

The Artist's Dilemma: Truth, Process, and Form in the Great War Narratives
of Robert Graves, Mary Borden, and David Jones

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Abstract

The Great War narrative has been the subject of wide scholarship but there have been no studies that have specifically focused on understanding the ethical and aesthetic struggles of the artist in war, the artist's dilemma. The generation that experienced the Great War included many giants of twentieth-century intellectual, cultural, and political life, many of whom wrote personal narratives of their experiences. These narratives have contributed to shaping familial stories and the meta-narratives of nation states for generations—sometimes limiting a fuller understanding of the war. Through this thesis I aim to open the field of narrative investigation into a wider inquiry through applying what Brian Lande identifies as the 'sensual and moral conversion' (98) of the soldier in war, to the artistic actor in the theatre of war. The proposition is to identify and read beyond generic conventions, then to observe the process, the tasks, and the moral, psychosocial, and aesthetic dilemmas of the artist in the theatre of war. To do this, the work focuses on three robust texts of the Great War: Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), and David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937). The project explores not only the nuance of creative witness, self-witness, and testimony, but proposes a fuller empathic engagement with the narrative within the social contract of war writing. After developing a model of the formal conventions which structure the genre of war writing, and building on the work of Max Saunders, Henri LeFebvre, and others, I have carried out close readings of the three authors' Great War narratives and related works. With an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses literary, artistic, historical, ethical, and sociological studies, and with extensive archival research, I propose to introduce another perspective on reading between the lines of Great War narratives. This perspective encompasses the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas that faced the artists of the war generation as they acted and reacted to war, a generation that shaped the intellectual, political, scientific, and artistic life of the twentieth century, and the lives of generations to follow.

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Abbreviations

G29	<i>Good-bye to All That</i> , 1929
G57	<i>Goodbye to All That</i> 1957
G95	<i>Good-bye to All That</i> ed. R.P. Graves, 1995
G14	<i>Good-bye to All That</i> ed. Fran Brearton, 2014
IP	<i>In Parenthesis</i>
KJV	<i>The Bible</i> King James Version
TFZ29	<i>The Forbidden Zone</i> 1929
TFZ	<i>The Forbidden Zone</i> 2008

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Figure 1. Three pieces of soldier 'graffiti' in the Maison Blanche souterraine at Neuville-Saint-Vaast, France.

Figure 2. 'The Chalet', Mary Borden's hut in Mobile Surgical Hospital No 1., Western Front, 1917–1918. Source: Australian War Memorial website.

Figure 3. Portrait of Mary Borden by Clovis Trouille, 1915. Historial de la Grande Guerre, Peronne, France.

Figure 4. Letter from David Jones to René Hague, 'Easter 1936'.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

To readers disgusted with the squalor of much recent War literature this book will come as a relief. Horrors are inevitable in any account of life in the trenches, but in the majority of these letters there is to be found at least an attempt to realize the meaning of it all, to rise above the mud and the blood, the hardships and dangers.

A.F. Wedd, *German Students' War Letters* (1929) (Witkop vi).

Robert Graves, Mary Borden, and David Jones published their Great War narratives, *Good-bye to All That* (1929),¹ *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), and *In Parenthesis* (1937), during the interwar years: a time of dynamic cultural re-evaluation, when issues of personal memory, testimony, historical record, aesthetics, and the relationship of societies to their First World War truth were passionately debated. As A.F. Wedd's introductory comments to *German Students' War Letters* illustrate, the ethics and the aesthetics of war literature took a prominent place in much of the literary criticism during the years of the war book phenomenon, 1928–31 (Cru; Falls).² This flood of literature came as direct memories of the war began to fade, or conversely, old memories were triggered by others' published testimonials and by the monuments to the dead that were being built across the former battlefields of the Great War as countries struggled to create and organise communal war narratives. In this thesis I situate the work of Graves, Borden, and Jones both within and beyond this debate and shows how fresh readings of their work, and the Great War canon, may bring new insight into the generation that lived through, and created, narratives of the Great War of 1914–1918.

