists, both home and abroad, which occur because of the war. The literary depiction of the war artist is particularly interesting because in exploring the role that art plays in representing war to those at home it provides a self-reflexive commentary on the practical and ethical issues inherent in the attempt to adequately represent the horrors of war.

Themes and issues

This study looks at contemporary British and Irish literature and includes thirteen novels in total, the earliest published in 1998 and the most recent in 2012, and is divided thematically into four chapters. They are arranged in roughly chronological order, beginning with issues pertinent to the outbreak of war in chapter one. Chapters two and three explore events taking place during the war and finally, chapter four focuses on the viral epidemics which occurred as the war was ending.

Jay Winter argues 'that shifting the scale of vision from the national and grandiose to the particular and mundane may help transform our understanding of war monuments' because 'the great national sites of remembrance are exceptional, and their histories provide a misleading impression of thousands of others'.⁴² He is concerned with the multifarious nature of history which he describes as 'a chorus of voices; some are louder than others, but they never sound alone'.⁴³ Obscured within the grand narratives of war are the personal memories and experiences of thousands of ordinary individuals whose stories become eclipsed in narratives which focus on great battles and military campaigns. Yet Winter contends that 'Memories are both personal and social, and sites of memory are created not just by nations but primarily by small groups of men and women who do the work of remembrance'.⁴⁴ The experiences of individuals are important and the history of war is incomplete when they are omitted or marginalised.

⁴² Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 135.

⁴³ Winter, p. 136.

⁴⁴ Winter, p. 136.

Historical novels traditionally maintain a focus on the lives of individuals and all the novels explored in this study engage with the trauma of war from a more personal perspective by focusing on the stories of ordinary people rather than the grand narratives of war. It is through their engagement with the experiences of the different protagonists at the centre of their narratives that contemporary authors are able to offer new, more personalised, perspectives on the experiences of war. In the first chapter, I consider four contemporary novels: *Remembrance* (2002) by Theresa Breslin; *Martha's Journey* (2010) by Maureen Lee; *In The Dark* (2007) by Deborah Moggach; and *Another World* (1998) by Pat Barker. They were chosen for this study because they foreground the impact on the families left at home when young men volunteered for war and draw attention to the consequences this has on the community as well as offering insight into the ways in which war is represented and remembered.

Breslin's *Remembrance* is a piece of historical fiction aimed at young adults and the narrative focuses throughout on the war experiences of its young characters. The texts included in this thesis tend to focus on the experiences of one or two families in order to draw attention to the impact of war on individuals as well as the wider community and Breslin's narrative revolves around the younger members of two families: the Dundas family, Maggie and John-Malcolm, twins aged 18, and Alex, aged 14; and the Armstrong-Barnes family, Francis, aged 22 and Charlotte, aged 15. Deborah Moggach's novel is aimed at adults rather than a young audience but it also represents the wartime experience from the perspective of its young protagonist, fourteen year old Ralph Clay. The desire to write about the lives of ordinary people during the First World War inspired Moggach to write *In the Dark*, which she describes in her website autobiography as 'a story about war, meat and sex'.⁴⁵ The relationships between her characters are clearly driven by sex rather than romance as Ralph Clay is usurped in his mother's affections by her new husband, providing the motivation behind his desire to enlist. Despite the wartime setting, in Moggach's text Freudian psychoanalysis is represented not through war neuroses but rather the Oedipal complex as the complexities of the mother-son relationship are portrayed from Ralph's adolescent perspective.

⁴⁵ See <http://www.deborahmoggach.com/index.php/category/biography>.

Maureen Lee describes her novels as ‘historical sagas’.⁴⁶ Her work is aimed at a popular audience and often has a romantic element, as can be seen in *Martha’s Journey* in the relationships involving Alex, Clive and Kate. Although most of *Martha’s Journey* is set during the First World War, it begins and ends during the Second World War which provides both a subtle link between the two wars and a glimpse at the wider context of its main protagonist’s life. Unlike the previous two novels, Lee’s narrative is told from an adult perspective, it tells the story of Martha Rossi, the mother of a fourteen year old child soldier, Joe, who is killed in action in France. Lee’s novel is one of the more popular ones included in this study but I would argue that it contributes a useful perspective since it shows how war has been considered across the spectrum from literary to popular novels.

Also narrated from an adult perspective, Pat Barker’s *Another World* juxtaposes 101 year old veteran Geordie’s experiences of war with those of its child protagonists in order to explore the legacy of the First World War alongside the relationship between children and violence. The persistent nature of traumatic experience is emphasized throughout Barker’s narrative by the continual reassertion in the present of the Victorian murder of a small child by his two siblings, and the continual threat that Gareth will re-enact Geordie’s fratricide and kill his step-brother.

All four novels demonstrate a self-reflexive concern with the way in which war is represented and they draw intertextually on different texts, styles and genres in order to explore the diverse potential for representation. Barker draws on media images of real-life violence and scrutinizes their impact alongside Gareth’s exposure to violent video games and in *Martha’s Journey*, Lee explores the way in which narratives are constructed by foregrounding the act of storytelling and by placing journalists at the centre of her novel. Similarly, Moggach and Breslin employ intertextual references to earlier literary representations of the war to place their work in dialogue with them and draw attention to their continuing influence in how the war is remembered. In doing so, they demonstrate a concern with how textual representations form part of the memory of war and foreground the role of historical fiction in contributing to the ongoing process of remembrance.

⁴⁶ Maureen Lee, ‘About Me’ < <http://www.maureenlee.co.uk/index.htm> > [accessed 16 December 2013].

As I have already mentioned, the task of representing the First World War is fraught with problems. In addition to issues concerning whether it is even possible to convey the enormity of war to those who have not experienced it for themselves, there are concerns about the authenticity of the experience conveyed and moral and ethical dilemmas about how and what is communicated. Texts which engage with the challenge of representing the First World War typically do so by considering the role of the written word, often in dialogue with the work of the soldier poets. In *Nineteen Twenty One* (2001) Adam Thorpe draws on the style and images of earlier works to explore the dilemma of his protagonist Joseph's attempt to represent the experiences of a war he had not experienced for himself. Similarly, in *The Stranger's Child* (2011), Alan Hollinghurst focuses on the work of a writer and poet Cecil Valance, the enduring legacy of whose work long after his death during the First World War bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Wilfred Owen.

It is much less common for literary texts to explore the crisis of representation from the perspective of artists and their paintings. For this reason, in the second chapter of this thesis I have chosen to include three novels which bring a new perspective on representing the First World War by focusing on the British art world, its artists and their role in the First World War: Pat Barker's *Life Class* and *Toby's Room* (2012); and Louisa Young's *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You* (2011). The pressure placed on young people to contribute to the war effort comes under scrutiny in these narratives as their protagonists become, both willingly and unwillingly, drawn into the conflict. Through my analysis of these novels, I explore the role of art as a vehicle for representing war and in communicating its horror to those who have not experienced it themselves, as well as considering its more practical applications when used in support of facial reconstruction surgery. I will show how the focus on the visual representation of war in these texts emphasizes the monstrosity of it as the destruction taking place in the arena of war is brought home in the shattered faces of their injured protagonists, reinforcing the reality that remaining on the Home Front provided no barrier to witnessing the appalling impact of war.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Pat Barker is the only author in this study who has attracted a significant amount of critical attention and her dominance as a writer of

First World War fiction is reflected by my inclusion of three of her novels. A great deal of the analysis carried out on Barker's novels has focused on the *Regeneration* trilogy although there are a number of book-length studies, by Mark Rawlinson, Sharon Monteith, John Brannigan and David Waterman, of her entire oeuvre.⁴⁷ Pat Wheeler's edited collection, *Re-reading Pat Barker*, includes critical analyses of *Life Class* by John Brannigan and Simon Avery as well as critiques of Barker's earlier works.⁴⁸ The growing body of criticism of Barker's work reflects her status as an important contemporary author. Sharon Monteith states that: 'in 1982 Pat Barker entered the literary world as a writer who takes risks, provides arresting insights, and has opened up new areas of representation to scrutiny'⁴⁹ and Nahem Yousaf and Sharon Monteith describe Barker as 'a very significant voice in contemporary fiction'.⁵⁰ They emphasize the way in which Barker's First World War narratives look at the war from new perspectives whilst still drawing on more traditional ways in which the war is remembered:

Barker opens up a corner of war history that is only beginning to be explored by writers of fiction: the tensions inherent in patriotic pacifism or the plain speaking exemplified by Sassoon's controversial intervention.⁵¹

This draws attention to the influence of Siegfried Sassoon on her narratives about the First World War, something which is also seen in other contemporary texts discussed in this study. Barker's representation of the war portrays it as overwhelming and all-enveloping. As David Waterman states:

Devoted readers of Pat Barker's work already know that war "gets into everything" ("Life Class" 242), and it is this articulation between two worlds, where everyday "normal" life and the trauma of war are found to have their

⁴⁷ Mark Rawlinson, *Pat Barker* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Sharon Monteith, *Pat Barker* (Devon: Northcote House, 2002), John Brannigan, *Pat Barker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), David Waterman, *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009).

⁴⁸ *Re-reading Pat Barker*, ed. Pat Wheeler (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

⁴⁹ Monteith, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Nahem Yousaf and Sharon Monteith, 'Introduction: Reading Pat Barker' in *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker*, ed. Sharon Monteith et al (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), pp. vii – xxiii (p. xiii).

⁵¹ Nahem Yousaf and Sharon Monteith, p. xii.

coordinates on the same map in time and space, which provides the foundation, albeit unstable, from which to ask critical questions of ourselves and others.⁵²

This concept of total war as something which had the power to influence the lives of those beyond the battlefields is seen in all the texts explored in this thesis. It shows how contemporary narratives about the First World War are acknowledging its enormous and continuing impact not only on those who fought it but on those at home supporting them and through its lasting legacy on society. Barker encourages her readers to look again at the First World War from different perspectives, as Monteith states: ‘her creative impetus is to narrate through and around history, or to stay in the margins of what has come to be understood as history’.⁵³ She brings new voices to the representation of the war which, as Mark Rawlinson argues ‘causes us to stand back and ponder moral and intellectual dilemmas at the same time as we are drawn to identify with her characters’.⁵⁴ John Brannigan argues that Barker’s ‘commitment to representing social, political and historical situations while acknowledging the problematics of representation ... enables her to construct and tell complex stories, from radical feminist and Marxist perspectives’ whilst maintaining popular appeal.⁵⁵ This construction of new perspectives, highlighted here in relation to Barker’s narratives, is seen in all the novels included in this thesis and it is this re-imagining of the First World War with which this thesis seeks to engage.

The texts in chapter three have been chosen because they engage with another recurrent theme in First World War literature from a new perspective, that of the war hero. Although public perception of the First World War tends to be of a conflict which resulted in the futile waste of young lives, this negativity has not precluded the veneration of its veterans, as Dan Todman states:

Most Britons share a set of received beliefs about the First World War—that it was a muddy, horrific, futile disaster in which a generation of young heroes was senselessly sacrificed by its foolish elders. These beliefs are so strong that they

⁵² David Waterman, *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), p. 149.

⁵³ Monteith, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Mark Rawlinson, *Pat Barker* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 14.

⁵⁵ John Brannigan, *Pat Barker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 174.

can survive almost any amount of exposure to different historical interpretations, internal contradictions and partial alteration. It is quite possible, for example, for individuals to celebrate their ancestors' achievements whilst at the same time believing that the war was without purpose.⁵⁶

The image of the returning soldier has featured in literary representations of the First World War since its earliest literature and the lasting psychological impact of war on its veterans has featured in texts such as Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, West's *Return of the Soldier* and Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy. There is an overriding tendency to represent the participants of the war, whether killed in action or survivor, as heroic victims of war. Only those whose beliefs set them apart from the patriotic imperative to fight, the absolutists and conscientious objectors, faced the censure of their peers and the public and until recently, their stories have been absent from the literary representations of the war. Furthermore, what has not tended to come under scrutiny in earlier narratives is the basis on which the accolade of hero, or conversely the accusation of cowardice, is attributed.

In chapter three I will explore the representation of the heroism of war in four contemporary novels. This chapter re-visits Pat Barker's *Another World* alongside Elaine di Rollo's *Bleakly Hall* (2011), Nigel Farndale's *The Blasphemer* (2010) and John Boyne's *The Absolutist* (2011). These narratives highlight the instability of the concept of the war veteran as universal hero as they scrutinize and contextualise the individual actions of their protagonists rather than obscuring them in the general milieu of war. They use representations of battlefield euthanasia, deserters and conscientious objectors to emphasize the enduring legacy of guilt and recrimination ingrained on the individual because of their actions during wartime. However, rather than simply judging their protagonists as falling short of society's expectations of the idealized returning soldier, these texts explore the processes through which the concept of heroism is constructed to raise questions about the underlying assumptions involved.

In chapter four I have chosen to look at two texts which engage with the First World War less directly. The language used to represent the fight against disease is inherently

⁵⁶ Todman, *Untold War*, p. 418.

that of conflict, and texts such as Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1947) have been read as analogies of war, however, representation of the First World War through the portrayal of disease is uncommon. In this regard, Reina James's *This Time of Dying* (2006) and Will Self's *Umbrella* (2012), which provide oblique representations of the suffering and legacy of the war, bring a fresh perspective to the subject. Both texts take viral epidemics occurring at the same time as the First World War as their central theme. James' narrative portrays the Influenza pandemic of 1918 and Self's engages with the legacy of war through the consequences of the Encephalitis lethargica pandemic which occurred around the same time and, in doing so, they draw comparisons between the fight against disease and that of war. I will show how they bring the horrors of war to the Home Front by showing the trauma and suffering of civilians fighting for survival against a viral enemy. Although the context of these narratives differs from the others in this study by focusing on disease rather than engaging with the war directly, they continue to draw on techniques traditionally used for representing war such as autobiography and intertextuality and thus provide an innovative way of engaging with the impact of the First World War and the way it is represented.

Contemporary historical fiction

The ability to bring new perspectives to historical events and their participants is an important objective of contemporary historical fiction. Frederick M. Holmes highlights the role that fiction plays in encouraging contemporary readers to renegotiate their understanding of the past by emphasizing the different aims of history and fiction: 'recorded histories supply the past with clarity, order and definition, but novels can question the reality of these patterns of significance'.⁵⁷ It is a view echoed by Pat Wheeler who states that: 'Classic realist writers confront "new truths" about the society they write about, drawing upon documentation, sociological detail, and fact, to represent a version of authenticity'.⁵⁸ My aim in this thesis is to show this process taking place in contemporary fiction about the First World War. One of the most powerful ways of offering a new perspective is to give a voice to sections of society

⁵⁷ Frederick M. Holmes, *The Historical Imagination: Postmodernism and the Treatment of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction* (Victoria, BC: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 1997), p. 23.

⁵⁸ Pat Wheeler, *Sebastian Faulk's Birdsong: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 25.

silenced in earlier versions of history and Jerome de Groot argues that ‘Historical novels have often been used to reinsert communities into the past, rescuing them from the marginal positions to which they have consciously been consigned’.⁵⁹ De Groot suggests that it is by focusing on aspects of history which were previously omitted, that fictional narratives are able to give voice to those participants who have been silenced by the mainstream historical record: ‘it is here, in the gaps of history, in the spaces between knowledges, in the lacking texts, within the misunderstood codes, that historical novelists work, and it is the very insubstantiality of the past that allows them to introduce their version of events’.⁶⁰ Introducing new voices into ongoing dialogue about the First World War does not only provide representations of new aspects of the conflict but also offers the possibility of new interpretations of existing images and perspectives. One way in which this can take place is by the introduction of earlier narratives and historical documents into contemporary texts. Jay Winter draws attention to the dialogic nature of historiography:

Writing history is always a dialogue. When historians put pen to paper, they carry with them the accumulated interpretations their colleagues have developed over time ... The dialogic nature of historical practice therefore makes it necessary to place one generation’s thinking about the Great War alongside those of earlier generations. And we are now the fourth generation of historians who have approached the history of the war of 1914-1918. Everyone writing today draws upon or reflects upon earlier publications in this field.⁶¹

Although Winter is talking about the development of historical narratives, the incorporation and adaptation of earlier ideas takes place within fictional narratives as well. Contemporary historical fiction about the First World War exists within the wider context of other texts, both fictional and historical, which also seek to represent it and is thus engaged in dialogue with them. Linda Hutcheon suggests that the use of actual historical documents in a fictional text has the potential ‘of making the reader into an

⁵⁹ Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 148.

⁶⁰ De Groot, p. 182.

⁶¹ Jay Winter, ‘Introduction: Approaching the History of the Great War: A User’s Guide’, in *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years On*, ed. by Jay Winter (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2009), pp. 1-32 (pp. 1-2).

aware collaborator, not a passive consumer'⁶² so that they become actively engaged in the renegotiation of their perceptions of historical events. This is particularly true of an event as well known as the First World War, where the reader brings a great deal of prior knowledge and pre-conceptions to the dialogue. Mariadele Boccardi argues that this knowledge is an integral part of the dialogue between reader and text: 'the persuasiveness of the representation rests on the contemporary readers' prior familiarity with the texts of the period'.⁶³ The introduction of historical documents within the texts can re-familiarise readers but it can also fill gaps in their historical knowledge. It emphasizes that history is mediated by texts and provides an environment in which those texts can be re-visited and re-evaluated within a new context and in relation to new situations whilst also drawing attention to the novel's role in narrating the past.

The intertextual use of historical documents and earlier literary works into the fictional narrative draws attention to its artificiality and reflects an awareness of the novel form as a mode of representation. In her exploration of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon coined the term 'historiographical metafiction' to describe 'well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages'.⁶⁴ She acknowledges that blurring the line between fiction and history has always been a feature of literature but argues that 'the simultaneous and overt assertion and crossing of boundaries is more postmodern'.⁶⁵ A degree of self-consciousness about their role as fictionally constructed representations of the past is demonstrated in all of the novels considered in this study across the literary spectrum. In addition to the extensive use of intertextuality and different genres which draw attention to the process of narration it is also evident in the framing techniques employed by Lee to draw attention to the role of storyteller, the chronological distortion created by the use of analepsis and in *Self's* self-conscious use of the modernist form.

A re-evaluation of past events occurs because contemporary narratives about the First World War are not only concerned with re-examining the past but also engage with

⁶² Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 88.

⁶³ Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 36.

⁶⁴ Hutcheon, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Hutcheon, p. 113.

history in order to bring new perspectives to current issues and conflicts. As Diana Wallace states:

Although readers are often attracted to historical novels because they believe they will learn about the past time recreated in the novel, any historical novel always has as much, or perhaps more, to say about the time in which it is written.⁶⁶

The events portrayed in narratives about the war become not only a commentary about events which took place at the beginning of the last century but also offer insight into ongoing concerns. Since the First World War took place, Britain has been involved in successive conflicts including the more recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. All the novels considered in this study, except Barker's *Another World*, were published after the terrorist attack on New York's World Trade Centre in September 2001. The iconic images and news reports broadcast all over the world detailing the collapse of the twin towers testifies to the power of such representations to convey a lasting shock and horror. Similarly, in March 2003, the media's enthusiastic use of the term 'shock and awe' to describe the initial attacks seemed to emphasize the visual impact of the assault on Iraq as much as the military objective. Although they are fought many miles from the Home Front that this thesis represents, the impact and consequences of modern warfare are brought closer to home through media images and terrorist reprisals. Issues of war which preoccupy the narratives in this thesis, child soldiers, the media, disease, mechanization and technology, are not relegated to history.

Wallace suggests that:

If the twentieth century really began (as Barker suggests) with the First World War, then in retrospect it can be seen to have ended, not at midnight on 31 December 1999, but with the fall of the twin towers in New York on 11 September 2001. While not the 'end of history', it was a moment of fracture which made us sharply aware of ourselves as subjects within history again.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Woman Writers 1900-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 4.

⁶⁷ Wallace, p. 228.

The attacks of 9/11 shattered the concept of the Home Front as a safe haven, not only in the United States but across the globe, and thrust contemporary society into a destabilised world in which established norms and expectations seem to have been swept aside. This has thrown up challenges and conflicts for which there seems to be no solution and no way forward. Put in this context a literary retreat to the First World War, a conflict which is completed and from which society emerged changed but relatively intact, can provide an effective vehicle for making sense of the complexities of the present. The First World War is still remembered with horror, regret, pity, and despair and although at the time it seemed like it would go on for ever, it did end. Mistakes were made but there were also great victories and by revisiting the conflict in their narratives, contemporary historical novelists draw on the events of the past in order to provide answers, or at least possibilities, towards resolving the issues of today. Their work reflects a society looking for answers without really knowing what difficult questions to ask. By looking at the most disquieting aspects of contemporary society through the lens of a past event of such magnitude as the First World War, they reveal the relationship between past and present as an ongoing dialogue and situate their narratives firmly within it.

Chapter 1: Families at War

‘Who in their right mind would want to go to war?’ said Francis. ‘Not the ordinary Prussian or Frenchman, I’ll wager. What makes a human being want to kill another who has done him no personal harm? Patriotism. The one thing that can unite people. It takes priority over religious differences, or class, or money, or social position. And then people can be manipulated by others for reasons of power or to gain a few acres of land’.¹

These words, spoken by Francis Armstrong-Barnes one of the central protagonists of Theresa Breslin’s *Remembrance*, raise an issue which will occupy the novel: why would anyone go to war? Francis is in conversation with his mother and sister but his outburst has the air of an impassioned speech, an image reinforced by the description of his appearance: ‘There was a high colour on Francis’s cheeks though his face was pale’ (p. 14). He suggests that no right minded person would contemplate going to war and includes the ‘ordinary Prussian or Frenchman’, uniting men on both sides of the conflict. His questions are rhetorical, defying anyone to provide an answer, yet almost immediately he provides one himself, ‘Patriotism’, the one word sentence emphasizing its significance. Patriotism, Francis argues allows men to be manipulated. Loyalty to one’s country makes people vulnerable to the influence of others. Repeatedly Francis uses the word ‘want’ not ‘choose’ and the subtle difference is significant since Francis will later choose to enlist himself despite his continuing conviction that the war is wrong.

In this chapter, I consider how contemporary authors explore the motivations of those drawn into conflict, the influences on them and the impact their involvement has on their families and community. To do this, I will examine the representation of families at war in four contemporary novels set during the First World War: *Remembrance* by Theresa Breslin; *Martha’s Journey* by Maureen Lee; *In The Dark* by Deborah Moggach; and *Another World* by Pat Barker. These novels look at the war from the

¹ Theresa Breslin, *Remembrance* (London: Corgi, 2003), p.14. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

perspective of ordinary people by focusing their narratives on individual families, reinforcing it as a national tragedy at a personal level. The ability of fictional narratives to provide access to the thoughts and desires of their protagonists allows authors to explore the reasons behind their responses to war. In *The Historical Novel* (1955), Georg Lukács identified this as a fundamental role of historical fiction: ‘What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality’.² This, he argues, can only be achieved by focusing, not on the ‘monumental dramas of world history’ but on the thoughts and behaviours of those individuals often deemed insignificant.³ Contemporary fiction still reflects the enormity of the First World War but the historical novelists whose work is included in this study focus on the lives of ordinary families revealing the influences shaping their involvement in war time society and scrutinizing the ways in which their experiences are represented.

Lukács is concerned with the novels of Walter Scott, written in the 19th century, but his arguments continue to be relevant to recent historical fiction. For instance, Linda Hutcheon suggests that problematizing ‘consciousness and human nature’⁴ is a key aspect of postmodern historical narrative and Margaret Scanlan argues that contemporary fictions ‘concern themselves with the question of how private lives and consciousnesses intersect with public events’.⁵ The public desire for access to ordinary people’s experiences of the war is evident in the collections of letters, journals, life stories and recorded memoirs published, not just those of its famous commentators but those of ordinary soldiers and survivors. A preoccupation with the behaviour of ordinary individuals and the implications for the wider community can be seen in all the novels discussed in this thesis. It is in this engagement with the individual consciousness and the frailty of human behaviour that contemporary historical novelists can be seen working within the ‘gaps of history, in the spaces between knowledges’ which de Groot identifies as a characteristic of fictional narratives and which allows a

² Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p. 42.

³ Lukács, p. 42.

⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 87.

⁵ Margaret Scanlan, *Traces of Another Time* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.7.

re-imagining of historical events at a more personal and revealing level.⁶ The imaginative nature of the novel form allows its readers to share the thoughts and emotions of its protagonists thus providing a platform to consider individual reactions and responses to war.

Three of the texts discussed here, *Remembrance*, *Martha's Journey* and *In The Dark* are historical novels which are set entirely in the past utilising third person narrative. The core of Lee's narrative, set in 1915, is framed by a prologue and epilogue dated 1940. This contextualises the earlier narrative within a century marked by two world wars and draws attention to the act of viewing conflict as historical. The prologue introduces Kate as the storyteller and the central narrative as her recollection of Martha's story. This reinforces the narrative as trustworthy, a form of memoir, and draws attention to the central narrative as a remembered version of the past. In contrast, *Another World* is set in the late 1990s and although Barker also employs third person narration she writes predominantly in the present tense, the only narrative written in the past being Geordie's recollections of his war experiences and the nested narrative which provides the history of the Fanshawe family. This results in a different type of engagement with the legacy of war, one which foregrounds its continuing importance in the present. All four novels focus on individual families. They draw attention to the personal nature of the loss experienced so that those who suffered are re-contextualised, not as the dehumanised statistics of war, but as real people; fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, friends and positions the family at the centre of contemporary debates on the representation of war. In particular, their focus on child soldiers reinforces the vulnerability of people to the influence of others and reveals the extent to which the involvement of the youngest members of the family affected everyone close to them.

Children at war

The ages carved on the headstones in the cemeteries of France and Belgium, dedicated to those who died during the First World War, attest to the youth of those involved. Richard Emden points out that 'Britain has a long tradition of taking young soldiers

⁶ Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 182.

overseas' but the sheer numbers involved in the First World War were unprecedented⁷ and perhaps it is the relative youth of all those involved which explains why the use of child soldiers has not been more prominently represented. The extreme youth of those involved in fighting the First World War exacerbates the sense of tragedy associated with it and this is emphasized in the novels discussed here by their focus on child soldiers. Child soldiers are usually defined as those under the age of eighteen. Some of those who enlisted underage during the First World War would have been just below the required age, others were much younger; soldiers as young as fourteen are recorded as having died during the war and it is claimed that boys as young as twelve or thirteen were deployed in the trenches.⁸ According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), 'the youngest known battle casualty of the war' was fourteen year-old Private John Condon, who fought with the 2nd Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment and was killed in May 1915.⁹

The use of child soldiers continues to generate fierce debate in contemporary society. Michael Wessells claims that children as young as seven years old are currently involved in armed conflict worldwide although most are aged between thirteen and eighteen.¹⁰ In 2009, Julia Dickson- Gómez reported that: 'An estimated 300,000 children are actively participating in 36 ongoing or recently ended conflicts in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and the former Soviet Union'.¹¹ The extent of this issue is emphasized by the United Nations creation in 1996 of a Special Representative '[t]o promote and protect the rights of all children affected by armed conflict'.¹² Yet more than 10 years after the UK ratified the UN treaty to prohibit the use of children as

⁷ Richard Van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War: Their Own Stories for the First Time* (London: Headline, 2005), pp. 2.

⁸ Van Emden, p. 5.

⁹ Van Emden, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 7-8.

¹¹ Julia Dickson-Gómez, 'Child Soldiers: Growing up in a Guerilla Camp' in *Cultures of Fear: A Critical Reader*, eds. Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (New York: Pluto Press, 2009), pp. 174-188 (p. 174).

¹² Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'The Office' (New York, 2012) <<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/theoffice.html>> [accessed 9 June 2012].

soldiers a succession of tabloid headlines testifies to the continued presence of British child soldiers in conflicts overseas.¹³

The role of the child in society came under increased scrutiny during the late twentieth century and Katherina Dodou identifies a growing preoccupation with childhood in contemporary fiction.¹⁴ She suggests this tends to ‘coalesce to a large extent around notions about the child’s innocence’ and engages with ‘the responsibilities that adults have in relation to the child’.¹⁵ She argues that contemporary authors engage with this differently to earlier representations because they interrogate the concept of childhood innocence and its sentimentalization.¹⁶ The potential corruption of childhood innocence is present in the novels discussed in this chapter since the representation of children who are involved in violent conflict problematizes ‘the image of the innocent child as a symbol of vulnerability, guiltlessness, and lack of knowledge’.¹⁷ However, it does not result in an entirely unsentimentalized view of childhood since the culpability of adults, particularly those in positions of power, is often emphasized.

The ways in which young people are represented in the novels discussed in this chapter are diverse and they do not present a homogenous view of childhood. These differing portrayals of young people reflect the ambiguity with which contemporary society views children. Adrienne E. Grant suggests uncertainty about the role and positioning of children in society:

¹³ Ian Drury, ‘UK sent ‘children’ to Iraq and Afghanistan despite Government ban’, *Daily Mail*, 18 October 2011, Ann Gripper, ‘Boy soldier sent to Afghanistan to fight for Britain after Army blunder’, *Daily Mirror*, 26 Jan 2012, Richard Hartley-Parkinson, ‘Britain's boy soldier II: Underage squaddie sent home from Iraq only after mother's complaint over postage for 18th birthday present’, *Daily Mail*, 30 Jan 2012.

¹⁴ Katherina Dodou, ‘Examining the Idea of Childhood: The Child in the Contemporary British Novel’, in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. by Adrienne E. Gavin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 238- 250 (p.238).

¹⁵ Dodou, p. 240.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

There is concern that children are, on the one hand, victims who need greater protection from abuse and neglect and, on the other hand, semi-feral victimizers who make the streets unsafe for adults and signal society's disintegration.¹⁸

In modern society, some children are viewed with fear whilst the vulnerability of others causes concern. What these narratives emphasize, however, is that the distinction between the two is not an absolute one and, in both cases children can be considered victims of society. Children are great imitators and their failure to become successful, integrated members of society should be considered in relation to the guidance provided to them. This is most apparent during times of conflict and as such the First World War provides a useful environment for authors to explore the complexity of childhood in modern society. The alignment of children and war draws attention to the impact of violence on modern society and allows for the scrutiny of how young people become drawn into conflict.

Fictional representations which provide a sentimentalized view of children as the innocent victims of adult conceived conflict are, to some extent, simply reflecting contemporary political thinking. For instance, the United Nations takes the stance that:

Children are the primary victims of armed conflict. They are both its targets and increasingly its instruments. Their suffering bears many faces, in the midst of armed conflict and its aftermath. Children are killed or maimed, made orphans, abducted, deprived of education and health care, and left with deep emotional scars and trauma. They are recruited and used as child soldiers, forced to give expression to the hatred of adults.¹⁹

They insist that, regardless of the nature of their recruitment and participation, it is the adults involved in the procurement of children who should be held accountable, not the

¹⁸ Adrienne E. Gavin, 'The Child in British Literature: An Introduction', in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. by Adrienne E. Gavin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-18 (p.1).

¹⁹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'Introduction' < <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/issues.html>>.

children themselves: ‘Regardless of how they are recruited, child soldiers are victims’.²⁰ This rather sentimentalized view of childhood places children outside the boundaries of normal moral scrutiny. However, some observers contend that the situation is less straightforward. Anne Whitehead argues that:

What the narrative of the vulnerable child recruited by manipulative adults potentially erases are those child soldiers who were politically active and who volunteered to fight for a number of justifiable reasons: economic exploitation and discontent; revenge for the killing of family members; the protection provided by being an armed fighter’.²¹

Whitehead scrutinizes the concept of the child as universal victim and theorizes that not all children involved in violence conform to this dynamic. Some children, she argues, are actively engaged in violence not passive victims. Similarly Peters and Richards report that ‘many under-age combatants choose with their eyes open to fight, and defend their choice, sometimes proudly’²² and argue that ‘as rational human actors they have, at times, a surprisingly mature understanding of their predicament’.²³ However, the ‘justifiable reasons’ that Whitehead puts forward in themselves speak of vulnerability, exploitation, hardship, violence and bereavement, reinforcing the complexity for young people who must adapt and survive in a violent environment.

In *Martha’s Journey*, Maureen Lee firmly positions Joe Rossi as the victim of morally deficient adults, from the local sergeant who recruits him knowing he is underage to his drunken, workshy father who has abdicated all parental responsibility to his wife. The culpability of the officer who sends Joe to his death, Captain Whitley-Neville is reinforced when he commits suicide and it is suggested that he might feel ‘personally

²⁰ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, ‘Recruiting or using child soldiers’ < <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/childsoldiers.html> > [.

²¹ Anne Whitehead, ‘Representing the Child Soldier: Trauma, Postcolonialism and Ethics in Delia Jarett-Macauley’s *Moses, Citizen and Me*’ in *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction*, eds. Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 241-263 (p.248).

²² Krijn Peters and Paul Richards, ‘“Why We Fight”: Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 68 (1998), 183-210 (p. 210).

²³ Peters and Richards, p. 184.

responsible for the death of young Joe Rossi'.²⁴ Despite his impact on the Rossi family, Whitley-Neville appears only briefly in the narrative and his interaction with Joe is brief. As such, he represents a faceless authority, a personification of the process of war which has the power to make youngsters like Joe its victim. The positioning of children as the victims of uncaring and unthinking adults is further underlined in Lee's narrative by the repeated casual violence meted out to the children of King's Court by their mothers, which exposes their vulnerability to the violence of adults from an early age.

In comparison, the determined and calculated way in which Alex Dundas plans to join the military in *Remembrance* challenges this sense of childhood innocence and lack of knowledge. However, this is undermined in the portrayal of his childish preparations. Initially accepting that they are too young to join up, Alex and his friend Hugh Kane commit to 'train themselves up so that they would be ready' (pp. 110-11). They train using: 'An old potato sack stuffed with straw hung from a tree and they practised bayonet charges with long wooden sticks' (p. 111), so that the violence is subverted by their childish weapons and the make-believe nature of their play. The scene in which Alex is shown judging his progress reflects his childishness:

Five counts to climb the oak tree. This was the same, but he had not felt so sick when looking down on the ground, so that could be marked up as an improvement. He awarded himself another tick. He looked at his body critically. Stripped to the waist most afternoons, his chest and arms were turning brown under the summer sun. He was sure that he looked more mature than he did a few months ago, but knew that his build was still more of a boy than a man. (p. 112)

Focalised from Alex's perspective, the narrative betrays his youthful enthusiasm and childhood innocence. Running, climbing trees, playing in the sun; these are all childish pursuits that are not preparation for war. The text draws attention to the physical changes taking place in Alex during the summer but his vulnerability is revealed in a fear of heights. The innocent act of mentally ticking each successful accomplishment

²⁴ Maureen Lee, *Martha's Journey* (London: Orion, 2010), p.325. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text

suggests a teacher marking the work of the schoolboy that he is. It is a portrait of someone who continues to be young and naïve in both body and mind and susceptible to the influences of the world around him.

The persistent threat of violence by children represented in Barker's *Another World* represents a darker side to childhood, although the culpability of the adults in the narrative also comes under scrutiny. Other than in *Another World*, which shows Gareth hurting Jasper on a number of occasions, the children in these texts are rarely shown to be directly involved in the perpetration of specific acts of violence. In *Remembrance*, Alex does kill an older German soldier when he is trapped in a shell hole with him during an attack but he cannot bring himself to kill Kurt, the German boy soldier, who is also present. This could reflect the author's reluctance to portray one child killing another, particularly in a book aimed at young readers. However, showing Alex as reluctant to engage in violence foregrounds his compassion and reinforces his position as victim rather than perpetrator.

Like Barker, Moggach shows childhood as a more troubled and complicated experience than Lee or Breslin do. In her portrayal of Ralph Clay in *In the Dark* she questions the concept of innocence through the corruptible influence of adolescent sexuality. Whitehead is critical of Barker for avoiding the issue of child sexuality in *Another World*.²⁵ In contrast, Moggach does not shy away from exploring the issue through Ralph, who is shown to be a victim, not so much of adults but of the sexual urges which threaten to overwhelm him. Moggach draws on the work of Sigmund Freud to convey the sexual turmoil afflicting her young protagonist when his mother remarries after the death of his father. The connection is revealed by Alwynne the lodger whose observations are both intertextual: 'Hamlet was a young man in a not dissimilar position to your own'²⁶ and more explicit: 'I expect you're unacquainted with the works of Doctor Freud [...] He has some interesting things to say about sons and mothers' (p. 148). Moggach problematizes the notion of childhood innocence through this use of Freud's Oedipus complex, which describes the feelings of jealousy aroused in young

²⁵ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 27.

²⁶ Deborah Moggach, *In the Dark* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 147. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

boys who want their mother's love exclusively for themselves. As in the example of Hamlet, these urges are repressed in Ralph and 'just as in the case of a neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences', in particular the desire for revenge.²⁷ His animosity towards his new stepfather is driven by his displacement of Ralph who has assumed the role of the man in the house, effectively stepping into his father's shoes:

Ralph loved her deeply and in the absence of his father was doing his best to look after her. They were very close during this time [...] they found themselves retiring at the same time and, lying in their adjoining rooms, murmured sleepily to each other through the interconnecting doors. He was her solace, and she his. When they walked down the street and she took his arm they resembled a married couple. Ralph had grown tall enough to be a husband. (p. 10)

The passage moves from describing Ralph's natural childish love for his mother and the desire to protect her towards the more unsettling portrait of Ralph as a replacement for his father, an arrangement in which his mother is portrayed, from Ralph's perspective at least, as complicit.

That Ralph harbours such sexual thoughts about his mother is made clear from the beginning. The narrative opens with a glimpse into the mind of the pubescent teenager which reveals his sexual fantasies as Ralph is shown looking at bust enlargement pictures in a borrowed magazine. At the same time as the telegram arrives announcing the death of his father he is deep in thought about his mother's breasts and he continues to ponder on his mother's sexual activities throughout the narrative. Every significant action in his life seems to be overshadowed by his developing sexuality. As he waits for a train to the recruiting office, the sounds bring back images of his mother having sex: 'The train arrived, puffing smoke. It panted, like his mother panted – heavy, groaning pants [...] her skirt hoisted up' (p. 179). This shows the child as inherently corruptible

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey et al, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), iv, p. 264.

and sexually aware, even obsessed, but his lack of control reinforces his naivety and vulnerability.

Freud suggests that ‘boys concentrate their sexual wishes upon their mother and develop hostile impulses against their father as being a rival’²⁸ and it is in his desire for revenge that Moggach shows the issues of child violence and sexuality to be related as she portrays his desire to escape to the army as an outlet for his repressed emotions. Mouzayan Osseiran-Houballah suggests that this explains why teenagers are so susceptible to military recruitment.²⁹ Adolescents are in a state of emotional upheaval when ‘the articulated incestuous and patricidal Oedipal motions awaken’ and she found repeated evidence of anger generated through these impulses in her study of Lebanese former child soldiers.³⁰ In this respect, Moggach’s depiction of Ralph seems to echo the accounts of contemporary child soldiers. The anger and resentment directed at his stepfather causes such emotional upheaval in Ralph that he cannot face the future they have planned for him and having failed to attend his bookkeeping exams, Ralph decides his only course of action is to go to war. At this point, the normal constraints of society function to prevent Ralph’s descent into violence and he is turned away from the recruiting office because of his age. Instead Ralph finds a sexual outlet for his repressed emotions in the prostitute he meets on the train home. Afterwards he is triumphant: ‘Ralph sat there in a stupor of pride. He had done it! He had crossed the threshold; his childhood was now behind him’ (p. 214). The novel functions as a coming of age narrative, in which Ralph works through the challenges to achieve adulthood and is able to put the turmoil of adolescence behind him. Just as in Breslin’s portrayal of Alex, the potential for childhood violence dissipates creating an impression of children not as threatening but as vulnerable and showing adolescence as beset with its own conflicts to be overcome.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage Books, 1995), p.22.

²⁹ Mouzayan Osseiran-Houballah, quoted in Mark Sanders, ‘Culpability and Guilt: Child Soldiers in Fiction and Memoir’, *Law and Literature*, 23 (2011), 195-225. The original is published in French: Mouzayan Osseiran-Houballah, *L’Enfant-Soldat: Victime transformée en bourreau* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2003), p. 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Visual influences

In contrast, the threat of violence by young people is more urgent in *Another World* where Barker juxtaposes the story of Gareth, the video-game playing teenager and his aggressive tendencies towards his baby step-brother, Jasper, with the story of First World War veteran Geordie's war trauma. Barker draws a clear connection between war and child violence, exploring the often suggested connection between video games and violence in children, as well as highlighting the possibility of extreme violence and murder by children by drawing on contemporary images of real-life child murder, particularly the killing of James Bulger.

Modern society is increasingly exposed to violent images of conflict and the momentum towards a more visual culture began before the outbreak of the First World War. War and violence intrude into the domestic space of those previously remote from it and all of the authors whose work is explored in this chapter are concerned with the way that war and violence are represented and the effect this trauma can have on families. They acknowledge the diverse range of representations, from the popular to the literary as well as the influential role of the media, in the way people respond to the threat of war. The paintings and drawings of the war artists made a major contribution to the visual portrayal of war and I will consider contemporary texts which engage with their work in chapter 2. Moving images became available to the mass public from the 1910s and a network of around 5,000 cinemas enabled audiences to view the week's war news via newsreels.³¹ Later in the twentieth century, television brought these images directly into viewers' homes, and they are now exposed to constant images of global conflict and violence through news, entertainment and movie channels. The First Gulf War has been 'described as the first televised war'³² as when operation Desert Storm began in January 1991 viewers in Britain could watch live video footage of events unfolding from the comfort of their own homes and the iconic images of the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 have become central to the way that event is remembered.

³¹ Luke McKernan, 'Newsreels and WWI' (2013) < http://lukemckernan.com/wp-content/uploads/newsreels_and_WWI.pdf > [accessed 19 January 2015].

³² See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1118611.stm

Contemporary authors are responding to the growing diversity in the ways that conflict and trauma are represented and scrutinizing its impact on those exposed to it. Barker's *Another World* is particularly concerned with the visual representation of violence, whether they are creative images or the psychological product of traumatic experiences. Like all contemporary historical fiction, the novels discussed in this chapter are products of their time as well as reflections on the First World War. One of the ways in which contemporary fiction provides new perspectives on historical events is by re-writing them with a focus on different aspects of the conflict. The preoccupations which become apparent when exploring these re-imaginings of the war suggest that they are all influenced by contemporary concerns in society about young people at war and as perpetrators of violence. The implications raised by exploring the influences and motivations behind the involvement of young men in the First World War resonate most strongly when they are considered in the context of these continuing concerns. The association between past and present occurs implicitly in all the texts discussed here but it is explicitly foregrounded in Barker's novel by the temporal balancing of two different historical time periods alongside a narrative which unfolds over a comparatively short period in the late twentieth century.

In 1993, a few years before Barker's *Another World* was published, the shocking murder of toddler James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys was followed by increased debate on the issue of children who commit violent crime and the reasons why this might happen, particularly about who, or what, might be to blame. It created a heightened fear of crime in the public. In his study into the relationship between crime and public opinion, David A. Green reports that public 'concern about crime spiked very sharply after James Bulger was killed.'³³ This positions the killing of James Bulger as something of a watershed moment which galvanized public debate on crime, particularly on the causes of it and on the appropriate responses to it.