This study is driven by the idea of reading the Great War personal narrative as an empathic conversation across a century, and also, by a fundamental belief in the civic project, one that requires the reader of a nation state that sends its people to war to examine their ethical relationship with war and war narratives. The energy driving this project results from my experience

¹ The hyphen in the title *Good-bye to All That* was dropped by the publisher of the 1957 edition and also by the St John's College Archives, Oxford when they assigned a title for the file of

² A companion volume *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen* was edited by Laurence Housman and published in 1930 by E.P. Dutton in New York.

as a war artist, a poet sent to Afghanistan with the Canadian Army, and is an attempt to explore and illuminate the ethical vulnerabilities and responsibilities that some artists feel working in the field of war, and to draw a roadmap, or methodology, that will encourage reading beyond the obvious tropes and/or expectations of genre; in the case of the Great War, this is the mud and blood narrative made familiar by canonical texts. The result of this study may hopefully engender a deeper conversation on the subject of war, and compassion for all who lived through war, and for those artists who dare to record what they witness, experience, and feel.

With the proposition that war literature is a ground for ethical inquiry, I present a cultural-literary genre study of three First World War personal accounts as an entrée into the larger issues inherent in personal war narratives, whether the texts are official histories, or personal memoirs. Further, I propose to look at the act of reading the war story with empathy from the point of view of author and reader as an ethical project. The major thematic inquiries of this thesis explore what may be considered to be the core ethical issues that the individual creative, the artist, confronts, that is, one who exercises a purposeful aesthetic imagination, or re-imagination in a skilful creation, or re-creation, of their personal war experience. These three inquiries address the ideas of truth, process, and form, through analysis of the literary techniques of Robert Graves, Mary Borden, and David Jones, respectively. In this chapter I argue that each of these attributes are inextricably linked, and that for a creator and a reader to understand the war story from an empathic point of view, one might also contemplate the other attributes that I identify.

While authors such as Edmund Blunden, whose *Undertones of War* (1928) was extremely influential, Siegfried Sassoon and other canonical writers of the Great War were considered for this thesis, it was Graves's quixotic and multi-faceted engagement with 'truth', Borden's display of the individual's transformation as witnessed through narrative process in the war zone, and Jones's negotiation with form that best served this thesis on war story. With a note to choice of class, gender, and narrative, the thesis is served by looking at Graves as representative of the British officer class, Borden as the American female civilian operative, and Jones as the half-Welsh enlisted man, or 'every-soldier'. Certainly in these centenary years of the Great War new

narratives are being considered and studied, but as Andrew Frayne writes of the personal war narrative at the time of the war book phenomena, ‘the difficulty of finding and publishing a working-class account of the war is exemplified by the need of Robert Graves to act as literary midwife to Frank Richard’s *Old Soldiers Never Die* (1933)’ (216).

All three texts have been chosen for this study as variations on the military memoir; the hospital corps included military and paramilitary structures, and Borden’s memoir conforms as such. In this, all three texts belong to a broader mixed genre, one that Alex Vernon identifies as being in the ‘No Genre’s Land’ (1) of military life-writing. To illustrate the complexity of the genre of the personal war narrative, it is helpful to look at Max Saunders’ identification of ‘four fundamental modes’ in his ‘grammar of auto/biografiction’ from *Self Impression: Life-writing, Autobiografiction, & the Forms of Modern Literature* (*Self Impression*): ‘Autobiographical writing’, ‘Biographical writing’, ‘Creative/Fictional writing’, and ‘Commentary (usually of an Editorial kind)’ (212). All three of the texts under scrutiny in this thesis fit into all of these categories in part.

Significantly, the biography of the war itself as a para-narrative is always present, a factor that feeds into the challenging nature of writing and of reading war, a communal activity and with a communal narrative. As Vernon believes, ‘the blurring of boundaries in war bleeds into its narrative representations’ (6). This is certainly true; but certainly the artist bleeds into the narrative. The heart of the empathic reading is to understand the challenges faced by the individual artist to write the multifaceted narrative of war, and, in the case of the personal war narrative, oneself in war, particularly given the nature of war’s effect upon the artist. War changes the artist, and in all three texts the authors reach for multiple rhetorical modes with which to articulate this change within themselves in the midst of the dynamic environment of the Western Front and its aftermath.