The CCTV footage of James Bulger's abduction, shown repeatedly on television news programs, became an important aspect of how the tragedy was received into the public consciousness. In particular the image of the toddler being led away by the two older

³³ David A. Green, *When Children Kill Children: Penal Populism and Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.

boys, prompted people to consider themselves in relation to the event and ask whether they would have intervened if they'd witnessed this scene. In *Another World*, Barker is concerned with how media representations of extreme violence affect communities and how it changes their perceptions. The acutely visual nature of the contemporary world is emphasized in Barker's narrative by her juxtapositioning of iconic images of real life crimes alongside the virtual horrors of video violence. At the same time she emphasizes the visual nature of Geordie's traumatic memories. She draws comparisons between the trauma suffered by young men like Geordie through real-life experience of war and those who are exposed to it through representational constructions. The images of real-life violence are shown as public atrocities which have been forced into the domestic arena by the power of their representation. Running late to collect his daughter, Miranda, from the railway station, Nick is consumed with fear that something terrible has happened to her:

This is all rubbish, he knows that. But then, like everyone else, he lives in the shadow of monstrosities. Peter Sutcliffe's bearded face, the number plate of a house in Cromwell Street, three figures smudged on a video surveillance screen, an older boy taking a toddler by the hand while his companion strides ahead, eager for the atrocity to come.³⁴

The straightforward statement 'This is all rubbish, he knows that' is complicated by the ambiguity as to whose words they represent. Taken as free indirect speech, they represent Nick's thoughts and suggest a degree of self-awareness and self-criticism of his inability to resist, underpinned by narratorial admonishment for his foolishness. Read as the narrator's critical commentary, the rational and more distanced perspective emphasizes the irrationality and the powerlessness of Nick's situation, unable even to articulate it adequately in his own words. Despite its irrationality, his fear is shown to be not imagined but physical: 'a nibble at his belly' (p.3), a physiological response to something his unconscious brain perceives as a threat at the same time that his rational, conscious brain attempts to dismiss it. This response is then widened to encompass the entire community, 'everyone else', positioning Nick's behaviour as normal at the same

³⁴ Pat Barker, *Another World* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.3. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

time that it is revealed to be irrational and disproportionate. Barker's reference to these historical events within the narrative emphasizes the shadow cast across her imaginary community by the lingering impact of real-life violence. She highlights the way in which representation can affect the way in which traumatic experiences are assimilated and remembered. Its effect is to trigger an empathetic response in the reader to an image so iconic that it is etched onto individual memories, both inside and outside the fictional narrative, creating a bond of anxiety between protagonist and reader. The images are not, in themselves, particularly horrific, they do not show mutilated bodies or direct evidence of atrocity and yet they are chillingly evocative of the crimes they represent. The notoriety of the images described and their associated crimes means that Barker does not need to elaborate on their use in her narrative, her readers can be assumed part of the 'everyone else' who live within the shadow of these crimes. With the inclusion of these images the powerful potential of visual representation of violence is firmly established early in the narrative. The ability for images of trauma to influence the thoughts and behaviours of those viewing them is emphasized throughout Barker's narrative as she considers various aspects of visual representation.

The potential for young people to embrace violence is explored in Barker's novel in its focus on video gaming. The games which Gareth plays alone in his bedroom reiterate the invasion of the domestic space by violence. In his study into the psychological aspects of killing Dave Grossman expresses concern that exposure to violent images blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy so that children lose the ability to tell the difference. He highlights the similarity between violent video games and techniques used by the United States military aimed at desensitizing soldiers and conditioning them to kill in Vietnam.³⁵ The blurring of the boundaries between reality and fantasy is shown in Barker's narrative through a series of repetitions not just to scrutinize any causal link between video games and adolescent violence, although that aspect is clearly present in the novel, but as an exploration of the nature of traumatic experience and the complicated relationship between what is represented and its reality.

³⁵ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston, MA; London: Little Brown, 1995), pp. 304-5.

Whitehead suggests that in narrative ‘Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression’.³⁶ Barker’s portrayal of Gareth draws constant parallels with that of Geordie as he is shown as repeating Geordie’s war experience through his exposure to virtual violence. This highlights the psychological impact of exposure to violence at a young age and the ongoing and persistent nature of trauma. Through Gareth’s game playing Barker shows an immersive world into which the player becomes so completely absorbed that he cannot distinguish fantasy from reality:

Gareth’s died three times in the past hour.

He can’t see any way of getting through the enemy’s shields without taking at least one direct hit and draining his reserves. Though if it wasn’t for a certain stupid bitch who should remain nameless – *look at all that sunshine and you cooped up in here have you done your homework why don’t you try reading a book for a change blah-de-blah-de-bloody blah* – he’d’ve wiped the buggers out long ago. (pp. 17-18)

At this point in the narrative, Gareth’s consciousness resides within the virtual world. The statement that ‘Gareth’s died three times in the past hour’ is delivered directly in the third person so that the reader might almost consider it a factual statement. It simultaneously represents both reality and fantasy. The narrator, like Gareth, has stepped inside the virtual reality and is reporting from that perspective. In the real world Gareth is not dead but his game persona has died several times. The game persona’s ability to come back to life, only to be killed again, reveals its unreality and distinguishes it from the real Gareth. The statement although spoken by the narrator is focalised and represents Gareth’s world view; the game has become his reality. Reality, in the remembered words of his mother, impinges on his fantasy, providing an unwanted distraction, an irritation emphasized by his irreverent criticism.

Barker shows the same blurring of fantasy and reality when Gareth throws stones at Jasper on the beach. Gareth’s spatial distance from Jasper, perched on the cliff above

³⁶ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 86.

the beach, removes him from the reality of his actions, just as his video game does: 'They don't look like real people, Gareth thinks, they look like actors on the telly' (p. 191), a comment which shows a psychological disconnection from the real-life consequences of his actions. The narrative is focalised on Gareth and from his perspective reality and fantasy seem reversed as the alien looking Jasper 'comes up again, hair plastered to his skull, T-shirt draped in green slime' (pp. 190-1). Gareth is confused that Jasper is still alive: 'He can't understand why Jasper's crying. From the moment the first stone hit his head Gareth's known he was dead. He was dead already after the first stone, it's just that he wouldn't lie down. He'd thrown the other stones out of despair because he wouldn't stay down' (p. 192). Gareth is portrayed as still within his virtual world, where death is not final but transitory. The game persona's reincarnation echoed here by Jasper's refusal to lie down and die. Gareth's confusion arises when reality diverges from fantasy; in his video game it is only the controlling persona who repeatedly gets up again after death, his victims remain dead. These echoes, patterns and connections between Gareth's game playing and his attack on Jasper resist attempts to separate fantasy from reality and draws attention to the relationship between trauma and fictional representation. The incident is told entirely from Gareth's perspective through the focalised narration so only his version of events is presented to the reader. They must read between the lines to decide whether Gareth's attack is deliberate or whether his protestations are believable: 'he's not doing anything wrong because he's not aiming at Jasper, he's throwing to miss' (p.190). Here, repetitions within the narrative are significant as earlier incidents which show Gareth hurting Jasper cast doubt on his innocence. In the same manner as Geordie's fratricide, the reality of what happened remains evasive. The family's knowledge of both incidents is limited and they are shown struggling to understand events which they did not witness and which are incompletely represented by others. Through them, Barker articulates the difficulty inherent in constructing a complete narrative of events and emphasizes the resistance of trauma to adequate representation.

The ghostly witness on the cliff top further complicates the situation. The ghost of Muriel appears throughout the novel and the suspicion that she and Robert murdered their brother James casts a shadow over the narrative as a premonition of what is to come. Barker sets up a series of repetitions which create the expectation that another

murder will take place and the image of Muriel overlooking the scene on the beach reinforces this. When Jasper does not die, the anticipated repetition in the narrative does not take place. The momentum is interrupted and the seemingly inevitable outcome recedes as Jasper is stitched up in the hospital and Gareth is despatched to stay with his Grandmother. Thus Barker destabilizes the possibility of determining a straightforward cause for violence by subverting the pattern and shape towards which her repetitions appear to be building.

The intermingling of reality and unreality, truth and supposition produce a complex picture of traumatic experience where determining what is real becomes elusive. This is further evidenced by the parallels Barker draws in her portrayal of Gareth and Geordie. Geordie has experienced war first hand rather than through virtual reality, but his nightmares in which memories of the trenches resurface exhibit a similar lack of distinction between the real and imaginary. Nick finds his grandfather outside in the middle of the night so absorbed in his own reality that he is completely unresponsive to Nick's calls. Interestingly, in this scene the focalisation of the narration is on Nick rather than Geordie so that it is the outward manifestation of Geordie's trauma that is presented to the reader:

Geordie's got halfway along the wall. He's staggering, bent almost double, but then, as Nick watches, he crouches, listens, moves again ... Geordie's reached a telegraph pole, and hides behind it. Nick begins to creep along the wall behind him, not wanting to shout his name and wake the street, still less to chase after him and add to the terror he must be feeling.

He's got to within a few yards, dodging the piles of dog shit that litter the alley, when Geordie with the agility of a much younger man sinks to his knees and starts slithering across the cobbles on his elbows and knees, pausing, waiting, lowering his face to the ground, edging forward again. Nick edges closer. He hears Geordie muttering to himself, but then he moves on again, making for the wood. But which wood is it? Devil's Wood, High Wood, Mametz, Thiepval? Geordie crawls faster, slithering away into the shadow of the trees. (p. 160)

Whereas Gareth was shown immersed in his fantasy with reality intruding on it, Geordie is shown as part of the real world, crawling over slippery cobbles and through dog shit, still immersed in his own re-imagined experiences of war. The use of historic place names, made synonymous with the tragedy of war: ‘Devil’s Wood, High Wood, Mametz, Thiepval’ (p. 160) reinforces the distinction; Geordie’s confusion is not caused by the blurring of fantasy and reality in the same way that Gareth’s is, but by the intersection of two different planes of reality, one of them displaced temporally. In Barker’s portrayal of Geordie’s night-time sortie, his reliving of his traumatic experience is visible to the reader only from an external perspective. The narrative allows no access to the images or fears in Geordie’s mind, which acknowledges the resistance of such trauma to representation. What Geordie sees is discernible only by observing the actions of a man fearing for his life, crawling, crouching and hiding, as the reader is presented with the outward manifestations of trauma. This creates a distinction within the narrative between fictional representation and actual trauma. Gareth’s trauma is accessible because it is imagined. His video game experience is then used to gain access to his real-life violence. In contrast, the persistent inaccessibility of Geordie’s trauma underlines its resistance to representation and without any external referent it remains incomprehensible. These differing depictions foreground fictional narrative as a means for exploring violent trauma whilst still acknowledging the limits for representation.

As Nick struggles to communicate with Geordie, the older man comes back into the present and then the narrative perspective changes to focalise on Geordie which reveals his disorientation: ‘not the horrors of the past, but the incomprehensibility of the present makes him afraid.’ (p. 161). Geordie’s terror increases on waking since, despite their horror, the images of war are familiar to him and as they recede he is left confused by a present he does not recognise and with which his connection is tenuous. Whitehead points out that Barker draws closely on Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ in her representation of Geordie’s wartime experiences as existing more in the present than the past: ‘it’s not like he’s remembering it, it’s like he’s actually seeing it’ (p. 69).³⁷ She considers the way in which Barker portrays the resurfacing of Geordie’s suffering in the

³⁷ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 17.

present as consistent with Freud's observation: 'that the shell-shocked soldiers return in their battle nightmares to the scene of trauma, only to awaken in a state of terror. The nightmares represent a re-entry into the experience'.³⁸ Geordie is 101 years old and so his trauma is shown to be particularly persistent. It is here that Whitehead considers that Barker extends the scope of Freud's theory of past trauma haunting the present by 'emphasizing the lasting and seemingly irresolvable nature of this possession' in her representation of Geordie's trauma as enduring for such a long period of time.³⁹ His longevity, and that of his trauma, marks Geordie as a man outside of his own time, representative of the persistence of trauma into the present.

Through Geordie, Barker shows trauma as something which refuses to go away or be fully understood and reinforces this through her portrayal of Gareth's exposure to the virtual horrors of war. This is further emphasized by the haunting presence of the two Victorian child killers, Muriel and Robert Fanshawe. Both the persistence and the visual nature of trauma are emphasized by Cathy Caruth when she states that 'the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event'.⁴⁰ Her use of 'possession' and 'possessed' emphasizes the persistence of trauma in the present as a form of haunting and as something unbidden which is imposed upon the recipient. Whitehead sees this reflected in Barker's narrative through the 'spectral figure of a young woman'.⁴¹ The appearance of the ghostly figure provides a visual reminder throughout the narrative that the past is haunting the present but Whitehead argues that it also brings a supernatural element to the novel which further blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination. She draws on Tzvetan Todorov's work about the fantastic which occurs 'when a person is confronted by a phenomenon that cannot readily be explained by the laws of his familiar world' to show how the supernatural is used in narrative to create a 'hesitation between real and imagined' which reflects traumatic experiences which 'have not yet been fully

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 269-398 (p. 288).

³⁹ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

⁴¹ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 24.

assimilated and so is not susceptible to conventional modes of references or reality'.⁴² I would argue that a similar sense of disorientation and uncertainty is created by the effect of the video games on Gareth although the effect of the spectral is more pronounced as it is further removed from the modern world than virtual reality. The use of the supernatural in Muriel's apparent possession of Miranda allows Barker to re-enact the potential for past violence to resurface in the present through another of her young protagonists, further emphasizing the difficulty representing it in a straightforward way and reflecting the belatedness of trauma observed by Caruth.

In *Another World*, the narrative is underpinned not only by the possibility that the legacy of the past continues to haunt the present but that the trauma is so strong that subsequent generations seem doomed to share and repeat it. The interchange of memory between generations in Barker's text can be described as an experience of what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory.⁴³ In a study of the memories of children of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch uses the term postmemory 'to describe the relationship of children of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as the stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right'.⁴⁴ She goes on to argue that:

[P]ostmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.⁴⁵

Significantly for my discussion here, she suggests that the concept of postmemory need not be restricted to the descendants of Holocaust survivors but 'may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and

⁴² Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, pp. 25-26.

⁴³ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.22.

⁴⁴ Hirsch, p. 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

experiences'.⁴⁶ I would suggest that both the trauma experienced in the trenches during the First World War and the trauma resulting from the murder of one child by another would inspire the kind of cultural and collective experience which would satisfy these conditions.

In *Another World* this concept of trans-generational or postmemory is explored through the relationship between Geordie and his grandson, Nick. Photography played an important role both in how the war was portrayed at the time and how it is remembered. Soldiers often had their photographs taken in their uniforms before going off to war and many photographs, amateur and professional, were taken throughout, depicting life at home and in the trenches. Those photographs that have survived now form an important part of the historical record as visual memories. In *Family Frames*, Hirsch describes how photographs facilitate postmemory in the children of Holocaust survivors as evidence which 'affirm[s] the past's existence'.⁴⁷ Photographs also play a key role in Nick's experience of postmemory. He looks through various photographs of Geordie and his brother, Harry, during the war but the moment that Nick realises he is taking on his grandfather's memories occurs when he is looking at a photograph taken during their visit to the war memorial at Thiepval:

He'd resisted this for years, but now couldn't refuse.

Grandad stood on the lip of a crater, looking down, it strikes Nick with the force of revelation, though he's known it all his life; *he was there* (p. 72).

The phrase, *he was there*, seems to have dual meaning here. Geordie was physically there and seeing him standing overlooking the crater brings home the enormity of what he experienced to Nick, but it also indicates Nick's realisation that he himself was also there as he takes on Geordie's memories of the war and integrates them into his own history so that his grandfather's traumatic experiences become integral to his own identity:

⁴⁶ Hirsch, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Hirsch, p. 23.

Geordie was attempting to graft his memories onto Nick – that’s what the visit was about [...] Something important happened to Nick at Thiepval and he’d never come to terms with it. (p.74)

The transposing of memories from one man to the other is portrayed as intentional and the transference of trauma is identified by its inability to be adequately assimilated by the recipient. Hirsch describes postmemory as ‘the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth’⁴⁸ and this is clearly true of Nick who has grown up immersed in the enigma that is his grandfather’s past. In their study of the transmission of PTSD to second-generation Holocaust survivors, Baranowsky et al suggest two methods by which the transmission takes place: through obsessive retelling by the survivors; and also through an ‘all consuming silence’.⁴⁹ This is reflected by Nick’s experience of his grandfather, who at different times in his life has been both silent and loquacious on the subject of his experience in the trenches. The duration of Nick’s exposure to the results of Geordie’s trauma inevitably leaves a residue on Nick which creates a form of transference between the two men; in effect making Nick a secondary victim of Geordie’s trauma.

Although the trans-generational exchange of memory is foregrounded through the relationship of grandfather and grandson it also occurs in the narrative in the more remote relationship between the veteran and his great-granddaughter and step-great-grandson. It is as though Geordie’s capacity to kill his brother has been passed down through the generations to resurface in Gareth and Miranda. Although Gareth is actually Fran’s son not Nick’s and so has no biological relationship to Geordie, the connection still exists because the trauma which inspires it is so strong.

It is not just through Geordie’s trauma that the past is bearing down on the present. Throughout the narrative, the ghostly presence of the Fanshawe murder creates an oppressive atmosphere which exerts its influence over the family. From the moment,

⁴⁸ Hirsch, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Baranowsky, Anna B., Marta Young, Sue Johnson-Douglas, Lyn Williams-Keeler and Michael Mccarrey, ‘PTSD transmission: A review of secondary traumatization in Holocaust survivor families’, *Canadian Psychology*, 39 (1998) 247-56 (p. 248).

Nick's family move into the house they begin to take on the memories and history of its previous inhabitants, although initially Nick refuses to believe in ghosts, denying any lingering residue of the past in the present: 'Everybody thinks old houses are haunted, but they're not, it's just rubbish' (p. 27). However, his straightforward realism is undermined significantly once the family uncover an old family portrait while re-decorating. Their initial excitement gives 'way to dismay, as it becomes clearer, minute by minute, that the portrait's an exercise in hate' (p. 40). Sharon Monteith suggests that 'the pervasive sense of disquiet and imminent evil can be understood to emanate from what the protagonists fear in the present and for the future, rather than what may have happened in the past'⁵⁰ and as the narrative progresses, the nature of that tension, sibling rivalry and jealousy is clearly seen to envelope both families. It is as if the future is already written and there is no avoiding the inevitable. Nick senses this and he withholds the details of the Fanshawe family history from the rest of his family in fear that knowledge will only hasten the inevitable re-enactment of the past. Throughout the novel, Gareth's narrative seems to have a momentum of its own; accelerating towards an inevitable tragedy but ultimately Gareth does not kill Jasper; breaking out of the potentially repetitive cycle which confounds the legacy provided by both Geordie's and the Fanshawes' fratricides. Their tendency to violence does not pass to Gareth who retains his innocence uncorrupted by the evil shadow of the past. However, Barker ambiguously leaves open what may happen in the future. The covered-up painting resists obscurity and its image resurfaces unbidden in Nick's mind in a similar way to the iconic and persistent real-life images used at the beginning of the novel.

The popular press

Whereas Barker's *Another World* is concerned with the visual representation of violent crime in the media both Maureen Lee's and Theresa Breslin's novels are concerned with the influence of printed news. In *Martha's Journey*, Lee draws attention to the role that newspapers play in influencing public opinion during war by placing journalists at the centre of her narrative, while in contrast, in *Remembrance* Breslin considers representations of war from the perspective of its readers. Analysing reactions to the murder of James Bulger, David A. Green is particularly critical of the tabloid press for

⁵⁰ Monteith, p.90.

inflaming public opinion.⁵¹ He is concerned with the way in which they ‘present selectively homogenized accounts of crime and punishment issues that do not even come close to providing citizens with the knowledge required to contribute responsibly to the debates.’⁵² Similar concerns about the way in which the press provide information to the public can be seen in *Martha’s Journey* and *Remembrance* where the desire and ability of the media to provide accurate information on events comes under scrutiny.

During times of war, a government needs to ensure continuing popular support for the conflict to enable them to raise funds, recruit personnel and maintain order at home. One of the ways to achieve this was through the use of propaganda posters and Breslin makes reference to these in her narrative:

Special newspapers and posters were printed and circulated, urging young men to join up. Factories and shops posted leaflets encouraging workers to enlist and huge billboards shrieked out the message: ‘Join up! The Safety of our Empire is in your hands!’ (p. 46)

The intention in these is clear but much less obvious is the way in which the information made available to the public via the press is controlled. Propaganda needs a vehicle for dissemination and Cate Haste maintains that: ‘The role of the press in propaganda was crucial. The raw material of propaganda is information’.⁵³ The media plays a powerful role in shaping popular opinion and this is reflected in Lee’s narrative in the publication of Martha’s story. As a mother, Martha wants people to know about the impact the war is having on families through the recruitment of child soldiers but without Clive’s insistence on printing her story, the subject would not have derived the publicity or public support that it ultimately achieves. This shows how important the decisions that editors make on what to publish, and what not to publish, have on the way that the public perceive what is happening. It is only with the power of the press behind her, that Martha is able to be heard. Like Martha, Clive feels compelled to speak

⁵¹ Green, p. 11.

⁵² Green, p. 11.

⁵³ Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p.2.

out against what is happening and as a journalist he is in a more powerful position than she is. This power that those who control the press have is illustrated when Clive initially writes a piece which asks ‘Do the generals with all their medals know their war is being fought for them by children? And if they did know, would they care?’ (p. 124) but his editor refuses to publish it:

‘Because it’s the truth and our readers don’t want to know the truth. I wonder how many youngsters from Lancashire are presently fighting in this damned war? Thousands probably, and hundreds, if not more, will have already lost their lives or been injured. Do our readers really want to be told their sons, husbands or brothers died in vain or were sacrificed for a lie? (p. 97)

This shows that withholding information as one way in which newspapers can influence the perception of events. The editor acknowledges the facts about child soldiers but argues that his readers do not want to hear the truth. Rather than expose injustice and thus criticise the government, a role which might be expected of the press in peacetime, the editor prioritises maintaining popular support for the war over investigative journalism. As Haste states:

[The press] subordinated their responsibility of providing accurate information to other obligations which were to do with carrying out their patriotic duty: the duty to persuade men to fight, to keep up morale, to inspire patriotism and continually to denigrate the enemy. Information was structured to fit the prevailing demand: to justify the war and assist recruitment.⁵⁴

Haste describes a climate in which the media, instead of maintaining an obligation to their readers to supply accurate news, succumb to government pressure to restrict information which results in news stories which are biased and inaccurate. The role of the press in providing information and their ability to deliver accurate and unbiased news is an issue of growing contemporary concern. The NatCen Social Research has

⁵⁴ Haste, p.3.

noted a steady decline in public opinion of the press⁵⁵ and a Yougov survey in 2011 ‘found that only 38% of Britons believed what they read in the newspapers and nearly three-quarters (74%) felt newspapers sometimes or frequently lie to their audiences’.⁵⁶ A similar scepticism about the accuracy of the press is articulated in *Remembrance* by Francis:

‘Actually,’ said Francis seriously, ‘home news should be the most important part of any newspaper. There is far too much patriotic drum-beating. It is quite wrong.’ (pp. 13-14)

The change of emphasis in the role of the press, ‘to keep up morale, to inspire patriotism’⁵⁷, which Haste describes is criticised here by Francis, who recognises it but does not support it. He is concerned not only with what is included but with what is omitted, home news, so that the newspaper is providing a selective perspective on current affairs. However, information does still get through from other sources, such as soldiers on leave, and this emphasizes the partisan nature of what is published:

The official newspaper reports told of parapets ‘melting away’ and barbed wire disappearing under the Allied bombardment. Of British and French troops breaking through on a front many miles long. But more recent news seemed to indicate that the Allies had paid dearly for their initial success, and that the price had been a huge number of casualties, that reserve battalions had been used, but they were untrained and had been sent in too late. Stories were passed from mouth to mouth, and the tales told seemed unbelievable. They said that the men sent forward had no clear instructions, and that they carried insufficient firepower to keep their objectives. (pp. 59-60)

As men returned home they told their own stories of the trenches. These unofficial reports ‘passed from mouth to mouth’ are much harder to control and resulted in more

⁵⁵ In 1983 53% of those polled agreed that the press was well run. This declined steadily to 27% in 2012. See: <http://bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/key-findings/trust,-politics-and-institutions.aspx>

⁵⁶ Stephen Coleman, ‘Believing the news: From sinking trust to atrophied efficacy’, *European Journal of Communication*, 27 (2012), 3-6 (p. 4).

⁵⁷ Haste, p. 3.

negative reports which contradicted the official versions. The contrast is so stark that these new stories seemed ‘unbelievable’ which is deeply ironic when considered alongside the official reports mentioned earlier, which ‘told of parapets ‘melting away’ and barbed wire disappearing’ and draws attention to its potential unreliability.

The failure of the media to give accurate information means that gaining a better understanding of events is more complicated than just accepting information without scrutiny. In *Remembrance* Maggie realises that she relies on others to give her information rather than seeking it out for herself: ‘It suddenly occurred to her how vulnerable that made her. In her situation others could decide what she should know, and more importantly *not* know’ (p. 64). The information that she does receive is selected for her by her father. When she meets Francis and gets a completely different interpretation of the same news, Maggie realises that by relying on her father and brother to tell her what is happening, that she gets a view of the war which is mediated through their perspective. She resolves to read the newspaper herself in future so that she can make up her own mind. Francis’s interrogative attitude to the press reports and his encouragement to widen her reading choices by using the libraries make Maggie more aware of the need to read between the lines and not accept the news reports at face value. It emphasizes the mediated nature of information and the necessity for wider reading and education in order to gain a better understanding of events past and present.

The role of the press in disseminating information is considered from a different perspective in Lee’s novel. Rather than focus on the reader’s experience of press representations of war as in *Remembrance*, *Martha’s Journey* is more concerned with the way in which those representations are constructed. In ‘The Historical Text as Literary Artefact’, Hayden White claims that historical narratives are ‘verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found*’.⁵⁸ He explores the concept of historical narrative as a literary construction by drawing attention to the different choices which narrators of history must make in order to bring order to historical events and make sense of them.⁵⁹ He argues that histories are more than just a chronological

⁵⁸ Hayden White, ‘Historical Text as Literary Artefact’, in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (London and Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978), p. 82.

⁵⁹ White, pp. 81-100.

record of events and that they achieve ‘their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles’ through a process which he calls ‘emplotment’; a series of choices the historian makes about what to include and how to narrate an event.⁶⁰ This makes varying representations of any event possible since ‘most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings’.⁶¹ The way in which history is narrated is therefore subjective and dependent on the narrative choices made by those who record it; a literary construct which employs the same devices as other literary texts.

Irene Martyniuk suggests that ‘[t]he slippery slope of White’s theories comes when authors try to become historians, even in fiction – when they write historical narratives. What are the facts that must be kept, what are the rules of the event that must be followed, and what are the truths about which lies cannot be told?’.⁶² This foregrounds the decision-making processes that authors must go through to determine what is included or omitted from their historical narratives and how they can maintain the desired degree of historical authenticity within a fictional context; and draws attention to the complex relationship between fictional texts and history. The inaccessibility of history as straightforward narrative is highlighted by White who suggests that authorial subjectivity and the use of literary devices in historical documents creates histories which are ‘verbal fictions’.⁶³ Martyniuk argues that historical fiction provides a way of exploring the impossibility of knowing the past ‘even with the discovery of primary sources’.⁶⁴ The fictional texts considered in this chapter show literature as well-placed to draw attention to the constructed nature of the historical record by foregrounding their own artifice and examining the processes by which history is recorded.

In *Martha’s Journey*, Lee draws attention to the construction of historical narrative by raising questions about how historical events are recorded and narrated, especially with

⁶⁰ White, p. 83.

⁶¹ White, pp. 84-85.

⁶² Irene Martyniuk, “‘This is not Science. This is storytelling’: The Place of the Individual and the Community in A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* and Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia*”, *CLIO*, 33.3 (2004), 265-286 (p. 267).

⁶³ White, pp. 84-85.

⁶⁴ Martyniuk, p. 269.

regard to the popular press. The preoccupation in *Martha's Journey* with the way that history and narrative is constructed is particularly interesting given its status as a popular novel and suggests that postmodern concepts of self-reflexivity and self-consciousness are not restricted to literary fiction. In *Martha's Journey*, Lee frames the central narrative with a prologue and an epilogue set during the Second World War. This introduces Kate as the storyteller as she relates Martha's history to a neighbour's granddaughter. It draws on the concept of oral history to show how experience is conveyed from one generation to another. By providing a frame narrative which identifies a storyteller, Lee is indicating to the reader that the story Kate tells to Betty is real within the context of the frame story, and as such it can be viewed as an historical account. The narrative perspective of the novel is, however, complicated because despite setting Kate up as the narrator in the frame, the central narrative is told using what appears to be an omniscient third-person narrator. Kate appears as a character in the narrative and is referred to in the third-person just as the other characters are, with no hint of self-awareness. The narrative begins before Kate meets Martha and gives details which Kate would only have known if they had been told to her by other characters. It still draws on the tradition of oral history, but it suggests that Kate is passing on a story constructed by a number of sources, rather than telling it from her own remembered perspective. Later, in the central narrative, Kate is revealed to be an aspiring journalist and this further complicates her position as a storyteller by giving her a professional interest in how stories are narrated. The choice of Kate as narrator, then, provides an interesting reflection on the nature of storytelling and undermines any suggestion of the seamless transmission of historical narrative from one person to another. Apart from the inclusion of the framing narrative, there is nothing to question the reliability of the account presented by the narrator. However, the positioning of Kate as narrator in the frame is enough to destabilise the reliability of the omniscient narrator in the central narrative and thus it brings into question the nature of narrated history, in particular the extent to which an individual's story is mediated by those who narrate it and to what extent it remains that individual's story after this process has taken place.

Throughout her novel Lee shows a preoccupation with the way in which Martha's story is constructed and moulded, often in ways which are outside her control. From the

beginning there is doubt about whose story is being told. The title of the novel is *Martha's Journey* but it is not Martha's story that Kate, prompted by the photograph on the sideboard, promises to tell Betty but Joe's: 'I'll tell you all about him, shall I?' (p. 10). Despite this, the majority of the narrative is focalised on Martha and apart from the description of Joe's time in France, the story told is hers. The telling of Martha's story in the narrative is further complicated by the inclusion of another embedded narrative, the newspaper story, also entitled 'Martha's Journey', which is written by the two journalist characters, Alex and Clive. So, whereas the reader of the novel is encouraged to see themselves as privy to the 'real' story since they follow Martha on her journey, this is undermined in a number of ways. Through the use of a framing narrator other than Martha herself, the use of third person narration throughout the main narrative and the inclusion of a further layer of third person narration in the newspaper story. Martha may be the headline but the story is written by Clive and Alex: 'there it was, "Martha's Journey", in big black letters and underneath, in smaller letters, "from Clive Dexter and Alex Scott"' (p. 289). When Clive discovers Alex's involvement in organising Martha's journey he asks: 'Does this mean Alex Scott is taking over "Martha's Journey" from now on?' (p. 252), he means from him not Martha. Martha's story is not told in her own words; it is entirely constructed, mediated and narrated by others. Her words, as the narrative repeatedly shows, are still faltering and less educated although as the novel progresses she begins to overcome this through education and her ability to communicate effectively increases.

The difference can be seen when Martha's words are reported as dialogue. Her language is straightforward and colloquial and she is keen to avoid any misrepresentation. For instance, when she addresses a group of reporters who have gathered to hear her speak during her walk:

'I hope you don't think I've been walking all the way,' she eventually began. 'I don't like the idea of fooling people. When I started off, I really did mean to walk to London, but I never realized it was so far. I'd hardly walked more than a couple of miles when me feet started killing me. I was sitting on a milestone not all that far from Liverpool, when Clive turned up in his motor car and gave me a lift to Chester. Clive's been turning up ever since . . .'

 (p. 298)

Martha is portrayed as open and honest in the way she talks about her experience. She admits to not realising what she was taking on when she started her journey and does not try to hide that she has not walked all the way. The two journalists are shown as less ethical in their pursuit of a story. In the same way that the newspaper story is constructed by Alex and Clive so that it becomes their representation of Martha's story rather than hers, so they are shown to manipulate her physical journey as well. In this way, Martha's physical journey is also shown to be a constructed, collaborative event, which is not necessarily what it seems or what she originally intended it to be. For instance, when Alex arranges meetings and events for Martha to speak at along the route he lets her think they are impromptu gatherings borne out of coincidence and later admits to extending her journey for the benefit of the story:

‘We’re being beastly, too,’ Alex concluded. ‘Maybe it’s because we’re reporters and, to us, the only thing that matters is the story.’ Clive raised the mug of cocoa he’d ordered from room service. ‘The story!’ he said by the way of a toast. ‘The story!’ Alex mock-saluted in return. There was another silence, then he said, ‘I think we should make an exception for Martha. Shall we stop manipulating her?’ ‘Hear, hear.’ Clive raised his mug. ‘I also think it’s time we stopped padding out the journey. I suggest we give Warwick a miss.’ ‘Sorry, old chap, but we can’t. Tomorrow, a welcoming party will be waiting to meet her. Tell you what, though . . .’ He got out of bed and studied the map. ‘After the reception, let’s go straight to Oxford where Martha can have a good rest, then make our way to London the next day. She’s worn out, and I think she’s had enough of travelling and giving speeches.’ He got back beneath the bedclothes. ‘What do you say?’ (p. 287)

Here the two journalists admit manipulating Martha's journey because ‘the only thing that matters is the story’. It portrays a singular focus in producing a good story. They toast ‘The story!’ not as a representation of Martha's endeavour but as an end in itself. Even though they momentarily agree to stop manipulating her they are straight back to planning the rest of her journey as if they can't help it. The image created is one of a press out of control, pursuing their own agenda regardless of the truth.

Literary influences

A concern with the way that war and violence are represented and its ability to influence people within the novels discussed here, provides a self-reflexive commentary on the role of the novels themselves. This is further emphasized by the way all four novels draw intertextually on other literary texts in their exploration of how literature is employed to convey violence and trauma. Whitehead states that '[m]any works of trauma fiction foreground the literary device of intertextuality'. She argues that 'Intertextuality can suggest the surfacing to consciousness of forgotten or repressed memories'.⁶⁵ The use of intertextuality functions as a form of memory, drawing earlier experiences and representations into the present. James Campbell positions literary texts as memory when he states that the 'Great War is now sufficiently recessed in time to be inaccessible to most living memories' so it is 'now impossible to remember the war without in some way remembering through its literary texts'.⁶⁶ By grounding their representations in popular perceptions about the war contemporary fictional narratives become part of the continuing way in which the war is remembered and form part of the imperative to ensure that it remains firmly within public discourse. In 'Why Authors Don't Give us Their own Worlds', David Bromwich discusses the interconnectivity between texts so that they do not contain isolated representations, what he calls worlds, but rather form part of an intricate network of representation.⁶⁷ New texts do not supersede older texts, instead they add to a growing network of representations. Julia Kristeva states that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'⁶⁸ and by entering into a dialogue with existing texts which represent the First World War these narratives are contributing to the ongoing debate about the legacy of the war and its representation.

Contemporary authors who write about the First World War do so from a position of distance rather than drawing on their own remembered experiences. This temporal distance gives them the ability to reflect on the war retrospectively, and as a whole, knowing the consequences of actions and decisions taken at the time. It also means that

⁶⁵ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, pp. 84-85.

⁶⁶ James Campbell, 'Interpreting the War', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261-279 (p. 262).

⁶⁷ David Bromwich, 'Why Authors Don't Give us Their Own Worlds', *Salmagundi*, 80 (1998), 126-143.

⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 37.

they are writing about the experiences of others, lacking first-hand experience themselves. Whitehead argues that a lack of first-hand experience makes novelists uneasy and acutely aware that they are commentating on the trauma of others:

Intertextuality can reflect the dilemma of the novelist who represents traumatic experiences which he or she has not witnessed, or it can highlight the role of the reader who acts to fill in the gaps of the text and to actively assemble meaning.⁶⁹

They seek to overcome this potentially restricting aspect of their representation by the extensive use of intertextuality which imbues their narrative with the memories of earlier texts. Intertextuality highlights the separation between the contemporary narrative and the experiences it seeks to represent by drawing attention to previous perspectives but it also paradoxically closes that gap in its engagement with them as memory. In their use of earlier texts, contemporary authors demonstrate their awareness of the body of literature which precedes them, particularly texts by those who did have first-hand experience of war, and places their narratives in dialogue with them. This draws on the readers previous knowledge and understanding to invite comparison in a number of different ways: in their ability to represent the experiences of war; in who is represented; and in how those people and their experiences are represented.

The use of different textual forms other than fictions, such as poetry, diaries, letters and memoirs scrutinizes the use of these forms for representation and invites comparison with the fictional form. Barker's interest in representation in *Another World* can be seen in the many different types of representation which she employs, photographs, media images, crime narrative, war memoirs, academic discourse which she uses to foreground a concern with the representation of trauma. Alongside the representations of the press, letters form an important aspect of *Martha's Journey*, where Martha must learn to read and write in order to communicate with her son. Breslin also makes extensive use of letters in her novel to provide epistolary glimpses into Francis' and Maggie's thoughts on war and representation and Deborah Moggach employs a range of different texts in the epigraphs which foreground the diverse potential for

⁶⁹ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 92, p. 94.

representation. This highlights the wide range of mediums used for representing war and emphasizes the need for diversity to overcome its resistance to representation, suggesting that any one mode of representation alone would prove inadequate.

In *Remembrance*, Breslin explicitly addresses the issue of how to effectively represent the war through Maggie's changing reading materials as she moves from gaining information from newspapers to exploring more diverse sources of representation, from poetry to books on treating war wounds. Goya's innovative approach to representing war is shown in a book Maggie finds in the library. She discovers that rather than depict battles as celebrations 'Goya's drawings personalized the conflict of the Spanish Peninsular War, showing individuals maimed, and, importantly for the first time, the horrendous effect of war on a civilian population' (p. 176). Viewing Goya's drawings: 'The violent twisted shapes assaulted Maggie's eyes' (p. 176) but the extracts from his letters also have significant impact. The quotations attributed to Goya are authentic although the comments were made during an address to the Royal Academy 1792 rather than in a letter.⁷⁰ The comments foreground his creative decision-making in how to represent war and emphasize the process by which representations are mediated by the artist's perceptions:

in Nature, colour does not exist any more than lines ... His use of drawing material bonded so well with his chosen subject that they became one force in expressing the horrors of war. (p. 176)

This mirrors the language used by Francis to describe his view from the trenches: '*the blackened tree stumps set against the sky, shell-holes rimed with frost remind of Goya at his most tortuous*' (p. 173). While Maggie turns to the representations of a previous war in an attempt to understand something outside her own experience, Francis uses them to articulate what he is witnessing himself. It shows war as something which cannot be represented straightforwardly but which relies on a complex network of representations in order to convey its horror. Goya's insistence that '*There are no rules in painting ... it is a deep play of understanding that is needed*' (p. 177) is shown to

⁷⁰ Sara Carr-Gomm, *Francisco Goya* (Hoo: Grange, 2005), p. 7.

have a significant effect on Maggie who ‘felt as though she was on the brink of understanding some great truth’ (p. 177). She begins to see representing war as something more than just the straightforward delivery of facts but as an emotive, personal engagement. In this short scene, Breslin draws on a diverse range of textual representations, paintings, letters, biography, within her narrative to explicitly explore the role that texts have in shaping perspectives of the world. For Maggie, the revelation raises more questions than it answers. It presents literature as a starting point for further exploration and enquiry, showing contemporary literature, not as a conveyer of historical information but as a way to help the reader make connections, as a prompt for new ideas, new perspectives.

Intertextual references, however, are not always used to inspire new ideas but can instead reinforce established perceptions. Sharon Ouditt draws attention to the persistent influence of the writings of the soldier poets such as Sassoon on the work of contemporary authors. In particular she is concerned that their representations are reinforced in contemporary narrative as offering a correct way in which to remember the war: ‘For the most part, it seems that Owen, Sassoon, Graves, and others have told us how to remember it, and it seems disrespectful to betray them. Perhaps we do not want those myths to be shattered’.⁷¹ References to Siegfried Sassoon, in particular, seem to recur in the contemporary narratives discussed in this study. The inclusion of Sassoon’s poems, ‘Suicide in the Trenches’ and ‘The Aftermath’ as the first and last words of *Remembrance* provides a frame for the entire narrative and indicates their importance to Breslin’s representation of war. Sassoon’s words are further privileged in the narrative when Francis speaks out against the war. Having been called up, Francis tells the appeal board that he is not a conscientious objector because he believes war may be necessary but that the current war is not: ‘This cause is not just’ (p. 96) and that is why he does not want to get involved. The language used by Francis’s declaration inevitably brings to mind the stand made by Sassoon, who famously spoke out about the progress of a war he believed to be ‘evil and unjust’ in what he describes as an ‘act

⁷¹ Sharon Ouditt, ‘Myths, Memories and Monuments: Re-imagining the Great War’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245-260, (p, 259).

of wilful defiance of military authority'.⁷² Later in the narrative when Maggie sends Francis, now a junior officer himself, a volume of Sassoon's poetry he declares that: 'Such comfort to know that I am not alone in my thoughts. If instead of speaking truth we remain silent, then surely our silence is a lie' (p. 228). This reinforces the expectation that the reader should draw comparisons between Francis's views and those of Sassoon. His words privilege Sassoon's words as 'truth' and acknowledge the important role Sassoon's speaking out played in the way the war is remembered in contemporary society.

The central role of the work of the soldier poets in how war is remembered is reflected in *Remembrance* by the way in which some forms of written language are elevated in the text. Guided by Francis, Maggie starts to read more widely in order to gain knowledge and she turns to poetry, published letters and biographies not history books or fiction in this quest. She chooses texts which represent earlier wars and in doing so, her choice of reading material tends to mirror those forms which are traditionally associated with representing the First World War. As James Campbell points out, in the years following the war, fiction was considered subordinate to poetry and autobiography as a means of representing the combatant's experience.⁷³ This, together with the alignment of Francis and Sassoon in Breslin's novel, seems to reinforce the perspective of the combatants and particularly the soldier poets as the most effective and authentic way to remember the war. However, Breslin potentially undermines the first-hand account as the most effective representation in Francis's letters when he tells Maggie: '*When I was at home I always felt that we were not being told the half of it or only "through a glass, darkly". Truths, half-truths, and lies, but here at the Front we know even less*' (p. 169). Rather than gaining insight from being in the trenches, Francis demonstrates that he is actually cut off from even the limited information available to him at home. Being in the trenches gives him first-hand experience of war but it restricts his knowledge of what is happening elsewhere. Alongside this view of a junior officer in the trenches, Breslin sets the experiences of those at home, Charlotte and Maggie's experiences as nurses and young Alex's experience as a child soldier. So

⁷² Sassoon's declaration was read out in the House of Commons on 30th July 1917 and printed in *The Times* on 31st July 1917. It is reproduced as the opening paragraph of Pat Barker's *Regeneration*.