Modras Eksteins observes, ‘What some felt to have been “a conspiracy of silence” had been shattered with a vengeance’ (Eksteins 345). Of the thousands of Great War texts that were published during the late 1920s to mid-1930s, many published privately, a core set of personal narratives solidified a dominant meta-narrative of the war—primarily that of combatants’ experiences of the Western Front. A century after the war, the narratives that continue to be

considered the most popular or important belong to Wilfred Owen's *Poems* (1920), edited by Siegfried Sassoon with Edith Sitwell, Sassoon's war poetry and autobiographical novels, the Sherston trilogy (1928–36), Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), and Erich Maria Remarque's novel, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) (1928).³ The Great War narrative established by these texts was, and continues to be, formulaic, and encoded with tropes of mud, poppies, and blood, or as Kate McLoughlin states in *Authoring War* (2012), 'image streams' or 'tropes of war' (17), or the 'tricks and tropes of language' (20). This has been, until recently, a narrative that privileged certain kinds of stories whilst systematically excluding others. For the purposes of this study, generic expectations, or, the mud and blood narrative, is a phrase that encapsulates countless iconic images of the Great War. As a result of this, the war could be (and was) frequently read and interpreted in a formulaic, generic way, primarily of victimhood or trauma. In his introduction to *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (2007), Leonard V. Smith argues that experience of the war became experience 'through narrative, and that authors created and were created by the testimonial text' (7) in a 'struggle for coherence' (x). This formulaic response was perhaps an antidote to what Smith identifies as the 'instability of the experience' (16).

The tendency of war autobiographies to adhere to the conventions and tropes of the Great War narrative extends even to the stories of non-combatants, such as Mary Borden, whose graphic nurse anecdotes in *The Forbidden Zone* introduce the reader to 'the second battlefield' (97) of the mobile surgical unit near the Front. As the chapter on Borden reveals, her narrative based on her service as *Madame la Directrice* of the French Army surgical unit *L'Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No. 1* appears to be centred primarily on the thousands of wounded *poilus* for whom she cared. But the passionate story of her extra-marital love affair with an army officer, and the intimate narratives of her nursing staff—other women's narratives—are largely absent,

³ Donald Ray Richards states that more than 900,000 copies of *Im Westen Nichts Neues* had been sold by the end of 1929. Other German war books, such as Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (*War*), sold 155,000 copies by 1931. For more on German war books, see Donald Ray Richards, *The German Bestseller in the Twentieth Century: A Complete Bibliography and Analysis, 1915–1940* (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1968).

much to the detriment of the larger war narrative.⁴ Further, Borden's relationship to the physical war space and war culture has rarely been considered, even though recent First World War scholarship has engaged deeply with the recovery of lesser-known narratives, particularly of women and non-European combatants such as the African, Indian, and Asian corps, or the North American narrative (Das, *Race, Empire*; Das, *Touch and Intimacy*; Higonnet; Hutchison).

This scholarship has frequently been preoccupied with, or presented itself as, the study of the representations of personal and collective trauma. However, this is beginning to change, as illustrated by recent work on survival and resilience in the narratives of medical personnel working in warzones (Acton and Potter). Carol Acton and Jane Potter observe that 'the life-writings of doctors, nurses, and ambulance drivers demonstrate a determination to make meaning of their experiences and, alongside the possibilities of breakdown, indicate remarkable resilience and the ability to endure' (62). But it may be suggested that many of these narratives go further than that of resilience; many narratives express an experience of thriving, innovation, and rapid personal growth and achievement of a level rarely seen over the course of a few peacetime years.

Narratives of trauma are not the only ones to emerge from the Great War; and with this in mind, throughout this thesis I seek to demonstrate that the conventions and tropes which have come to dominate the genre of Great War narratives act to exclude those other, more nuanced narratives of the war experience that may be found in lesser-known texts. The proposal I present in this thesis calls for what may be perceived as an empathic reading of the Great War narrative that engages the reader on a level beyond the pre-packaged formulae of genre, and proposes to explore these alternate narratives, not only in formerly marginal voices, but also *within* the canon—even in those narratives that enthusiastically promulgate the now-conventional 'mud and blood' narrative of the Great War, such as Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* (1916), or Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Derek Attridge identifies this type of reading as 'creative reading' (80). He sees this as a reader engagement that does not 'override the work's conventionally determined meanings in the name of

⁴ Though according to Borden's biographer, Jane Conway, Borden's papers in the Gottlieb archives in Boston contain 'a piece called Interlude which is a dialogue between an officer and his lover meeting in secret' (email to author, 31 May 2013).

imaginative freedom', but instead 'striv[es] to do full justice to the work, [and] is obliged to go beyond existing conventions' (80). Attridge observes that the creative reading (and in this case, war), should not be 'programmed by the work and the context in which it is read' (80).