⁷³ Campbell, p. 264.

while Breslin's narrative continues to reinforce those with first-hand experience, particularly the soldier poets, as authoritative commentators, she moots the possibility that wider perspectives are necessary.

In *Martha's Journey*, the allusion to Sassoon is created through Martha's act of protest rather than with reference to his work. Sassoon is famous for his anti-war declaration. Its stated intention 'to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize'⁷⁴ mirrors the lack of awareness that motivates Martha to begin her protest. Unlike Sassoon she is a civilian but her experience of the war as a mother has given her a particular insight which she feels compelled to share. In contrast to Sassoon who condemns those at home for their ignorance, Lee suggests that public awareness is obscured rather than lacking:

'Do you think the government don't already know?' another woman called.
'What Martha's doing is letting *them* know that *we*, the general public, know what's going on; that we're not the stupid idiots they think we are. That we've got brains like they have. (p. 299)

Martha is reacting against her powerlessness in the face of her son's recruitment and subsequent death: 'She was making a gesture, walking for Joe and all the other young men who'd become soldiers well before their time' (p. 237). As an unknown mother she cannot get anyone to listen to her, but by undertaking her walk she places herself in the public arena and forces people to take notice of her. Although the response of many to Martha's walk is positive she discovers, as did Sassoon, that some would prefer protest against the conduct of war be silenced: "'This country is at war," he said, as if she didn't know. "It does not need the likes of you trumpeting how evil it is and criticizing the way things are being run"' (p. 274). Those who spoke out against the First World War have become an integral part of its memory. Sassoon's memoirs and poetry made a major contribution to the growing body of disillusionment literature following the war and he has come to epitomize the protest against it, a role which has already been firmly

⁷⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, 'Finished with the war: a Soldier's Declaration', *The Times*, 31st July 1917.

established in contemporary discourse about the war through Barker's earlier novel, *Regeneration*. Lee engages in this ongoing debate through Martha Rossi who, in speaking out during her journey to London, continues in this tradition of individual protest against established opinion. However, rather than using the voice of the literary junior officer which is so closely associated with the war, Lee takes as her protagonist an illiterate working-class Liverpool housewife. By using someone who is unmistakably different from the privileged and educated Sassoon, Lee produces a new framework for protesting against war, one which includes civilians.

Deborah Moggach takes a different approach to intertextuality in *In The Dark* through the use of epigraphs. Moggach draws on a variety of historical texts for her chapter epigraphs, including extracts from speeches and memoirs, letters and poetry, and she also makes extensive use of *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*. Her repeated references to Beeton's manual insert the skills needed for efficient management and organisation in running the home into the context of the war, a conflict repeatedly criticised for its lack of effective leadership. She includes poems by Ivor Gurney, Wilfred Owen and Edward Thomas as epigraphs to four of the later chapters reflecting the way in which the 'narrative of bitter disillusionment'⁷⁵ in the now canonical literary response to the war is echoed in the lives of Eithne and Ralph Clay. Michael Peled Ginsburg states that:

The use of epigraphs establishes a relation between the text and a past tradition. That relation can be one of illustration, in which the text repeats or exemplifies the insights of the epigraph, or it can be an ironic relationship, in which the text calls into question the truth of the epigraph. In both cases, however, the result of the act of preceding the text by an epigraph is that the text defines itself in relation to a past text, thus pronouncing itself secondary and derivative while positing the epigraph text as prior and original.⁷⁶

Epigraphs, like other forms of intertextuality, are a self-referential device which makes use of the literary past to add an extra dimension to the narrative by making connections

⁷⁵ Ouditt, p. 245.

⁷⁶ Michael Peled Ginsburg, 'Pseudonym, Epigraphs, and Narrative Voice: Middlemarch and the Problem of Authorship', *ELH*, 45 (1980), 542-558 (p. 547).

to other texts. However, their position relative to the narrative privileges them and thus emphasizes their importance to the text so that they remain both external to it and intrinsically bound up in its meaning. Moggach's use of previous texts in this way self-consciously positions her novel within existing discourse on the family and the First World War. Her use of epigraphs foregrounds these earlier texts and emphasizes their continuing importance for representing the war in contemporary fiction.

Moggach establishes her narrative as one that is part of the literature of disillusionment with the epigraph, a pessimistic quotation from Sir Edward Grey, which precedes the prologue: '*The lights are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime*'.⁷⁷ Originally spoken at the beginning of the war in 1914, Moggach uses Grey's words to open the prologue, dated 1916, in which Ralph and his mother receive the telegram telling them of his father's death. It provides a metaphorical reflection of the impact of the event on Ralph as the war comes to his door in this chapter and the darkening of his life by the loss of his father. As such it also reflects the impact of the First World War, suggestive of a shadow cast on modern society. The sense that something ended in 1914 and it has not, and cannot be regained. On a lighter note, it also provides an ironical commentary on the novel as a whole as his mother moves on to try to re-illuminate her life through her remarriage to Mr Turk, quite literally as he oversees the installation of electric lighting at the house.

Mr Turk's involvement in a chapter is often heralded by the inclusion of a quotation from *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, as it is here in chapter one:

The mode of slaughtering sheep is perhaps as humane and expeditious a process as could be adopted to attain the objects sought: the animal being laid on its side in a sort of concave stool, the butcher, while pressing the body with his knee, transfixes the throat near the angle of the jaw, passing his knife between the windpipe and bones of the neck; thus dividing the jugulars, carotids, and large vessels, the death being very rapid from such a haemorrhage. (p. 14)

⁷⁷ Deborah Moggach, *In the Dark* (London: Vintage, 2008). Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

This quotation describing the humane killing of sheep relates to Mr Turk's profession as a butcher; a similar description of the killing of hogs is used in chapter three. Of course this is a novel about the First World War not meat production and the graphic reference to efficient killing and bloodletting is one of the few direct references to the violence of war which exist in a text situated entirely on the Home Front. It takes on a strongly ironic tone when considered in relation to the slaughter of war. Mariadele Boccardi states that 'epigraphs offer a short-hand reminder of the limits to realist representation' when they are used to refer to things which are considered unacceptable within the novel form.⁷⁸ Here, Moggach uses epigraphs to show how war resists realist representation by using the straightforward instructions for humane butchery as an introduction to a narrative which explores the emotional and complex impact of war on Ralph and his family.

The epigraphs draw attention to the novel's modernity as well as its fictionality, showing it as constructed representation rather than allowing immersion into the historical period. As well as irony, Moggach also applies more direct humour in her choice of epigraphs, such as the 'Question asked to Lt Bernard Martin' in chapter eight: '*When it's too dark to go on fighting – are you free for the evening, can you get to the cinema?*' (p. 219). The quotation draws on the commonly held view that civilians had absolutely no idea what went on at the front but from a modern perspective this particular quotation is absurd and invites condemnation. It precedes a chapter in which the reality of war is foregrounded when Alwynne denounces Ralph's idea of war as 'noble and brave' (p. 233) telling him:

It's blood and guts and men drowning in the mud, coughing up their lungs. It's men drowning in excrement, in *shit*, and crying for their mothers with what remains of their mouths ... It's men with their arms blown off taking three days to die in a shell hole filled with the flesh of their friends. (p. 234)

⁷⁸ Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 38.

The language used is brutal and direct, its intention is to shock Ralph out of his complacency. The stark disparity between the war represented in the epigraph and Alwynne's shockingly visual description of the horror represents the gap between perception and reality that representations of war are attempting to bridge. Using an epigraph inserts an outside voice into the narrative, sometimes reflecting its content, sometimes providing a commentary on it, suggesting a particular interpretation of it and thus always adding something to draw the reader into the meaning of the chapter as an active participant. Moggach's epigraphs insert a multitude of voices into her narrative so that it rings with echoes of the past. It reinforces the implication that her novel should be read in dialogue with earlier representations of the war as a new voice, a continuation. In particular the use of factual documents for her intertextuality emphasizes the fictionality of Moggach's narrative whilst reinforcing the way in which fictional narrative draws on the historical in its construction.

Conclusion

As well as placing themselves within a body of literary works which seek to represent the war these authors use intertextuality to situate their novels within a genre, the historical novel, that seeks to represent and explore the past. They are often concerned with their ability to convey the reality of traumatic experience and draw attention to the limitations of representation, acknowledging that there are aspects where realist fiction proves inadequate and they must turn to other forms of representation, for instance, letters, memoirs or even the supernatural. This highlights the need for diversity in the literary techniques used to portray trauma and foregrounds the inadequacy of any one mode of representation alone to convey the experiences of war. In *Another World*, Barker includes information on the Fanshawe murder by embedding a crime narrative written by 'a prolific historical novelist' (p. 106) into the novel. Using a writer of historical fiction to provide documentary details on the historical murder is a self-reflexive device which draws attention to Barker's own use of fiction to engage with history. It gives authority to the historical novel as a means of accessing the past and highlights the versatility of the novelist. Its straightforward informative tone contrasts with the main narrative to emphasize the way in which fiction goes beyond conveying details of historical events to explore issues and initiate debates, raising questions rather than answering them.

The narratives explored in this thesis represent war from the perspective of individual families; providing access to the thoughts and emotions of their protagonists to personalize the tragedy experienced by so many. In their exploration of child soldiers, they reflect a contemporary preoccupation with the role of children in society, their potential for violence and concern about what influences their behaviour. By focusing on young people involved in the First World War they highlight the tragedy of a lost generation but they also reveal a society in which conflict is part of everyday life and reveal how young people are particularly susceptible to its influence.

In this chapter, I have considered how contemporary authors contemplate three spheres of influence, visual, popular press and literary. The increasingly visual representation of traumatic events is foregrounded in Barker's *Another World* where she explores the disorientating and intangible nature of remembered trauma by drawing parallels with the effects of exposure to virtual violence. The persistent and intrusive nature of traumatic memory is demonstrated through the use of repetition and trans-generational haunting as the traumas of the past threaten to re-write themselves in the present.

In Barker's narrative, iconic media images of real-life murders emphasize the impact the news has on people, even when remote from the event. In contemporary society media influence has grown with its widening reach and the increasing diversity with which information is disseminated. In their novels, Lee and Breslin contemplate the contribution of the press to the war effort and the part it plays in shaping perceptions of war. By drawing attention to the role of the media during the war, these novels recognise the increasing impact that the media has on the way that important cultural and political issues are portrayed to the public and thus influence their reception. In *Martha's Journey* Lee portrays the creation of both personal and journalistic narratives from the perspective of the journalist or storyteller in order to scrutinize the process by which it is constructed and undermine it as straightforward narrative. In contrast, Breslin is more concerned with the process through which her young protagonists gain information as readers of texts. She emphasizes the need to interrogate individual sources and include a diverse range of textual evidence in order to gain understanding.

All the novels discussed in this chapter draw on intertextual references and allusions to situate themselves within an ongoing tradition in which literature engaged with and criticised the First World War. In doing so, they reveal their interest in the textual representations which influence people's thoughts and behaviour and reinforce the role of literary texts as vehicles of influence and remembrance. They consider the way in which traumatic experience resists representation by exploring the processes by which it is attempted and thus display a self-conscious awareness of the contemporary historical novel as a medium for traumatic representation. By foregrounding the importance of literature as a means of representing trauma they engage with continuing debates. Contemporary novelists use fictional narratives to widen the scope of debates about conflict and violence, underlining the influential role of the First World War as a context in which to facilitate discussions about ongoing issues of contemporary society.

Chapter 2: Artists at War

War and Art are not always enemies, and Peace is not always Art's best friend.¹

Artists and their art have become a recurrent theme in contemporary British fiction about the First World War. Like the soldier poets who represented the war through their poetry, many artists were preoccupied with issues such as destruction, disillusionment and fragmented bodies and critics have drawn comparisons between their work. Sue Malvern states that: '[Paul] Nash's *We are Making a New World* is often read as a paradigmatic icon of the destruction and devastation of the First World War, the pictorial equivalent of the writings of the war poets'² and A. D. Harvey claims that: 'the British produced the most important paintings of the war, just as they produced the most important poetry'.³ Just as poets were divided into those who sought to represent the war patriotically and those who felt the need to speak out against it, so the art world was divided by those who felt art had no role in the representation of war and those for whom it inspired and reinvigorated their creativity.

In this chapter I will consider three novels which focus on the British art world, its artists and their role in the First World War: Pat Barker's *Life Class* and *Toby's Room*; and Louisa Young's *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You*. In *Life Class*, Barker follows the lives of a group of young artists, Elinor Brooke, Paul Tarrant and Kit Neville, who are studying at the Slade School of Art in London before the war, and charts the changes to their lives after the outbreak of war. *Toby's Room* features the same protagonists as *Life Class* but it is not a sequel since it intersects temporally with the earlier novel, beginning in an earlier period and charting different events, although it also covers a period after the end of *Life Class*, thus ultimately providing a continuation. Louisa Young's novel follows the lives of aspiring artists Nadine Waveney and Riley Purefoy and draws parallels between their lives and those of the other protagonists, Peter, Julia and Rose Locke. Unlike Barker's novels, this narrative is not directly concerned with

¹ Selwyn Image, *Art, Morals and the War* (Oxford: H. Milford, 1914), p. 18.

² Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony and Remembrance* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 17.

³ A. D. Harvey, *A Muse of Fire: Literature, Art and War* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1998), p. 106.

the work of the artists but it does draw attention to the changes that the outbreak of war brings about in their lives and remains firmly focused throughout on the visual and the aesthetic, highlighting the creative nature of the facial reconstruction process which is also evident in Barker's *Toby's Room*.

The novels considered in this chapter explore the value of art as a means of narrating war and in doing so they scrutinize the imperative to represent traumatic events. By contrasting the work of two artists, Kit Neville and Paul Tarrant, who were active participants in the war with that of the non-combatant Elinor Brooke, Barker considers whether those with first-hand experience of trauma are the ones best able to represent it, a concept she problematizes by showing their difficulty articulating what they witness. Both Barker and Young contemplate the difficult decision-making involved during the creative process to show the finished product as a carefully constructed piece of artistry which highlights the artifice of representation and provides a self-reflexive commentary on the novel as a form of representation.

These authors reinforce the diversity of traumatic representation by positioning the war artist both as a contributor to the war effort and as part of the process of repairing its damage. Moreover, as the novels' protagonists are killed, maimed and traumatised by their experiences their bodies become physical representations of their trauma, a visual manifestation of their experiences. Through the efforts of the plastic surgeons who are shown painstakingly attempting to reconstruct the faces of injured veterans, Barker and Young consider not only the practical applications of art but the extent to which images of the war, artistic and textual, remain partial constructions despite efforts to make them as realistic as possible.

Samuel Hynes argues that the effect of the First World War was so significant that:

it changed reality. That change was so vast and so abrupt as to make the years after the war seem discontinuous from the years before, and the discontinuity became part of English imagination. Men and women after the war looked back

at their own pasts as one might look across a great chasm to a remote, peaceable place on the other side.⁴

Diana Wallace identifies a tendency to inflect these ‘notions of “before” and “afterwards”’ into writings about the war⁵ and in both Barker’s and Young’s novels the impact of the war is emphasized by their structure. *Life Class* and *Toby’s Room* are both split into two parts, part one being set before the war with part two set during the war. As the characters’ pre-war existence changes inexorably, so the narrative draws attention to the differentiation between before and after, reflecting two separate lives lived by the same people and echoing the words of Paul Nash: ‘I feel I could make a complete thing by taking it up to 1914 - just up to the war. After that it was another life, another world’.⁶ Unlike the two other novels, neither part of *Life Class* is specifically dated so that the time period has to be gleaned from within the narrative itself. The two parts of *Toby’s Room* are dated, 1912 and 1917, which reinforces the before and after dichotomy, although, like *Life Class* the chapters themselves are not dated.

Similarly, the first part of Young’s novel, *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You*, is set before the war begins, setting the scene of pre-war life. However, the novel opens with an initial prologue set in 1917, during a particularly heavy bombardment in France. This immediately envelops the reader in the chaos of war. Unlike Barker, Young dates each chapter so that the proximity of war is always foregrounded. The date of the prologue is precise: ‘France, 7 June 1917, 3.10am’⁷ which identifies the scene described as the Battle of Messines Ridge.⁸ This gives way to the vaguer dating of chapter one: ‘London, towards Christmas, 1907’ (*My Dear*, p. 5). The narrative has moved back ten years and the vagueness of the date suggests a remembered event rather than a diary entry written close to the event. Once the narrative moves closer to the war, the dates become more specific, for instance in chapter 5: ‘Sidcup, June 1915’ (*My Dear*, p. 59). The dates emphasize the historical context of the narrative and encourage the reader to draw on

⁴ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), p. ix.

⁵ Diana Wallace, *The Woman’s Historical Novel: British Woman Writers 1900-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 26.

⁶ David Boyd Haycock, ‘Review of *London, Modernism and 1914*’, *British Art Journal*, 22 June (2010).

⁷ Louisa Young, *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You* (London: HarperCollins, 2011), prologue. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

⁸ Spencer C. Tucker, *The Great War: 1914-18* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 138.

their own knowledge about the war. This provides the novel with an external temporality which exists separately from the narrative itself, so that fictional narrative and historical referents co-exist symbiotically.

The various locations indicated reveal that most of the narrative is situated on the Home Front although the occasional inclusion of locations in France and Belgium re-asserts the continuing presence of the war. The way that Louisa Young's novel encompasses both home and Western fronts is illustrated in the structure of its prologue. The precise dating mirrors that of a diary, but the text that follows is not a personal account. Written in the third person this part of the narrative does not focus on any one character, instead it conveys the depersonalised, all-encompassing nature of war, in contrast to the main body of the narrative which maintains a more personal focus on its protagonists: 'The men became a part of the noise, drowned in it, dismembered by it, saturated. They were of it. It was of them' (p. 1). The narrative moves smoothly from the trenches to those at home, articulating the nature of total war and its ability to touch the lives of everyone:

Across no man's land, the soldiers flew up in the air, and fell, and the earth flew up in the air, and fell, and buried them whether they were dead or not...And the German artillery responded, and it all doubled, redoubled, an exponential vastness, and in Berlin wives and girlfriends sat up at night desks and in beds.
(p. 3)

Young uses repetition, of individual words and of actions and behaviours, to create connections as it takes a circular trajectory from the wives and girlfriends at home in Britain, to the Allied troops in France planting and blowing up mines under the German trenches, to the German deaths and response, and then on to the German wives and girlfriends back home. It encompasses the entirety of the war in just a few pages by drawing together the men who fought on both sides and the women who waited at home for them. This acknowledges the widespread consequences of the war, seen in all the novels discussed here, as its effects resonated beyond the fighting in the trenches to subsume non-combatants as well.

Enlistment and volunteering

Perhaps not surprisingly, the impact of the war was most keenly felt by the younger generation of artists, whose innovative works were influential in changes occurring in British art in the years immediately before the war. As Sue Malvern points out these artists were the same young men called upon to fight:

The First World War was a young man's war and, inevitably, significant numbers of British avant-garde artists, by and large in their twenties at its outbreak, volunteered.⁹

Although conscription only came later in the war, many young men and women felt it was their duty to sign up as soon as possible and young artists were no different. If anything, their public profile created pressure on them to do what was perceived to be the right thing. The complex position of artists within the public perception is illustrated by Michael J. K. Walsh who states that:

If they didn't adapt and do their bit – if they continued with the pre-war pantomime – they could expect no sympathy from a nation that had no time or patience for them... Commentators posited modern painters and writers between three basic notions. At one extreme they were seen to represent everything that had been corrupt, disengaged, decadent and foreign (which had led to the war in the first place); more neutrally they were dismissed as a meaningless and valueless frivolity – the product of peace-time London which could now be set aside (or exterminated) as the nation got down to the serious business at hand; and at the other extreme, they were representatives of the very sophisticated and profound culture and civilisation that Kitchener's million was being asked to defend.¹⁰

Here artists are positioned as an integral part of the war process, regardless of the way in which they are publicly perceived. At both extremes, whether they are part of the

⁹ Malvern, p.1.

¹⁰ Michael J. K. Walsh, 'Introduction: avant-garde and avant-guerre' in *London, Modernism, and 1914*, ed. Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-19, (p. 6).

cultural infrastructure deemed worth fighting for or symptoms of a corrupt society in need of change, artists and their art are identified as having an important influence on social order. Consequently, since artists were considered such an essential part of contemporary society the expectation arose that they would be prepared to contribute by volunteering along with other young men their age. Some artists were keen to volunteer, even sensing an artistic opportunity in being part of the war. Malvern observes that:

When the war broke out in August 1914, many of the avant-garde artists enlisted and went to the front. For them it was a great opportunity to find an equivalent for their art by worship of violence and fearless desire to take action.¹¹

This reaction is shown in *Life Class*, when on hearing of the war, Kit Neville immediately states that he will ‘Enlist, of course. No bloody choice’ although Paul observes that: ‘You don’t sound very keen’.¹² He later tells Paul that:

‘My father’s been out there twice already. He went to one hospital where there were five hundred men lying on straw, covered in piss and shit – some of them hadn’t had their wounds dressed in a fortnight. No anaesthetics, no disinfectant, nothing. Whole place stank of gangrene. As far as I can make out the medical services have been completely overwhelmed.’

‘And that’s what you’re going to paint?’

‘I’ll paint whatever’s there.’

‘You really do see it as a painting opportunity, don’t you?’

‘Too bloody right I do.’ (p. 119)

Neville’s immediate reaction, ‘No bloody choice’ hints at compulsion yet his subsequent conversation with Paul does not indicate any reluctance, quite the opposite. The linguistic repetition in his words, ‘Too bloody right I do’ links the two passages

¹¹ David Wragg, ‘Conflict ‘resolution’: Wyndham Lewis’s Blasts at War’ in *London, Modernism, and 1914*, ed. Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 101-121 (p. 233).

¹² Pat Barker, *Life Class* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 104. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

and reveals Neville's motivation as an artistic imperative to represent what is happening rather than a desire to fight. There is the suggestion that Neville is one of those artists who saw the war as an artistic opportunity. This reflects similar assertions which were made about Christopher Richard Nevinson, the artist on who Neville's character is based. Harvey suggests that: 'Nevinson was himself a kind of war profiteer, making a better income painting the war than he would have done as a corporal fighting it'.¹³ However, in Barker's narrative, Neville's motivation is shown to be more complex than a straightforward desire to improve his artistic credibility because of the references made to his father. Like Henry Woodd Nevinson, Richard Nevinson's father, Neville's father is a war correspondent¹⁴ and Neville is described as being 'in awe of his father, a war correspondent' (p. 41). His father is said to have 'faced danger in every corner of the world. Throughout his life the father had gravitated towards violent conflict, and the son was desperate to measure up. No easy matter if the worst danger you face is a collapsing easel' (p. 42). Neville clearly views his father as a heroic figure and he aspires to be like him, so his decision to volunteer stems from a desire to show his father that art can have a valid role in conflict as well as journalism and that artists can also take risks, both creatively and physically. The juxtaposition of journalist father with artist son links literature and art as means of representation and foregrounds the value of art as a method for communicating experience. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for diversity in representing trauma, drawing on all available creative resources, written and visual, documentary and imaginative, in an attempt to convey the events of war.

From a contemporary perspective it is often difficult to understand why young people would have rushed to volunteer to be part of something as terrible as the First World War. The surge of patriotism can be explained to a large extent by naivety inspired by the heroic battles and great military successes which were the subject of so many earlier works of literature and art. In *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You*, Riley Purefoy makes a similarly impulsive decision to enlist early in the war but based on entirely different circumstances from those shown by Barker. After engaging in sexual activity with

¹³ Harvey, p. 118.

¹⁴ Michael J. K. Walsh, *C. R. W. Nevinson: This Cult of Violence*, (New Haven, CT ; London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 3.

Terence during a sitting, Riley is horrified by what has happened. He blames his involvement in the art world for his behaviour, calling himself a '*nancy boy to a posh artist*' (p. 29). Unlike Neville, who seeks artistic inspiration and the chance to be a hero, Riley's intention is to escape from art, and more particularly artists, when he volunteers to join the army. In an effort to reassert control over his own life, and ironically his own body, he intends to 'prove himself a man, in the army. Hard work. Proper work. No nancy stuff – no art' (p. 32). The wisdom of his decision is immediately challenged in the text through the irony of the concluding sentences on Riley's enlistment: 'Length of service: one year or duration of the war. Duration of war, of course. He didn't want to spend a whole year in the army' (p. 32). In this statement, Young draws on the reader's historical knowledge about the war to reflect ironically on Riley's belief in a short conclusion. Echoes of the popular assumption that the war would be all over by Christmas underline the naivety with which young men rushed to do their duty. This is reinforced by Riley's visions of France, inspired by works of art:

France, to Riley, meant the golden sunflowers Van Gogh had painted in Arles, the bright skies, the lines of trees, the colours of Matisse, the sea, Renoir's girls in bars, David's dramatic half-naked heroes, Fragonard's girls with their petticoats flying, Ingres' society ladies with their white skin, black hair and melting fingers (p. 23).

Riley's perceptions are conveyed through third person narrative and the phrase 'France, to Riley, meant' suggests that the more knowledgeable narrator is critical of Riley's viewpoint. That his vision of France is an outdated, pre-war perspective is highlighted by using paintings from the eighteenth century. Riley's perceptions of the world are inspired by these artists, showing the impact of artistic representations as well as emphasizing his naivety in his vision of France untouched by war. It reinforces the disparity between representations before the war and the techniques which would be necessary to represent it. It suggests the need for artists to convey the devastation of the 'afterwards' by producing modern works representative of a changed world.

The need for innovation

In *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You*, Terence draws on the breakdown of traditional rules

in art to suggest that the time has come for men to think for themselves rather than blindly follow established patterns of behaviour:

‘... the real joy and breakthrough of the romantic movement was that it means it’s no longer necessary to be hidebound by the rules of classicism and tradition, which means, it seems to me, that *all* rules are there to be questioned, and all kinds of behaviour should now be considered on their own merits, not simply in the light of traditional rules and models’. (p. 28)

His assertion that ‘all rules are there to be questioned’ suggests a need for art to break with ‘traditional rules and models’ to become more experimental and push at the boundaries of representation. Through Terence’s words, Young articulates a need for innovation in creative responses to war which can be read as a commentary on the traditions and rules which have developed for the portrayal of war experiences. James Campbell notes that as a canon of First World War writing emerged so did a ‘hierarchy of genres’ so that it consisted mainly of the writing of combatants, dominated by lyrical poetry supported by autobiography.¹⁵ Similarly, Sharon Ouditt draws attention to the persistent influence of the work of junior officers in contemporary narratives about the war, particular those which portray an anti-war perspective.¹⁶ An attempt to look beyond these traditional texts can be seen in contemporary fictions which consider new modes of representation and in those which scrutinize the process by which this innovation takes place. Campbell and Ouditt observe that an increasing engagement with fictional narratives depicting the war began towards the end of the twentieth century as the narrower focus of earlier criticism broadened to include writing by non-combatants, particularly women. Young’s text suggests that representations of war should be considered on their ‘own merits’ rather than exclusively in relation to what has preceded them, in order to gain new insight and explore new perspectives.

The question of the role art should play in the representation of war is explored in all

¹⁵ James Campbell, ‘*Interpreting the War*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261-279 (p. 264).

¹⁶ Sharon Ouditt, ‘Myths, Memories and Monuments: Re-imagining the Great War’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245-260, (p. 245).

three of the novels discussed here but they also consider whether art should become involved in depicting trauma at all. Barker's two main male protagonists are actively involved in painting in response to the war yet not all artists were keen to do so. Mark Gertler, on whom Paul Tarrant is partly based, is reported to have reacted angrily against the suggestion that he volunteer:

Don't ask me to enlist! Can a fish do much out of water? Do you want my spirits to be broken forever? This *wretched sordid butchery!!* They call it war! Oh the sordid mess of it! Leave me alone, I'm unhappy enough. Only when I work do I forget ... All my plans over. All that I wanted to paint – over.¹⁷

He clearly felt that artists had no place on the battlefield and that the war signalled an end to his painting ambitions. A similar sentiment is expressed in Young's narrative by Sir Alfred but he fears that art no longer has a role to play:

'Does art feel useless?' she said.

'At the moment, yes,' he said. 'They need the canvas for tents and the chemicals for weapons and the factories and the labour... I'm wondering how we can ever come back from war, after so much has been turned over to it... That's not something I can paint, though. I don't know what people want. I've always painted what they want, lovely things ... and I am old, and the young are suffering, and I can do nothing for them.' (pp. 153-4)

Sir Alfred's reasons for believing art to be useless in the representation of war are generally practical rather than ideological, as shown by his assertion that canvases and chemicals can be put to better use in the war effort. His words seem to indicate that art has no role to left to play, that the war has destroyed the capacity for artistic representation. By reducing it to its component parts he strips away its potential for creativity and reduces art to a set of resources. He is portrayed as an old man out of place in a new world, powerless to effect change either in himself or others, a symbol of the resistance of trauma to traditional forms of representation.

¹⁷ Walsh, 'Avante-Garde', p. 11.

In Barker's narratives, Elinor is shown to be similarly outside the sphere of influence. However, in her case, this reflects her position as a woman and a non-combatant. There is a persistent impression throughout the narrative that Elinor's lack of engagement with the war is imposed upon her. When she visits Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf, Elinor meets some conscientious objectors who she writes about unsympathetically:

[S]ome of the conchies make no effort to acquire the skills they need to do farm work. Oh, I know it's compulsory, they haven't chosen to do it, but I do think, in their place, I'd make a bit more of an effort. But then, I never shall be in their place so oughtn't to criticize, I suppose. (Toby's Room, p. 68)

Her reference to them as 'conchies' implies contempt for those who choose to remain outside the war effort but she does not align herself with their position of opting out. Instead, she acknowledges that she will never be in their place which distances her from their refusal to participate and suggests her own exclusion may not be entirely voluntary.

The meeting with Woolf creates an explicit literary link within the text and places Elinor's artistic role within wider debates on representation. This perspective is strengthened by the use of diary entries, a traditional format for First World War narratives, for this aspect of the text. These modes of representation are most strongly associated with male combatants and Barker's use of them here draws attention to the relationship between women and war. Literary responses to the war by women have been consistently overlooked and marginalised so that Elinor's artistic silence in response to the war can be seen as analogous with the refusal to acknowledge the importance of the work produced by women. The critical dismissal of the work of non-combatants who sought to represent the war means that its ability to influence its perception has been limited. For instance, Lynne Hanley is critical of earlier analyses of First World War literature, particularly Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, which she argues give the sense that a single collective consciousness on war

exists which is 'rightly constructed by literate soldiers'.¹⁸ However, since the 1980s, a growing number of critics have sought to re-assess a canon whose narrow focus allows so many significant texts to be ignored. In the second volume of *No Man's Land* (1984) Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar consider how the lives of women during the war are represented by both male and female writers and others, such as Angela K. Smith and Sharon Ouditt, have sought to redress the balance by focusing specifically on the work of women.¹⁹

Elinor's marginalised position is illustrated in Barker's narrative even before the outbreak of war is announced:

She pulled the curtain aside and saw Father and Paul talking on the terrace. The bumble and rumble of male voices reached her but only a few distinct words. Germany, Servia, Austria-Hungary, Russia, mobilization, ultimatum, alliance, triple alliance – on and on it went. She was so bored with it. (*Life Class*, pp. 93-94)

This is a brief interlude in the text, between domestic concerns about her parent's marriage and what she should wear for dinner. Elinor's feelings are not expressed directly but through the words of the narrator which highlights her lack of voice. She is described as 'bored with it' but this arises from a lack of active engagement with it. The 'bumble and rumble' equates the noise of war with the specifically 'male voices'. The isolated words she hears are without context and she has no opportunity to engage with them in any meaningful way. The men's position outside on the terrace contrasts with Elinor's inside the house so that she is positioned as remote and isolated. The curtain provides a physical analogy to the perceived divide between those who would become directly involved in war and those who could not. A perception held not only by the

¹⁸ Lynne Hanley, *Writing War: Fiction, Gender, Memory* (Amherst, NY: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), p. 23.

¹⁹ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2005) and *Women Writers of the First World War: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Routledge, 2000); Angela, K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

men but by women themselves. In one of the few canonical texts written by a woman, Vera Brittain describes the war as ‘a barrier of indescribable experience between men and the women whom they loved’.²⁰ That a woman’s perspective is possible is hinted at in Barker’s narrative when Elinor pulls the curtain aside, but it continues to be limited by her remaining behind it.

Elinor stubbornly maintains that art should not be influenced by or respond to the war in any way. This stance of silence, a refusal to engage artistically with the war, is reiterated throughout the text thus cementing Elinor’s position as outside the sphere of representation:

‘Are you really content to let it all pass you by?’

‘The war? Yes.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t think it matters very much. I don’t think it’s important.’

Silence. She looked slightly uncomfortable.

‘Of course it matters, in one way, it matters that people are dying. I just don’t think that’s what art should be about. It’s like painting a train crash. Of course it’s dreadful, but it’s not ...’ She was groping for words, which had never come easily to her. ‘It’s not *you*, is it? An accident’s something that happens *to* you. It’s not you, not in the same way people you love are. Or places you love. It’s not *chosen*.’ (*Life Class*, p. 244)

The opposition to representing the war through art is presented as dialogue, distancing the third person narrator from the argument. Diana Wallace identifies the desire to give ‘a voice to experience unrecorded or misrepresented’ in earlier texts as typical of women’s historical fiction and in presenting Elinor’s opposition as dialogue Barker inserts a dissenting voice into her narrative.²¹ The third person narrator draws attention to her discomfort and her inability to find words to express herself which emphasizes her difficulty in conveying an opinion at odds with those around her and reinforces her

²⁰ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (London: Gollancz, 1933), p. 143.

²¹ Wallace, p. 222.

position as outside the sphere of influence. However, when she is silent, Barker does not seek to fill the void with the voices of others, but instead shows Elinor working through her argument, giving her space to construct and articulate a different viewpoint. In doing so, Barker conveys the process by which new ways of thinking can take shape, how new perspectives can evolve and contribute to ongoing debates if these new voices are given an opportunity to germinate.

Barker shows that the separation of war and art is not something which is easy to articulate without sounding callous and unfeeling. It is clear that it is not Elinor's intention to dismiss the enormity of the suffering itself but rather to convey her belief that it is not a valid subject for art. In likening the casualties to a train crash, she communicates the potentially voyeuristic nature of viewing such images and establishes that hers is not a purely selfish concern but one which maintains, at least partly, sensitivity to the needs of others. Her position on the subject remains entrenched and her view that art should be about representing the self and what is important to the artist is reinforced throughout both of Barker's texts by her ability to shut out the reality that surrounds her and concentrate instead on herself. For instance, in *Life Class*, she travels to Belgium disguised as a nurse, to see Paul. There, she is surrounded by those who intend to actively contribute to the war effort while her deception serves only her own selfish desire to visit Paul. On the ferry crossing she finds a subject which seems as remote from the war as she is, a young mother and her child. It is as though her artistic vision is limited to the personal and domestic and she is unable, or unwilling to push beyond it. Yet when the war forces itself into Elinor's life when her brother Toby is killed in *Toby's Room*, she turns to art in order to cope with her grief. When the war becomes personal for her, and someone she loves is involved, it changes her perspective on how art and war should intersect. In her grief, Elinor puts aside her earlier assertion that 'painting should be about ... celebration. Praise' (*Toby's Room*, p. 141) and turns to it instead to hold onto her memories of her brother. Whilst this reflects the potentially cathartic nature of art in response to loss, by maintaining Elinor's refusal to respond to the war until she suffers a personal tragedy, Barker continues to engage in the debate as to whether only those with first-hand experience can, or should, represent trauma.

That artists were considered central to representing the war at the time is evidenced by

the appointment of the first official war artist in 1916 by the War Propaganda Bureau.²² The enlistment of young artists, as official war artists or in more direct war service, inevitably had an effect on the art produced during the period although the nature and extent of the change is a matter of some debate. Artists continued to paint, so the quantity of art being produced was not a concern, as David Wragg notes: ‘Despite the approaching war the art world in London in 1914 was thriving, not only with respect to the works produced by individuals, but to the multiple diverse exhibitions being staged’.²³ However, as Walsh observes, some artists viewed the impact of the war on their artistic creativity with some trepidation:

The traditional isolation and intellectual singleness of purpose previously afforded the artist and writer seemed to have been taken away forcibly and suddenly, leaving in its place disorientation and doubt that the pen and the brush had any ability to deal with such extreme subject matter.²⁴

Yet others felt that art was already well-positioned for representing war. Malvern draws attention to the complex and symbiotic relationship which occurs between war and art, suggesting that this influence even preceded the war: ‘The experience of war was itself shaped in representation and the conflict was thought and imagined before it was fought in ways that prepared the ground for the unimaginable to take place’.²⁵ This suggests that the visions of artists played an influential role in public perceptions of the war, even before it began. It is a view echoed by artist Richard Nevinson, who in 1919 observed that:

This war did not take the modern artist by surprise. I think it can be said that modern artists have been at war since 1912... They were in love with the glory of violence. Some say that artists have lagged behind the war, I should say not! They were miles ahead of it.²⁶

²² Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 267.

²³ Wragg, p. 214.

²⁴ Walsh, ‘Avante-Garde’, p. 9.

²⁵ Malvern, p. 4.

²⁶ J. Ferguson, *The Arts in Britain in World War I* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1980), p. 26.

A. D. Harvey supports this view, stating that: ‘one of the things that happened was that the war came just as artists, at least pictorial artists, were becoming, artistically speaking, ready for it’.²⁷ He highlights the Italian Futurist movement and F. T. Marinetti’s assertion that ‘war was the only hygiene of the world in 1912’ although he is clear that ‘The timeliness of Futurism, Expressionism, Cubism is not that they facilitated the outbreak of war, but that they provided the ideal expressive medium for depicting it’.²⁸ The Futurist perspective on war appears in *Life Class* when Paul Tarrant and Kit Neville discuss the war with Elinor’s father:

What happened to, “War is the only health-giver of mankind”?’

Dr Brooke looked puzzled.

‘*The Futurist Manifesto*, sir,’ Tarrant explained.

‘Oh, I see. Well, I suppose it’s an interesting point of view, though if war’s such a health-giver I do wonder why we need to clear quite so many beds.’ (p. 104).

The easy dismissal of the Futurist slogan by Dr Brooke suggests that it is not a view which Barker intends to support in her narrative and this is reinforced by the lack of any further mention of the Futurist movement within her texts. Alan Munton criticises Barker for refusing to engage with the ‘disputes between the Futurists and the Vorticists at the time, even though one of Barker’s characters, Kit Neville, is based on C. R. W. Nevinson, who took part in them as the only English Futurist artist’ and in particular cites the omission of any reference to *Blast* magazine, which was published in June 1914, arguing that ‘Barker’s fictional young Slade artists live through 1914 in complete ignorance’ of significant developments in art and literature.²⁹ This misses the point, however, that Barker’s text is not an exploration of art history at around the time of the First World War. Instead, Barker’s focus is, like her earlier *Regeneration* trilogy, on the human response to war and its representation; the individuals who support and oppose it, those who participate in it and those who seek to avoid doing so and the very personal motivations and decision-making processes which lie behind it. The allusion to

²⁷ Harvey, p. 105.

²⁸ Harvey, p. 106.

²⁹ Alan Munton, ‘Rewriting 1914: The Slade, Tonks and War in Pat Barker’s *Life Class*’ in *London, Modernism, and 1914*, ed. Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 240-271 (p. 241).

Futurism places it within this arena but it is deliberately not foregrounded because within the narrative it is not the changes in art itself which is at the core of Barker's text but the way in which her young protagonists respond through their art to the changes taking place in the wider world. Placing too much emphasis on the introduction of *Blast* or the influence of Futurism would result in a narrowing of focus which would detract from the wider picture which Barker seeks to draw about the role of artists, of all persuasions, in war. Barker's narrative is preoccupied not with the specifics of individual art movements but rather with the impact of war and the overarching nature of the changes taking place in response to it.

Realism or not?

There was inevitably resistance from some people to the increasingly experimental nature of the art being produced and the outbreak of hostilities was used as justification by those who preferred more realist representation. Malvern notes that: 'Reviewers, habitually hostile to modern art, characterised the works not only as an irresponsible failure of duty and unpatriotic but almost as enemy action',³⁰ highlighting difficulties for artists intent on finding new ways of representation. She suggests that: 'Critical reaction being extreme, however, was symptomatic of a feeling that there was such a thing as an essential national identity vulnerable to fracture'³¹ as Modern art was criticised by some as a deviation from realism that had no place in the patriotic support of war. In an editorial about the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1916, written shortly before the appointment of the first official war artist, Muirhead Bone, in May 1916,³² *The Times* suggests that: 'Now, the question is whether an effort ought to be made to bring Art into contact with Reality when the reality is so great and noble as it is at the present moment'.³³ Despite this hostility to Modern art, the need for paintings to depict war was still recognised as an essential aspect of recording it. As Malvern states: '[p]art of the function of art was to record momentous events'³⁴ and although *The Times* insisted that this should be done 'under military control',³⁵ to ensure that anything considered unsuitable would not come to public view, they agreed that work by artists

³⁰ Malvern, p. 5.

³¹ Malvern, p. 5.

³² Kramer, p. 267.

³³ 'Artists and the War', *The Times*, 5 May 1916, p. 9.

³⁴ Malvern, p. 12.

³⁵ 'Artists and the War', *The Times*, 5 May 1916, p. 9.

‘who have seen with their own eyes, and have brought the emotions of the artist into touch with the grim or noble realities of war’³⁶ was necessary. This foregrounded the work of those artists who had witnessed the war for themselves, and their work was later to become greatly valued in the same way that the poetry of those who had fought in the war gained authority in the public consciousness over those who had not. The need to produce this work was recognised as part of the wider imperative to ensure that the experiences and suffering of those who endured it would not be forgotten. As John Rothenstein states:

While the war lasted, in short, and for a few years afterwards while the memory of it lingered, the gulf between life and art, which had widened steadily for more than a century, momentarily disappeared. Thus it came to pass that artists who had been treating trivial subjects or else had been studiously avoiding subjects of any kind, and artists who believed that the language they used was a self-sufficient end, suddenly found themselves voicing the terror, the awe, the scepticism, the disgust and the humour of vast numbers of their fellow-men.³⁷

So when the classical aspect of art is highlighted in the early pages of Young’s novel, it seems to foreground the impracticality and exquisiteness of it in such a way that seems to imply its unsuitability for what is to come:

And then the paintings: heroines and beggar maids, knights in gleaming silver-grey armour, coiling strings of flowers and loops of braided hair, emerald weeds floating under water, gauzy drapes of cloth you could see through to the wax-white glowing flesh beneath, glimpses of cavernous blue skies ... all made of paint, and light seeming to come from inside the canvas. It looked like the real world, so real, but much, much better. (p. 11).

Here, the realism of the paintings is emphasized; its ability to show the real world in all its glory, focusing on the wonder of it and ignoring the bad. The beggar maid is tucked between heroines and knights as though it is perfectly natural and acceptable. Sir Alfred

³⁶ ‘Artists and the War’, *The Times*, 5 May 1916, p. 9.

³⁷ John Rothenstein, *British Artists and the War* (London: Peter Davies, 1931), p. 21.

prefers representing the past not the present, he intends his next project: ‘*The Childhood of the Knights of the Round Table*’ to feature Riley as ‘the young Sir Gawaine fighting his way through a thorn bush’ (p. 11). It foregrounds a particular way of viewing art, as something beautiful to be admired, a perspective which will become problematized when what needs to be represented is impossible to make beautiful or heroic. That Sir Alfred belongs to the more traditional sphere of artists is emphasized when Nadine and Riley look at a painting by Van Gogh which they retrieve from a ‘large folder of reproductions that Sir Alfred kept purely, Riley sometimes thought, to sneer at – or perhaps out of fear of such a different way of doing it’ (p. 17). He is not alone in this resistance to change: ‘The paintings, to Nadine and to Riley, had been perfect, wonderful, naturally beautiful, right, somehow, and they hadn’t understood at all why people were laughing, and expostulating, and leaving’ (pp. 17-18). So despite the focus on the traditional, through Nadine and Riley’s love for the new paintings, Young’s text appears to support the changing modes of artistic representation that were being introduced during the period whilst acknowledging that such support was not universal. As Malvern illustrates:

Reviewers of *The Nation’s War Paintings*, [an exhibition which took place in 1919/20], at the time said the war had remedied a deficit in modern art, supplying artists with a subject matter of epochal importance. As a consequence, form and content had been reunified in avant-garde art and formal experimentation justified, or vindicated, by its fitness to represent the subject. Modern art had at last found a purpose. But the same arguments about topicality and relevance of the war paintings to a nation at peace were used [by some writers]... to reject the work precisely on the ground that it was motivated by subject matter and not aesthetics. War pictures did not qualify as art.³⁸

This is a concern which is evident in Barker’s texts through Kit Neville’s assertion that ‘once the bloody war’s over nobody’s going to want to look at anything I paint’ (*Life Class*, p. 239). On the one hand, artists were concerned with their ability to adequately represent the horror, whilst on the other they had to face the possibility that in doing so

³⁸ Malvern, p. 107.

they were producing work that was not going to be accepted as art because what they were experiencing wasn't what others wanted to see. In *Life Class*, Paul discusses his work with Elinor:

‘What do you draw?’

‘Oh, people at the hospital. Patients.’ His tone hardened. ‘That’s what I *see*. Though I don’t know what the point of it is. Nobody’s going to hang that sort of thing in a gallery.’

‘Why would you want them to?’

‘Because it’s there. *They’re* there, the people, the men. And it’s not right their suffering should just be swept out of sight’ (p. 175).

Paul’s words: ‘That’s what I *see*’ draws attention to his position as witness. The emphasis is on ‘see’ not ‘I’ and this focuses attention on what he is viewing, accentuating those who are suffering whilst still privileging him as someone with the vision to see it. As a witness, Paul is acutely aware of the need to effectively represent the full horror, yet he also appreciates that those images may be unacceptable to the viewing public. It is presented here as a paradox, that he must paint things as they are because that is the only ethical approach but if he does and they are not viewed by the public then they are not conveying the horrors of war then either. If he paints something more acceptable for viewing then he is still not conveying the reality of those men’s experiences. Mark Rawlinson identifies this as a central issue in representations of the First World War:

Most significantly the very possibility of vicarious suffering and of sympathy is bound up with the idea of war art, and the conviction that the reality of war must be shown to those who have not encountered it directly. Indeed, an early and central motif of the literature of war past-1914 is that knowledge of that reality cannot be, but must be, broadcast beyond the community of combatants.³⁹

This imperative to represent the unrepresentable extends beyond art to literature and

³⁹ Mark Rawlinson, *Pat Barker* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 147.

even beyond the First World War to other conflicts as other modes of representation such as film and television are considered to be similarly limited. The act of representing someone else's pain and trauma in such a public way could be viewed as an act of voyeurism and Susan Sontag suggests that 'Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it'.⁴⁰ However, Elaine Scarry argues that it is often necessary to show the suffering of others in order to give them a voice:

Because the person in pain is ordinarily so bereft of the resources of speech, it is not surprising that the language for pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak *on behalf of* those who are. Though there are very great impediments to expressing another's sentient distress, so are there also very good reasons why one might want to do so, and thus there come to be avenues by which this most radically private of experiences begins to enter the realm of public discourse.⁴¹

The representation of another's traumatic experience and ongoing suffering is not a straightforward act of relaying information. It involves a great deal of interpretation, an act which poses ethical challenges, and is necessarily mediated by the experiences of both the person attempting to convey the pain and the eventual viewer. The complexity of the task and the level of skill required to carry it out effectively underlines the importance of the work of war artists in this area.

While Paul struggles with difficult decisions about his own work, Elinor is enjoying continued success at home with her art: 'Oh, I keep going. I had three paintings accepted for the New English Gallery' (*Life Class*, p. 175). Her refusal to engage with the war does not impact her public success as an artist but it does position her as an outsider who does not appreciate the need to represent others' suffering:

'I'd have thought it was even less right to put it on the wall of a public gallery.'

⁴⁰ Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 37.

⁴¹ Scarry, Elaine, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) Tucker, Spencer, C, *The Great War: 1914-18* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 6.

Can't you imagine it? People peering at other people's suffering and saying, "Oh my *dear*, how perfectly *dreadful*" – and then moving on to the next picture. It would just be a freak show. An arty freak show' (*Life Class*, p. 176).

The italicised emphasis in her imitation of the viewers: "Oh my *dear*, how perfectly *dreadful*" has an element of humour and exaggeration. This portrays them as superficial, not taking the subject seriously, looking and then moving along without thought. How a spectator responds when faced with traumatic images in a work of art is considered by David Bromwich in his interpretation of Edmund Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757):

We are driven to sympathize with scenes of actual or fictive suffering by a delight in pain that does not "press too close" upon us. Placed at the right distance, we bestow our attention first merely as spectators, without any thought of the pangs of the sufferers.⁴²

This distancing of the spectator from the pain suffered appears to support Elinor's argument that the act of viewing is mere voyeurism. However, spectators may gain more from the experience than is immediately apparent. Bromwich goes on to suggest that: 'the attention of the spectator helps to perpetuate human nature itself. Works of art multiply the occasions for such attention, and in this rather strange sense, they humanize' although he cautions that 'It does not follow that works of art tend to edify or improve the person who comes to know them'.⁴³ He considers it necessary that people view such scenes because otherwise they would overlook the suffering of others entirely: 'Morally ambiguous tears would then become impossible, but so would the act of nursing and giving medical care to the wounded'.⁴⁴ Something which is demonstrated later in Barker's when repeated exposure to Tonks' drawings of disfigured patients helps persuade Elinor to become involved in his work.

At the heart of this issue about the role of art in war, which can be related equally to

⁴² David Bromwich, *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and Beautiful to American Independence* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

other aspects of representation such as poetry and literature, is the question of how to represent suffering without reducing it merely to transient entertainment. More self-consciously, it raises questions about Barker's own fiction and whether the enjoyment derived from reading her novels risks trivialising the representation of war. In 'Mirroring Evil', Gene Ray considers the shocking impact of the 2002 exhibition of Nazi imagery and art at the Jewish Museum in New York in the context of Theodor Adorno's admonishment that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.⁴⁵ In it he explores Adorno's later concession that art must continue because 'The excess of real suffering permits no forgetting'⁴⁶ and the difficulty artists face attempting to provide ethical representation which is devoid of aesthetic pleasure.

Whilst Adorno's argument relates specifically to the Holocaust its basic premise that representations of suffering should provide a focus for remembrance rather than visual pleasure can be explored in relation to all contemporary representations of war. Ray argues that although this had become the dominant framework, more recently artists have begun to challenge established ethical boundaries, for instance by the use of consumer icons and provocative images in their work.⁴⁷ Elinor's protestation that an exhibition of 'other people's suffering' would be 'an arty freak show' in contrast to Paul's insistence on acknowledging suffering: 'it's not right their suffering should just be swept out of sight' (*Life Class*, p. 175) shows Barker's text engaging in this debate, considering the imperative for representation against the need for sensitivity.

Barker's engagement in a debate which has particular resonance in connection to the Holocaust is interesting. Anne Whitehead points out 'a reticence in Barker's writing relating to the Second World War, and to the Holocaust in particular' and notes that Baker has spoken in interviews about the 'difficulties of representing the Holocaust for those who are not survivors or who are not Jewish'.⁴⁸ In *Another World*, for example, Barker portrays only the first, third and fourth generations of the Lucas family, the second generation which would represent the Second World War is omitted. The

⁴⁵ Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 61-72.

⁴⁶ Adorno, quoted in Ray, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Ray, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁸ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 16.

historical period in which *Life Class* and *Toby's Room* are set means that no direct reference to the later war would be expected but the dominant issues of mechanized warfare and the representation of trauma are also particularly pertinent to the Second World War. Barker's avoidance thus far in her career of direct depiction of the Second World War⁴⁹ seems to reflect Adorno's argument that the only way to represent the Holocaust is negatively. Ray explains that: 'Auschwitz is not assimilable to subjective experience, it can only enter art as a void or absence'.⁵⁰ Its impact on contemporary society is so great that its shadow extends beyond the boundaries of its explicit representation: 'In the act of omission, what is left out survives as something that is avoided'.⁵¹

Ray argues that artists have the resources to influence debates on trauma and war but that they are limited by previously established precedents:

Artistic practices and interventions can, within the limitations of their contexts, effectively put repressed traumatic material back into motion and thereby make it available for discourse. But the ability of any artist to do so declines as the links between his or her body of work and their historical referents become recognized and established.⁵²

Ray maintains that signposting a creative text as a representation of a particular traumatic event or experience lessens its potential impact because this recalls established debates rather than inspiring new ones. Viewed in this context, Barker's lack of engagement with the Second World War in her narratives could be viewed as a positive approach. Her preference for the First World War in her narratives serves not as a retreat to a pre-Holocaust culture but more as a return to the origin of the modernized warfare which allowed it to take place. Whitehead raises concerns that Barker risks generalisation and loss of historical specificity in her use of the First World

⁴⁹ As I was completing this chapter the publication of the concluding novel in the *Life Class* trilogy, *Noonday*, was announced and this takes the characters into the Second World War.

⁵⁰ Ray, p. 66.

⁵¹ Ray, p. 66.

⁵² Ray, p. 10.

War as an analogy for all contemporary conflicts.⁵³ However, rather than considering it as a generalisation it can be seen to reflect the persistence of issues arising out of the First World War into contemporary conflicts.

Violence and creativity

For those, like Paul and Neville who insist that art does have a role to play in representing war there are still more problems to overcome. If art exists purely for the visual pleasure and entertainment of its viewers then it is unacceptable to shock or distress them with visions of a terrible reality but if its function is to convey that reality, to record it, witness and preserve it, then it is essential to convey the emotion and the suffering and devastation involved; so that others can appreciate the sacrifices that have been made. An exhibition can only become an 'arty freak show' if it does not provoke some kind of engagement, if the people viewing the paintings do not gain anything from the experience.

Rather than allow their art to become compromised through balancing the restrictions on acceptable subjects with the desire to show the full horror of war, the artists apply their creativity to providing a solution:

'Well, I intend to push it as far as I can.'

'Why, what's the point? If you push it too far they won't let you show it.

Besides, you can get round it'

... 'You can. Your landscapes are bodies.'

... 'The point is, the wound and the wasteland are the same thing. They aren't metaphors for each other, it's closer than that. Anyway, you do the same thing. All those mutilated machines.'

'My machines aren't mutilated, they're triumphant.' (*Toby's Room*, pp. 233-234)

Both Neville and Paul are pushing the boundaries of artistic representation in order to convey the horror without censorship. They are showing the reality of death and destruction without actually showing the shattered human bodies which are deemed

⁵³ Whitehead, p. 16.

unacceptable. The merged devastation of landscape and humanity echoes Rod Giblett's assertion that: 'Land and body are intimately inter-related. The ways in which we talk about one are often drawn from, or couched in, the ways (and terms) in which we talk about the other'.⁵⁴ We use the same language to talk about both landscape and bodies so that these connections are made at a subconscious level when viewing the paintings. When the viewer sees the heart ripped out of the countryside it is not a huge leap to consider it in human terms. Thus, the landscapes can successfully convey a level of human devastation that would risk censor if it were represented explicitly.

As Giblett also notes, Leonardo da Vinci put forward the view that not only was there a link between the body and the earth but that the body was also a machine,⁵⁵ and this view was later expanded by Rene Descartes who 'took the distinctly modern view of the body as machine alone disconnected from the body of the earth'.⁵⁶ In this vein, Paul utilizes machines, triumphant in their destructive power, as Barker draws on the merging of man and technology which is often present in literary representations of the twentieth century. From this perspective, the devastation of the landscape reinforces the disconnection between men and the earth and aligns them instead with the machines which they use to orchestrate its destruction. In Paul's paintings, the machinery, the paraphernalia of the surgical ward becomes the focus of his paintings of the patients:

He'd painted the worst aspect of his duties as an orderly: infusing hydrogen peroxide or carbolic acid into a gangrenous wound. Though the figure by the bed, carrying out this unpleasant task, was by no means a self-portrait. Indeed, it was so wrapped up in rubber and white cloth: gown, apron, cap, mask, gloves – ah, yes, the all-important gloves – that it had no individual features. Its anonymity, alone, made it appear threatening. No ministering angel, this. A white-swaddled mummy intent on causing pain. The patient was nothing: merely a blob of tortured nerves. (*Life Class*, p. 238)

The description of Paul's painting is conveyed by the narrator so that it is not the artist's

⁵⁴ Rod, Giblett, *The Body of Nature and Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

⁵⁵ Giblett, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Giblett, p. 23.

interpretation of his work but a more critical perspective. The position of artist as witness is once again emphasized, he has seen this during 'his duties as an orderly'. However, it resists personalisation: 'by no means a self-portrait', emphasizing the dehumanising effect of war. Even where a human figure is present, it is consumed by the technology which surrounds it. This analogy is also found in Young's text when Nadine, nursing the wounded in France, observes that: 'She would continue, her body jerking and rattling, like a machine out of order' (p. 240). In addition to highlighting the reduction of the human body and spirit to that of a machine, it also simultaneously draws attention to the fragility of the human body and the corresponding fallibility of machines. The development of new technology and its successes and failures were a significant factor in the progress of the war and the extent of its devastation, and it is often linked, as it is here, with the increasing dehumanization of the individual, as the ability to destroy achieves domination over the desire to preserve life.

Rothenstein argued that the extreme nature of war brought out something in the artists which had been lacking in their pre-war work: 'Many of them revealed depths of emotion and technical powers they had not hitherto been conscious of possessing, and, stranger still, which they now possess no longer'.⁵⁷ In *Life Class*, Paul Tarrant's work benefits from the influence of war. Before the war Tonks tells him:

'Most people who come here are bursting with something they want to say, and the trouble I have with some of them is that they can't be bothered to learn the language to say it in. Whereas with you it's almost the opposite... I don't get the feeling that they're yours. You seem to have nothing to say.' (p. 29)

Tonks' analysis of Paul's paintings places the artist at odds with those around him. Whereas they have something to say but lack the skills to communicate their message, Paul has the technical skills but has 'nothing to say'. He describes the painting skills as 'language' which emphasizes the ability of artists to communicate through their work but it also draws comparisons to literary texts, linking the different forms of representation as an expression of something personal to the artist.

⁵⁷ Rothenstein, p. 22.

Paul's experience at the Slade is frustrating because he is unable to make the advancements necessary to produce great art. Once he is working at the ambulance station in Belgium it is more difficult for him to find time for drawing and painting yet it somehow slots into his new lifestyle quite seamlessly: 'Now and then something would catch his eye and he'd reach for a drawing pad, but that was as natural and unreflective as breathing' (*Life Class*, p. 157). His work seems to take on a life of his own as if his war experiences are infused within his consciousness and streaming out into his art:

My God. It looked as if it had been painted by somebody else. That was his first thought. It had an authority that he didn't associate with his stumbling, uncertain, inadequate self. It seemed to stand alone. Really, to have nothing much to do with him. (*Life Class*, p. 203)

Paul's thoughts are conveyed, not directly, but through third person narrative which reinforces his lack of control over the representation and his difficulty articulating what he sees. Now he has something to say the enormity of it overwhelms him and he lacks the language to express it in any other way than through his art. Paul's reaction that it might have been painted by a different person emphasizes the changes that have taken place so that he is not the man he was before the war. It also represents the imperative to convey what he is witnessing, which overwhelms him to such an extent that he gives himself up to it, relinquishing control. The result is that when it is finished it is the work of someone he no longer recognises.

This shows how the violence and ugliness of war had begun to intrude into the artists' world and influence their creative vision. Matthew Kieran states that: 'The pursuit of beauty was renounced, derided and left out in the cold'.⁵⁸ Similarly, Barnett Newman declares that: 'The impulse of modern art is to destroy beauty'.⁵⁹ The literal destruction of beauty by war is highlighted by Paul Fussell who talks about the 'symbolic piece[s]

⁵⁸ Matthew Kieran, *Revealing Art* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 47.

⁵⁹ Barnett Newman, 'The Sublime is now' in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 170-173 (p.171).

of ruined public architecture' in Ypres and on the Somme, as 'this eloquent emblem of what happens when war collides with art'.⁶⁰ Yet the move away from creating beautiful artwork is not a straightforward destruction of beauty. Art had always been a medium for expressing the emotional, but in order to represent the full horror of the First World War artists had to renegotiate the relationship between art and beauty and look to create a new aesthetic of ugliness. Once artists no longer aspired to produce works which were inherently beautiful to look at they were freed in their scope for representing the war, as Kieran argues:

The purpose of art, freed from the shackles of naturalism, was to change things. Art should sear, shock, unsettle, disturb, disconcert and enrage. It should awaken people from the dull slumbers of conventionality and confront them with the real world, themselves and the possibilities of change - something which modern society made them otherwise too desensitised to see.⁶¹

This opened up the possibility for artistic expression as a means of communication, whose strength lies in its ability to directly impact the emotions of the viewer by disorientating them and thus forcing them to engage more closely with its meaning.

In the narratives discussed in this chapter, the ugliness and violence of war stretched far beyond the trenches of France and Belgium and intruded into the domestic arena as well. For Riley, in *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You*, art turns ugly even before he signs up for the war after his sexual encounter with Terence. Initially, art represents an opportunity for Riley and when Sir Alfred wanted to paint him: 'Riley saw the gates of opportunity swinging open before his eyes. Beyond, he could see Better, shining in the distance like the lilies of heaven' (p. 9). His initial foray into the world of art is as an artist's model and Young fixes this as being in the classical tradition with the assertion that: 'Sir Alfred likes your face. He wants to put it in a painting, on top of a goaty-legged faun' (p. 9). His idealism is destroyed following Terence's sexual advances and, having spent the night sleeping outside in the rain, 'sleepless, angry, hungry, lonely, embarrassed, humiliated' (p. 31), Riley heads straight for the recruiting office. His

⁶⁰ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 40.

⁶¹ Kieran, p. 49.

enlistment comes about as a direct result of his rejection of the art world and everything it stands for. So for Riley it is the violent rejection of what has happened at home that pushes him into the violence of war.

In contrast, his commanding officer, Peter Locke, takes the violence of war home to his wife. Julia Locke is beautiful and any other virtues are thus overshadowed by her appearance:

Though beauty was not Julia's only quality; it could only be the first thing about her. When she entered a room, nobody thought: *There is a generous, determined, kind-looking woman*. Her kindness, her determination and her flashes of wit were, in everyday life, dazzled out of view by her rich pale hair, her tiny waist, her glowing skin, the surprise of her dark blue eyes. (p. 62)

Julia is portrayed as an ornament, a beautiful woman comparable to a work of art. Her beauty is also projected onto her surroundings; her beautiful home and garden become a way in which Julia envelops herself in the protective aura of beauty. She seeks to widen this influence to encompass her husband by using her creative talents to prepare the garden for his return, so that 'however long this terrible thing dragged on, the garden would be beautiful for him' (p. 78). Her attempt to avoid facing reality by concentrating on the domestic arena echoes the perceived idea that the Home Front was a safe haven untouched by the trauma of war. However, the unreality of this is exposed in the narrative by interspersing these more trivial concerns with the psychological trauma endured by her husband in the trenches. Just as the horror and ugliness of war intruded into the works of the artists discussed earlier, so it invades and violates the beauty of Julia Locke. Home on leave, Peter's head is full of memories of men lost in battle. The mingling of home and war are foregrounded as the language used to describe his recollections of retrieving dead soldiers emulates that used to caress a woman:

He'd carried the boys back in bits. An armful of Atkins; Bloom's head on his shoulder and his arm round his neck, resting like a woman's or a tired child's. His own long-fingered hand white against Bloom's hair, embracing the dead head to keep it from flopping. (p. 81)

Peter is unable to suppress the awful mental images from the trenches which create in him, ‘the horrible realisation that flesh, all flesh, even her flesh, was bloody meat, as cold and hideous as Atkins’s heavy cold leg’ (p. 88). The beautiful Julia becomes conflated with the horrors of war and her domestic haven is shattered and made ugly by its violence: ‘like a kind of fit – horrible, quick, desperate, violent. She found herself stiff with shock beneath him, suffocated by his chest on her face, her breasts painfully squashed, almost twisted’ (p. 84). The language of war has infiltrated Julia’s conscious as her body ‘stiff with shock’, ‘suffocated’ and distorted mirrors Peter’s experiences of war. It fuels her obsession with maintaining her own beauty as a means of pushing back the invasion of war into her life. An article in a magazine she reads declares that it is a woman’s ‘duty to use every means in her power to prevent the effect [of the war] on her beauty’ (p. 141). It is accompanied by a picture of a beautiful woman in her Red Cross uniform and serves to reinforce Julia’s insecurities, both about her own appearance and her role in the war effort. It appears to stand in direct contrast to the changes to artistic representation of the war, which were challenging boundaries and railing against the beautiful. Yet the incongruity of a preoccupation with physical beauty within the context of the wider narrative, particularly the portrayal of Riley’s injuries, suggests that it is not a view which Young seeks to endorse:

He was both ridiculous and grotesque. He didn’t look like a face at all... The top lip of his mouth, still there, the upper lip Nadine had kissed and sworn was so beautiful to her.

And, underneath, the biggest mess ... He looked like a scarlet crater rimmed with a half-formed pile of earthworks, a fallen-over pile of dirty sandbags. Grey bruising and purple swelling and black scab, hanging loose over nothing. The metal chin support, like revetting. Seams between pads of flesh running across his face like trenches, swellings like sandbags. A few loose stitches like barbed wire.

I look like fucking no man’s land. (p. 217).

Riley’s injuries are described in third person narration so that it emphasizes his inability to communicate so someone else must speak for him. The italicised outburst at the end:

'*I look like fucking no man's land*' shows Riley's frustrations breaking through in a more direct communication of his emotions. Young goes further than just attributing Riley's injuries to the violence of war, she makes them part of the landscape of war too. In the same way that artists like Tarrant and Neville in Barker's novels see the interrelatedness of body and landscape, both victims of the destructive power of war, so Young makes the same connections through Riley. As the paintings show the impact of the war through the devastation of the surrounding countryside, so Riley's face reflects the origin of his injuries. As artists turned to the devastated landscape in order to articulate the human suffering, so Young turns to iconic images of the trenches to convey the enormity of this personal tragedy. Just as Riley's facial injuries are described in terms of the landscape of the trenches, so the process of reparation draws on war analogies: 'The plaster sucked at his face like mud. He felt buried alive' (p. 232). It makes connections between the ongoing physical trauma and its origin but also emphasizes the persistent psychological trauma of injured veterans like Riley who are constantly reminded of the horrors they have experienced.

Facial reconstruction

His injuries mean that having run away to enlist in order to escape the ugliness of the art world, Riley has now succumbed to the ugliness of war and must ironically rely on the creative vision of his surgeon, Major Gillies, to reconstruct his shattered face. Reconstructive surgery is described in both *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You* and *Toby's Room* in some detail. The intricate process, which requires new structures to be put in place to construct the new face, portrays the surgeon as creator or artist. Riley is likened to a damaged statue: 'You look like a broken statue ... some young god lying around at the Acropolis' (*My Dear*, p. 232). This draws on earlier images of Riley as a model for Sir Alfred's paintings and positions his surgeon as the sculptor working to enact the repair. Like a sculptor he must work painstakingly with the material available to create the best visual image possible. Young draws attention to the creative nature of this type of surgery in the way Gillies describes his own work:

The scalpel. Cut cut cut, slide underneath with the blade to release: lift. Not much give – good. Slide over forehead, swing down, twist, position under the new jaw. It's so simple – beautiful. (p. 238)

The patient is notably absent. That it is a person being operated on is alluded to only through the references to forehead and jaw. The process is foregrounded, the person reduced to an abstract, secondary to the skills of the surgeon. Heather Laine Talley argues that this reflects society's reaction to facial disfigurement:

Be it the carnival barker who points to the sideshow performer with facial variance (the “bearded lady” or “elephant man”) or the reconstructive surgeon who describes the techniques used on a face (“grafts replace scar tissue”), disfigurement is *talked about* in ways that position people with faces defined as disfigured as objects.⁶²

The objectification of the patient together with the precise description of the surgical procedure suggests a piece of sculpture being sliced, cut and moulded into the finished product. It is focused on the process, drawing attention to its construction so that it is the act of creation which is considered beautiful, not the result.

The artistic nature of the process is further emphasized by the work of the historical character Henry Tonks, who features in both Barker's and Young's texts. Tonks' belief that anatomy is crucial for artists is well documented throughout Barker's two novels:

His eye, honed in the dissecting room and the theatre, detected every failure to convey what lay beneath the skin. ‘Look for the line,’ he would say again and again. ‘Drawing is an explication of the form.’ (*Life Class*, p. 4)

The links between art and medicine are established early in Barker's narrative when Tonks encourages Elinor to participate in an anatomy class with female medical students in order to improve her life drawing skills. In Barker's narratives, Tonks represents the unity of medicine and art and the preoccupation with anatomy which exists at the beginning of both novels, prefigures the importance of the creative role later in *Toby's Room*, when Tonks' artistic expertise is required to reconstruct the faces

⁶² Heather Laine Talley, *Saving Face: Disfigurement & The Politics of Appearance* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), p. 10.

of disfigured war veterans. In Young's novel face masks are created for the injured soldiers in Tonks' studio and 'Gillies would use the cast to consider and practise the size and shape and position of the flaps of flesh, which he would wrap around the new chin' (*My Dear*, p. 231) so that art becomes central to recovery and reparation.

The debate over realism as an artistic approach takes on a whole new dimension when considered in the context of disfigured veterans. While elsewhere in response to the war, artists were redefining the relationship between reality and art the artists involved in facial reconstruction had to apply all their innovative creativity to reproducing reality as faithfully as possible. The resistance of trauma to realist representation is problematized in the unreality of the results. When Paul first sees Neville wearing a mask he is struck by its lack of realism: 'A featureless, silvery oval hovering in the half-darkness, as if a deranged, wandering moon had somehow strayed into the building' (*Toby's Room*, p. 186). This is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's Romantic grotesque mask which has turned away from the lighthearted folk tradition so that it 'acquires a sombre hue. A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it'.⁶³ There is the sense of the mask as an absence of features rather than as a representation or replacement of Neville's face. Its craftsmanship is not in doubt but there is something about it which Paul finds disconcerting:

The mask was beautifully made, expressionless, of course, except for a faint, archaic smile. It reminded him of a kouros, except that they had no individuality and this most definitely did, though it wasn't a portrait of Neville as he'd once been. (*Toby's Room*, p. 186)

The mask is likened to a kouros, an ancient Greek statue originally used as a funerary figure⁶⁴ which emphasizes its lifelessness and suggests it is a representation of something dead, or at least irretrievably lost, which is reinforced by Paul's admission that 'it wasn't a portrait of Neville as he'd once been'. However beautifully painted the

⁶³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 39-40.

⁶⁴ David Rodgers and Dimitris Plantzos, 'Nude', *Grove Art Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy4.lib.le.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T062999>> [accessed 11 March 2015].

mask may be and however closely it may resemble the original it cannot reproduce the animation of a man's face. The result is a 'failure to convey what lay beneath the skin' (*Life Class*, p. 4), a lifeless representation which does not capture the humanity of the man behind the mask. The expressionless mask reiterates the dehumanisation and loss of identity portrayed in the destructive machines and devastated landscapes of the artists' paintings.

Bakhtin describes the mask as 'based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image'⁶⁵ so that, despite the attempt, it never actually comes close to being realistic. The incongruity of trying to recreate someone's face with a mask is highlighted by Neville's admission that the mask was created for someone else and that it aims to reproduce the face of poet Rupert Brooke, a choice which Juliet Nicolson notes did occur in some who sought to improve on their pre-war appearance.⁶⁶ Paul's uncertainty as to why they would choose to look like someone else is shrugged off by Neville who simply asks 'Why not? Why not aim for something better? You've got to admit he was absolutely stunning' (*Toby's Room*, p. 186). Neville uses humour in an attempt to deflect the issue but their exchange raises questions about the nature of one's identity if the face that is offered to the world is not one's own. The use of someone else's image is particularly significant because the face provides a very public representation of personal identity. Arthur C. Danto suggests: 'We look into the mirror not merely to see how we look, but how we expect others to see us'.⁶⁷ Similarly, bioethicist John A. Robertson states that: 'Faces are the external manifestation of our persons (our souls?). They provide information about age, gender, ethnicity, and emotional states, and help to form the image that others have of us. Indeed, our face often provides the image that we have of ourselves'.⁶⁸ The impact created by disfigurement is emphasized by Nichola Rumsey who describes it as akin to bereavement: 'Disruption to one's facial appearance, in particular, disruption to the process of recognition of oneself, has been described as a major life crisis, resulting in a bereavement reaction, with only a slow process of

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, p. 40.

⁶⁶ Juliet Nicolson, *The Great Silence: 1918-1920 Living in the Shadow of the Great War* (London: John Murray, 2009), p. 65.

⁶⁷ Arthur C. Danto, 'Beauty and Beautification' in *Beauty Matters*, ed. by Peggy Zeglin Brand (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 65-83 (p. 72).

⁶⁸ John A. Robertson, 'Face Transplants: Enriching the Debate', *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 4 (2004) 32-32 (p. 32).

adaptation'.⁶⁹ Robertson and Rumsey are concerned with the impact and ethics of facial transplants, a fairly recent contemporary development which represents a significant progression from the masks and constructive work used during the First World War. However, they all involve changing a person's appearance, creating issues for personal identity. The face is almost always on display or at least hard to conceal, as Riley and Neville discover. Therefore it offers a portrait of the owner to the outside world, something which is disrupted by replacing it with the image of someone else.

The use of Rupert Brooke's face creates a literary connection to the creativity of facial reconstruction. Portraying the mask as a construction which, however closely it resembles the original, will always lack realism, draws attention to its artificiality and foregrounds the role of imagination in representation. Through Brooke, Barker introduces a soldier poet who was distinctly different in his engagement with the war from Sassoon and Owen who were central characters in her *Regeneration* trilogy. In contrast to the pivotal role that the anti-war soldier poets played in the trilogy, Brooke's inclusion here is brief. Unlike the poets who spoke out against the war through their poetry, Brooke's was more patriotically supportive of it, 'his famous Five War Sonnets, which include "The Soldier", reflect the romantic, patriotic mood that was shared by most of the country, and indeed, Owen and Sassoon at the beginning'.⁷⁰ Due to his early death in 1915 Brooke never experienced the trenches that the others had to endure and the Rupert Brooke Society cites this as a reason why his poetry has 'sometimes been unfairly dismissed'.⁷¹ Michael Paris argues that: 'it is something of a cliché to refer to Rupert Brooke and his enthusiasm for an adventure he believed would rescue him from the dullness of everyday life. But the simple truth is that he really did speak for most of his generation'.⁷² However, Barker's use of the image of someone whose poetry glorified the war as a mask for someone hideously disfigured by it is ironic and disrupts any attempt to reaffirm Brooke as representative of his generation.

⁶⁹ Nichola Rumsey, 'Psychological Aspects of Facial Transplantation: Read the Small Print Carefully, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 4 (2004) 22-25 (p. 22).

⁷⁰ The Rupert Brooke Society, <http://www.rupertbrooke.com> [accessed 11 March 2015].

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of a War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000), p. 11.

The ironic humour foregrounds Neville's lack of choice in his change of identity. His only decision is whether to show his damaged face or attempt to conceal it. As Barker shows, there is no easy solution to his problem: 'It was hard to relate to Neville wearing that thing. And though it hid the ruin of the face it also directed the imagination towards it' (*Toby's Room*, p. 186). Paul's reaction focuses on the discomfort of those viewing Neville rather than on the recipient of their stares. His inability to hide is emphasized since the presence of the mask invites people to imagine the disfigurement beneath. However, it does provide a partial shield since it conceals any emotional response to the stares. This appears to give Neville power: 'behind the mask anything was possible. Neville could say – and quite possibly do – *anything*' (*Toby's Room*, p. 187). The face is a gauge for human interaction and the mask removes that so that the person behind it becomes an enigma. The mask provides a physical barrier so that in this instance, art is concealing reality rather than communicating it. Neville uses this: 'He waited until every eye in the room was fixed on him, and then he took off the mask' (*Toby's Room*, p. 191). In response 'Paul stepped in front of Neville, though whether to shield him from their reactions or them from the sight of him, he didn't know' (*Toby's Room*, p. 192) in effect replacing the mask that Neville has just removed with his own body. His reaction reinforces the difficulty faced by those who are visibly disfigured in trying to reintegrate themselves into society. It raises the question of who the mask is designed to protect; the deformed veteran or the general public. This issue is echoed, with obvious bitterness, by Riley in Young's text when on hearing the war has ended he states that: '*It's rather uncouth of us to be such living reminders that ... aspects of the war are not over at all and never will be*' (*My Dear*, pp. 263-4). Not only will Riley and Neville have to live with the legacy of war for the rest of their lives but they have become a constant reminder to those around them. The issue that Neville envisaged earlier in relation to his art: 'Nobody wants to look at a nightmare once they've woken up' (*Life Class*, p. 239) now manifests itself through his own body as his injuries become another powerful form of representation.

Yet sympathy for Neville is potentially undermined by the portrayal of the incident as some kind of gruesome game, suggesting he was more in control than it first appeared: 'Perhaps Neville had always intended that dramatic sweeping aside of the mask' (*Toby's Room*, p. 192). Paul does not want to be confronted by Neville's trauma and re-

contextualises it so that from his perspective Neville maintains control. However, as Scarry affirms, pain is an inherently powerless phenomenon:

Either it remains inarticulate or else the moment it first becomes articulate it silences all else ...Nothing sustains its image in the world; nothing alerts us to the place it has vacated. From the inarticulate it half emerges into speech and then quickly recedes once more. Invisible in part because of its resistance to language, it is also invisible because its own powerfulness ensures its isolation, ensures that it will not be seen in the context of other events, that it will fall back from its new arrival in language and remain devastating. Its absolute claim for acknowledgment contributes to its being ultimately unacknowledged.⁷³

Scarry emphasizes that even when pain tries to manifest itself, it is doomed to failure not only because it resists the language to do so but because, without context, it is invisible. The suffering of the individual, then, becomes overwhelmed by the representation of the event in which it takes place. It is the increased focus on the individual within these events that allows contemporary historical novelists to give victims a voice whilst simultaneously reiterating their difficulty articulating their suffering. Although taking off the mask and forcing others to confront his injuries seems powerful, that power recedes almost immediately to become more pain. The pain cannot be externalised because it remains resistant to representation. The laughter which Paul perceives as evidence of Neville's manipulation is a form of hysteria which reinforces his powerlessness rather than undermining the authenticity of his trauma.

Neville's face has become another medium to represent the war, producing the shocked reaction which he aspired to with his paintings. He is acutely aware of the irony of becoming the subject for art: 'Drawn by bloody Tonks. What a fate' (*Toby's Room*, p. 170). Neville finds the role reversal from artist to subject difficult to accept since his intention had been to actively represent the war as an artist. Becoming the passive patient, submitting to the demands of others, is not something he welcomes. Mark Rawlinson states that: 'Patients may be passive, but artists should be agents, exerting

⁷³ Scarry, pp. 60-61.

power, rather than being instruments of external forces'.⁷⁴ Here, Rawlinson reflects on W. B. Yeats' justification for omitting Wilfred Owen's poems from his 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* because they represented passive suffering which he did not consider a valid subject for poetry.⁷⁵ However, despite their implied passivity as patients, the physical manifestation of the war shown in Neville and Riley's faces provides a powerful representation of the destructiveness of war, subverting any contention that they have nothing to say on the subject.

As I have already shown, Barker explores this debate about the passivity of war through Elinor: 'It's unchosen, it's passive, and I don't think that's a proper subject for art' (*Life Class*, p. 176). Yet this argument is significantly undermined in *Toby's Room* by the work that Tonks and other artists are doing in association with Gillies. The importance of the reconstructive work strongly suggests that *there is* more than one role for art within the framework of war. Henry Tonks is only mentioned occasionally in Young's narrative but plays a much larger role in *Toby's Room* where his pen-and-ink drawings are used to assist Major Gillies in the reconstruction process. Although the drawings have a medical function they are still works of art, albeit unconventional ones, something which is emphasized when Elinor first views them:

Elinor went across to the table and looked at a pen-and-ink drawing of a patient with a gaping hole in his cheek. Presumably, Tonks's medical drawings would be done in pen and ink – ironic, really, since he'd never made any secret of how much he hated that medium. In fact, he'd described it to her once as the least forgiving medium an artist could work in, calculated to expose every flaw in draughtsmanship. Yet she'd have recognized this as Tonks's work from the purity of the line alone. (p. 138)

Her instinct is to assess the drawings as art. She is drawn not to the wounded face but to the medium in which it is drawn. In doing so she highlights the skill required and reinforces the necessity of having talented artists involved. The versatility and adaptation of artistic talent is foregrounded as Tonks applies his skills not to the

⁷⁴ Rawlinson, p. 149.

⁷⁵ Rawlinson, p. 149.

representation of war but towards removing its visual record from the faces of its veterans.

The enormity of this task is illustrated by the wall of portraits in Tonks' office:

[A] whole wall full of portraits of men with hideously disfigured faces. One of them, the man with no jaw, she recognized from the corridor. Individually, each portrait would have been remarkable; displayed like this, row upon row, they were overwhelming. (*Toby's Room*, p. 138)

The number of patients involved and the extent of their injuries shocks Elinor. Their suffering is made personal by her recognition of one of the men as someone she saw earlier. It brings her face-to-face with the war that she has been steadfastly trying to avoid and it does so through the medium which she used to enact her avoidance. Elinor is forced to confront the war and its casualties and consider its impact. She does this by evaluating its effect on Tonks' art:

Were they portraits, or were they medical illustrations? Portraits celebrate the identity of the sitter. Everything – the clothes they've chosen to wear, the background, the objects on a table by the chair – leads the eye back to the face. And the face is the person. Here, in these portraits, the wound was central... There was no point of rest; no pleasure in the exploration of a unique individual. (*Toby's Room*, p. 138)

Elinor must accept that the boundaries between art and science have been breached in an attempt to respond to the effects of the war. Medicine and art have come together as anticipated in Elinor's earlier participation at the anatomy class, only this time it is medicine which is reliant on art for an indication of accurate form rather than the other way round which is indicative of the need for adaptation and change due to the extreme circumstances of war. Here the traditional role of art has been surpassed by a practical necessity and the changing focus is illustrated in the way Elinor's gaze is drawn to different aspects of the drawings. Whereas a portrait would be carefully staged to draw the eye towards the face there is no need with these patients as the wounds dominate the

images so that the patient's identity is overshadowed. Elinor confides her concerns to Tonks:

‘I don't know what I'm looking at – a man or a wound.’

‘Both, I hope.’ (*Toby's Room*, p. 139)

His response indicates the delicate balance necessary in dealing with disfigured patients so that the dehumanising effects of war are not allowed to intrude into recovery. In this way, those like Tonks and Gillies who were involved in the reconstructive process are fighting their own battle against the ravages of war and providing a new form of representation in the faces of the men they work on.

Conclusion

Elaine Scarry states that: ‘even the artist – whose lifework and everyday habit are to refine and extend the reflexes of speech – ordinarily falls silent before pain’.⁷⁶ What the novels discussed in this chapter show are artists attempting to give a voice to those silenced by pain and trauma, including themselves. They seek to ensure that their suffering does not fade silently away into obscurity, but is forced upon and remains in the public consciousness through their paintings. But more than this, those involved in the reconstruction surgery are contributing to enabling these men to literally regain their own voices and making it possible for them to face the world again. Scarry draws attention to the lack of representation of physical pain, which she finds particularly striking given the predisposition of literature and art to represent psychological trauma.⁷⁷ This is why the focus on the visual and aesthetic in these novels challenges the reader to look anew at the extent of trauma suffered during the war. Although all three texts deal equally with the psychological trauma of war, since it is rarely absent in the case of physical suffering, they emphasize the importance of recognising it within those who are visibly disabled through conflict. Those who suffer from physical manifestations of trauma would seem to be harder to hide away or dismiss than those suffering from psychological trauma, yet that is exactly what society does when they are shut away in hospitals and segregated by restricting their involvement with the

⁷⁶ Scarry, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Scarry, p. 11.

wider community, thus forcing them to the periphery of society, both physically and emotionally.

These novels show their young protagonists become an integral part of the war process: fighting it by actively serving in the armed forces; supporting it as nurses; representing it as artists; and helping to repair the damage as part of the process of facial reconstructive surgery. Even those, like Elinor and Julia, who seem to reside outside the arena of war become sucked into it: Elinor through the death of her brother and her work with Tonks; and Julia through the violence of her husband due to his war trauma. It becomes clear that there is no escape from total war, since it invades the domestic community too. Both Barker's and Young's narratives raise important questions about the impossibility of choosing to ignore or remain outside the influence of the war. The overriding implication seems to be that there is ultimately little or no choice about becoming involved, since even those characters in the texts who attempt to do so are eventually drawn into it in one way or another.

This compulsion to become involved in war provides an analogy for the creative imperative to represent it, despite its resistance. In their narratives both Barker and Young engage in the debate about whether art and artists have a role to play in representing the war and explore their obligations when doing so. They consider the moral and ethical issues surrounding the depiction of war by examining the choices made by individual artists. The decision making and construction behind the creative process is foregrounded by considering the opportunities and restrictions applied to artists and in the innovative imaginative work of those involved in facial reconstructions. Issues of representation dominate these narratives so that both authors establish a framework in which to self-reflexively explore the role of literature as a form for representing trauma and conflict, considering its powerful potential but also revealing its limitations.