In this thesis, I propose that these perspectives may be uncovered through the practice of a type of 'ethical criticism', which, as summarised by Wayne Booth (1988), consists of 'encounters of a story-teller's ethos with that of the reader or listener' (8). This type of criticism not only requires investigation of the construction of the text as an aesthetic product or a reflection of a great historical event, but also requires an investigation into the ethics of a specific time and place—which, in the context of this study, is that of the culture of the Great War and the responses of authors within the war space and beyond. This approach considers the physical and psychosocial environment of the war and follows the trends of current war studies, many of which take a cross-discipline approach to their fields, as seen in the establishment of research centres such as the North East Research Forum for First World War Studies, at Durham University, or the Globalising and Localising the Great War interdisciplinary network, at Oxford University. Because of the complexity and diversity of the narratives, and the hyper-kinetic environment of war, the research draws on multiple disciplines as a means of approaching texts such as Graves's, Borden's, and Jones's. These approaches include: archaeology (Nicholas J. Saunders, Andrew Hawkins, Matthew Leonard), sociology (Henri Lefebvre, Erving Goffman), military and social history (Jay Winter), literary studies (Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes, Kate McLoughlin, and others) and art criticism (Merlin James).

What is an ethical approach to the personal Great War narrative? In 'Narrative Ethics', James Phelan writes: 'Investigations into narrative ethics have been diverse and wide-ranging, but they can be usefully understood as focused on one or more of four issues: (1) the ethics of the told; (2) the ethics of the telling; (3) the ethics of writing/producing; and (4) the ethics of reading/reception' (n.pag.). Of particular relevance to this study of Great War literature is my interest in the ethics of the authorial process, or the ethics in the telling of a story. Because of this, the study is preoccupied with the ethical state of the author—that is, contextually, at the time of experiencing the war and in

the writing period. To gauge this state, clearly a difficult proposition, the creative reading encompasses the historical, cultural, and personal engagement of the author at the time of experiencing the war, then writing. In particular, the idea is to look at the author's relationship with the large ethical issues of the times—truth being of primary importance, as illustrated by the first chapter on Robert Graves—and the responsibility of the reader to engage with this context.

Because the creation of the war text and the reception of the war text may have significant political or social implications, it is plausible that to read the genre without engaging in empathy with the issues of the artist's ethos in and after war is, perhaps, to read war narratives unethically; the concept of ethics in the context of this argument may at times be defined as an act of empathic, or compassionate reading. Empathic or compassionate reading considers the inner-life of the author in creating the work and the idea of war as a para-narrative, but equally, it is an engagement with the self as a morally inquisitive being. This is, arguably, important particularly in the context of the citizen project, that is, of belonging to societies that send their people to war, or that engage in war directly or by proxy. The consequences of the citizen's unethical approach to the war story through reading solely the expected generic conventions is, at the least, an exercise in cultural stasis—the status quo is ensured—and at its worst may contribute to a cultural myth which in turn may lead to consequences as dire as genocide as seen in the Bosnian War and many other wars. Because experiencing war is experientially solitary *and* communal, reading the war story without empathy is potentially unethical if one does not consider the political, cultural, creative, and performative influences on the artist recounting war. Further, without empathy the reader does not consider the ethos of the era, contextually, as outlined in Chapter 2 on 'truth', Robert Graves, and the war book, as articulated variously by Storm Jameson, Douglas Jerrold, Jean Norton Cru, Cyril Falls and many other critics and writers of the era.

To encounter the war text as an ethical project encompasses an empathic reading between the lines that acts as an uncovering of an embedded narrative akin to the one that David Jones proposed might be found within his paintings long after the First World War. In his essay 'Art in Relation to War', from *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings*, Jones writes:

Let us return for a moment to the effects of war experience, as we know it, upon some kind of artist. A trench lived in 1915 might easily 'get into' a picture of a back garden in 1925 and by one of those hidden processes, transmogrify it—impart, somehow or other, a vitality which otherwise it might not possess. (140)

Jones infers that the essence of his war continues actively 'to transmogrify', mystically, in his paintings beyond his war sketches, and, as will be shown in this thesis, his major textual works. But to read Jones's paintings, and his literary war narrative, solely as records of loss and suffering is to do the painter and poet a great disservice—he ascribes 'vitality' (140) to the essence of the trench embedded in the non-war painting. Conversely, Jones recognises that '[e]ven a picture in the gayest possible mood may achieve that very gaiety by a mode not at all gay—by some acid twist, hidden maybe in the bowels of the arts' (140). He believes that the layers, the nuance of experience embedded in art, result from 'every sort of undertone and overtone, both of form and content, it is both peace and war; it must make the lion lie by the lamb without anyone noticing, it must hint at December snow, when summer's heat is the text' (140). *In Parenthesis* records Jones's observations of how his unit 'respond[ed] to the war landscape', 'that mysterious existence' in a place of suffering (IP x). But reading Jones, one must be mindful that the field of war was for him, also, 'a place of enchantment' (x).