In her narrative, Barker places her female protagonist, Elinor, in opposition to the two male protagonists in her determination to avoid engaging with the war. This positions her as an outsider, reflecting her status as a non-combatant woman. In her portrayal of Elinor, then, Barker invites comparisons with the persistent neglect of the work of non-

combatants, particularly women, in the canon of First World War literature. Furthermore, this self-consciously explores the role of contemporary authors with no personal experience of the war and reaffirms the importance of providing wider, more diverse perspectives in order to more fully understand the implications of war on society.

The impact of the war is reflected in the structural form of all the novels by dividing them into before and after. In Young's narrative, this is also shown figuratively as the inability of classical artistry to represent the new reality is foregrounded in the destruction of Riley's model features. In all three novels, the extent of the transformation taking place in society is emphasized by the effect of the war on the young artists and their work. It highlights the need for innovation and change in artistic representation in order to respond to the new challenges provided by the First World War and emphasizes an ongoing need for inventive and original approaches in contemporary responses to war.

The persistence of trauma is emphasized in the novels by the inability to erase war from the bodies, and minds, of its disfigured veterans. The portrayal of facial reconstruction mirrors the process of representing war, articulating its problems and limitations and emphasizing its resistance to adequate representation. There is an allusion to intertextuality in facial reconstruction, as the artists and surgeons draw on what already exists in order to build on it and create something new, and Barker creates an explicit literary connection through the use of Rupert Brooke's image on face masks. Furthermore, the painstaking process of attempting to reconstruct disfigured faces, shown by both authors, attests to the difficulties inherent in trying to move forward after the war. It reinforces the potential role for creativity in facilitating this process of reparation and survival following conflict, by allowing both survivors and members of the wider community to work through their experiences of war.

Chapter 3: Reimagining the War Hero

‘Jack fell as he’d have wished,’ the Mother said,
And folded up the letter that she’d read.
‘The Colonel writes so nicely.’ Something broke
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.
She half looked up. ‘We mothers are so proud
Of our dead soldiers.’ Then her face was bowed.

Quietly the Brother Officer went out.
He’d told the poor old dear some gallant lies
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt.
For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes
Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,
Because he’d been so brave, her glorious boy.

He thought how ‘Jack’, cold-footed, useless swine,
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he’d tried
To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care
Except that lonely woman with white hair.

‘The Hero’, Siegfried Sassoon

In this poem, Sassoon expresses his anger at the lack of civilian awareness of the reality of war which is inherent in the instinctive veneration of its participants. Patrick Campbell suggests that it is usually ‘the nature of trench warfare that precludes the possibility of heroism’ in Sassoon’s poetry but that the focus here on the fighting spirit of an individual soldier represents an attempt to ‘explode the journalistic fiction of universally courageous behavior by the “British Tommy”’.¹ Nearly a century after it began, there is still a great deal of anger and resentment about the First World War and the enormous loss of life that ensued but this has not impeded the veneration of the soldiers who fought in it. As historian Dan Todman points out, the way in which

¹ Patrick Campbell, *Siegfried Sassoon: A Study of the War Poetry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1999), p. 117.

veterans of the First World War are remembered is often in conflict with public perceptions about the futility of the war itself:

The rhetoric associated with veterans emphasizes the heroism and sacrifice of individuals in a manner seemingly at odds with the war's popular reputation as a futile, mistaken, misfought conflict... For most men, that experience—whatever else it was—was not ennobling at the time. Yet ninety years later their participation and survival has turned these men into saints and heroes in popular culture.²

This highlights a distinct dichotomy between perceptions of the war itself, as a futile conflict lacking in glory, and the men who fought it, who are remembered as heroes. In this respect, literature tends to follow popular discourse and the portrayal of the lost or returning soldier as a heroic figure is common in literary representations of the First World War. Whereas its generals have attracted contempt for their role in the conduct of war, ordinary soldiers are more often portrayed as victims of war, heroically prepared to lay down their lives for their country. Recognition of their heroism is reinforced in popular culture through ongoing acts of memorialisation and remembrance at the cenotaph and war memorials. The Royal British Legion estimates that there are more than 100,000 war memorials in the United Kingdom including the Cenotaph which stands as a central symbol of national mourning and the more recently erected National Memorial Arboretum: 'a park of trees and memorials devoted to the concept of Remembrance.'³ Similarly, simply surviving, however emotionally or physically damaged the returning soldiers might be, represents an act of endurance and courage which merits admiration from those at home.

The remembrance of those involved in conflict in this way is not entirely altruistic. Victor Quimette argues that war heroes are 'the product of social needs and forces',

² Dan Todman, 'The First World War in Contemporary British Popular Culture', in *Untold War: New Perspectives on First World War Studies*, ed. by Heather Jones, Jennifer O'Brien and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 417-442 (p. 423).

³ The Royal British Legion, 'Memorials' (London, 2012) <<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/we-will-remember-them/memorials/>> [accessed 18 July 2012].

reinforcing prevailing orthodoxies⁴ and Robert H. MacDonald pronounces them a ‘distraction from the harsh facts; presenting a different and more dramatic reality’.⁵ In her study of the treatment of New York firefighters following 9/11, Elizabeth Goren argues that society makes heroes out of these men to fulfil a need in the general psyche rather than solely as recognition of those involved:

The heroes created out of national catastrophes are a barometer of the collective’s moral and emotional state and conflicts. How the image of the hero evolves over time tells us more about the psyche of the society at any given moment than about the individual or group identified as the hero.⁶

She suggests that the creation of heroes comes out of a sense of helplessness and helps people achieve relief from their inability to prevent or ease the suffering of others. This concept of the hero as constructed for the benefit of society is reflected in Rousseau’s writings. As M. W. Jackson states in his analysis of Rousseau’s essay on heroes and heroism, Rousseau ‘causes us to see that social necessity, not moral excellence, recommends the hero’.⁷ Identifying survivors as heroes creates a positive aspect to trauma within the public consciousness and provides an impetus for society to recover.

The word hero derives from the Greek, *hêrôis* and Dean A. Miller draws attention to its use in in Homer’s *Iliad*.⁸ As Miller points out, Homer’s use of the word hero is ambiguous, used to mean any free or significant man whilst still imbuing his central characters with an ‘extraordinary heroic-epic status’ influenced by the gods.⁹ The concept of the universal hero can be seen as originating from the more archaic lexical usage making anyone involved in conflict a hero. Yet in its modern usage it still indicates an elevated status compared to other men and can reflect the perception that

⁴ Victor Ouimette, *Reason Aflame: Unamuno and the Heroic Will* (London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 13.

⁵ Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors or Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 81.

⁶ Elizabeth Goren, ‘Society’s use of the Hero Following National Trauma’, *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 67 (2007), 37-52 (p. 37).

⁷ M. W. Jackson, ‘Rousseau’s Discourse on Heroes and Heroism’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 133 (1989), 434-446, (p. 438).

⁸ Dean A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 2000), p. 70.

⁹ Miller, p. 3.

those doing their duty in combat are nobler and braver than those who do not. There continues to be an ambiguity and a degree of uncertainty about the nature of heroism in contemporary thought and this has been further compounded by the influence of two world wars. In particular, Miller argues that the image of the strong, dominant warrior hero was problematized by the idolization of prominent figures in Nazi Germany so that although ‘Heroism has no specific susceptibility to moral judgment ... it is easy nevertheless to identify a “bad” heroism in all of this—or heroism in a bad cause’.¹⁰ This dilemma is also reflected in Primo Levi’s suspicion of hero worship which he denounces ‘for fostering illusions, dishonesty, and moral inertia’.¹¹ Victor Brombert argues that ‘[t]he moral nature of the hero has been the subject of considerable dissension’ so that while some, such as Thomas Carlyle and Joseph Campbell view the hero as a role model capable of putting others before himself, others such as Johan Huizinga see the hero as more self-serving and in pursuit of personal glory.¹² This raises the issue of context in determining heroism and mutes the possibility that whether someone can be considered a hero might change over time as prevailing perspectives change and as the tendency to apply moral scrutiny to the concept increases.

Some early First World War narratives explore the concept of heroism by placing the coward in opposition to the idealized warrior hero. In her analysis of autobiographical responses to the First World War, Christina Pividori argues that ‘[t]he trope of the soldier as a warrior hero’, which was the ‘dominant paradigm in the literary construction of the heroic masculine ideal’ before the war contrasts against the cowardly other and becomes ‘irreversibly fragmented’ as a result of the devastation of modern warfare.¹³ In her exploration of the literary portrayal of the malingerer, the deserter and the psychologically injured soldier in A. P. Herbert’s *The Secret Battle* (1919), Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* (1929) and Frederic Manning’s *Her Privates We* (1930) she observes ‘the progressive decline of the Victorian heroic rhetoric’ together with ‘the presence of a cowardly countertype threatening to weaken

¹⁰ Miller, p. 52.

¹¹ Victor Brombert, *In Praise of Antiheroes: Figures and Themes in Modern European Literature 1830-1980* (Chicago, IL; London: Chicago University Press, 1999), p. 5.

¹² Brombert, p. 4.

¹³ Cristina Pividori, ‘Resisting the Hero’s Tale: The Trope of the Cowardly Soldier in the Literature of the Great War’, *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 13(2014):111-131.

and destabilise it'.¹⁴ She suggests that the 'boundaries between courage and cowardice are now less clear and more questionable' and that rather than existing in opposition, 'courage and cowardice coexist in the most complex and interesting works of war fiction'.¹⁵ Brombert agrees that the 'lines of demarcation separating the heroic from the unheroic have become blurred' although he identifies such a trend as early as the nineteenth century:

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature is moreover crowded with weak, ineffectual, pale, humiliated, self-doubting, inept, occasionally abject characters – often afflicted with self-conscious and paralyzing irony, yet at times capable of unexpected resilience and fortitude. Such characters do not conform to traditional models of heroic figures; they even stand in opposition to them. But there can be great strength in that opposition. Implicitly or explicitly, they cast doubt on values that have been taken for granted, or were assumed to be unshakable.¹⁶

Although they disagree on the timing, Brombert and Pivodori agree that the use of characters who subvert the paradigmatic hero allows authors to challenge conventional modes of thinking and suggests new frameworks in which the concept of the hero can be explored.

In this chapter, I consider four contemporary novels which reflect the blurring of boundaries between heroism and cowardice in their representations of First World War veterans: Pat Barker's *Another World*; Elaine di Rollo's *Bleakly Hall*; Nigel Farndale's *The Blasphemer*; and John Boyne's *The Absolutist*. Although these contemporary fictional narratives continue to portray veterans of the First World War as worthy of honour and remembrance they subject the actions of certain individuals during war to increased scrutiny and problematize the concept of the universal war hero. They draw attention to the complexity of the distinction between hero and coward and scrutinize the difficulties inherent in representing the war hero. They go beyond showing heroism

¹⁴ Pivodori, p. 127.

¹⁵ Pivodori, p. 128.

¹⁶ Brombert, p. 2.

and cowardice in co-existent opposition to reveal the courage in those who act against the norms of heroism while scrutinizing the morality of those routinely considered heroic. Through their concern with the way that the character and behaviour of individuals during times of conflict are represented, these contemporary authors engage with the emerging distinction between the culturally constructed image of the lost or returning hero and the nature of individual acts which might, or might not, constitute bravery.

It is notable that the irrelevancy of applying moral judgements to those considered heroic is raised repeatedly in the studies mentioned yet it is the decency and integrity of those involved in war which comes under scrutiny in the novels explored in this chapter. They take as their protagonists not the traditional hero, but those who are normally considered cowardly such as deserters and conscientious objectors, and those who are unable or unwilling to speak of their actions during war for fear of censure. They conflate aspects of heroism and cowardice so that they no longer exist in opposition but are foregrounded to reveal dual aspects of the same person and thus suggest that courage exists not only in the actions of the strong warrior type but in those outside this idealized model. In doing so, they ask their readers to reconsider the image of the war hero and to scrutinize the judgements society makes on both collective and individual behaviour during wartime.

Unlikely heroes

While the imperative for a nation to remember those who gave their lives for their country during conflict in a positive light is an understandable one, for those who have survived these conflicts the issue is far less straightforward. It is not only the word hero that originates from the Greek but the concept of the powerful returning warrior hero. Nancy Sherman points out that:

Historically, the image of the returning warrior has been idealized. We owe something of this to the Greeks. The perfect Greek body goes to war and returns

home nearly as perfect. That is how war is often depicted. It does not shatter the body or psyche of the warrior.¹⁷

The breaking down of this idealized notion of the perfect returning warrior has been evident in literature about the First World War since the 1920s when veterans like Sassoon and Robert Graves began publishing their versions of events. Similarly, the psychological impact of wartime service has become a core trope in literature about the war. Fictional narratives which depict the traumatised veteran span the twentieth century and are seen in canonical war texts such as Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and later, Pat Barker's *Regeneration*. The depiction of those with shattered bodies has been less evident in fiction but contemporary authors have, as I have shown in chapter two, begun to redress this imbalance by representing those left physically disabled and disfigured by war. The focus has turned from the triumphant warrior to the traumatised individual and in some contemporary narratives the portrait of the soldier as inevitable hero has also come under scrutiny.

The associations between Bleakly Hall and the First World War are established early in the narrative with the ironic parody of Kitchener's recruitment slogan in the advertising pamphlet which Monty holds in her hand on arrival: 'Bleakly Hydropathic welcomes YOU'.¹⁸ Inside, the alignment of war and hydro continues as images of the trenches are reflected in its maze of watery tunnels complete with duckboards and wooden signposting so that in entering the hydro the characters are stepping back in time, re-immersing themselves in the environment of war. The hydro is portrayed as a Gothic haunted mansion, a place to which the various actors are drawn together so that, unlike in Barker's narrative where the spectre of the past radiates outwards from the house at Lob's Hill to encompass subsequent generations, the traumatic experiences in Di Rollo's novel focus inwards as those involved are brought together and forced to confront their pasts. The hydro setting, thus, provides a closed environment in which

¹⁷ Nancy Sherman, *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2010), p. 199.

¹⁸ Elaine Di Rollo, *Bleakly Hall* (London: Vintage, 2011), p.1. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

the actions and events of the war are re-imagined, decisions re-examined and their consequences scrutinized.

There are no idealized warriors in the veterans drawn together in *Bleakly Hall*. The crumbling hydro path in which it is set is, like its protagonists, a shattered version of its former pre-war self. Here, the behaviour of the participants of war comes under scrutiny since the actions of its protagonists seem to be anything but heroic. Nurse Montgomery, known as Monty, smothered her friend Sophia during an air raid and Peter Foxley was ordered by his commanding officer, Grier Blackwood, to kill their comrade as he lay dying in the trenches. Yet the way that the narrative portrays these events makes it clear that it is impossible to unilaterally denounce any of them for their actions. Instead it tends to show their decisions as courageous and sees them as victims of the complex circumstances of war.

Di Rollo controls the way in which the true nature of Monty's and Foxley's wartime experiences are revealed in *Bleakly Hall* by the way the third person narrator withholds information. By allowing her readers to form their own opinions of the characters before their wartime secrets are slowly revealed, it becomes clear that although much of the narrative is shown from Monty's perspective and appears to cast Captain Foxley as the villain, his character is much more complex. Dr Slack tells Monty that 'Ghosts ... [are] everywhere at Bleakly' (p. 14) and the spectre of cowardice seems to haunt the health hydro from the beginning:

'Coward!' The voice was the merest whisper, so faint that Monty was not quite sure she had heard it. But there it was again, as faint as the rustle of fallen leaves, but a whispered voice nonetheless. 'Coward.' ... 'Coward!' screamed the voice. 'Coward! Coward!' (p. 23)

The disembodied voice foreshadows the accusations which come to the fore later in the narrative about the actions of its protagonists during the war, although later it is revealed that the voice is neither ghostly nor accusatory but simply Foxley's guilty lament for his dead comrade, Sergeant Coward, transmitted through the water pipes which run throughout the hydro. Coward's name, like Foxley's moans, echoes through

the narrative as a lasting accusation against those responsible for his death as well as issuing a satirical challenge to the idea of the universally courageous soldier, although the narrative suggests his behaviour belied his name: ‘Sergeant Coward was openly dedicated to killing as many Germans as possible’ (p. 157). The ambiguity shown through Coward’s name parallels the representation of Captain Foxley, who, ultimately, turns out not to be the archetypical villain that earlier parts of the narrative suggest he is, as a far more complex personality emerges: ‘He’s a hero *and* a villain. He’s the bravest man I know, but also the greatest coward’ (p. 245). Foxley is revealed to have acted quite heroically when he saved Curran Blackwood’s life. Curran tells Monty that:

‘He pulled me out of a shell hole and brought me back to the lines. I’d never have got through the night stuck out in no-man’s-land waiting for the stretcher bearers. His behaviour might be not quite what I approve of these days, but he’s always welcome in my home. He always will be. It’s no more than I owe him.’
(p. 151)

The importance of context in the decision to kill is emphasized when Monty is given the opportunity to let Foxley be mauled to death by a bear at the zoo: ‘[w]ould it not be a fitting outcome if he were mauled to death on the very spot where he and Sophia had met?’ (p. 296). The last paragraph of chapter twenty-seven is deliberately ambiguous:

Captain Foxley was on his knees in the dust. The bear seemed to have made up its mind about the violence of its character and was lumbering forward, its legs akimbo, its jaws snarling. Monty looked at the revolver in her hands. (p. 296)

For a brief moment the reader is asked to believe that Monty may have killed Foxley. However, the next chapter reveals that Monty has not taken revenge for the death of her friend by shooting Foxley, nor killed the predatory bear to protect him, but rather succeeded in preserving the lives of both by firing a warning shot into the air. In different circumstances, then, Monty and Foxley are capable both of saving or ending the life of another. Viewed in isolation the actions of Foxley and Monty in killing their friends does not make them seem particularly heroic yet once the full circumstances are revealed and when their other actions throughout the narrative are taken into

consideration it disrupts the dichotomy between hero and villain and raises the possibility that they might be rather unlikely heroes after all.

Similarly, in Barker's *Another World*, the idealized portrait of the returning veteran as unambiguous hero is challenged through the portrayal of Geordie Lucas. While others insist on enshrining his actions in public memory, Geordie eschews the label war hero and avoids remembrance ceremonies, since remembering means facing his guilt for killing his brother. He '[w]ould walk a mile out of his way to avoid passing the war memorial'.¹⁹ Like *Bleakly Hall* the narrative is mainly set after the war but employs analepsis to show events during the war. The retrospective presentation set alongside the more contemporary interpretation of events makes it possible to explore the lasting impact created by the actions of the protagonists in both texts as part of the framework in which war is remembered and how the notion of the war hero is constructed.

In *Another World* Barker offers a different perspective on the veteran war hero. Geordie, unlike Foxley and Monty is portrayed as a heroic figure from the beginning of the narrative. In many ways he is represented as the typical war veteran. His continuing trauma is shown to result in nightmares and hallucinations and he is portrayed working with a war historian, Helen, to record his memoirs. Although it seems that the narrative will follow the familiar trajectory so that as Geordie survived the horror of the trenches he will inevitably be a returning, even if reluctant, hero, Barker confounds this straightforward association when it becomes clear that Geordie's story is more complicated. The revelation that Geordie killed his brother threatens to change the positioning of him as returning hero within the narrative. The circumstances of the killing are portrayed ambiguously and although the narrative does not condemn him outright for his actions the juxtaposition of Geordie killing his brother with the other fratricidal events in the narrative shatter the possibility of representing Geordie as an unambiguous returning hero. Like Di Rollo, Barker's narrator withholds information so that the reader remains unaware of the killing until the characters of Geordie and Nick are well established. This encourages empathy with them both and produces a reluctance to accept Geordie's actions as criminal after the revelation. Yet the imprint

¹⁹ Barker, Pat, *Another World* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 57. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

of past events on the present and the possibility that Gareth may kill Jasper underscores the narrative and reinforces the enormity of Geordie's fratricide before it is revealed to the reader.

Barker, like Di Rollo, explores the difficulty of representing history when the details of events remain partial or obscured, whether because they are repressed deliberately for fear of censure or unconsciously as a result of trauma. Barker shows the process by which Geordie's story is constructed and becomes part of public memory. Mark Rawlinson argues that in *Another World*, Geordie 'has a prominent social function as a vehicle of memory in a contemporary culture of remembrance'.²⁰ Through his longevity he has come to represent not only himself but all of those who were there so that as Sharon Monteith points out, 'Geordie is at one and the same time unusual and representative'.²¹ As such his stories are sought after and his public speaking engagements allow him to communicate his wartime experiences to a new generation as Barker shows him becoming part of the historical record:

[A] scrapbook for cuttings of his public appearances. Not many recent cuttings, only one in the last three months, but before that they come thick and fast. Grandad at the Imperial War Museum, talking to children in schools and colleges, on a televised trip to the battlefields, framed by the arches of Thiepval. The record of an ordinary man who, by living long, had become extraordinary. (p. 71)

The diversity of Geordie's public appearances reflects the enormous public enthusiasm for engaging with the war and in particular the perceived importance of those with first-hand experience in the process of establishing an authentic historical narrative. His positioning here as a portal for younger generations to gain information about the war contrasts with the instability of his own memories which is shown elsewhere in the novel so that Barker attests to the narrative resistance of trauma by disrupting the perception that veterans can provide more authentic or complete representations of war

²⁰ Mark Rawlinson, *Pat Barker* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.106.

²¹ Sharon Monteith, *Pat Barker* (Devon: Northcote House, 2002), p. 82.

and showing their testimony as susceptible to the same barriers as other forms of narrative.

The focus on his longevity highlights the heroism deemed inherent in the act of surviving, in Geordie's case not just the war but also most of the other First World War veterans but it also reinforces his distance from the original event:

[A]s other veterans died around him, his own rarity value grew. In the nineties he was one of a tiny group of survivors who gathered for the anniversaries of the first day of the Somme, and most of the others were in wheelchairs. There were rewards in this for him. He was sought after, listened to. (p. 82)

Because Geordie outlives most other veterans, his story gains rarity value at the same time as it recedes into more distant memory and becomes more elusive. The duration between event and re-telling is further emphasized because Geordie initially remains silent about his wartime experiences 'because what he had thought and felt at that time was not acceptable' (p. 83) and only begins to speak publicly about them when:

A later generation, fresh from a visit to *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the *Dies Irae* of Britten's *War Requiem* pounding in its ears couldn't get enough of fear, pain, etc. The horror, the horror. Give us more. Suddenly a large part of Geordie's experience was 'acceptable', though still not all. (p. 83)

Geordie's re-telling of his experiences is shown to be tempered based on his perceptions of what people want to hear so that at any time his story remains partial and mediated by the implications of disclosure. In addition to the role of popular culture, specifically film, drama and music in this instance, in this process of changing public perception of the war Barker's text also emphasizes the influence of more academic discourse through the actions of Helen, the historian who is recording Geordie's memoirs: 'She tried to get Geordie to frame his war experiences in terms of late-twentieth century-preoccupations. Gender. Definitions of masculinity. Homoeroticism' (p. 83). It shows an attempt to manipulate Geordie's memories to conform to the needs of contemporary society: 'she was so much in love with her thesis that she distorted his

experience to make it fit' (p. 86). The portrayal of the different influences on Geordie's memoirs draws attention to the constructed nature of historical narrative and the inherent difficulty in achieving a coherent and complete picture of events. Yet the impossibility of representing the event does not erase it from history as Barker shows through Geordie's bayonet scar which provides ongoing evidence of his trauma which is 'left to speak for him' (p. 163). John Brannigan argues that 'Geordie's wound is figured in the novel as an irreducible, unnarratable mark of the violence of history, a signifier of the indelibility of history as event' which contrasts with the suggestion that 'Geordie remoulds his memories of the war according to changing public perceptions' to provide a symbol of 'the monumental against the shifting fashions of what stories we tell ourselves'.²² However, whilst the scar is a constant which testifies to Geordie's trauma as real it does not elucidate the nature of that trauma or the complexities which surround it. When doctors tell Geordie he is dying of cancer he refuses to accept that this is the origin of his pain and insists that it is the bayonet wound which is causing him pain and killing him. Thus, even the bayonet wound which could be viewed as straightforward physical evidence becomes complicated because of the way Geordie represents it, imbued with feelings of guilt. Geordie's scar does not tell the whole story and nor does Geordie. Rather than testifying to the power of the monumental as a lasting form of remembrance it reinforces its mutability through interpretation and mediation.

As Barker's narrative progresses it shows a growing preoccupation with the way that Geordie's war experiences are communicated to others and how what is known about him affects perceptions of him. The way that the protagonists are portrayed in both *Bleakly Hall* and *Another World* foregrounds the ambiguity of their involvement in traumatic events during the war. Both Barker and Di Rollo draw attention to the way in which the literary protagonist, the novel's hero, is represented in order to explore issues surrounding how the concept of the war hero is constructed within the context of remembering the war. The instability of the concept comes under scrutiny in *Another World* because the central protagonist, Nick, is the fictional hero but not the war hero. While the narrative focalises extensively on Nick, Geordie remains insistently

²² John Brannigan, *Pat Barker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 127.

unavailable to the reader and the notion of the hero in the narrative is effectively problematized by this strategy. Despite becoming a central character in the narrative Geordie's inaccessibility allows him to elude categorization as protagonist just as avoiding the cenotaph distances him from the label of war hero. In *Bleakly Hall*, Di Rollo similarly destabilizes the concept of the hero by establishing a literary hero/villain dichotomy in her representation of Monty and Foxley, only to dissolve the differentiation as the narrative progresses. Monty is herself a war veteran so her construction as both literary and war hero align the two concepts yet this is undermined when she kills Sophia. Foxley, on the other hand, is set up as the villain, the cowardly seducer who took advantage of the war to entrap a vulnerable young woman. As the narrative progresses, however, his record as war hero and the esteem in which his comrades hold him is revealed to refute Monty's opinion of him. As his role in the narrative becomes more prominent his positioning changes so that he is represented not in opposition to Monty but alongside her, both literary protagonist and war hero. In her portrayal of the variance of character in both Monty and Foxley, Di Rollo demonstrates the precariousness of the hero concept and shows courage and cowardice not as characteristics which define a person absolutely but as fluctuating aspects of character which can co-exist in the same person.

Battlefield euthanasia

The sense of the surviving veteran as inevitable hero is undercut in both novels since neither Barker nor Di Rollo imbues their protagonists with any sense of their own heroism. Instead they are shown to be traumatized by guilt. This is not unusual in veterans who have lost comrades as just the process of surviving can inspire guilt. The guilt of being the lucky one, a victim of chance that allowed them to survive often weighs heavily on the minds of those who made it. As Robert Jay Lifton states:

The survivor can never, inwardly, simply conclude that it was logical and right for him, and not others, to survive. Rather, he is bound by an unconscious perception of organic social balance which makes him feel that his survival was made possible by others' deaths.²³

²³ Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.56.

The American psychoanalyst William G. Niederland was one of the principal proponents of the concept of survivor guilt. With Henry Krystal, he put forward the idea of survivor guilt as a particularly intense form of mourning: '[S]urvivor guilt is a form of pathological mourning in which the survivor is stuck in a magnification of the guilt which is present in every bereaved person'.²⁴ They went on to suggest that 'closely connected to the persistence of survivor guilt and pathological mourning is the unconscious identification with the aggressor on the part of the survivors'.²⁵ This analysis links survivor guilt with Freud's suggestion in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) that 'in the beginning conscience arises through the suppression of an aggressive impulse and that it is subsequently reinforced by fresh suppressions of the same kind'.²⁶ With this in mind, it is interesting that in both the novels I am looking at here, the survivors are shown to have been responsible for the death of a close friend or comrade. Not only are they identified with the role of the aggressor, but to some extent at least, they became the aggressor. The deaths they were involved in were not accidental and the survivors were not simply witnesses; their comrades died directly through a deliberate act on their part in what is often commonly referred to as an act of battlefield euthanasia.

Battlefield euthanasia is not a new concept. The first recorded case of an injured soldier asking his comrade to kill him is biblical; when Saul is fatally injured by the Philistines he calls on his armourbearer to kill him, although in that instance the request is refused:

Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it.²⁷

²⁴ Henry Krystal, *Massive Psychic Trauma* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968), pp. 343-44.

²⁵ Krystal, pp. 343-44.

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage Books, 1995), p.761.

²⁷ 1 Samuel 31: 4.

Although the use of euthanasia generates considerable popular debate, response to the specific issue of battlefield euthanasia is rather more muted. However, incidents of battlefield euthanasia are reported periodically in contemporary conflicts. For instance, in 2005 a United States soldier, Roger Maynulet, was convicted of ‘assault with intent to commit voluntary manslaughter’ following the shooting of an injured Iraqi.²⁸ More recently, in 2010, a Canadian soldier, Captain Robert Semrau, was accused of the mercy killing of a wounded Taliban fighter in Afghanistan. Semrau’s court martial highlighted the concept of the soldier’s pact, where it is understood that a soldier’s comrades will ‘put him out of his misery’ rather than leaving him to suffer if he is fatally wounded.²⁹

The real-life debates surrounding battlefield mercy killing have tended to focus on its legality and justification rather than the effects it might have on those involved. In contrast, its literary representation in *Bleakly Hall* and *Another World* focuses on the emotional impact on the individual by showing the significant traumatic repercussions suffered by the three protagonists who perpetrated the act. The portrayal of killing in these novels is particularly interesting when considered in the wider context of killing during wartime. Rather than conveying the widespread killing of soldiers as a result of enemy action, both Barker and Di Rollo explore a much more personal act of taking a life. This scrutinizes the act of killing during war from a new perspective, investigating the justification for taking another life within the more controversial arena of euthanasia. This is a rather disorientating strategy since it forces the reader to confront the concept of the war hero as someone who has killed another human being, an aspect of wartime heroism which is often not foregrounded. It draws attention to the different rules which are employed during wartime, when some killing is deemed both necessary and acceptable, and considers how this might affect the perceived characteristics of the war hero. The ambiguity created around the courage, or otherwise, of their protagonists reinforces the difficulties encountered when attempting to construct a definitive sense of what constitutes a war hero.

²⁸ Nancy Montgomery, ‘U.S. Army Captain is Found Guilty in Shooting Death of Wounded Iraqi’, *Stars and Stripes*, 1 April 2005.

²⁹ Michael Friscolanti, ‘No Longer Reporting for Duty’, *Maclean’s*, 124 (2011), 24.

In *Bleakly Hall* the acts of euthanasia are portrayed as compassionate, motivated by a desire to prevent further suffering. However, such altruistic motives do nothing to mitigate the trauma suffered as a result. Captain Foxley killed Sergeant Coward on the orders of his commanding officer, Grier. In the instant that the decision was made they both believed that Coward had sustained fatal injuries and that his screams were both evidence of this and a direct threat to their own continued survival if they alerted the Germans to their position. It is not only Foxley who is traumatised; Grier suffers from claustrophobia after the incident in which they are temporarily buried alive and his memories resurface quite vividly when he is forced to crawl into the pipes under the sanatorium:

Grier had done his best to forget those moments of unspeakable terror as he lay buried alive beneath the mud of Ypres. He had blotted out all thought of the endless minutes spend on his back in that tiny pocket of air, crushed by the earth, entombed in the remains of that dugout with Foxley, two corpses and a noisily dying man. He had allowed other memories to overlay those moments, burying them beneath alternative visions of horror, of which there had been many to choose from. But now, in the turbulent waters of Bleakly Hall that misplaced memory returned. (p. 334)

Grier's repressed memories re-surface when he is forced to relive his wartime experience in the water pipes under the hydro. He initially describes the repression as deliberate but when he later refers to his memories as 'misplaced' it suggests that they might have been unconsciously lost, repressed by his unconscious. This lack of control is emphasized when he 'allowed other memories to overlay those moments', not with more positive images but with 'alternative visions of horror' so that he remains submissive to the workings of his traumatized mind. Grier describes his experience as 'unspeakable terror', an event which defies narration, yet for a moment he relives it in vivid detail as though he has returned to the original event.

While Grier remembers his actions so that he can endlessly question his decision, Captain Foxley suppresses his memories of the event. The elusive nature of traumatic memories is symbolized by the bees he captures when they fly up to his room. He

collects them in individual jars, believing that each one holds a single memory which he can then recapture. Some of the bees die so that the memory is lost forever and Foxley hopes 'that those thoughts were not too important' (p. 323). Yet when towards the end of the narrative, he captures a bee which gives him the clarity he desires, he lets it go again so that he can slip back into ignorance, unable to face what he has remembered. Foxley just seems to need to forget, while constantly seeking to remember by catching the bees. It is as though his conscious and unconscious are at odds with each other; the one trying to protect the other from the secret, hidden deep in the recesses of his mind. Nonetheless the inability to remember causes its own distress. Here, it seems there is no sanctuary in either memory or forgetfulness.

Monty also agonises over whether she made the right choice in killing her friend, Sophia. Monty's guilt manifests itself in her intense anger and hatred of Foxley, so much so that she takes the job at Bleakly Hall with the intention of confronting him. However, as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that her objection is driven by her own jealousy, driven by her love for Sophia, rather than by Foxley's unsuitability. When Foxley makes it clear in his note to Sophia that he has no intention of marrying her, Monty withholds that part of his correspondence so that Sophia goes to the British Empire Hotel expecting to meet him. She refuses to leave when the Zeppelin raid begins in case she misses him. After the hotel is hit, Monty finds her friend badly burned and in order to save her from further suffering she smothers her with a cushion. The text makes it clear that Sophia is beyond help:

The heat was unbearable, her coat and hair smouldering, so that she was in danger of bursting into flames herself. She could not leave Sophia to face the fire alone. Yet even if Sophia were rescued, even if Monty could carry her out of the terrible inferno, it would be utterly impossible to save her. With such sickening burns, she would die, slowly, consumed instead by pain and shock. (p. 278)

Sophia's own whispered request: 'Look after me' (p. 278), can be interpreted as a desperate plea to Monty to enact the soldier's pact and end her suffering. Di Rollo integrates the narration of wartime events with the later period at Bleakly Hall, one

chapter at a time so that both aspects are evenly balanced against each other emphasizing their ongoing connection. Like most of the novel, the majority of the wartime storyline is focalised on Monty and relayed by an omniscient third person narrator. However, there are several chapters which focalize on Sophia to show her growing friendship with Foxley. Coming before the revelation of Monty's act of euthanasia, this makes the reader connect with Sophia as a person so that she is not just an abstract part of Monty's past but someone whose hopes and enthusiasm for life the reader has shared for themselves. The horror of her death is magnified by the repetition of words associated with fire, 'inferno', 'smouldering', 'flames', 'heat', 'burns'. Sophia's hopeless situation and Monty's response mirrors that of Foxley and Coward in the shell hole as Di Rollo sets up one act of euthanasia as a repetition of the other, reinforcing the act of killing in wartime as a recurring and deeply personal event through the horror faced by her protagonists in such an impossible situation.

Once the reason for Monty's antipathy towards Foxley is revealed the connection between their apparently separate traumatic experiences becomes stronger. The guilt which eats away at her because of what she has done is manifested in her hatred for Foxley, whom she blames for her friend's death, but this just masks her own despair, and anger at herself, for her own actions. Not only in killing her friend but in ensuring that she was put in danger in the first place. In a moment of clarity, Monty exclaims that:

'And it was all my fault. It was my fault that she was there and my fault that she waited so long. I thought I was helping her, but I wasn't. I thought I was protecting her, but instead I ended up killing her.' (pp. 284-5)

The true focus of Monty's trauma is revealed in this passage as inward facing so that her hatred of Foxley is the outward manifestation of a traumatic memory which she cannot get straight in her own head. So, unlike the other protagonists discussed here, Monty remembers her trauma quite distinctly. There are no gaps in her memory of it but her processing of it is still not straightforward and shows the complexity of traumatic memory. Cathy Caruth argues that '[f]or the survivor of trauma, [...] the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence

defies simple comprehension' and this prevents the construction of a complete narrative history.³⁰ The differing experiences of Monty, Foxley and Grier emphasize the fragmented and incomplete nature of memory in trauma survivors and show how their personal suffering continues to influence their lives and the lives of those around them after the war. Brought together at Bleakly Hall in a re-enactment of their war time experiences their repressed memories break through, reinforcing the ongoing nature of traumatic experience and its insistent intrusion into the present. It reveals an aspect of wartime killing which is not depersonalised or sanctioned as an engagement with the enemy but one which stretches the boundaries of interpersonal relationships and exacts a high price in terms of personal trauma, loss and regret.

In contrast, the portrayal of euthanasia in *Another World*, is more ambiguous. Like Di Rollo, Barker shows the representation of war experiences as partial and resistant to communication so that what is most important is often obscured or withheld only to break through later. However, as the details of past actions are revealed Barker's narrative takes a different turn. Rather than emphasizing the courage involved in killing a friend so that the image of the war veteran as heroic re-emerges intact from this rather unlikely scenario, Barker's treatment of Geordie's fratricide threatens to destroy his positioning as war hero.

Geordie, like Foxley, is unable to provide a complete narrative of his war experiences. Unlike Foxley however, he has some, fragmented memories although these are conveyed in the text in such a way as to retain their fragmented and ambiguous nature. His recurring nightmares and hallucinations can be clearly recognised as the classic symptoms of PTSD and Mark Rawlinson argues that Geordie's nightmares represent a 'return of the past' which is so strong it 'has the force to displace the reality of the present'.³¹ Barker reinforces this perception by the way Geordie's wartime experiences are relayed in the present tense. For Geordie the past is never pushed away, but continues to impinge on the present: 'it's not like he's remembering it, it's like he's actually seeing it' (p. 69). That the past is a space that he inhabits just as much as the

³⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 153.

³¹ Rawlinson, pp. 104-105.

present is shown when Nick finds him outside in the middle of a nightmare: ‘slithering across the cobbles on his elbows and knees, pausing, waiting, lowering his face to the ground, edging forward again’ (p. 160) as though still in the trenches.

This firmly links Geordie’s trauma with his experiences in the trenches but this association is complicated when it is revealed that the source of the 101 year old war veteran’s guilt is his action in killing his own brother. The circumstances surrounding this killing are ambiguously represented. Barker’s narrative never returns to past events to convey them directly so her readers must rely on the fragmented and inconsistent details which remain in the present in order to piece together a picture of events in the past. Whether it was an act of euthanasia, when his brother was already fatally injured, or an opportunistic murder fuelled by sibling rivalry and resentment is never fully resolved in the narrative, undermining Geordie’s initial portrayal as returning hero and drawing attention to the instability of narratives which rely on established frameworks and assumptions to construct representations of war.

Critics are divided on the actual nature of Geordie’s killing of his brother. Rawlinson describes it as ‘the mercy killing of his fatally wounded brother which, under the deforming pressures of maternal preference, the culture of remembrance and involuntary flashbacks arcing across 80 years, he now believes to have been fratricide’³² and Sharon Monteith’s assertion that ‘He crawled out alone into No Man’s Land and silenced him with a quick death’³³ suggests a compassionate motive. Anne Whitehead argues that:

He is haunted not by the memory of what he has done, but by a shocking and paradoxical failure of memory which produces in him a deep and painful uncertainty regarding both the truth of the past and the significance of his own action. He takes with him to the grave a suspicion that the war gave him an opportunity to act on a ‘child’s hatred’ of his brother that would otherwise have existed only in fantasy.³⁴

³² Rawlinson, p.106.

³³ Monteith, p. 83.

³⁴ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.18.

This draws attention to the incomprehensibility of Geordie's traumatic memories which is foregrounded in Barker's text because he cannot even rely on his own recollection of events. He is afraid of what he might have done but he is unable to differentiate the reality of the event from his fearful re-imagining of it. Barker shows Geordie as undoubtedly traumatized and the fractional and partial nature of the distressing memories he has endured for many years, together with his grief and sense of disorientation between past and present do not position him as a reliable witness to what happened. Nick's immediate reaction is to dismiss Geordie's confession: 'It's not true of course, it's obviously a delusion, but there's no denying the reality of his despair' (pp. 164-165) although he recognises that it is real to Geordie. Herein lies the difficulty in ascertaining a definitive account of what occurred. Caruth counsels against dismissing the kind of fragmented nightmares and hallucinations that Geordie experiences as merely symbolic:

[M]odern analysts ... have remarked on the surprising *literality* and non symbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks, which resist cure to the extent that they remain, precisely, literal. It is this literality and its insistent return which thus constitutes trauma and points towards its enigmatic core: the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event.³⁵

Geordie's hallucinations are real, an emphatic return of the past in which he relives the event repeatedly. Throughout the narrative, when Geordie is immersed in one of his flashbacks he is shown entirely consumed by it so that it becomes his present reality. It is not the literality of his experience that is in doubt in the narrative but the interpretation of it. As Barker offers no access to Geordie's thought processes the interpretation of his past experiences is mediated through others. Geordie's attempt to convey his own story, shown by his earlier public appearances and tape recorded memoirs, breaks down when confronted with this aspect of his trauma.

³⁵ Caruth, p. 5.

The fear that Geordie may not actually be a war hero at all nags away at the narrative and Nick later ponders, 'Perhaps it wasn't "survivor's guilt" that made Geordie imagine his mother had rejected him. Perhaps it was true' (p. 231)? There is certainly ample evidence in the text to support the view that Geordie murdered his brother. The focus of his guilt is clearly his brother: 'And yet his nightmares, now, are not about "the war". They're about Harry. It's Harry's name he shouts out in the night' (p. 158). When Geordie tells Nick: 'I killed Harry' (p. 164), it feels like a deathbed confession and Nick's reaction reflects his immediate assumption that Geordie is confessing to murder although there is some understanding apparent in his observation that: 'Everything from a persistent delusion sparked off by survivor's guilt to actual murder. What better place for that than on the Somme?' (p. 169). The mention of the Somme reinforces the trauma Geordie was exposed to in France and Nick's words foreground the unanswerable question, guilt induced delusion or guilt induced by murder? What Barker keeps emphasizing is that nobody knows, not even Geordie. She does not give her narrator access to Geordie's thoughts, acknowledging his trauma as beyond direct representation. Instead she shows Geordie and those around him struggling unsuccessfully to construct a complete and veracious picture of what happened. Eventually they, like the reader, must content themselves with a partial set of fragments, unsure how they might effectively be pieced back together.

Geordie's own recollections of the event are conveyed to the reader only after his death when Nick listens to Helen's recorded interviews. Even though his description of events seems clear here, Geordie does not trust his own memories of it: 'I know that what I remember seeing is false, It can't have been like that, and so the one thing I need to remember clearly, I can't' (p. 265). His guilt becomes routed in his inability to remember: 'So how do I *know* I couldn't have got him back?' (p. 265), his failure of memory defying any hope of definitive knowledge. Thus Barker maintains the ambiguity right to the end so that although her narrative succeeds in destabilising the notion of the universal hero by scrutinizing Geordie's actions during the war and casting doubt on the straightforward correlation between returning soldier and military hero it does not destroy it completely. She articulates the fear that the truth is no longer accessible once the last remaining veterans are lost and underscores this with the suggestion that it probably never was, undermining the privileging of veteran testimony

in the representation of war. What both Barker and Di Rollo deal with then is the failure of memory even in what appears to be remembered, complicated by trauma, guilt and the passage of time the details become blurred and distorted and increasingly resistant to communication. In their exploration of the war hero they emphasize the difficulty in providing a straightforward representation of those involved in the complex events of war by showing the potential for courage and cowardice, not in opposition but as existing side-by-side.

The heroic coward

Both Di Rollo and Barker take as their protagonists characters who, until their secrets are revealed, appear to conform to the usual heroic expectations for survivors of war. In contrast, in *The Blasphemer* and *The Absolutist*, Farndale and Boyne employ deserters and conscientious objectors as central characters to re-contextualise a group of war participants who are normally firmly associated with cowardice. In 1917 the prolific novelist Mrs Desmond Humphreys published an article under the penname of Rita, in which she questions the condemnation of those who spoke out against the war as cowards:

It does not do to thrust aside all the old familiar cant of “glory,” “victory,” and “patriotism.” But do those who sound these cries ever stop to question their *real* meaning, or try to understand and excuse those who, by upholding that meaning, receive only the stigma of cowardice? Yet are they cowards? Are they not rather very brave?³⁶

She uses the term ‘heroic cowardice’ to describe those who ‘stand apart from their contemporaries’ and draws attention to how ‘equally heroic it can be to look on duty with – disinclination’³⁷ and to speak out against it:

But the world stands in need of a wider vision than its own self-interest. It will have to judge one day between two sorts of heroism, and it may yet learn that its true heroes are those it has never glorified.³⁸

³⁶ Rita, ‘Heroic Cowardice’, *The English Review*, 25 (1917), 528-532 (pp. 529-530).

³⁷ Rita, p. 531.

She identifies a ‘finer sense of distinguishing between the thing itself and the labels that glorify it’ in those who oppose war, men who think for themselves rather than following the calls of others.³⁹ While she continues to recognise the heroism in those who do fight she speaks of ‘a moral courage, a courage of the soul, and also a courage of temperament, which is often so misunderstood as to come under the heading of cowardice’ and argues that ‘there is something braver in a man’s ability to stand alone and face the storm of opposition to a certain standard of action than there is in moving with the multitude – wearing its label of conventionality.’⁴⁰ Rather than viewing the cowardly and courageous as diametrically opposed, she identifies heroism in acts perceived as cowardice, arguing that courage need not be synonymous with conformity. This positions the heroic coward not in opposition to heroism but rather against the prevailing pro-war rhetoric so that, as Pivodori argues, ‘courage is no longer constructed in binary opposition to cowardice, but as a reaction against institutions and a national ideal of military comradeship’.⁴¹

In their novels, Farndale and Boyne utilise heroic cowards as their protagonists to explore how the norms of war are used to frame the concept of heroism so that obedience and allegiance are valued whereas individuality or conscience, which might inspire dissent, are discouraged. They present their narratives in quite different forms but both are preoccupied with the unreliability of representation and the way that the war hero is constructed and remembered. *The Blasphemer* foregrounds the influence of history on the lives of subsequent generations in its portrayal of several generations of the Kennedy family as the heroic past they think they know is torn apart by revelations of desertion and cowardice. In contrast, *The Absolutist* explores the role of the conscientious objector through the fictionalised autobiography of Tristan Sadler, scrutinizing the memoir as a form of representation and considering the act of speaking out and refusing to fight not as an act of cowardice but as one of great courage.

³⁸ Rita, p. 532.

³⁹ Rita, p. 529.

⁴⁰ Rita, p. 528.

⁴¹ Pivodori, p. 128.

From the beginning of his narrative, Farndale shows heroism as constructed within a framework of remembrance so that conformity to the idealized warrior is essential to achieving the heroic. He shows his protagonist, Daniel Kennedy, a civilian overshadowed by a family tradition of military heroism whose perceived inadequacy is compounded when in the aftermath of a plane crash he succumbs to an overwhelming instinct to survive and pushes past his partner in order to save himself. Farndale explores Daniel's reaction to this traumatic experience and his judgement of himself as a coward alongside the First World War trauma of his great-grandfather, Andrew, so that Daniel's actions are viewed not in isolation but within the context of established precedents and expectations. Andrew Kennedy is presumed to have been 'killed in action on the first day of Passchendaele' (p. 115) and his name is carved on the memorial at the Menin Gate, an indelible public recognition of his heroism. Yet, this straightforward representation of the past is destabilized when it is revealed that Andrew was condemned to die for desertion and had in fact survived the war.

Farndale shows the construction of the war hero as communal, within the process of a community's remembrance of its war dead, and as more personal, in a family's recognition and pride in their ancestors' contribution; although both are shown to be interconnected. The communal aspect is shown in the annual remembrance ceremony, war memorials and the awarding of medals for gallantry but these also reveal more personal connections. The recognition of bravery in the Kennedy family spans three generations and encompasses three different wars. In addition to Andrew's commemoration on the war memorial, Captain William Kennedy was awarded the VC for 'a suicidal charge on ... a German machine-gun position' (p. 114) in 1944 and Philip Kennedy, a military doctor, was awarded the MC for 'treating his comrades after a ricochet had ripped off the top half of his ear and pierced his eardrum' (p. 116) during Desert Storm. The details of these three generations of heroes are relayed to the reader, interspersed with those of the cenotaph ceremony, so that personal and communal remembrances become conflated:

There is no such thing as silence ... he noticed the chimes of Big Ben were followed not by silence but by the ambient noise; distant planes, birdsong, the shuffle of feet... But for Philip the two-minute silence was crowded in other

ways. In what amounted to a family tradition, he had not known his father, who in turn had not known his father. Neither man had grown old, as he, the son and grandson, had grown old. They had instead been frozen in youth, their likenesses recorded in a few granular photographs, their names carved on stones in foreign fields. They were strangers to one another, grandfather, father and son, yet once a year, on the same November morning, they met for two minutes in the silence. (pp. 111-2)

The process is an uncomfortable one, shown by the shuffling of feet and the everyday noises breaking through the silence. Personal and public memories coalesce as Andrew becomes ‘the Unknown Grandfather’ (p. 115) and family dynamics are reflected in the words of the remembrance ceremony: ‘Neither man had grown old, as he, the son and grandson, had grown old’ (p. 111-2). In doing so, their individuality is obscured as they become blurred into communal experience as Philip looks to an established framework for representing and commemorating the war dead in order to overcome gaps in the knowledge of his own family. Representation and reality are portrayed as malleable in order to meet expectation and conform to pre-conceived ideals.

The established division between those considered heroes and cowards is evident in Philip Kennedy’s reaction at the commemoration service:

There were no First World War veterans left to take part in the march past, although he had noticed, with a disapproving eye, a Wren in her forties, thirties possibly, holding a wreath of poppies on behalf of the SAD campaign. Shot at Dawn. The red poppies had white corners. These symbolized the white patches of cloth placed as targets over the hearts of the soldiers shot for cowardice and desertion. Philip had been asked to support the campaign but had declined. He had also argued that the SAD campaigners shouldn’t be part of the parade. They made a mockery of the men – men like his father and grandfather – who had given their lives gallantly in battle. (p. 115)

Here, he recognizes that there are no veterans left to take part in the service and so it is up to their representatives to continue to remember their involvement in the war. He

disapproves of the SAD campaign because he believes those shot for cowardice or desertion do not deserve to be remembered alongside the heroes, doing so somehow trivializes their more courageous actions. The irony of which becomes apparent later in the narrative when Andrew is revealed to have been: ‘accused of dereliction of duty, specifically of shameful desertion in the face of the enemy’ (p. 320). Philip’s position is shown as well established, having previously been asked to support the campaign and declined. The SAD representative is depicted as a WREN which provides a military authority for the campaign, reflecting a change in established reaction and her youth relative to Philip suggests a softening of opinion in younger generations and that his view does not represent the official or accepted stance.

Through this portrayal of the Kennedy’s family’s memories of war, Farndale’s narrative explores the processes by which the histories of individuals become established and the extent to which they become integrated into or diverge from the grand narratives of war. Annette Kuhn argues that ‘Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of ourselves’⁴² and in *The Blasphemer* Farndale shows oral storytelling as an essential component in the construction of family histories:

As a child he had sat at Philip’s knee and listened in awe to tales about the world wars in which his grandfather and great-grandfather had fought. One of his favourite bedtime stories, indeed, had been from a war memoir, an account of how his grandfather had posthumously won his VC, shortly after D-Day.⁴³

Even here, though, the personal becomes merged with the communal as Philip uses a published memoir detailing his father’s exploits because he does not possess that knowledge himself. Although oral history traditionally plays a significant role in the passing on of war stories from one generation to another, the nature of this medium of communication inevitably results in mediated and often incomplete narratives. Kuhn goes on to state that: ‘To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such

⁴² Annette Kuhn, ‘From Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination’, in *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, ed. by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 230-235 (p. 231).

⁴³ Nigel Farndale, *The Blasphemer* (London: Black Swan, 2010), p.28. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account – whether forgotten or repressed – as by what is actually said'.⁴⁴ Barker shows this in *Another World* through Geordie's silence when he will not speak about his experiences or is unable to do so due to failure of memory. Farndale foregrounds the gaps in the family history and shows how attempting to construct a complete narrative by filling those gaps means that Daniel is influenced not by the reality of his grandfather's experience but by a re-imagined version of events.

Farndale thus problematizes the Kennedy stories of bravery and success as deceptive representations which, in seeking to conform to established expectations of heroism, omit any potential failings or character flaws to provide an unreliable record of events. The processes through which the concept of the hero and coward are constructed are explored throughout the narrative by interweaving the experiences of Andrew and Daniel Kennedy, drawing comparisons between the two time periods. The novel begins with a prologue set in 1917 which signals its interest in the First World War and details Andrew Kennedy's arrival at the Front. The narrative then returns to the present day and events apparently disconnected from the war as it describes Daniel Kennedy's preparations for a trip to the Galapagos Islands. Subsequent chapters alternate between the two time periods so that the experiences of Andrew and Daniel Kennedy are relayed in parallel, foregrounding the similarities between their experiences and inviting comparisons.

Daniel is linked in the narrative with his great-grandfather, Andrew Kennedy, in their shared desire not to be judged a coward. Andrew's last words to his unborn son, written in a letter to his lover, Adilah, implore her to: 'tell him that his father faced his death like a soldier, gallantly like a soldier' (p. 56). William Ian Miller emphasizes the importance of courage: 'Courage has a special cachet; people care about it desperately. They compete for it and want to be known for having it'.⁴⁵ Its particular importance during conflict is emphasized in the narrative by the passage Philip reads to Daniel: 'In war, men are judged only on their bravery. Nothing else matters' (p. 368).

⁴⁴ Kuhn, p. 231.

⁴⁵ William Ian Miller, *The Mystery of Courage* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 9.

It is through his portrayal of Andrew Kennedy's experiences of war that Farndale shows that the distinction between hero and coward is not at all straightforward. He shows the harsh reality of life in the trenches through the focalised perspective of Andrew to reveal a man overcoming paralysing fear rather than succumbing to it:

When the order comes to stand by the scaling ladders, Andrew's pulse quickens and he feels his testicles contract. He is breathing heavily. Macintyre hears him and tries to smile reassuringly, but the smile comes out as a grimace. Andrew can see the fear entering his friend's heart too...

Andrew sees the CSM pacing up and down, shouting orders, but he can no longer hear him. Blood is roaring in his ears. He needs to urinate. A feeling of inertia is creeping over him. He's no longer sure he will be able to climb the ladder. All his fears, he knows, lie over these sandbags – fears not of pain but of annihilation, of ceasing to exist, of unimaginable emptiness. Yet for weeks he has been willingly drawn to this moment, pulled towards this line. (p. 139)

This passage shows a man who is terrified just like those around him but he goes out to fight despite his fear. Fear is shown not as cowardly but as a natural response.

Significantly, Andrew expresses his fear of death through the horror of emptiness associated with No-man's land: 'The name terrifies him. No-man's land. A land where men do not belong' (p. 140). This fear of emptiness recurs in Daniel's fears as his memories of the crash come flooding back, inspired by Paul Nash's painting of the First World War: 'He had been certain then that he was about to die and the imminent prospect of his death, of the nothingness it represented, the hell of not being, terrified him' (pp. 353-4). Like Andrew, he describes No-man's land as 'a godless landscape. A blasphemous place' (p. 354). As a confirmed atheist Daniel already inhabits a godless environment but the feelings which consume him are Andrew's: 'It was as if the trenches were entering his own memory; his own consciousness. They were squatting over him, giving him a terrible sense of foreboding, evoking words that had not held meaning for him since he had abandoned them as a child' (p. 354). The connection between Daniel and his great-grandfather runs throughout the narrative as Daniel's experiences in the present create a re-imagining of his grandfather's experiences during the war.

The two stories begin with the men positioned in opposition as Andrew Kennedy is considered a war hero whilst Daniel considers himself a coward. The experiences of the two men are connected through a series of similarities and repetitions so that when Andrew is revealed as a deserter and Daniel risks his life to save his daughter the dichotomy of hero/coward is destabilised and shown to resist straightforward representation. Both Andrew and Daniel Kennedy have similar visions in times of trauma. For Andrew, the vision appears to him as he lies traumatised in no-man's land:

[H]e looks up and sees a man staring down at him, his face illuminated by light, poised like a German star shell. He is a British soldier, a ranker, his uniform intact. He is standing perfectly upright, apparently oblivious to the danger. When he smiles at Andrew, his teeth are luminous against his mud-darkened features. The soldier looks at once familiar and strange. More ghost than man. He belongs here in no-man's-land. (p. 171)

The ghostly soldier, reminiscent of the famous Angel of Mons, leads Andrew across no-man's land until he reaches 'what looks like a giant turtle shell: half an empty wooden beer barrel part submerged in mud' and floats to safety (p. 173). The same experience is replayed when Daniel becomes exhausted trying to swim for help after the plane crash:

Then he saw him. A young man with a lapidary smile and protuberant wide-set eyes was treading water no more than ten yards away, gently beckoning with his hand. Delicate-boned, olive-skinned and with contour, quiddity and mass, the man was completely present, yet could not be. (p. 122)

The ghostly figure is linked to Andrew's vision by the shining teeth and he inspires Daniel to keep swimming although he lapses into unconsciousness shortly afterwards. When he comes to he has been dragged to safety by a turtle in a further connection to Andrew's experience. This provides a supernatural element to the narrative so that the past appears to be haunting the present in the same way that the ghostly figure of Muriel Fanshawe haunts the characters of Barker's *Another World*. It foregrounds the sense of unreality so that what is represented becomes unreliable because it seems impossible. As Anne Whitehead argues in relation to *Another World*, the use of the supernatural

disrupts the distinction between reality and imagination and it can thus be used to convey traumatic experiences which resist straightforward representation.⁴⁶ The shared experience of a guardian angel links Andrew's traumatic experience to Daniel's as a form of haunting, where the earlier trauma, still unresolved, resurfaces to be replayed in subsequent generations.

The two traumas are linked further when a photograph of Andrew Kennedy appears to feature the man from Daniel's vision. In her exploration of post-memory, Marianne Hirsch emphasizes the role of photographs which produce 'a past projected into the present, seen in the present as overlays of memory'.⁴⁷ The appearance of Daniel's guardian angel in his grandfather's photograph represents this overlay of the past into the present. It creates what Hirsch describes as 'identifications across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides' which 'reveals memory to be *cultural*'.⁴⁸ It reinforces the connection between Andrew and Daniel as their lives converge in this series of shared experiences. It also reflects the instability of memory. Although logically the photograph must have existed first, Daniel's vision occurs first in the narrative producing a form of reversal and complicating the process of memory. Daniel has superimposed his vision onto his grandfather's photograph; imprinting his own memory onto the past. It reflects Hirsch's assertion that people can take on 'the traumatic experiences – and thus also the memories – of others as one's own, or, more precisely, as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story'.⁴⁹ Daniel imprints his own experience onto that of his grandfather thus forming a tangible link between past and present in the form of the photograph.

The intermingling of past and present is further employed to subvert the charge of cowardice against the two men by showing them enacting similar acts of courage in an attempt to protect the lives of their loved ones. When Major Morris captures Andrew's wife he is prepared to die to save her and he surrenders to Morris expecting to be shot:

⁴⁶ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷ Hirsch, Marianne, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy', in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), p. 6.

⁴⁸ Hirsch, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Hirsch, p. 9.

The major has his pistol pressed against Adilah's head. At this moment Andrew knows he is going to pull the trigger. He also knows that he would rather surrender his own life than watch Adilah die. The ache of fear that has defined him for so long lifts from his heart. He understands what he must do. There can be no cowardice. (p. 265)

Andrew, like Daniel, consistently admits to fear which he equates to cowardice. Here, the fog of war has lifted and Andrew sees things clearly. Morris, who declares of Andrew that 'The man's a coward. Cowards don't deserve pity' (pp. 328-9), is prefigured from the beginning of the novel as a man without compassion: 'The older man levels his eyes at the younger. They are cold and bestial; the eyes of a man who has killed before and could, without hesitation or conscience, kill again' (p. 12). The dichotomy between hero and coward is re-established here and firmly upended as the cowardly deserter sacrifices himself to the madness of his commanding officer. Major Morris, then, represents an establishment which appears to have lost its sanity, calling on men to put aside their fear and humanity to kill others in the name of duty. Andrew Kennedy, on the other hand, is shown as a man dazed and confused by the chaos of war who only regains his sense of perspective when he has something real and personal to fight for.

Similarly, the charge of cowardice against Daniel is exploded quite dramatically towards the end of the narrative when he jumps through a glass roof into a gas filled room to rescue his daughter, Martha. Daniel has to face the possibility of his own death and accept it in order to jump: 'The point of no return. The realization of the unthinkable' (p. 458). As he falls it is as if time itself is altering and the differentiation between Daniel and his great-grandfather, which has been consistently tenuous in the narrative, collapses completely:

Outward, linear time had expanded and slowed almost to a halt. Below him, the earth was losing its gravitational pull. There was a pungent smell of gas in his nostrils; gas escaping past him through the shattered ceiling of the conservatory, into the night. As his arms flailed they disturbed particles of silver dust: shattered glass suspended in air, floating as if in a vacuum. He had been there

before, living out these final moments, these fractions of seconds – falling to earth, through the earth, into a deep place where the sun is silent. He landed heavily, his knees buckling, and as he pitched sideways, he felt his skull crack against something solid. The fragments of glass darkened and thickened. They were everywhere, showering him, suffocating him, burying him alive. And then he felt nothing. (pp. 458-9)

The gas invokes comparisons to the trenches and as Daniel plunges he appears to inhabit a time and space which is not his own. His experience mirrors his great-grandfather's trauma in No-man's land, the mud and soil replaced by fragments of glass so that Daniel is reliving Andrew's trauma. Thus, the narration of past events is shown to be an ongoing and evolving process rather than a straightforward representation with the present making its mark on the past at the same time that the past influences the present.

Narrating cowardice

The duality of influence, past on present and present on past, is also shown in John Boyne's *The Absolutist* through the preoccupations of its central protagonist, Tristan Sadler. The representation of cowardice in those soldiers who refused to fight is at the centre of Boyne's narrative but unlike *The Blasphemer* which tells the stories of those accused of cowardice from their own perspective, *The Absolutist*, portrays their experiences through the eyes of a third-party, Tristan, whose changing perspective of the two men's behaviour evolves as the narrative progresses.

The narrative alternates between two time periods which unfold in parallel. It begins after the war in 1919 with flashbacks to 1916. The 1919 narrative is relayed in the past tense yet the narrative which relates to the war itself is told in the present tense. Thus it is in the war that Tristan's real present seems to reside, just as was the case for Geordie in *Another World*. Furthermore, the reason for relating the 1919 narrative in the past tense becomes apparent right at the end of the novel when it is revealed that the story is framed by a third, later period. In the final chapter, set in 1979, Tristan is a famous author receiving a literary prize although he has not published anything explicitly pertaining to the war. He accepts the accusation that he is a coward for withholding his

story and vows to publish the manuscript he carries with him, the story just shared with the reader. It is an unsettling moment as the reader is made to feel that they have been taken into his confidence having heard Tristan's autobiography before he makes it available to a wider audience. The cathartic nature of autobiography is highlighted as in this final act of making his experiences public, Tristan is able to consider coming to terms with the guilt he feels at his part in Will's death in the final section entitled 'The shame of my actions'.

The later frame story blurs the boundary between fiction and autobiography, drawing attention to their similarities as constructed narrative genres, mediated by experience and influenced by others. Thus the narrative draws attention to, and scrutinizes, the importance of memoir and autobiography in the way that war is remembered. The recollections of those who participated in war are highly valued and given great weight in how the conflict is regarded in the public consciousness. The First World War is a conflict which is known for, and through, its literature and a large amount of the literature produced in the decades immediately following the war were autobiographical in nature.

Only those soldiers who returned could write their memoirs although there are literary works, particularly poetry, by those who perished. It is through the autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writings of surviving soldiers, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, that the public perception of the First World War became focused. However, they did not write those memoirs right away. For instance, Graves' *Goodbye to All That* was published in 1929 and *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, the first book of Sassoon's Sherston trilogy, was published in 1928. After nearly a decade the resultant narratives would have been influenced and mediated by events taking place after the war. In addition the authors would have benefited from time to contemplate their own feelings and attempt to order and make sense of what had happened in their own minds. For instance, in his first trilogy Sassoon uses protagonist George Sherston to represent himself in the form of a fictionalised autobiography. He did not publish his actual autobiography until 1938 when he published *The Old Century* followed by additional volumes in 1942 and 1945. Writing an autobiography over such a long period of time allows a great deal of opportunity for revision and reconsideration of events.

Boyne shows the evolution of Tristan's autobiography although for most of the narrative the reader is unaware of this aspect of the text. *The Absolutist* shows how the memoir forms, and how it is influenced by the agonizing that takes place over years as well as by the opinions and actions of others who were not even there: Tristan's family; Will's sister, Marian; the hotel manager; and even the stranger in a bar who tells him: 'you hate yourself'.⁵⁰ How external stimuli can cause memories of the past to resurface is shown in the narrative through the effect that the people Tristan meets after the war have on his story. Marian, in particular, facilitates Tristan recounting the details of his relationship with her brother, Will, and influences his decision to publish the manuscript. So strong is her influence on Tristan's story that her need to know the details of her brother's death refocuses the story around memories of Will so that at times it becomes, as the title suggests, Will's story.

The narrative is portrayed as a way for Tristan to re-examine his attitude to objectors and attempt to gain a greater understanding of himself and his actions during the war. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek argue that:

As humans, we draw on our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally, our identity and character are shaped by our narratives. People emerge from and as the products of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives. Through acts of memory they strive to render their lives in meaningful terms.⁵¹

The narrative becomes more than just a cathartic process because writing it helps re-shape his perspective. The reader shares this experience as Tristan comes to terms with the events and people which have been influential in making him who he is. Karl Weintraub considers this urge for self-scrutiny as a natural desire for the individual to make sense of his life:

⁵⁰ John Boyne, *The Absolutist* (London: Doubleday, 2011), pp. 23-24, Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

⁵¹ Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, 'Introduction: Forecasting Memory' in *Tense Past* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. xviii.

We are captivated by an uncanny sense that each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form, and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self.⁵²

This concept of the irreplaceability of each individual is particularly significant within the context of war and large numbers of lives lost. Tristan feels compelled to consider his worth against those who did not survive. This illustrates the obsessive nature of guilt and regret behind the imperative to re-examine and reconsider the past. Victoria Stewart states that autobiographical ‘authors often supplement their testimony with a self-analytical or interpretative aspect; this means that . . . authors are not restricted to the role of witness, but at times adopt, or attempt to adopt, the perspectives of the analyst or indeed the historian’.⁵³ The need to find some purpose or value in his life can be seen as a reasonable reaction to survival when so many comrades have perished. The decimation of Tristan’s initial training group is regularly documented throughout the narrative by reference to the numbers who have died and how many remain. Tristan’s return from the war makes it possible for him to write his memoirs but he is reluctant to publish them because that would mean admitting publicly his belief that he is not the heroic returning soldier but rather a coward who, on several occasions, allowed good men to suffer because they stood up for their principles while he stood by and kept quiet. Although the prevailing trend in post-war literature was away from the heroic soldier it did focus on those who were prepared to speak out in protest and Tristan cannot see a place in the body of literature about the war for a text which would expose his failure to do so.

Through this portrayal of Tristan’s story, Boyne explores the role of memoir and autobiography in representing the war. Julia Swindells argued that: ‘Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual’.⁵⁴ In representing the story of conscientious objectors during the war, Tristan’s story can be seen as an attempt to

⁵² Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. xiii.

⁵³ Victoria Stewart, *Women’s Autobiography: War and Trauma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 15.

⁵⁴ Julia Swindells, *The Uses of Autobiography* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), p. 7.

give a voice to a group of people who are usually silenced in First World War narratives. In this way, as Linda Anderson claims: ‘autobiography becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition’.⁵⁵ The publication of Tristan’s manuscript, which frames the narrative, self-reflexively draws attention to the role of literature in empowering the repressed to write their versions of history and reassert themselves in a more central position within it.

The use of conscientious objectors reflects a changing perspective in the way dissident voices about the war are remembered. The First World War has been associated with individual protest for some time but it is only with more modern sensibilities that conscientious objection can be seen as another form of protest rather than as a cowardly act. This change of perspective is represented in Boyne’s narrative in the critical tone of Tristan’s narration of his earlier reaction to Wolf:

I hiss and shake my head in disgust, assuming that he, like me, thinks the man a coward. I don’t object to those who are opposed to the war on principle or wish for its speedy conclusion – that’s natural enough – but I am of the belief that while it’s still going on, it remains the responsibility of all of us to join in and do our bit. I’m young, of course. I’m stupid. (p. 67)

The passage, although related entirely in the present tense reflects both the narrator’s feelings at the time and his later judgement of his younger self so that a duality exists in the narrative. The consciousness of the young recruit becomes conflated with that of his older self and provides a commentary on his earlier behaviour. It is a duality which exists throughout the narrative as the older Tristan constantly stands in judgement over the thoughts and actions of his younger self and the social structure which allowed it to happen.

In Boyne’s narrative, conscientious objectors represent an alternative to mindless conformity. The fear which this inspired in military commanders is shown through the reaction of Sergeant Clayton who contemptuously declares that ‘They surround us. And

⁵⁵ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 105.

they would bring us down if they could' (pp. 59-60). Boyne undermines this positioning of the objectors as the enemy by portraying Clayton as 'half mad. Anyone can see that. Babbling half the day. Great rages, then weeping fits. He needs to be carted off to the funny farm' (p. 267). In contrast, Will provides a more considered, thoughtful perspective on the treatment of objectors:

a stretcher-bearer at the Front has a life expectancy of about ten minutes. They sent them over the trenches and out into No Man's Land to pick up the bodies of the dead and the wounded and that's the end of them. Snipers pick them off quite easily. It's a sort of public execution really...' (p. 67)

This draws attention to two important aspects of the involvement of conscientious objectors during the war. If those who refused to fight for reasons of conscience were prepared to walk out into No Man's Land with a stretcher it seems to confound the possibility of labelling them cowards since those who did so must have faced the same fears as the soldiers who climbed out of the trenches. Yet one group of men were hailed as heroes; the other as cowards.

The threat to the wellbeing of society which the conscientious objectors are accused of by Sergeant Clayton is contextualized in the narrative by the unscrupulous and immoral behaviour of other soldiers whose actions do not attract censure. Arthur Wolf is murdered by other recruits before being sent to the trenches: 'He didn't kill himself. He was murdered. Killed in cold blood' (pp. 98-99) and a terrified German child soldier is shot by Milton to 'just get rid of him now and be done with it' despite Will's objection that 'we're not murderers' (p. 193). The lack of censure of the men is contrasted with Will's death sentence for refusing to fight and their portrayal undermines the concept of universal war hero. The reversal of the hero/coward positioning in the narrative is further foregrounded when Will tears off his blindfold to see Tristan standing as part of the firing squad in an act of betrayal which haunts his memories of the war:

And the command comes, and the index finger of my right hand presses on the trigger and, in a heartbeat, six guns have discharged, mine as quickly as anyone's, and my friend lies on the ground, unmoving, his war over.

Mine about to begin. (p. 292)

Tristan's conformity is foregrounded here in his adherence to protocol as he carries out his duty without hesitation. It is a pivotal moment in his memory which marks the point at which his inner war began; the instant when he understands the power of a man's conscience because his own begins to assert itself. Through Tristan's judgment of himself, the narrative asks who is the real coward, the man who stood up for his principles or the man who was prepared to shoot him because of a personal rejection; the same man who keeps it to himself for years and refuses to tell the real story of what really happened to him during the war. It is articulated explicitly when Will asked Tristan if he could see the irony '[t]hat I am to be shot as a coward while you get to live as one' (p. 285).

Andrew Fiala argues that the individual voice is effectively silenced by the process of war:

Conscience is an individual's soft, quiet, inner voice that asks moral questions late into the night. But war is a raging clamor organized by those at the top of the political hierarchy. War is oriented toward collective goods that most individuals cannot see or understand. There is no time or space in war for individual conscience. The movements of men and the clash of weapons drown out this soft quiet voice and reasons of state trump individual interests, ideas, and moral judgments.⁵⁶

He goes on to highlight the 'difficulty of defending private conscience as the only value in life' when the protection of the individual's liberty is only possible if the state protects it against potential aggressors.⁵⁷ Thus, he argues 'Some individuals may have to sacrifice their rights—including liberty and life—in order to establish security and the tranquillity of order.'⁵⁸ This creates an unfortunate situation whereby one individual must relinquish the right to follow his conscience for the well-being of the majority.

⁵⁶ Andrew Fiala, *Public War, Private Conscience: The Ethics of Political Violence* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 24.

⁵⁷ Fiala, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Fiala, p. 26.

However, this presupposes military conflict is the right course of action. By allowing the dominant discourse to suppress any dissenting voices effective debate about the justification for war is curtailed. The drowning out of the individual voice by the noise of war is clearly in evidence in both *The Blasphemer* and *The Absolutist*. However, by giving the previously silenced deserters and conscientious objectors a voice and recognising their heroism they challenge the process by which it takes place.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with Siegfried Sassoon's poetic assertion that dying in war does not necessarily make someone a hero. In Sassoon's poem, Jack is denounced because he dies running away in terror. It implies that a single action can be a measure of bravery or cowardice. However, what constitutes heroism or bravery during war is not easily defined as Jay Winter highlights:

What does courage mean under such circumstances? Most soldiers who died in the First World War – 80 percent – were killed by artillery; did it take courage to be blown up by a shell fired ten miles behind the lines? Did it take courage to fire it? Something has happened to language here. Words don't seem to fit experience. A courageous man, like the sergeant standing next to Paul Fussell, and a coward in his unit, had equal chances of getting blown to pieces.⁵⁹

Winter questions the simplicity of defining bravery and suggests that the tendency to do so stems from a failure of language, the inability to effectively represent a complex reality. In his poem, Sassoon seeks to highlight the difference between representation and reality, exposing the truth behind the young man whose mother thinks he was a hero. Yet his representation is itself only partial because it provides no insight into what caused Jack's bolt from the trenches. The brevity of the poetic form means that Sassoon relies on his readers making the same straightforward connections, running away equals desertion and desertion equals cowardice. All four of the novels discussed in this chapter are concerned with people remembering the war through a lens of guilt and

⁵⁹ Jay Winter, 'The Great War: Midwife to Modern Memory', in *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years On*, ed. by Jay Winter (Columbia, MO; London: University of Missouri Press, 2009), pp. 159-184 (p. 160).

regret because they do not view their actions as courageous. However, the advantage of the novel form is that it allows for more detail to explore and scrutinize the nuances of these underlying assumptions.

Pivodori's analysis of the portrayal of the coward in several early First World War narratives shows the coward as a vehicle of resistance and opposition but reveals the same established assumptions made by Sassoon to align the malingerer and the deserter with cowardice. In contrast, in the four novels discussed in this chapter, these underlying assumptions are problematized so that the framework within which heroism is constructed is dismantled, so that it can be re-constructed without restrictions or preconceptions. Contemporary authors highlight the gaps in representation, whether conscious or unconscious, to show how established assumptions are based on flawed and partial evidence. The, apparently cowardly, actions of their protagonists reside outside the norms of heroic behaviour but by allowing for new ways of thinking which are not dependent on existing frameworks for interpretation, they are shown not in opposition to the heroic but as different aspects of it, as Harold Lubin states in his description of the anti-hero as: 'a special category of heroes'.⁶⁰

All four novels discussed here are concerned with re-imagining the war hero to emphasize the individuality and complexity of acts of courage during wartime. By representing war through images of those who do not live up to the idealized vision of the dead or returning hero, contemporary narratives are opening up discourse to include those who were previously considered to have fallen short of society's expectations for the participants of war. In doing so they consider the basis on which the concept of heroism is constructed and provide alternative interpretations to reveal the need for more flexible insight and show the limitations of representations which adhere too rigidly to established conventions.

In these contemporary novels, the construction of heroism is shown to be ongoing and communal. The passing on of stories from one generation to another through oral storytelling, memoirs and historical documents, the communality of the annual

⁶⁰ Harold Lubin, *Heroes and Anti-heroes: A Reader in Depth* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1968), p. 3.

remembrance service, are all shown to contribute to the representation of war and the conduct of its participants. Contemporary authors show that since the construction of the concept of heroism is communal then the process of re-constructing it must be also. For instance, in *Bleakly Hall*, established ideas and preconceived notions of heroism are re-examined through the gathering together of the veteran community and in *The Absolutist* through the influential nature of the wider community on the development of Tristan's memoirs. In *The Blasphemer* and *Another World* the re-imagining of the war hero is shown through multi-generational narrative which interweaves different time periods to show the impact of contemporary perspectives on the way that the war and its participants are remembered.

Contemporary novels about the First World War are often reflective in nature with a narrator or central protagonist looking back on his or her earlier life experiences and this is true of all the novels examined in this chapter. They all have a contemporary perspective, looking back at the war in a series of flashbacks so that the structure of their narratives reflects the fragmented memories of their traumatized protagonists. This allows them to explore how the war is remembered in contemporary society as well as portraying the memories of individual characters. John Brannigan states of Barker's novel that it 'deploys a series of opposed images and symbols to reflect on the significance of contemporary commemorations of war'.⁶¹ For instance, in the association she makes between Geordie's memory and vehicles for public remembrance such as war memorials: 'his memories are carved in granite' (p. 86). As the characters work through their own feelings about their involvement in the war so the reader, as a representative of contemporary society, is encouraged to work through their own complex relationship with this pivotal event. In this chapter, guilt at actions during the war creates an impulse to keep going back, to live in the past, continuously re-examining and re-living those experiences; agonising over whether things could, or should, have been done differently. Thus the guilt and anguish shown reflects contemporary feeling about the war and these are the very concerns which cause society to keep returning to the First World War, re-evaluating its progress and judging afresh, through contemporary eyes, the decisions made and the consequences of them. Even

⁶¹ John Brannigan, *Pat Barker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 131.

now, a hundred years after it began, there exists a lingering anger and resentment at many of the events of the war which creates an enduring need to re-examine it.

A preoccupation with textual representations within these narratives, shown through intertextual references to earlier writings and the utilisation of different genres, reflects the ongoing and evolving nature of this re-examination. It establishes literature as a core means for exploring the First World War and in particular the representation and construction of the hero and firmly inserts contemporary fictions into ongoing debates. In this way contemporary authors seek to legitimise their own role in scrutinizing and re-imagining the war and in providing a new conceptual framework for looking at the hero. This is particularly evident in their use of different genres such as the Gothic, memoirs, autobiography, historical and academic, to scrutinize the way in which the hero has been previously represented and to show how this can be re-interpreted by exposing the processes by which it takes place.

Chapter 4: Viral Incursions

You have to admire its simplicity. It's one billionth our size and it's beating us'.¹

Not all contemporary novels which engage with the First World War do so directly. The monumental impact of the war has tended to overwhelm other events which took place during the same period but for many the concerns of everyday life continued and this included the threat of disease. In this chapter, I examine two novels which take viral epidemics occurring at the same time as the First World War as their central theme: *This Time of Dying* by Reina James; and *Umbrella* by Will Self. In *This Time of Dying* James portrays the effects of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, which killed more than 50 million people worldwide during the closing months of the war,² and in *Umbrella* Self draws on the Encephalitis Lethargica pandemic which occurred around the same time and was responsible for approximately 5 million deaths over ten years and left many survivors 'ontologically dead, or suspended'.³

The use of disease as the theme for popular narratives reflects the impact that sickness can have on ordinary people's lives and the fear that can generate. Classic texts such as Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) and Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1947) attest to how fascinating this topic has been to a generation of authors.

Furthermore, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen a surge in popular entertainment depicting near apocalyptic disasters including those caused by the outbreak of plagues and viral epidemics. In 2011 the *Daily Telegraph* marked the release of the latest blockbuster movie *Contagion* (2011), which portrays the battle against a deadly virus threatening the United States, with a list of its 'Top 10 plague movies'.⁴ The list reveals that some of the most popular movies of the last fifty years have been thrillers involving the fight to save the world from a virulent epidemic: *Twelve Monkeys* (1995); *28 Days Later* (2002); *Mimic* (1997); *Resident Evil* (2002);

¹ *Outbreak*, dir. by Wolfgang Petersen (Warner Brothers, 1995).

² J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 75.

³ Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (London: Pan Books, 1991), pp. 13-14.

⁴ Robert Beames, 'Contagion: Top 10 Plague Movies', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 2011.

Children of Men (2006); *I am Legend* (2007); *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011); *The Satan Bug* (1995); *The Andromeda Strain* (1971); and *Outbreak* (1995). These films typically combine impressive special effects with the casting of high profile celebrity actors, such as Matt Damon and Jude Law in *Contagion*, Will Smith in *I am Legend* and Dustin Hoffman and Morgan Freeman in *Outbreak*, to appeal to a wide audience. At the core of the use of disease as the thriller aspect of popular entertainment is the readiness with which people can identify with it as a potential threat. Jennie Punter suggests that recent events such as 9/11, natural disasters, and the global spread of HIV/AIDS have ‘heightened apocalyptic anxiety’ and argues that popular entertainment has responded to the growing anxiety this inspires by reflecting it ‘back to audiences hungry for more and full of questions’.⁵ Furthermore, Heather Schell suggests that disease may have superseded war in its ability to inspire fear in contemporary society:

It seems as though many people now sincerely believe that the world could end in pestilence, almost as though viruses have now taken the place of nuclear weapons in our apocalyptic imaginations.⁶

Viral outbreaks represent a force of nature over which people can exert only limited control. Thus, while war and disease are linked by their potential for destruction the potentially uncontrollable aspect of a viral pandemic magnifies the sense of fear created.

This, in turn, generates a voyeuristic excitement and Jay Winter similarly considers this a factor in the persistence of the First World War in public memory: ‘It is not just the injuries of war, but its drama, its earthquake-like character, which has fuelled the memory boom’.⁷ Contemporary fiction reflects this aspect of war. For instance, a sense of apocalyptic tension is evident in James’ narrative in Henry’s final words: ‘*As I went to sleep, I thought that if every one of the newly bereaved were to hold a lantern to*

⁵ Jennie Punter, ‘Apocalypse New?’, *Queen’s Quarterly*, 117:1 (2010), 104-114 (p. 107).

⁶ Heather Schell, ‘Outburst! A Chilling True Story about Emerging-Virus Narratives and Pandemic Social Change’ *Configurations*, 5.1 (1997), 93-133 (p.112).

⁷ J. M. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT ; London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 6.

the sky, the man in the moon would think the world to be on fire'.⁸ Both *This Time of Dying* and *Umbrella* combine the drama of viral epidemics with that of the First World War and although the narratives themselves are fictional the epidemics which inspired them are real. So, in contrast to the outbreaks common in Hollywood movies, these two disasters draw on historical events rather than existing solely in the imagination of their authors. Thus they do not represent the speculative possibility of disaster or vague apocalyptic prophecies but an attempt to engage with a history of genuine suffering and devastation. However, neither author is content to use the authenticity of their subject to fully immerse their narrative within the historical period. Instead, they employ a range of literary techniques to draw attention to the fictional nature of their narratives so that despite their focus on viral pandemics the preoccupations of these two novels remain the same as the others considered in this study, contributing to and self-reflexively exploring how the devastation wreaked on society by war is represented.

By engaging with the period surrounding the First World War through the lens of illness, these two contemporary authors ask their readers to draw analogies between the fight against disease and war in order to consider how traumatic events can be represented. For instance, Self writes in a modernist style and both authors draw on narrative strategies such as journal writing and biography, which are firmly established in the corpus of First World War writing, to emphasize the impetus for victims of trauma to provide evidence of their plight. In doing so they draw together the techniques for representing war and pandemic to engage with the war from a contemporary perspective, self-reflexively scrutinizing the methods by which representation is attempted and considering their ability to adequately convey the reality of such destruction.

Spanish flu & Encephalitis lethargica

The 1918 outbreak caused by the H1N1 influenza virus is popularly referred to as Spanish Flu although it is now universally agreed that its origin was not in Spain. The name came about because, as it was a neutral country during the First World War, Spain was the only country to openly report the emergence of the disease. This created

⁸ Reina James, *This Time of Dying* (London: Portobello Books, 2006), p. 290. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

an association between Spain and the outbreak which resulted in its being reported as Spanish Flu. Nowadays, it is more commonly referred to simply as the 1918 influenza pandemic and there is no definitive answer as to where it originated. Scientific investigations have discovered that it arose almost simultaneously across Europe, Asia and North America.⁹

In comparison to the abundance of literature produced in response to the Great War, the Spanish Flu pandemic is less often the focal subject for literary representation. In fact the Spanish flu pandemic is often described as the forgotten tragedy of the twentieth century. While researching *This Time of Dying* James observed that: 'I became more and more astonished at this sense that we had wiped the flu epidemic from global consciousness'¹⁰ and Susan Sontag reflects on the 'near total historical amnesia regarding the influenza pandemic'.¹¹ Admittedly it does not seem to occupy a particularly prominent position in the public consciousness but research proves that there is actually a significant corpus of writing on the subject including scientific, historical and fictional genres. It has featured in popular entertainment, afflicting several characters in the second series of ITV's popular period drama *Downton Abbey* (2011) and is the reason that Edward Cullen became a vampire in Stephenie Meyer's hugely popular *Twilight* (2005). The scientific press has always maintained an interest in the virus but in addition to the numerous scientific journal articles on the subject, there is also a small but comprehensive collection of academic history texts which focus on recording and analysing the pandemic: most notably Richard Collier's *The Plague of the Spanish Lady* (1974); Niall Johnson's *Britain and the 1918-19 Influenza Pandemic* (2006) and Howard Phillips and David Killingray's edited collection of essays *The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19: New Perspectives* (2003). Two books, Gina Kolata's *Flu* (1999) and Pete Davies' *Catching Cold* (1999), document the search for the pathogen which caused the pandemic and are both written in a journalistic form which is designed to appeal to a wider popular readership rather than targeting the academic community. Literary fiction has continued to contribute to the body of work

⁹ Jeffery K. Taubenberger and David M. Morens, '1918 Influenza: the Mother of All Pandemics', *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 12.1 (2006), 15-22 (p. 16).

¹⁰ Linda Grant, 'Deathly Prose', *Guardian*, 28 June 2007, Books.

¹¹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and, AIDS and its Metaphors*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 72.

on the pandemic throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Jane Elizabeth Fisher notes a number of American authors who have made it the subject of their novels:

A surprising number of twentieth-century writers, such as Wallace Stegner, Horton Foote, Kaye Gibbons, Christina Schwarz, Myla Goldberg, and Kevin Kerr, have found the 1918 pandemic engaging as a dramatic literary setting, valuable in its ability to motivate characters, supply unfamiliar historical detail, and provide suspense.¹²

The war and influenza pandemic both feature in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1923) and Fisher draws attention to the way Woolf portrays the lingering effects of both.¹³ Similarly, the American short story writer Katherine Anne Porter published 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider' in 1939 which depicts her protagonists' battle against the disease. The popularity of the pandemic as a theme for fictional narrative seems to have increased towards the end of the twentieth century and it features in a number of popular British novels in addition to James' text which is discussed in detail in this chapter: Pamela Oldfield's *Loving and Losing* (2007), Kate Saunders' *Night Shall Overtake Us* (1993); Deborah Moggach's *In the Dark* (2007); Michelle Paver's *The Serpent's Tooth* (2005); Cynthia Harrod-Eagles' *The Fallen Kings* (2009) and Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* (2013).¹⁴ Clearly, it is no longer forgotten either academically or popularly.

Much less well known and represented is the Encephalitis lethargica epidemic, also known as sleeping sickness, which occurred between 1916 and 1927 and was thus in progress at the same time as the influenza pandemic in 1918. The term Encephalitis lethargica originates from around the time of the First World War although the symptoms: 'profound and prolonged sleep' were 'observed in connection with many epidemics of influenza since early times'.¹⁵ As Self indicates in *Umbrella* there have

¹² Jane Elizabeth Fisher, *Envisioning Disease, Gender, and War: Women's Narratives of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 149.

¹³ Fisher, p. 81.

¹⁴ Most of these novels engage with the pandemic only briefly.

¹⁵ Office of Medical History, 'Chapter XV: Encephalitis Lethargica' (2009)

even been suggestions that the two diseases were linked: ‘end of the First War ... Came before the Spanish Flu epidemic – maybe a precursor?’.¹⁶ Whether the 1918 influenza pandemic was linked to Encephalitis lethargica has been the subject of much debate among scientists and still remains unresolved.¹⁷ Scientifically, Maurizi has suggested that influenza might have caused the encephalitis epidemic although this view remains controversial.¹⁸ The encephalitis outbreak is the subject of very few narratives other than in scientific journals although it does feature in Oliver Sacks’ 1973 memoir *Awakenings* and more recently is the subject of two academic works: Joel Vilensky’s *Encephalitis Lethargica: During and After the Pandemic* and Molly Crosby’s *Asleep :The Forgotten Epidemic That Remains One of Medicine's Greatest Mysteries*, both published in 2010. Sacks’ text, which details his attempt to treat patients suffering from the disease, brought the virus to a wider audience particularly when it was used as a basis for the 1990 film of the same name directed by Penny Marshall and starring Robert de Niro and Robin Williams. Harold Pinter acknowledged Sacks’ narrative as the source for his 1982 play *A Kind of Alaska*¹⁹ and it also provided the inspiration for Will Self’s *Umbrella* which is discussed in this chapter, so that those fictional texts which address the encephalitis pandemic are all related to Sacks’ memoir. No mention is made of encephalitis in any of the other narratives considered in this study and I would contend that its use in Will Self’s novel provides a unique way of looking at the issues and legacy of the period during the First World War. By drawing on viral pandemics as the focus for their novels, Self and James emphasize the possibilities inherent in looking at the war from previously unconsidered perspectives and illustrate the wide potential for continued re-examination and exploration of the First World War within a more diverse context.

<<http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/communicablediseases/chapter15.html>>

[accessed 28 November 2012].

¹⁶ Will Self, *Umbrella* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p.85. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷ For scientific discussion on the link between the 1918 influenza pandemic and encephalitis lethargica see: C. P. Maurizi, ‘Influenza caused epidemic encephalitis (Encephalitis lethargica):The circumstantial evidence and a challenge to the nonbelievers’, *Medical Hypotheses*, 74 (2010), 798–801; Paul Bernard Foley, ‘Encephalitis lethargica and the influenza virus. III. The influenza pandemic of 1918/19 and encephalitis lethargica: neuropathology and discussion’, *The Journal of Neural Transmission* (2009) 116:1309–1321.

¹⁸ C. P. Maurizi, ‘Influenza caused epidemic encephalitis’, *Medical Hypotheses*, 74 (2010), 798-801.

¹⁹ Benedict Nightingale, ‘Time Passing’, *The New Statesman* (1982)

<http://www.haroldpinter.org/plays/plays_alaska.shtml> [accessed 29 October 2013].

Issues of modernity

Umbrella is a very different narrative to *This Time of Dying* despite the fact that they are both based on true historical events which occurred at similar times. Firstly, the narrative structure of Will Self's *Umbrella* is quite different. Written in modernist style, Self explained in an interview that 'the entire novel is shaped like an umbrella – with curved spokes of narrative radiating outwards from a central scene.'²⁰ In terms of layout it has little to differentiate one part of the narrative from another, having no chapters or divisions between the actions, speech or thoughts of its three protagonists. Self considers this one of the modernist aspects of the novel: 'the refusal to accept the arbitrary divisions of chapters and line breaks [because] life doesn't resolve itself into chapters, nor is it punctuated by line breaks. Continuous present is all we have',²¹ although he admits that stream of conscious narrative can be just as artificial as traditional narration.²² Thus despite Self's modernist style this foregrounding of the artifice of his narration together with an acknowledgement of the complexities involved in constructing a fictional world and his explicit exploration of the modernist style as a means of representation are indicative of postmodernism.

The constructed nature of the narrative is also foregrounded by the way in which it tells the stories of Audrey Death, an encephalitis survivor who has been in a catatonic state in hospital since the 1920s, and her brother Stanley, who died in the trenches during the First World War. Their stories are interwoven with the observations and memories of psychiatrist Dr. Zack Busner whose privileged position in the narrative is reflected by the dual-aspect of his narration; that of 1971 when he was treating Audrey and that of 2010 when he has retired. Although the narrative always seems to centre on Audrey, Busner's narration gains an authority from the inclusion of the later time frame; it is as though he is having the final say, drawing conclusions and commenting on the narrative in its entirety. However, since this framing narrative is not isolated at the end of the text but is, like the other time periods, interlaced with the others throughout the narrative this tends to diminish and challenge that authority although it never entirely negates it.

²⁰ Elizabeth Day, 'Will Self: I Don't Write for Readers', *Guardian* (5 August 2012), section Books.

²¹ Will Self, 'Will Self, on Himself', ed. Five Books (San Francisco: Salon, 2012)

< http://www.salon.com/2012/08/20/will_self_on_himself/ > [accessed 18 February 2013].

²² *Ibid.*

The complex temporal presentation in Self's narrative contrasts with the realist concept of linear time and provides a critique of its adequacy as a means for representation.

The narration of a fourth character, Albert, Audrey's elder brother is quite different. Unlike the other protagonists whose thoughts and emotions are revealed to the reader Albert's mind remains, for the most part, inaccessible to the reader. In part, this reflects his aloof, emotionally removed personality which Busner later diagnoses as due to a psychiatric illness, Savant syndrome, but it also reflects the novel's preoccupation with mechanization and its effects on modern society; in essence, Albert is portrayed as a form of human machine. This connection is reinforced by his comparison to a musical hall act: 'they call him Datas, after the music-hall mental prestidigitator' (pp. 61-62) although there is no hint of entertainment in Albert's ability:

Although unlike the genial Datas on stage there's no jocularly to Albert's correctitude. He is *rigid in all things*, disdaining brawling, yet looks *fit to kill* if he's accused of having *funked it* by failing to answer a question or complete a computation. (p. 62)

This emphasizes how seriously Albert takes himself and the aloof manner in which he relates to those around him. In contrast, it is a mechanized body which impresses his brother Stanley:

Datas is not Stanley's hero, but *Enigmarelle, the Man of Steel* – he desires to be *a mechanical man* with an engine *hammerin'* in his belly and smoke *spurtin'* from *'is mouf an 'nose*. (p. 62)

These 'artificial humans' were popular at the time although the robots were actually humans in disguise. That Stanley should aspire to be such a thing is ironic given that he ends up in the trenches mindlessly following orders and ultimately being killed by virtue of innovations in mechanization. The potential mechanization of man is further illustrated later in the text when he is readying his machine-gun for action:

Death and his section were taught to dash forward when the whistle blew, release the ratchet that secured her front legs so they could be swung open and then fixed by tightening it again. Sitting there, as Death, Stanley removed the pins from her raven hair, and the Number Two ran up and placed her body on top of her legs, her body – her death-dealing body, her 28-pound body. As Machine-Gunner Death he looked on while Number Two fiddled the first round of the belt into the feed block. As Death he flicked up her safety catch, as Death he grasped her hips and, staring her full in her steely eye, gently touched her trigger. (p. 202)

It reads like a sexual encounter with a woman rather than the procedure for prepping a weapon and represents the ultimate integration of man and machine; a bonding experience where the boundaries between humanity and machine have dissolved completely so that the machine is now more human than the man. The destructive power of them both as implements of war is reinforced in the narrative by the repetition of Stanley's surname, Death. The increasing mechanization of the twentieth-century is also reflected linguistically through the repetitions in the narrative. The repetitive mechanised movements of the shell factory have become so much part of Audrey's being that she repeats them endlessly through the years of her catatonia, mentally reliving the creation of the shells: 'a pickingitupandpickingitupandpickingitup, a hairflickinghairflickinghair-flicking' (p. 127); 'She drones on, becausewe're'erebecausewe're'ere' (p. 137) as the repetitive movements made by the post-encephalitic patients resemble the working of machines:

Freaky, that old biddy's working an invisible turret lathe– then expatiated: See, she's turning a flywheel with that hand, plain as – it's the one that moves the lathe bed – and that's gotta be her yanking on the lever that shifts the turret up and down . . . and see here, here she's pulling on another lever, the one that opens the chuck up to release the finished piece. (p. 137)

In this passage Audrey compulsively relives her previous occupation in the ammunition factory. Self's narrative exhibits a preoccupation with technology and the increasing mechanization of society. He draws direct connections between the development of

technology and the development of modern society, connections which are echoed by Philip Brey who insists that: ‘Technology made modernity possible ... it has catalyzed the transition to modernity and catalyzed major transitions within it’.²³ It is appropriate, then, that the earliest period of Self’s narrative is the First World War which marks the beginning of the onset of mechanized war, the era when people took the positive advances of technology developed during the industrial revolution and used it to wreak harm on one another. As Self explains:

It all began just at the end of the First World War, which was a watershed for industrialisation and the coming era of technology in civilisation. The war was an assembly line of death, and out of it came this illness, in which the individual human body seems to be caught up in a mechanistic frenzy.²⁴

In his review of the novel, Paul Griffiths suggests that it is mechanization, not encephalitis, which is afflicting society: ‘The villain, rather, is mechanization, seen as stiffening human life as surely as encephalitis freezes its victims’.²⁵ Self articulates how people have become dependent on it and controlled by it to such an extent that they use it automatically without considering its potential for destruction. The interweaving of man and machinery is starkly apparent in trench scenes:

The insupportable weight and density of the mud, packed by the pounding of the shells into every nook and cranny of his form – the steel, and the steel that’s made that steel – of all this there will be more: more milled and turned and drilled, the component parts stretching out into the future on a ceaselessly revolving conveyor belt that has no end. He need never have resurfaced at all – his hands shake and twitch, his back bends . . . bends . . . he is seized by impulsiveness in fingers, hands, feet, toes, and in his inclinations also, an irresistible urge to point, poke, touch, lick, want – this, that, all others . . . and yet he cannot, of his own volition, move at all. (p. 341)

²³ Philip Brey, ‘Theorizing Modernity and Technology’ in *Modernity and Technology*, eds. Thomas, J. Misa, Philip Brey and Andrew Feenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 33-72 (p. 33).

²⁴ Will Self, ‘Will Self, on Himself’.

²⁵ Paul Griffiths, ‘Living With the Deaths’, *TLS* (28 September 2012).

This shows Stanley exhibiting the same symptoms in the trenches as the post-encephalitis patients and thus emphasizing the links which the narrative continuously makes between the traumatic effects of both events. It is in this way that the First World War reasserts itself and it highlights the underlying connection between war veterans suffering from PTSD and the portrayal of disease which runs throughout the narrative.

The stories of the three protagonists are told through their own perspectives, focusing on their own thoughts and memories. The text moves smoothly from one consciousness to another which disrupts the continuity of each perspective and foregrounds the complexity of both their memories and their personal histories. It interweaves the past and present creating a fluidity between what is remembered and what actually took place thus reinforcing the inevitably tentative grip which can be maintained over past events. The temporal location of ideas becomes conflated so that things that ought to reside in the present become located in the past: 'Stanley swayed to the beat of his predictions: There will be man-made plagues . . . And voyaging to other planets – the scientists will unlock the power of the atom' (p. 150). Stanley's predictive ability is due not to some miraculous insight but to the folding of time within the narrative so that that which is known in the present becomes accessible in the past.

The elaborate interweaving of different perspectives in the narrative often creates a feeling of chaos which reflects both the complexity of representing events involving traumatic experiences and the nature of the disease itself: 'it is chaotic disease that howls through the enki's cellular caverns, and screeches between the manifold branches of their brainstems' (p. 375). Self allows access to the thoughts of his protagonists through stream of consciousness narration which increases the chaotic and random nature of his text. Like Self, Virginia Woolf argued that stream of consciousness narrative is necessary in order to represent the complexities of human life:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of

Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style ... Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?²⁶

Woolf argues that life is not a straightforward series of events but a complex network of thoughts and feelings and the writer must break free of the constraints and limitations imposed by conventions such as plot and genre and seek to represent the workings of the mind. The imperative to convey the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the human mind can be seen in *Umbrella* as Self's narrative communicates the consciousness of his characters. In order to do this, Self takes inspiration from the novels of the late modernist author Louis-Ferdinand Celine, so that his narrative 'combine[s] thought and speech'²⁷ in such a way that they flow into each other, often midsentence and without warning, to reflect the way people really function: talking and thinking at the same time rather than as distinct or disparate actions. Self offers a window on life and experience through small fragmented glimpses; several perspectives are layered over each other forming a palimpsest view of reality, with no mediation between them due to the lack of conventional structuring. It creates the impression of standing in the middle of a room and spinning around trying to catch the thoughts and sounds of everybody there; at times it is overwhelming and at others there are flashes of inspiration.

Not content with a complex structure, Self adheres to the modernist desire for complexity in language as well which makes the narrative particularly difficult to

²⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Volume 4: 1925 to 1928*, ed. Andrew McNeille (London: The Hogarth, 1984), 158-165 (160).

²⁷ Will Self, 'Review: Journey to the End of the Night: Will Self has always felt Alienated and Pained by the Constrictions of English Fiction. Only the Modernists Offered Him Liberation as Reader and Aspiring Writer with his Latest Novel, Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, has he Finally Ripped Off the Corsetry of Convention?', *Guardian* (4 August 2012).

follow. However, the complexity of the narrative, rather than simply propagating arbitrary elitism, actually contributes to its meaning. Roger Moss argues that difficult language is justified because representing a person's perceptions is also difficult:

We learn, in coming to term with the difficulty, that the shape of language and the shape of the world are distinct, that there is a realistic art whose realism insists on bending language or reality, one to fit the shape of the other.²⁸

Self's use of a difficult narrative syntax challenges the reader's understanding because it reflects the difficulty in accurately rendering through language the perceptions someone has of their world. The narrative form of *Umbrella* makes it difficult to read and thus produces a barrier between reader and meaning in which the reader must make an active investment in interpreting the text in order to gain understanding. According to Victor Shklovsky this can produce positive benefits:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.²⁹

A point of view which is echoed by John Mepham who suggests that the difficulty inherent in reading modernist literature slows down the process of understanding meaning and creates the possibility of more innovative interpretation:

In reading, we move too quickly to conclusions, to interpretations. Modernist writers aimed to obstruct these habits of reading. Meanings are already prepared for us, in the vast circulating atmosphere of received opinions and habits of thought. To arrive at new thoughts, to liberate oneself from our default habits of

²⁸ Moss, Roger, 'Difficult Language: the Justification of Joyce's Syntax in *Ulysses*', in *The Modern English Novel: The Reader, The Writer and the Work*, ed. Gabriel Josipovici (London: Open Books, 1976), p.135.

²⁹ Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, 1965), pp. 3-24 (12).

thought, one has to invent ways of slowing down reading, so preventing interpretations from clicking in so quickly.³⁰

Self's narrative employs a technique that the Russian Formalists called *ostraneniye* or defamiliarisation which disrupts the reader's normal way of seeing things and leaves 'our perceptions freshened; and our awareness of the world heightened'.³¹ This forces the reader to look beyond the ordinary and opens up the possibility of new perspectives and interpretations. Thus, the form that Self has chosen to write his narrative in is highly significant and forms an essential part of its meaning as a whole. Self's narrative draws attention to its artifice by its complexity and opens up the possibilities for understanding in an attempt to provide a more realistic representation of the workings of the human mind. B. S. Johnson claimed that 'What happens is nothing like as important as how it is written, as the medium of the words and form through which it is made to happen to the reader'³² and Self's narrative choices reinforce the indivisibility of content and form.

The complexity of the narrative also reflects the unreliability of memory and experience and this is highlighted in the treatment of Stanley's narrative after his death. This strange after-life sequence of Stanley's shows the possibility of history that is not history, the reliving of an experience that was not actually experienced. However, in the narrative, it is nevertheless part of the fabric of memory and experience. Memory is an important aspect of trauma, and the recovery from it, but the unreliability of memory has the potential to affect this. In considering the reliability of memory, the portrayal of Audrey in the narrative is interesting. Having spent most of her life in a catatonic state and unable to engage with the world around her, Audrey is effectively still residing in the past without any knowledge of the intervening years to mediate her memories. Commenting on Albert's memory skills, Busner observes that:

³⁰ John Mepham, 'Designing the Modernist Text: Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', in *The Great London Vortex: Modernist Literature and Art* (Chippenham: Sulis Press, 2003), 174-193 (175).

³¹ Janet Maybin and Michael Pearce, 'Literature and Creativity in English' in *The Art of English: Literary Creativity*, ed. Sharon Goodman and Kieran O'Halloran (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3-28 (6).

³² B. S. Johnson, 'Introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*', in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (London: Fontana, 1990), 151-168 (152).

[A] superior mnemonist – not the only one in your immediate family either – Miss Death, is, I’m convinced, similarly gifted, and perhaps has an advantage over you, given that for the past fifty years there has been scarcely any new data. (p. 368)

When Audrey wakes up she becomes a window on the past; providing a brief glimpse in somewhat elusive fragments which must be pieced together by the reader before it is closed once more as Self explores the potential for accessing and constructing history in the present.

Like James’, Self’s narrative deals with trauma. Audrey and Stanley both experience trauma; Audrey through encephalitis; and Stanley through war. There is also a witness to this trauma in the form of Zack Busner who, although he does not actually witness the earlier events himself, becomes part of the process of witnessing both in awakening Audrey so that her consciousness can be shared with the reader and in the act of telling his own story. Similarly, the importance of recording his patients’ experiences is stressed by Oliver Sacks in the preface to the original edition of his book:

I have ... tried to preserve what is important and essential – the real and full *presence* of the patients themselves, the ‘feeling’ of their lives, their characters, their illnesses, their responses – the essential qualities of their strange situation.³³

In telling of his involvement with Audrey, Busner’s telling of his own story becomes an act of witness to her suffering in the same way that Oliver Sacks provided his patients with a wider audience for their traumatic experiences.

The way in which *Umbrella* portrays the personal stories of the protagonists follows the tendency towards fictional biography and autobiography which is common in First World War narratives. It creates a sense of intimacy between narrator and reader as personal details and histories are revealed. Howard Brody argues that intimacy exists in all narrative but that ‘intimacy exists, especially in autobiographical narrative, because

³³ Sacks, pp. xvii-xviii.

the narrator *is* the individual mentioned in the narrative, is responsible for the events disclosed, and thus has a personal stake in how others react to the telling of the story'.³⁴ Thus the access to Audrey, Stanley and Busner's consciousness, in telling their stories, creates a sense of intimacy, of hearing their story first-hand; witnessing their thoughts. In particular, the inclusion of the older Busner as a more reminiscent narrator gives a sense of looking back on a life's work; the mainstay of many autobiographies:

The pop ditties that had infested his mind had been, he now understands, continuous reminders not only of this unfinished and abandoned travail, but of all the other crimes of forgetting he had committed. (p. 396)

It draws attention not only to what is remembered but to what has been forgotten and creates the sense that Busner has an emotional investment in how the entire story is received because Audrey's story has become part of his story through her role in his life.

Witnessing trauma

In contrast to *Umbrella* whose narrative moves fluidly through three different time periods from 1918 to the present day, *This Time of Dying* is set entirely in the past, in 1918. *This Time of Dying* is conveyed in chronological order, the narrative mimicking the form of a journal with an entry for every day from the first entry on 'Sunday, 20 October 1918' to the final one on 'Wednesday 6 November'. However, it is not presented as a straightforward journal since the narrative perspective alternates between the first person narrative of its protagonist, undertaker Henry Speake, and third person narration. The first person narration gives the reader access to Henry's personal thoughts about events whereas the third person narrator provides a wider perspective and allows the inclusion of actions outside of Henry's experience. The third person narration often focalises on individual characters, particularly the novel's other protagonist Mrs Allen Thompson and this allows the reader to experience the personal stories and frustrations of the two characters in quite different ways.

³⁴ Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 25.

The form that James has chosen for her narrative is significant because a journal is a record of the personal experience of events and thus represents an act of witnessing. The imperative for those who have witnessed traumatic events to retell their experiences through literature is evident in the many journals published about the First World War. However, First World War journals were not always straightforward autobiographies and included fictionalised accounts such as in Sassoon's *Sherston* trilogy. Joanna Scutts takes issue with the acceptance of such literature as historical truth:

Autobiographical writers also make a tacit commitment to tell the truth, but any inherent difficulty in accurately recalling or narrating events ten years after their occurrence was generally played down by the readers and writers of war books, who took for granted the idea that a localised or individual point of view was in itself more truthful than the long historical view. The fidelity of the narrative to externally verifiable facts was less important than the stance of witness adopted by the narrator. It was not necessarily seen as important that writers might relate events in a different order, confuse or obscure the names of people or places, or commit any one of a thousand small inaccuracies in the process of telling their story. Accuracy mattered less than authenticity, indicating that in the reception of these books there was a broad shift from the values of history to the values of literature. Yet on the whole, the 'boom' books denied their literariness, and quickly came to be accepted as historical fact.³⁵

The importance of individual testimony is foregrounded here as the act of relaying a history personally experienced is elevated above the need for accuracy in the re-telling. Scutts argues that the boundaries of fiction and history have become blurred to such an extent that autobiography can get away with historical inaccuracy as long as it feels emotionally authentic. Jennifer Cooke outlines the benefits of using fictional biography to represent traumatic experiences but urges caution:

³⁵ Joanna Scutts, 'The "War Books Boom": Resisting and Rewriting First World War Commemoration' in *Literatures of War*, ed. Richard Pine and Eve Patten (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 118-131 (p. 126).

[L]iterature, by employing the fantasy witness who can speak for all, certainly does provide a medium through which traumatic events can be narrativised with imaginative impact, and where abstraction can be addressed and challenged. At the same time, we would do well to keep in mind the very fictional nature of such an enterprise.³⁶

She acknowledges the ability of fictionalised accounts to explore and scrutinize traumatic events but remains suspicious of the ability of literature to transform history without compromising its integrity.³⁷ However, other critics, such as Shoshana Felman consider that it is the ability of literature to adapt the narrative styles of the biographer and historian that contributes to its success in representing the past. In her discussion of Albert Camus' *The Plague* as an oblique representation of the Holocaust, Felman argues that in contemporary fiction the:

[T]raditional relationships of narrative to history *have changed* through the historical necessity of involving literature in action, of creating a new form of *narrative as testimony* not merely to record, but to rethink and, in the act of its rethinking, in effect *transform history* by bearing literary witness'.³⁸

Felman shows the value of literature not as a mere record of events but as an active process of interpretation and re-imagining so that in its attempt to represent trauma the narrative becomes part of the historical record despite its fiction.

The presentation of a disease outbreak through a fictionalised eye-witness account is seen in both Camus' *The Plague* and Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and James' text continues in this tradition with the inclusion of Henry's account of the pandemic. However, the act of witnessing is less overt in *This Time of Dying* than it is in Camus' or Defoe's texts. Although James' narrative is divided into daily entries like a journal

³⁶ Jennifer Cooke, 'Writing Plague: Transforming Narrative, Witnessing, and History' in *The Tapestry of Health, Illness and Disease*, ed. Vera Kalitzkus and Peter L. Twohig (New York: Rodopi, 2009), 22-42 (p. 37).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Shoshana Felman, 'Camus' *The Plague*, or a Monument to Witnessing' in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 93-119 (p. 95).

the interlacing of first and third-person narrative reminds the reader that this is a fictional account. A substantial part of the text is written from the perspective of Henry Speake and although he does not draw attention to his act of diarising events he does emphasize the need for recording events as testimony: 'If somebody were to read my ledger, they'd see for themselves how we were unable to keep going so in that respect it was a good record, but for me, it was the last pages of Speake & Son and therefore a part of my testament' (p. 275). The first-person narrative places Henry at the centre of the disease narrative, reinforces his position as witness and his account as a testimony of events. Elena Gomel observes an inherent ambiguity in the plague witness:

On the one hand, to fulfill their task the narrators must be granted (at least temporary) immunity. On the other hand, by identifying with the collective body whose dissolution they chronicle, they experience its protracted agony. Writing becomes dying; not so much a means to survive as the endless postponement of the irreversible moment of death.³⁹

The narrator is set apart from the affected community at the same time that he is positioned as speaking for them:

As more people fell ill I debated with myself: should I pass the letter on or should I assume it to be the ravings of a man in the last stages of fever? I felt very alone in this, being sure that Walter would dismiss me without ceremony and that Allen would have little sympathy ... There was no point whatever in talking to my sisters. (p. 25).

Henry is shown as isolated: 'very alone', yet at the same time is reaffirmed as part of the general community through his risk of catching the disease: 'a man in the last stages of fever'. James foregrounds this paradoxical position by interweaving first and third person narration throughout her novel so that Henry's testimony is continually interrupted and fragmented, forcing him back into the general community, emphasizing the risk of contamination. This reiterates the potentially temporary nature of his survival

³⁹ Elana Gomel, 'The Plague of Utopias: Pestilence and the Apocalyptic Body', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46 (2000), 405-433 (p. 411).

by virtue of narratorial witness. Gomel asserts that ‘The witness may fall silent but another, indistinguishable witness will take his or her place’⁴⁰ and the third person narration reinforces this possibility.

Henry’s entries are written in the past tense which is not unusual in a journal but there are indicators in the text that the entries have been written at some point in the future rather than at the end of each day as in a journal. They thus constitute an act of remembering rather than a straightforward daily record of the events taking place, something which James draws attention to in the text: ‘*And this might sound like another strange thing to remember about that day*’ (p. 6). He refers to knowledge when writing which he did not possess at the time: ‘*I didn’t know what he’d died of, not then*’ (p. 6). This shows an element of retrospective analysis and foregrounds the act of transforming history that Felman argues takes places when narrating it.

James’s narrative is concerned with the relationship between fiction and the historical events it represents. She uses aspects of the narrative structure to emphasize its status as witness and to self-reflexively scrutinize its status as an authoritative account of events. The text is divided into three parts, each beginning with a quotation from a different historical document:

‘The disease simply had its way. It came like a thief in the night and stole treasure.’ Ministry of Health Report on the Pandemic of Influenza 1918-19’. (Part 1)

‘We have studied, particularly, the report of the Medical Officer of the Local Government Board. We conclude, after mouthing such plaguey syllables as “meningococcic” and “saprophylic” – oh, that doctors had never heard of Greek! – that there is no cure, no remedy, small hope and little help.’ Daily Mirror, 24 October 1918. (Part 2)

‘No one has a good word for the latest scourge, the “Spanish flu”. Women go about handkerchiefs to nose and reeking of antiseptic. The two pet pastimes are

⁴⁰ Gomel, p. 412.

sneezing and skipping – the first not caused by ‘flu, but by the use of Kruschen Salts to prevent it by getting rid of the germs, the second by way of keeping warm in the healthiest way. An impromptu sneezing party proved rather a frolic; the guests passed round the salts, sniffed and sneezed into properly disinfected hankies in a disinfected room. There may be developments with competitions, the best sneezer to get a prize; or, if members of the minority sex are present, bets might enliven the proceedings, which would certainly often become hilarious.’ Ladies Section, Illustrated London News, 2 November 1918. (Part 3)

All the texts are genuine historical sources and their inclusion serves as a device to reinforce the authenticity of the events described in the narrative whilst simultaneously drawing attention to the fictionality of the main narrative. It creates what Felman describes as ‘a first-hand document, situated at the level of primordial data closely adhering to historical perception’⁴¹ indicating that the text can still function as an effective representation of historical events despite its artifice.

The relationship between contemporary historical fiction and history is a complex one. Felman states that contemporary writing is in a state ‘of “constant obligation” to the “woes of history,” and to its dead’ and suggests that in Camus’ *The Plague* this is represented by the passing of notebooks to Rieux when Tarrou dies as a form of ‘testimonial legacy’.⁴² The imperative to write in order to provide an enduring witness to the traumas experienced in war is an act now firmly associated with the Holocaust but it can also be seen in the memoirs and journals of veterans of the First World War and continues with accounts written by veterans of more recent conflicts. A similar obligation to testify is created in *This Time of Dying* when first Thomas Wey’s letter and then his papers come into Henry’s possession. The obligation created by the letter is thrust on Henry by circumstances rather than sought out:

[T]hat’s when I found the letter. For a moment, I thought the postman might have dropped it on the first delivery but then I remembered that the man had been holding something when I’d gone to him in the road. I hadn’t thought

⁴¹ Felman, p. 101.

⁴² Felman, p. 115.

anything of it at the time but now it was in front of me, on the floor, I felt nervous. I don't remember ever waiting for an important letter but I imagine that you might be a bit jittery when you see it, in case it's not what you want, or more than you dare hope for. I picked it up. (p. 5)

The discovery of the letter is fundamental to the progression of the narrative and its importance is highlighted by Henry's nervous reaction to it. That Thomas Wey has died trying to post his letter warning the Principle Medical Officer, Arthur Newsholme, about the influenza outbreak places a degree of responsibility on Henry but James does not represent this as an obligation to fulfil Wey's intentions but rather to witness and testify to the lack of reaction by the authorities to Wey's earlier pleas for action. James portrays Henry as a man of good character who is careful of his reputation: 'I don't like to touch anything when I'm on my own like that, in case there's money and so forth' (p. 4) and his decision to retain the letter and take possession of Wey's papers is shown to be a significant diversion from his previous behaviour: 'There have been opportunities all my life to take from the deceased and it had never occurred to me to do so. The papers compounded my dishonesty and I have no excuse for it' (p. 6). This aspect of his actions demonstrates the importance of making information available rather than allowing it to fall into the hands of those who might conceal or suppress it. The issue of individual conscience takes on a wider significance than whether it is right for Henry to retain the papers and instead focuses on the imperative to make sure the information is disseminated in the best way. The weight of the obligation, and the lack of a straightforward course of action, is emphasized by Henry's deliberations about what to do with the information and the ferocity with which he protects the papers from those who may not take them seriously, in particular from Eric Bevans because he 'didn't like his manner' (p. 213). The obligation to bear witness to events thus invokes a higher level of conscience in Henry and follows from the perceived intention of the original owner of the papers. Wey is shown to have died in the act of attempting to incite action from Newsholme and without Wey's professional authority, Henry must seek more creative ways to encourage action but the imperative to provide a narrative of events remains foregrounded.

The positioning of its central character as a chronicler of historical events forms part of a preoccupation in James's novel with the relationship between fiction and history. This is further highlighted by her choice of poem to conclude the narrative. The complicated provenance of the poem can be viewed as a reflection of the anxiety inherent in the representation of trauma and suffering which is seen in earlier First World War texts such as Sassoon's *Sherston* trilogy, which were neither straightforward autobiography nor entirely fictional. The two verses, presented as a single poem, is credited to 'Sir George Newman Friends' Quarterly Examiner September 1918' (James, pp. 291-2) but its provenance is not so straightforward:

I

I am in deep woods,
Between the two twilights.

Whatever I am and may be,
Write it down to the Light in me;
I am I, and it is my deed;
For I know that the paths are dark
Between the two twilights.

I have made my choice to proceed
By the light I have within;
And the issue rests with me,
Who might sleep in a chrysalis,
In the fold of a simple prayer,
Between the two twilights.

Having nought but the Light in me,
Which I take for my soul in arms,
Resolved to go unto the wells
For water, rejecting spells,
And mouthings of magic for charms,
And the cup that does not flow.

I am in deep woods
Between the two twilights.
Over valley and hill
I hear the woodland wave,
Like the voice of Time, as slow,
The voice of Life, as grave,
The voice of Death, as still.

II

The stars are with the voyager wherever he may sail,
The moon is constant to her time, the sun will never fail,
But follow, follow round the world, the green earth and the sea,
So Love is with the lover's heart wherever he may be. (pp. 291-292)

The inclusion of a poem as an epilogue provides a textual link to other earlier works about the First World War, notably that produced by the soldier poets. The way in which it is presented is interesting. The single poem actually derives from two separate poems. The first verse, 'I am in deep woods' is a poem by the Victorian novelist George Meredith and although the date the poem was written is uncertain, Meredith died in 1909 so it would have pre-dated both the war and the pandemic.⁴³ The second poem was written by Thomas Hood before 1845.⁴⁴ The reference in James' text reflects the format in which the poems were published in the Friends' Quarterly Examiner; as though they were two verses of the same poem. The poem is reproduced in the Quarterly Examiner at the end of the lead article entitled 'The House of the Four Winds'. The article is not credited and focuses on the role of the League of Nations and about the need for better education. The poem sits, somewhat in isolation at the end of the article with no indication, or analysis, to link it to the preceding narrative. However, it seems to tie in with the sentiment expressed in the section on education: 'But at last the forces of reaction and prejudice have been defeated and the English child steps out

⁴³ George Meredith, *The Poetical Works of George Meredith*, ed. G. M. Trevelyan (London: Constable and Company, 1919), p. 342.

⁴⁴ Thomas Hood, *The Works of Thomas Hood. Comic and Serious: In prose and verse* (London: Edward Moxon & Co, 1862-1863), p. 120.

of the Dark Ages into the sunlight of a new time'⁴⁵ which would seem to indicate optimism for the future. The poems are featured several times in the novel in addition to the end so that the use of intertextuality within James's narrative is foregrounded: earlier in the narrative when Henry reads them in the Friends' Quarterly Examiner meant for Thomas Wey; and they form the words written on the note which Henry passes to Allen after Gladys' burial. In this way, the poem creates a link between the different spheres of Henry's life as well as providing the final commentary on the crisis, emphasizing the role of literature in prompting connections and providing a forum for evaluation. It follows Henry's final entry as exhausted he falls into bed with 'no reason to get up' (p. 290) as his business, health and relationships fall victim to the pandemic. That James chooses to end Henry's narration, and the novel, so abruptly without any sense of resolution reflects its realism. It is simply the end of what has preceded it; just as it is in any journal abandoned by its author. It reflects a failure of first person narrative to provide a conclusion because the narratorial voice has been interrupted. It is a failure which could be overcome through the use of a third person narrator but James resists the need to provide closure, choosing instead to end her novel with the more ambiguous outside voice of the poem. The provenance of this final historical source is interesting since all the other historical sources used in James' narrative are authentic. Cooke argues that '[e]ach author writes plague by allowing features of the disease to infect their writing'⁴⁶ so that the narrative 'might stutter, repeat itself or wander incoherently'.⁴⁷ James' inclusion of the poem reflects a narrative which has itself become infected by disease, including the language with which it is written, so that its veracity and authenticity have become contaminated.

Cooke argues that in Camus' and Defoe's texts the 'relentlessness of the plague is written into the language' as the narrative becomes infected with the fever it seeks to describe.⁴⁸ Similarly, in James's narrative, details of the disease are delivered in short sentences broken down further by an abundance of commas to reflect the growing panic created by fears of a pandemic:

⁴⁵ 'From the House of the Four Winds', *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, 52 (1918), 356-375 (p. 374).

⁴⁶ Jennifer Cooke, *Legacies of Plague in Literature, Theory and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 19.

⁴⁷ Cooke, *Legacies*, p. 24.

⁴⁸ Cooke, 'Writing Plague', p. 25.

The world's body can hardly draw breath; it is sick and brought to its bed. Its wounds are open. The young spill out. There are no circumstances, save peace and universal quarantine, that can afford even the slightest hope. Death is crossing every sea. (p. 12)

In James' narrative the increasing speed with which the influenza spreads is reflected in the urgent language used to describe it which builds an expectation of death everywhere. Soon '[t]here wasn't a street without its sick . . . and in some streets it was every house' (p. 14). The impact of the disease increases as the novel progresses and before long 'the sick and dead were mounting up and disturbing the general running of things' (p. 74). Soon, hardly a page passes without another victim and it becomes apparent that this is not just another case of winter influenza:

'This influenza, it's nothing like it was in the summer, is it?'

'No. They're going down quicker and staying down longer. There's more of them dying. And the colouring up – you can't say we've seen a lot of that before, can you?'

'And they're young,' Henry said. 'More than you'd expect'. (p. 37)

Cooke identifies a further correlation between disease and the narrative which seeks to represent it in the presence of 'small, almost self-contained narrative outbreaks' which she terms 'episodemics' and which erupt from the main narrative like the characteristic buboes on plague victims so that the 'surface of the narrative is rumpled by the bumpy observations'.⁴⁹ These episodemics are collected by the narrator as evidence of the spread of the disease, their brevity reinforcing the 'untimely interruption of life'.⁵⁰ Buboes are not symptomatic of influenza as the narrative acknowledges: 'Mr Speake couldn't have meant the real plague – I mean, nobody's had the symptoms, have they? Not boils or whatever it was?' (p. 116). However, James's use of episodemics within her narrative reflects the way in which she repeatedly aligns images of plague with the influenza pandemic.

⁴⁹ Cooke, 'Writing Plague', p. 25.

⁵⁰ Cooke, 'Writing Plague', p. 26.

The pandemic is explicitly referred to as a plague, firstly by Thomas Wey who prophesises that ‘a plague is now among us which may well leave the earth to the animals’ (p. 6) and later when Allen repeats Henry’s fears : ‘we’re on the brink of some kind of plague’ (p. 116). More subtly, the ‘pillow-cases and shirts flapping out of the windows. The locked, deserted shops, each with its hand-written notice’ which prompt Allen to ask, ‘What sense of alarm would lead you to announce your illness in the street?’ (p. 116) evoke images of when the Black Death and bubonic plague swept London and households marked their doors to show they were stricken with the disease.

The gathering of these short episodemics by the narrators, both first and third person, reinforces their role as witnesses, seeking to collate as much evidence as possible in their record of the event. Their proliferation throughout the main narrative mirrors the spread of the disease. Stories from the suffering community are gathered together in the narrative to offer diverse glimpses of those affected by the pandemic. The fate of some is mentioned only briefly and they remain anonymous victims: ‘Many other desks were empty; a colleague had fallen off his chair that very hour and been taken away in an ambulance’ (p. 159). Others have more impact, despite their brevity. The story of Herbert Winter who kills his family, including his grandchildren, by cutting their throats erupts unexpectedly from the main narrative as if to compound the horror. The aberrant circumstances are foregrounded in the banality of the scene: ‘all their little shoes laid out at the foot of the bed’ (p. 238). Its brevity marks their deaths as almost incidental against the backdrop of the pandemic in which bodies might go undiscovered for days: ‘If he hadn’t gone looking, they’d still be there now’ (p. 238). James also uses the letters exchanged between Henry and his sister Rose to interrupt the continuity of the narrative. Inserting Rose’s geographically distant perspective not only temporarily relocates the focus of suffering within the narrative but also disrupts the continuity through the time delay inherent in postal communications between London and Napier, New Zealand. As Cooke asserts, episodemics break up the flow of the narrative and thus reflect the impact that an outbreak of plague has on society.⁵¹ Their use in James’s

⁵¹ Cooke, ‘Writing Plague’, p. 26.

narrative creates further fragmentation in the narrative to mirror the sense of panic and disorientation experienced by the community during the pandemic.

War and disease

The fragmentary representation of the trauma caused by the pandemic draws comparisons with the civil upheavals experienced during war and Sontag argues that: ‘Order is the oldest concern of political philosophy, and if it is plausible to compare the polis to an organism, then it is plausible to compare civil disorder to an illness’.⁵² Both James and Self make this connection in their narratives by using disease as a metaphor for the breakdown of society due to the war and the responses to it. In *Umbrella*, encephalitis reflects modernity as the disease with which society is shown to be afflicted, creating imbalance and despondency. The influenza pandemic at the heart of James’ narrative is used to create the apocalyptic fear that the war represents the fatal disease from which society cannot recover. Any optimism which might exist while treatment is attempted is distinctly lacking in both narratives; in James’ as the treatment for influenza proves inadequate and in Self’s as the improvement in the post-encephalitis patients who have been given L-Dopa dissipates. The lack of optimism in Self’s text is emphasized by extinguishing the initial hope generated by the seemingly miraculous improvement of the patients. Such pessimism reflects the knowledge that contemporary conflicts remain ongoing and there appears to be no possible cure for society’s need to wage war.

It could be said that the extent of change following the war parallels the treatment of disease. In this way the spread of the disease becomes a criticism of the processes by which society is managed and there is evidence of this in both James’ and Self’s narratives. Sontag suggests that in this context the inability to control the disease becomes a metaphor for lack of foresight because ‘as prudence is needed to control serious diseases, so foresight is needed to control social crises’ as without prompt and effective action there comes a point when the ills of society are beyond help.⁵³

⁵² Sontag, p. 77.

⁵³ Sontag, p. 78.

The connection between war and pandemic is clearly made in *This Time of Dying* by setting the narrative in the closing months of the First World War. This makes the representation of the pandemic historically accurate since that is when the actual outbreak took place but it also provides an opportunity to draw parallels between the representation of the disease and popular perceptions about the war. In a text set during the war it is perhaps not all that surprising that both the men who die in the first few pages have recently returned from France but it does link the two deaths. Henry makes the connection clear: ‘*but him being that purplish-blue, like Thomas Wey, that really took me back*’ (p. 11) and emphasizes the unusual nature of their deaths. The writings of Thomas Wey reinforce the implications of this connection: ‘This pestilence will not be confined. I have examined the dead in France and I have seen the first young die in London. I fear we are lost’ (p. 12). His words also suggest that the disease constitutes a form of foreign invasion. This connection is frequently made in the movies mentioned earlier where the opening scene is often that of an exotic foreign location, such as Africa or the Far East, where people are dying from an unknown disease. It is only when the virus is unwarily transported to the Western world that fear and panic ensue. Such scenarios reinforce the concept of danger as external to the western world; coming from the foreign or the other and presenting a deadly threat to humanity only when it threatens western civilisation:

Part of the centuries-old conception of Europe as a privileged cultural entity is that it is a place which is colonized by lethal diseases coming from elsewhere. Europe is assumed to be by rights free of disease.⁵⁴

James’ text reinforces this concept of disease as a foreign threat to the small London community: ‘In the old days they used to call influenza the knock-me-down fever. And we’ve had Russian and now it’s Spanish. You don’t hear of Welsh ‘flu, do you? Or American? ...’ (p. 31). There is an element of humour here but it cannot obscure the fundamental assumption that something which can cause the community harm must come from outside of it. As Sontag states:

⁵⁴ Sontag, p 136.

One feature of the usual script for plague: the disease invariably comes from somewhere else. The names for syphilis, when it began its epidemic sweep through Europe in the last decade of the fifteenth century, are an exemplary illustration of the need to make a dreaded disease foreign. It was the ‘French pox’ to the English, *morbus Germanicus* to the Parisians, the Naples sickness to the Florentines, the Chinese disease to the Japanese. But what may seem like a joke about the inevitability of chauvinism reveals a more important truth: that there is a link between imagining disease and imagining foreignness. It lies perhaps in the very concept of wrong, which is archaically identical with the non-us, the alien. (pp. 133-134)

In *This Time of Dying* Thomas Wey represents the outsider, the foreign threat, although it is not him but the virus he carries which is the foreign intruder. He is represented as someone from outside the community, living in temporary lodgings where neither his landlady nor anyone else seems to know much about him. He is said to ‘*have been sent back from France with what [his landlady] had always believed was a bad stomach wound, ‘or something in that department’, as he ate nothing to speak of*’ (p. 7). That the disease originated from outside the community is reinforced in an episodic narrative which describes the death of Henry’s nephew, Samuel, on his return from active service in France. Samuel has returned with significant injuries; his ‘face was squeezed together, obliterating an eye’ (p. 9) and he walks with the aid of crutches. He has hardly entered the house when ‘Samuel’s nose started to bleed, great gushes of hot red blood, spouting on to their clothes and across them, down to the carpet’ (p. 10). The irony in Henry’s understated: ‘He’s got a touch of influenza’ (p. 11) undercuts any possibility of a trivial incident and making these two men the first to show signs of the disease firmly establishes it as originating abroad.

In representing the threat of disease as a foreign enemy, war and disease become linked though language, as Sontag states: ‘the disease itself is conceived as the enemy on which society wages war.’⁵⁵ Military metaphors are frequently invoked to describe the process of disease within the body: viruses like influenza are said to invade the body;

⁵⁵ Sontag, p. 67.

attack the body's defences; and break down resistance. Sontag states that: 'Etymologically, patient means sufferer'⁵⁶ and as the patient suffers from the disease he or she becomes its victim. They are thus required to put up a fight against the disease, to be brave and to soldier on. The potential for death during an outbreak can be likened to the slaughter of war. In her analysis of Camus' *The Plague*, Felman describes how the representation of a virulent disease invokes images of war:

[T]he horror of the epidemic constantly suggests that of the war through the Plague's potential for massive killing. What the Plague, above all, means is a *mass murder* of such scope that it deprives the very loss of life of any tragic impact, reducing death itself to an anonymous, depersonalized experience, to a statistical *abstraction*.⁵⁷

She foregrounds the shared potential for indiscriminate killing where the enormity of the death toll reduces people to mere statistics. However, historical fiction works against this tendency to abstraction by focusing on the experiences of individuals, encouraging empathy between reader and victim. James' characterisation links those individuals who die to her protagonists giving them greater significance in the narrative and resisting any anonymity threatened by the rising casualty lists: the doctor's friend John Drummond; Allen's friend Ruth; and Ada's lover Gladys.

The representation of the influenza pandemic in James' text shows many similarities to the way the progress of the war was perceived in popular opinion. At the beginning of the war people were generally caught up in the excitement of it all. The rush to volunteer saw men queuing at the recruitment offices, eager to enlist and fearful that it would all be over before they had chance to play their part and women and children cheered in the streets as they set off for war. Their perception of what was to occur was based on the glorification of war generated by previous British military success. Disillusionment only set in later when the reality of what was happening became apparent. Similarly, James' text reflects the widely-held public perception that the influenza is a disease which although unpleasant for its duration, does not need to be

⁵⁶ Sontag, p. 123.

⁵⁷ Felman, pp. 97-98.

taken too seriously or feared: '*It's not as if we were strangers to influenza. It came every year, some worse than others*' (p. 19). Just as the concept of a war in which mass British casualties would occur was outside the public imagination so the association of influenza with an even greater death toll was not easily accepted.

James' portrayal of the pandemic mirrors the way in which the unexpectedly high casualty numbers of war caused people to re-evaluate their feelings about it as the feeling grew that those in authorities were failing in their duty and that too little was being done to protect communities from the impact of influenza. Similar concerns were raised by soldiers and their families against the war leaders such as General Haig. James' portrayal of the government officials' reaction to the pandemic invites similar accusations through the character Eric Bevens, a local government administrator. Initially, Bevens invites some sympathy when his wife and mother are taken ill and he has to take time off work to deal with their domestic affairs. He is also shown to be under considerable pressure at work due to the absence of other members of staff: 'The correspondence was in a shambles; some of it was dated as far back as the previous month' (p. 159). The delay in acknowledging Wey's letter was caused by this increased workload and Eric Bevens does read it promptly when it becomes his responsibility. Although the action he takes, writing a general reply, proves to be something of an under reaction to the growing crisis he is only reflecting popular opinion in his decision that '[t]he symptomology was accurate enough but one could hardly describe a winter influenza epidemic as a plague' (p. 159). It is only later when Bevens becomes locked in a battle with Henry over Wey's papers that his contempt for the ordinary man is revealed. When Bevens sees that the mortality rate is rising alarmingly and notes that 'young adults [make] up the majority of the dead' (p. 187) he feels obliged to look into it more closely despite the lack of orders from above, 'Sir Arthur Newsholme had sent no communication that pertained to the figures and the few clerks remaining would normally be required to note and file, not to pass judgement' (p. 187). Bevens decides he should visit Dr Wey after all but he is not happy to learn that Henry is now in possession of Wey's papers. He dismisses undertaking as 'the *dismal trade*', and admits that '[h]e had never considered the general undertaker's existence beyond admitting to the unfortunate need of one in relation to a deceased relative' (p. 197). His arrogant contempt for the tradesman draws comparison to the authorities attitude towards the

soldiers in the trenches, useful when performing a service or fighting for their country but otherwise of no significance. His superior attitude and aggressive questioning do not inspire cooperation, and incite Henry to the mutinous withholding of any information at all which enrages Bevens and sets him on a personal crusade to bring Henry down. On finally receiving an apology from Henry he is triumphant:

The more Eric Bevens considered his exchange with the undertaker, the more emphatically he desired to bring the man down. Dr Wey and his theories were no longer a priority; all speculation was running a poor second to the need for mastery over the mutinous working class. (p. 226)

The portrayal of the authorities then is somewhat ambiguous. The lack of adequate process and supervision at the local government office is repeatedly highlighted in the narrative as is their abject failure to respond adequately to the crisis: ‘They’d been given no word from the authorities and the man I spoke to refused to consider that there might be a need for it’ (p. 153). In particular, the lack of communication is foregrounded and Arthur Newsholme’s failure to adequately manage the crisis places the blame with those in higher positions than Eric Bevens. Thus the portrayal of the individuals involved, such as Bevens, is far more complicated since although some of his behaviour is unpleasant this is mitigated by personal and professional pressures resulting from the pandemic and the lack of any useful guidance from his superiors.

The portrayal of the authorities in James’ narratives thus bears a striking resemblance to the popular representation of the military authorities during the war. The First World War Generals and General Haig, in particular, have attracted vehement criticism and much public antipathy for their role in the conflict. However, as James Hayward states, the ‘Simplistic denigration of the Generals and revelling in defeat may be more satisfying for some, and undoubtedly makes for better copy, but it does not tell the whole story of the First World War, or even the true one’.⁵⁸ In representing Haig, Sheffield cautions that ‘we must be careful to distinguish between ‘callousness’ and

⁵⁸ James Hayward, *Myths and Legends of the First World War*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), p. 153.

ruthless determination to succeed'⁵⁹ and insists that although Haig inevitably made mistakes he also deserves credit for his successes.⁶⁰ Todman agrees that a commander should be judged, not on his personality, but on 'whether he wins or loses'⁶¹ and Haig did have victories; his 1918 offensives forced the Germans to surrender and have been hailed as 'the greatest military victory in Britain's history'.⁶² What this shows is that modern historians tend to take a more balanced view of the general's actions than popular opinion and this complexity is reflected in the portrayal of those in authority in James' text.

A common aphorism used to express the relationship between the soldiers who fought and those who commanded them is 'lions led by donkeys'. In *This Time of Dying* there are several examples of ordinary people behaving heroically and doing what they can to help others despite the lack of support from the authorities. These exist as sub-stories running within the main narrative to contrast the practicality and determination of the individual against the inaction of the authorities. For example, the local vicar is determined to continue his visits despite his wife's concerns for his own health: 'If they can't get to church, Muriel, the church must go to them. The shepherd . . . must save the sheep' (p. 219). He insists that he is not afraid to visit his parishioners during the epidemic: 'I shall go forth in a cloud of holy disinfectant' (p. 131). Similarly, Allen's friend Ruth is determined to carry on visiting and administering to the sick 'until the epidemic was over – or until we catch it . . . which would be most unfair if we're doing good works' (p. 123). Sadly the unfairness in life becomes apparent when Ruth catches the disease and dies from it. Visiting the homes of sick patients, the vicar and Ruth are portrayed as being at the front line in the fight against the disease; metaphorically linked to the soldiers fighting in the trenches of France and Belgium.

James also draws strong connections with the Western Front in the portrayal of the medical treatment available to the domestic community. When Dr Tite develops a triage system that 'allowed him to greet, diagnose and prescribe in under a minute' (p. 162) it

⁵⁹ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory – The First World War: Myths and Realities*, (London: Headline Publishing Group, 2001), p. 138.

⁶⁰ Sheffield, p. 135.

⁶¹ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 83.

⁶² Todman, p. 82.

invokes images of the military doctors passing over the battle wounded, without time or resources to make more than a cursory observation. It highlights the overwhelming nature of the numbers of dead involved in the pandemic which reflects a similar situation at the front. The unprecedented number of dead as a result of the influenza means that undertakers like Henry struggle to bury the dead: *'the four of us were on the point of being overwhelmed, however many hours we worked'* (p. 126). Without the resources to conduct funerals and inter the dead their bodies are held in a local barn until such time as they can be dealt with. There are obvious comparisons here to the situation at the Front where bodies were abandoned in No Man's Land or left where they fell in the trenches. The narrative portrays the helplessness felt by those trying to help as shown when Dr Tite's observes that it didn't matter what he did as, 'the survivors would pull through and the doomed would not' (p. 119). Just as in the trenches, the image is one of ordinary people struggling to maintain some semblance of normality amidst the chaos.

In Self's novel disease becomes a metaphor for modern society; sleepwalking, as represented by Audrey's catatonic state, after the First World War into an increasingly mechanised and bureaucratic environment. Albert, whose rise to the higher echelons of the civil service mark him out as a successful man professionally, if not a particularly likeable one, becomes the representative of the authorities: 'Albert understands far better than his companions that war is always an opportunity' (p. 172). His callous disregard for the value of human life is shown in his consideration of psychiatric patients and even children as potential combatants:

The lunatics were probably brought in by rail or road – but why not by the Grand Junction Canal? He heard their cries lapping at the coal wharves . . . lunatic women . . . they were being classified now in terms of their usefulness for the effort – why not children, then, imbeciles, perhaps? After all, they'd serve quite as well as . . . machine-gun fodder. (p. 173)

His inhumanity is further reflected in the text by his treatment of his sister Audrey from whom he is estranged because he took her erratic behaviour to be an attack on his wife and child; a view which Audrey's memories of the incident reflect quite differently.

Towards the end of the narrative, he too is shown to be suffering from a disease, Savant syndrome, which is responsible for his eidetic memory. So it is revealed that Albert is not naturally gifted but rather is sick, even success in the novel is tainted then by illness. Thus, Self's novel can be read as the representation of a society which is sick, through and through, so that even those who think they are healthy and productive are sufferers. In doing so it provides a damning commentary on modern society.

The First World War marks the starting point for Self's narrative in that it is from there, and the onset of Audrey's illness, that the text spreads out marking the event as the beginning of modern society. Throughout the narrative Self explicitly aligns war and disease: 'What was it Marcus had said of his time at the Hatch? mere trench warfare against mental disease' (pp. 189-90). Linguistically, death permeates Self's narrative; being the name of one of its central protagonists. Audrey's family name ensures its repeated use so that it is always foregrounded. It reflects the nature of a century of war and conflict and draws the reader to the central issues of the modern society which Self portrays. Modern society is frequently at war, whether in the conventional sense or in the war against disease. Thus the metaphorical and actual natures of the text converge through Audrey's identity. However, it is not a straightforward identity. Within her family there is dissent about the use of the name Death: 'Audrey's father, Sam Death: not De'Ath, not lar-de-dar, not like some uz thinks they're better than they should be' (p. 15). Audrey maintains her name despite attempts by the hospital authorities over the years to change it:

Deeth, Audrey, mutated into Deerth, Audrey ...It would have been next to impossible to have tracked this pseudonymous patient down through the decades within an institution in a continuing identity crisis, were it not that Miss De'Ath, AKA Miss Death, AKA Miss Deeth, AKA Miss Deerth, remained in *exactly the same place*. (p. 81)

Through this mutation of Audrey's name Self employs linguistic play to critique the reluctance to openly acknowledge death in a modern society seemingly dominated by violence. This is further compounded by showing the irony of Death volunteering to

fight in the First World War trenches. The repetition of Stanley's surname reinforces the nature of the trenches; they are all about death:

He enlisted at the Mitcham Road barracks as Death ... and as Death he attested that he would fight for King and country. As Death he drilled with a dummy rifle and mimed fifteen rounds rapid fire – and no one thought it queer. He lay in the bell tent at night with the others' piss dribbling on his face, yet none of them said, I'm pissing on Death ... As Death he sneered when the MO lectured the company on the horrors of gon and syph, as Death he sat dulling his tunic buttons with acid, as Death he reported to the QM. (pp. 201-202)

There is no suggestion here of a distortion or sanitising of Stanley's surname as within the arena of war the reality of death is foregrounded. Death is at the heart of Self's narrative because death has pervaded the century on which he focuses. Beginning with the First World War, the twentieth century has been an era of conflict; two world wars and a succession of further hostilities have resulted in a level of global instability which has continued into the new century.

In this way the encephalitis disease and the treatment of the patients suffering its after effects become a metaphor for war and its legacy for modern society. Audrey's decline into illness comes on at the end of the war and is represented as a form of living burial: 'the malaise had come upon her relentlessly, in mounting heavy, earthy waves, until this morning she had feared she might never dig myself out from under it' (p. 287). The inevitability of her decline once afflicted is emphasized in the relentless advance of the disease, pushing forward like the soldiers in the trenches so that she is consumed in 'earthy waves' just as they were. The impasse of trench warfare during the war and the inability of society to move forward following the war are reiterated in Audrey's suspension which creates a stalling in the present, a kind of pause which also afflicts those war veterans, like Geordie in *Another World*, who continue to live in the war era rather than in the present. Connections between the patients and other war veterans are made throughout the text:

Enkies? he queries. They had a nickname? Marcus snorts, Naturally! After all, they were simply another feature of the post-war scene – along with limbless ex-servicemen and economic stagnation. I remember as a young man going to the cinema and seeing newsreels of enkies – quite a lot was made of ’em in their hyperkinetic phase, and you could understand why because they had a strange sort of physical genius, able to make sudden moves that were deft – but zany and prankish, y’know, juggling lots of balls, chucking stuff, leaping and skipping. (pp. 91-92)

Here, they are described as part of the landscape of post-war Britain, the subject of cinema newsreels, standing side-by-side with limbless veterans and economic problems. They are portrayed as the objects of public interest because they are strange and shocking in their appearance and actions. Like the disfigured veterans, they have become victims of an unhappy period which people would like to forget and leave behind; visible reminders that things are not always so optimistic. The links between the post-encephalitis sufferers and war veterans in the text are not only physical; they bear mental scars which draw comparisons to traumatised soldiers. Audrey compares herself to soldiers suffering from shell shock:

I am not a fool and nor have I been in a complete swoon these past years. If you wish to form some idea of the constitution of my mind, it may well aid you to think of me as a sort of soldier but recently returned from the Front, and afflicted with a very peculiar case of shell shock. (p. 212)

This firmly positions her as a victim of trauma. This connection between shell-shocked veterans and post-encephalitis patients is echoed in Sacks’ documentary text as well:

During August 1969 Miss D. remained in a subterranean state: ‘She looks almost dazed at times,’ our speech-pathologist, Miss Kohl, wrote to me, ‘like someone who has come back from the front line, like a soldier with shell-shock.’⁶³

⁶³ Sacks, p. 52.

Throughout the narrative, Audrey displays many of the characteristics of First World War veterans. For instance, the way she lives in the past, because she has no present, is an innovative way of representing the experiences of psychologically traumatised veterans.

Her mind still maintains a closer link with the past than the present: 'her brain . . . is outside of time . . . so far away . . . in another place . . . in another phase of development' (p. 139). Audrey apparently resides both in the past and the present; bodily she is in the present but mentally, she is in the past, a divide frequently seen in the representation of trauma survivors. Furthermore, the glimpses that Audrey gets of her past can be likened to the flashbacks which occur in victims of trauma, and are not always consciously accessible or under her control. Cathy Caruth states that '[t]he ability to recover the past is . . . closely and paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to have access to it'.⁶⁴ Audrey's memories can be accessed only when the administration of L-DOPA makes her lucid enough to do so and even then the results are unpredictable. Caruth argues that:

[T]rauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge . . . and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time. Not having been fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become . . . integrated into a completed story of the past.⁶⁵

In the representation of Audrey, prior knowledge is removed so that the incompleteness and incompatibility of her memories is foregrounded as they appear isolated. This and the fragmented nature of the text emphasizes the incompleteness of Audrey's memories which have to be painstakingly pieced together in an attempt to form a complete narrative.

⁶⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 152.

⁶⁵ Caruth, p. 153.

The period when she is in a catatonic state takes the form of a gap in Audrey's existence. She is still living yet she is unable to function or interact with the world around her: 'Waking that very morning, Audrey found the world was barred to me' (p. 285). She exists in a kind of limbo; between life and death. In Self's novel this blurring of life and death is also evident in the story of Audrey's brother Stanley. When Stanley dies in the trenches he continues to live on in the narrative in a dreamlike afterlife in which he continues living underground and eventually returns to England. *Umbrella* is littered with literary allusions which place it in dialogue with earlier representations of the war and the underground tunnels in which Stanley takes up residence after his death appear in several other narratives about the war; Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Sebastian Faulk's *Birdsong* being perhaps the most notable. However, Stanley's afterlife experience also brings to mind Paul Fussell's description of the 'Trogolodyte World'⁶⁶ and its effect on the soldiers who endured it: 'To be in the trenches was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being unorientated and lost'.⁶⁷ Such a sense of unreality is clearly apparent in Self's portrayal of this aspect of the text. The juxtaposing of Stanley's story, dead but alive in his afterlife experience, with Audrey's, alive but effectively dead to the world, questions the nature of existence itself:

I-am, I-am, I-am – a magic spell, chanted by a terrified child in the drained-out nothingness before dawn, I-am, I-am, I-am – Audrey sighs dispiritedly, aware suddenly of her own flickering existence and deathly fatigue. They both know that only one product derives from these formulae: that . . . he is not. – You don't imagine –. Adeline cannot continue. She tries again: They say missing and presumed . . . so you don't think –. (p.296)

M. Hunter Hayes notes a concern with '[t]he anxieties of identity', and in particular 'the autonomy of selfhood',⁶⁸ in Self's work generally and a preoccupation with the nature of existence is shown here with the repetition of the phrase 'I am' which also occurs elsewhere in the text. Here, Self also reflects on the soldier who is missing presumed

⁶⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Sterling, 1975), p. 43.

⁶⁷ Paul Fussell, p. 57.

⁶⁸ M. Hunter Hayes, *Understanding Will Self* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), p. 1.

dead. It is a subject which occurs in a number of contemporary novels about the First World War when relatives receive the infamous notice that their loved one is presumed lost in battle. One of the overriding issues with the receipt of this information is the unreality of it. Although the strong implication is that the soldier is dead the phrase 'missing presumed dead' allows continuing hope of a miraculous reappearance and creates an obstacle to acceptance and grieving. The idea that those who are alive might really be dead and conversely those who are dead might still be alive is a paradox which Self plays with in his narrative in his portrayal of the lives of Audrey and Stanley. While Audrey continues to exist in her living death, Stanley, missing presumed dead, personifies the miraculous resurrection of the soldier who is not dead but missing:

The narrow streets of the town were full of newspaper boys crying the latest headlines: THOUSANDS GIVEN UP FOR DEAD FOUND TO BE LIVING IN EXTENSIVE TUNNELLING BENEATH NO-MAN'S-LAND. (p. 337)

For much of this part of the narrative, the reader must endure the same ambiguity and uncertainty as those receiving the notices since it remains unclear whether Stanley has really survived or not. Following the explosion, Stanley is buried in 'sweet-smelling loam. Reddy-dark and then maroon-to-black' which 'packs around his arms, legs, trunk, neck, head – hammering down cottony paralysis into every joint and crevice' and 'there is no feeling any more – none after that final and extreme myoclonic jerk: the arms flung backwards, the spine bowed by the shockwave' (p. 273). Whether Stanley is dead or buried alive is complicated in the narrative when, after a pause in the retelling of Stanley's story while the narrative returns to Audrey's decline into catatonia, Stanley's consciousness still appears to have a presence:

[A]nd then there is sensation – the answering pressure of fingers that make his fingers exist once more, and once they are, so are his wrists, his forearms, his elbows, *all me benders*. (p. 278)

The possibility that Stanley has survived the shelling continues to grow in the reader's mind as he is dragged through the underground tunnels which stretch beneath the Western Front and introduced to other survivors: 'Men are packed into the well-lit

chamber' (p. 281). He continues to live with men of all nationalities in the underground tunnels in what could be a miraculous act of survival. That Stanley's survival is an illusion, a vision of life after death, is revealed through a series of clues and signifiers in the text. For instance, Stanley refers to those around him as: 'All are dead – all are buried' (p. 311) and describes a comfortable living environment with 'a horsehair settee, two big old paintings' and 'a sheep dog who did gamely enough in his treadmill on a diet of Victoria's Houndmeal that Stan ordered from Spillers of Cardiff' (p. 336). Another literary link provides a vital clue to the nature of Stanley's new existence: '*Curiouser and curiouser*' (p. 280) he thinks as he ventures into the tunnels as Self draws a link to Alice's dream of her descent into Wonderland. It becomes clear that there has been no reprieve and Stanley is not missing in action, safe beneath No Man's land, but dead. Since the boundaries between the different protagonists thoughts are so tightly interwoven the dream can also be attributed to Audrey's consciousness. In this way she represents the many relatives who remained in a state of denial after receiving the notice of missing presumed dead, clinging onto the word missing rather than acknowledging the word dead. With this interweaving of different narrative perspectives and the disorientating effect of the fantastical, Self challenges realist representation and draws attention to the instability of his fictional world. Fictional allusions underline the artifice of Self's narrative and this foregrounds the complexity of sifting historical fact from fictional construct and challenges the basis on which historical narrative gains greater authenticity from the employment of first person narrative perspective.

Self's narrative thus demonstrates a concern with the way in which the world is represented in narrative. His decision to write in a modernist style produces a postmodern critique of the form's effectiveness as a means of representing the real world and in particular its traumatic events. The use of two aspects of the real world, disease and war, which are arguably the most starkly realist aspects of it then contrasts with the disorientating and highly artificial narrative style. Furthermore, the use of both fictional and historical allusions within the text draws attention to the constructed nature of the narrative in order to explore and challenge its ability to represent such a complex reality.

Conclusion

A concern with the relationship between fictional and historical narrative is evident in both Self's and James' novels and James draws attention to the imaginative nature of her story through the insertion of historical documents as epigraphs so that their authenticity contrasts with the main narrative and foregrounds its fictionality. James's use of both historical and fictional material reveals the novel to be engaging with history and by foregrounding her narrative's fictionality she shows the historical novel not as inferior to historical documents so that its status as fiction needs to be hidden or obscured but as another effective means of representation.

One aspect of fictional narrative which has proved particularly effective in exploring traumatic historical events is that of the fictional witness. Cook argues that: 'literature provides an imaginative capacity which history cannot, but the way it achieves this is not through the superior images it can paint or the imaginative experiences it can stimulate; it is through the provision of these from a narrative position which an historical account is unable to provide'.⁶⁹ This draws attention to the powerful position of the fictional witness, who can relate aspects of history which remain unavailable to the historian. Self's narrative demonstrates this potential through his use of stream of consciousness narration to give access to the thoughts of his protagonists and provides a window on history seemingly uncorrupted by modern society through the eyes of Audrey. James employs a fictional witness alongside third person narration to show how providing a personal narrative of events contrasts with the more traditional perspectives of the historian. It is this perspective, Cooke argues, which means 'that fiction may be in a privileged position to address the trauma of enormous death counts' whether they are caused by disease or war.⁷⁰

The links between the representation of disease and war are made throughout both narratives as James and Self demonstrate their concern with the way war and disease are represented. They use a range of different literary styles, genres and techniques in order to explore their effectiveness for representation, intertextually scrutinizing the ways in which earlier authors have attempted to represent war and re-imagining and re-

⁶⁹ Cooke, 'Writing Plague', p. 37.

⁷⁰ Cooke, *Legacies*, p. 17.

contextualising them to test their effectiveness and continuing relevance. Although both narratives use disease as their central theme, their preoccupations remain the same as those seen throughout this thesis; effectively representing the influence of the First World War on modern society and exploring its lasting legacy into the next century. Both novelists reflect the continuing need to revisit the First World War in contemporary fiction together with the imperative to approach it in different ways in order to gain more understanding of its effect on modern society. Self chooses to do this through a complex narrative which creates a distance between text and reader which both encourages and confounds clear meaning; a technique which emphasizes the enormity of the event itself and the impossibility of fully exploring its influence. Although James' narrative has a less experimental form than Self's, she also utilises different perspectives and historical reference points to form an intertextual mosaic so that both novelists position their texts within wider debates about the continuing importance of the First World War for contemporary society and how it can be represented most effectively.

Conclusion

‘These ghosts will not speak for themselves: the process of interpretation continues’.¹

In this thesis I have shown how the authors of contemporary fiction have provided new perspectives on the ways in which the First World War is represented by considering its impact and legacy, not with the traditional focus on the trenches of the Western Front, but with narratives situated instead on the Home Front. To do so, I have drawn on a growing body of fiction which has emerged during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and which succeeds in widening the scope of First World War representation beyond the combatants who have so often been the primary focus in earlier texts.

Sharon Ouditt argues that in these earlier texts, experiences beyond the trenches are thrown ‘into dull relief’ compared to those of combatants as the ‘enormity of suffering on one side is counterbalanced by banal concerns with the price of domestic commodities’.² She criticizes this superficial representation of the ‘non-combatants who “love us when we’re home on leave” or are “wounded in a mentionable place”, [who] are presented ... as believing unreflectively what they read in the papers and speaking only in clichés beyond and behind which they dare not think’.³ This tendency to side-line aspects of the war not directly related to the fighting is not only evident in literary representations. In *The Long Shadow* (2013) David Reynolds considers the way in which the First World War is remembered and comments on the preoccupation with particular aspects of the war. In particular he cites the dominant images of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916 as representative of the war as a whole and asks ‘What are we missing? What new vistas might open up for those willing to clamber out of the

¹ James Campbell, ‘Interpreting the War’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261-279 (p. 277).

² Sharon Ouditt, ‘Debatable Ground: Freedom and Constraint in British First World War Prose Fiction’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-century British and American War Literature*, eds. Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 31-39 (p. 31).

³ *Ibid.*

trenches?’⁴ His question strikes a particular resonance with me and reflects my own preoccupation throughout my research as I have sought to explore those fictional texts which provide access to and representation of these missing aspects of the war. Reynolds suggests a number of ways in which historians can broaden their understanding of the legacy of the war, including widening their geographic horizons and taking a more critical look at the legacy of the war poets and his comments on the Home Front are especially pertinent to my study:

We are also overlooking the fact that this was a war in which the home front mattered almost as much as the battle front. Mobilizing the whole economy was crucial for modern warfare... So the ‘war experience’ covers a multitude of human beings, not just front-line soldiers; in particular the reactions of women to the conflict are still a hugely neglected area. The whole population of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Ireland in 1914 was about 46 million. The Great War was their story, not just that of 720,000 men who marched away for ever to foreign fields.⁵

As I have shown throughout this study, contemporary fiction is already actively engaged in providing representations of these new aspects of the war, reclaiming the war for those previously marginalised or erased from its history. James Campbell also observes a changing trend in literary criticism so that ‘we have experienced the gradual movement from placing the Great War in a narrow version of literary history to a much broader cultural account of history’.⁶ It reflects a growing recognition within popular and critical discourse of the role of non-combatants in the process of war and provides an acknowledgement of the all-enveloping nature of total war, both geographically and temporally.

Contemporary authors who focus their narratives on the Home Front in order to engage with debates about the First World War demonstrate an awareness of these changing perspectives on the conflict, allowing them to explore contemporary preoccupations and

⁴ David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013), p. 430.

⁵ Reynolds, pp. 430-431.

⁶ Campbell, p. 277.

concerns about war in an historical context. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods argue that historical fiction is concerned with ‘the relation of the past to the present, with where the past is and how it persists in our lives, and how it can be experienced or resisted’.⁷ The way the First World War is often publicly remembered, as a futile waste of young lives which was needlessly drawn out, bears a striking similarity to responses to many contemporary conflicts where concerns about the motives behind war are raised repeatedly in the media and public protests testify to public anger and division. These connections mean that memories of the devastation and loss of life experienced during the First World War continue to exert influence on the way that contemporary conflicts are perceived. Narratives about the First World War thus provide a vehicle for exploring these contemporary issues where the consequences of the decisions made about war can be considered from an historical distance and with the advantage of being able to view it in its entirety rather than from within its midst.

Conversely, contemporary experiences of war since the beginning of the twentieth century and ongoing issues in society generally, such as violence perpetrated by children and young people, also exert influence on popular and literary discourse about the First World War. The ongoing threat of terrorism, particularly specific terror attacks such as 9/11 in the United States and 7/7 in London, has brought war directly to the Home Front. Media images of displaced civilians and live coverage of cities and towns under fire in contemporary conflicts around the world reinforce the civilian suffering that can occur when a country wages war, whether internally or externally, and places the Home Front at the centre of contemporary conflict. Furthermore, many of the recent conflicts seen in media reports are civil wars where there is no distinction between the Front line and the Home Front and news images show civilians protesting and fighting alongside soldiers in their own communities. This has provoked a re-visiting of traditional representations of the First World War through the previously underrepresented Home Front experience to bring new perspectives on that conflict. This aligns it with contemporary preoccupations about the consequences of war more

⁷ Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 22.

generally and further reinforces the First World War's position as a pivotal event in the construction of modern society.

An acknowledgement of the importance of the First World War in shaping contemporary society underlies all the novels considered in this study and as such they seek not only to represent the war but to explore and scrutinize how it is represented. They employ a number of different literary techniques and genres in order to do this and in particular they all exhibit an awareness of the role of fiction in representing war and trauma and in its relationship to the historical record. James Campbell argues that the way the First World War has traditionally been represented was dominated by lyrical poetry and autobiography so that '[f]iction was relegated to a tertiary role'.⁸ He suggests that 'eyewitness poetry is privileged because of its speed: it is the genre that comes closest to allowing a kind of real-time representation of trench experience' so that it is perceived as providing a more authentic view of events.⁹ In contrast, he argues, fiction was seen as lacking this immediacy and although the autobiographical texts were similarly chronologically distanced from the event they lacked the added 'burden of fictional characters and events imposing themselves between the reader and the supposedly real experience with which the reader was seeking a connection'.¹⁰ Fiction was still seen as a valid form for representing the war but its role was considered to be limited by its imaginative nature.

Contemporary critics such as Anne Whitehead, however, have identified a more significant role for fictional narrative in the representation of trauma as attention has shifted from 'the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered'.¹¹ Considering the representation of war from this new perspective, the distance created by the lack of immediacy perceived in fictional narrative acquires more positive potential. The fictional aspect of the narrative provides the freedom with which to explore how war is, and how it might be, represented within a text which also seeks to provide an imaginative representation itself.

⁸ James Campbell, p. 264.

⁹ Campbell, p. 264.

¹⁰ Campbell, p. 264.

¹¹ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 3.

In the novels considered in this study, contemporary authors show their awareness of these debates about the role of fiction in representing trauma and war, and position their texts as part of this ongoing dialogue. They are not content to see their genre, the historical novel, as a secondary means of representation so they do not obscure its imaginative nature. Instead, they foreground it, for instance by displacing the chronology of events through the use of analepsis or by placing it alongside the historical documents and poetry to which they have previously been considered subordinate, thus insisting on its importance as part of the representation of war. For example, in *Another World*, Barker challenges the subordination of historical fiction by providing an historical account of the murder of James Fanshawe in an embedded narrative which takes the form of a chapter from a book written by an historical novelist, Veronica Laidlaw. This positions the historical novelist as someone with the authority to convey important historical information and draws attention to Barker's own role as a novelist engaged in representing historical events. Theresa Breslin opens and closes *Remembrance* with poems by Siegfried Sassoon, enclosing her narrative within the poetry which has been so significant in the way the war is remembered and signalling the centrality of fiction in contemporary representations of war. Similarly, in *In The Dark*, Deborah Moggach makes use of a variety of historical documents as epigraphs which place her narrative in dialogue with, rather than subordinate to, earlier texts.

Contemporary authors explore a diverse range of genres and styles of representation, both factual and fictional including poetry, letters, autobiography, journals, the popular press, the Gothic, and modernism by intertextually weaving them into their own narratives. In their novels they show an awareness of history as textually mediated and build on the traditions of earlier literature to insert themselves into ongoing dialogues about the war. For instance, in *This Time of Dying* Reina James utilises the journal format favoured by earlier writers such as Sassoon, Graves and Brittain, and others make similar connections through the use of dated chapter headings and diary extracts. Similarly, Will Self's modernist style in *Umbrella* recalls the work of earlier writers such as Virginia Woolf and Ford Madox Ford, establishing a link between the two writing periods and bringing a contemporary perspective to the use of fragmentary narrative as a means of representing the enduring trauma of the First World War.

Despite his disdain for postmodernism which he describes as ‘a determination to vault over all the quicksand of the 20th century, in order to gain the seemingly safer ground provided by a cut-and-paste job on the styles and modes that antedated it’¹², Self makes extensive use of intertextual material and his self-conscious attempt to create a contemporary modernist novel draws attention to the instability of the fictional world in a distinctly postmodern way, providing a critique of the modernist novel’s effectiveness for representation and as a means of engaging with history.

By placing their imaginative texts alongside other modes of representation, the fictional aspect of the narrative is not concealed but openly flaunted so that it is offered up for scrutiny alongside other modes of representation, whilst at the same time scrutinizing the nature and effectiveness of these more traditional genres and techniques. Thus contemporary authors explore how these means of representation can be used and how effective they are as modes of representation. They place them within and alongside their own imaginative texts for contrast and comparison, working through how narrative can represent trauma and war most effectively, drawing attention to the process of constructing narrative and revealing the limitations for representation.

The self-awareness of fiction as a means of representation and the scrutiny of how narrative is constructed is seen in all the novels including the more popular. For example, in *Martha’s Journey* Lee’s illiterate protagonist is used as a focal point to explore how the events of war are represented. She foregrounds the mediated and constructed nature of documentary narrative through the nested newspaper story which runs throughout the novel. The main narrative is framed as a piece of ‘oral storytelling’ which contrasts the genre of personal history against the professional account, exploring the way by which history is constructed for public consumption and asking her readers to consider which is more effective and more authentic. In *Another World*, Barker considers representation from a visual perspective by juxtaposing images of real life violence with those evoked by her storytelling, exploring the increasing impact of photography and moving images on contemporary society. Barker’s preoccupation with

¹² Will Self, ‘Review: Journey to the End of the Night: Will Self has always felt Alienated and Pained by the Constrictions of English Fiction. Only the Modernists Offered Him Liberation as Reader and Aspiring Writer with his Latest Novel, Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, has he Finally Ripped Off the Corsetry of Convention?’, *Guardian* (4 August 2012).

visual representation is further foregrounded in *Life Class* and *Toby's Room* where she draws on the work of war artists to consider how war can be effectively represented. Like Barker, Louisa Young brings the practical and aesthetic together to consider the relationship between art and war through the portrayal of facial reconstruction surgery, self-reflexively drawing attention to the artificiality of literary representation.

The importance of authenticity in historical narrative comes under particular scrutiny in those novels which concern themselves with the role of the witness. Several of the novels in this study draw on the genres of autobiography, memoir and the diary to explore narratives where an individual tells the story of war from their own personal experience and perspective. Contemporary authors consider these means of representation by integrating them into their own narratives in different ways: by using that style in their own narrative, for instance by writing in the journal form; by using extracts from other texts written in these forms; and by using stream of consciousness narrative to give direct access to a personal perspective. However, these techniques are rarely used straightforwardly. For instance, James interweaves first-person journal entries with third-person narration and John Boyne subverts the autobiographical form when his protagonist's memoirs evolve to convey another man's story. This allows them to work through how these forms are used and consider their strengths and limitations whilst contrasting them against the fictional forms in their own novels.

In this thesis my aim was to explore the representation of the First World War Home Front in contemporary literature. It is not an exhaustive study of contemporary First World War literature, nor was this my intention. The field of First World War literature is vast and no single study could hope to do justice to it in its entirety. I would like to briefly touch on a number of areas which I considered during my early research for this project but which were ultimately placed outside of the scope of this thesis when the focus was more closely defined. There exists within contemporary literature about the war a wealth of material for future research. There are a number of texts which allude to the work of the soldier poets in response to the war and the enduring impact that their body of work has had on the way the war is remembered. Some texts draw on the historical characters directly, for instance the poetry and protest of Siegfried Sassoon and his friendship with Wilfred Owen are at the heart of Pat Barker's *Regeneration*

trilogy, Robert Edric's *In Zodiac Light* (2009) portrays the suffering of Ivor Gurney after the war and Jill Dawson's *The Great Lover* (2007) draws on the pre-war experiences of Rupert Brooke. Others, like Alan Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child*, allude to them through the lives and experiences of their fictional characters. The intertextual legacy of the work of the soldier poets in contemporary fiction about the First World War is indivisible from the war itself and the relationship is touched on repeatedly in this study. It is a subject worthy of a project in its own right, something which I intend to pursue after the completion of this research work.

During my research one of the aspects of First World War representation which surprised me was the lack of direct engagement with the suffragette movement and the fight for women's emancipation in contemporary fiction. Anthony Quinn's *Half of the Human Race* (2011) is one of the few texts which does seek to represent the movement by looking at the impact the war has on Connie Callaway's ambitions to become a doctor. There is a pattern which emerges, in the tendency of contemporary fiction to focus on the opportunities afforded to women by nursing because of the war. Several of the texts already considered in this study for other reasons, *Remembrance*, *Bleakly Hall* and *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You*, for example, draw attention to the potential changes in women's lives through their work as nurses and VADs during the war. In addition, Kate Saunders *Night Shall Overtake Us* (1993) considers emancipation through war work as her protagonists volunteer to drive ambulances at the front and Michelle Paver's *The Serpent's Tooth* (2005) portrays a young women's role as a war photographer as a means of escaping her violent past. Representations of nursing and ambulance driving are inevitably situated predominantly on the Western Front and thus outside of the scope of this study. As a future study, I would like to explore how the changes in women's lives during the First World War are represented in contemporary fiction taking into consideration the influences of early writing by women. In particular Vera Brittain's memoirs detailing her nursing experience during the war exert a strong influence over contemporary depictions of nursing during the war.

Final Thoughts

All the authors whose novels I have included in this study demonstrate a desire to engage with the First World War from new perspectives. In part this is demonstrated by

locating their narratives on the Home Front which reflects a preoccupation with the way that ordinary people are represented in war and provides a perspective which works at eroding the veil of anonymity which the sweeping statistics and depersonalised histories of war provide. They exploit the imaginative potential of the historical novel to offer fresh insight into the plight of the ordinary person during times of national trauma and provide a narrative which is able to give access to the thoughts and desires of their protagonists, thus providing a perspective on events which is outside the ability of mainstream historical narrative. They exhibit a preoccupation with ordinary people at war, not the great historical figures, but the ordinary members of the community whose individual involvement is at the same time crucially important and yet so easily forgotten. They show that in order to conceptualise the individual experiences of war they must convey a multitude of different responses which resists the tendency to construct a homogenous, single story about people at war. This results in narratives which acknowledge people's memories and responses to war and trauma as complicated and diverse.

At the same time, they show a persistent concern with the way in which the experiences of war are narrated. This postmodernist interest in the relationship between fiction and historical representation can be observed in all the novels in this study, right across the continuum of literariness from the more popular, such as Lee's *Martha's Journey*, to the more literary and experimental novels of Barker and Self. Mariadele Boccardi argues that the way in which contemporary historical fiction demonstrates an 'awareness of history as both text and process; its dialogue with the Victorian realist tradition; and its examination of the competing models of the nation offered by the examples of the past' is what sets it apart from the purely reproductive aims of the heritage industry.¹³ The novels considered in this study do not provide a straightforward re-imagining of the First World War for passive consumption. Instead they acknowledge the resistance of traumatic experience to adequate representation whilst exploring the potential contribution of the fictional form. The wide use of multiple styles, genres and techniques employed suggests that contemporary authors do not see

¹³ Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 23.

one particular mode of representation as superior but rather indicates an acknowledgement that the use of multiple modes is necessary for effective representation. It enables them to provide multiple perspectives so that they move beyond providing a straightforward representation of history towards narrative which makes their readers think for themselves, ask their own questions and draw their own conclusions. The history presented by the contemporary historical novel is not a straightforward chronicle but a complex series of perspectives and explorations which reveals the possibilities for the representation of trauma and war whilst recognising and acknowledging its limitations.

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