Understanding the multiple narrative forces at work in *In Parenthesis*—the story of an individual going into war, and what might perhaps be described as a creative ethnography of a military unit heading towards the Somme—provides a grounding for a sense of narrative ethics. It is plausible that the personal narratives of Graves, Borden, and Jones, and of so many others who wrote at the time, act in some sense on three levels: at the level of the intensely personal, then as a creative study of the cultural forces through which the authors experienced the war, and finally, the public, broader, historical narrative of the Great War. It is the embedded war narratives of Jones, Borden, and Graves which I aim to identify in this thesis. To do so requires a method of empathic reading. A passage from Jones in which he describes the war experience gives the reader an example of the artist's dilemma:

We stroke cats, pluck flowers, tie ribands, assist at the manual acts of religion, make some kind of love, write poems, paint pictures, are generally at one with that creaturely world . . . Yet must we do gas-drill, be attuned to many newfangled technicalities, respond to increasingly exacting mechanical devices; some fascinating and compelling, others sinister in the extreme; all requiring a new and strange direction of the mind, a new sensitivity certainly, but at a considerable cost. (IP xiv)

In this passage we see an example of what could be perceived as Jones's epic and ethical struggle, that is, to communicate the 'fascinating and compelling' nature of weaponry juxtaposed with flowers and ribbons, and sacred acts of love and violence in the field of war. How the artist reconciles the creative acts and the 'sinister in the extreme' (xiv) elements of a war grounded in mechanised warfare—deadly gas and 'mechanical devices'—summarises the ethical struggle. It is an aesthetic disconnect one may also read in Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in a passage describing two 'brimstone-butterflies, with red spots on their yellow wings' that 'settle on the teeth of a skull' (127). Jones's relationship to his war is complex; he is intrigued with the 'new and strange direction of the mind' and 'new sensitivity' (IP xiv) that the war exposes him to, and the sanctioned chaos of war that permits him to feel this admiration. Remarque sees the aesthetic possibilities of butterflies on skulls. But Jones clearly recognises the psychic cost to himself and to others exposed to this new type of warfare. An additional complexity for an artist like Jones, perhaps, is that though he was an accomplished art student before the war, as for many artists, the war propelled him to a level of artistry he might never have otherwise achieved; herein lies some of the guilt of the war artist. How the artist reconciles this knowledge, and struggles with the formal and ethical dilemmas of art in war, is a central theme in this work.

Still, Jones is no moralist—he respects his readership too much to dictate an ethical response. As the critic, and Vietnam veteran, Tim O'Brien, writes:

A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things they have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. (174)

This project confronts O'Brien's statement that 'a true war story is never moral' (174). The thesis explores the question of whether writing and reading the personal war narrative is, fundamentally, an ethical project that can carry political, emotional, and aesthetic weight. As Kate McLoughlin states in *Authoring War*: 'even as it resists representation, conflict demands it' (7). While I concur with McLoughlin's statement, I disagree with McLoughlin's ethical stance: 'While war literature may dazzle . . . its subject matter can and should—sadden and horrify . . . the two elements of this proposition are bound in an ethical-aesthetical nexus. The dazzlement's *raison d'être* is to keep the horror in view' (7). The basis of this thesis is the proposal that producers and readers of war literature, as members of nations that send citizens to war, may have *some* moral contract with the genre, but this moral contract does not demand McLoughlin's prescription that war literature be one of aesthetic 'dazzlement' in the service of anti-war sentiment. The ethics of a compassionate reading cannot be represented by the binary of pro- or anti-war. There is, however, an agreement with McLoughlin when she states that this engagement can be more than 'catharsis', or entertainment, that understanding the 'authoring of war can also be a beneficent democratic act in itself' through an 'understanding [of] how the obfuscations, misrepresentations and deliberate decoys are put together' (20). That is if one perceives the democratic act as fundamentally participatory and investigative.

If authoring of war can be seen as a participatory and political act, then so too might reading war with empathy, become an ethical and democratic act. Leonard V. Smith asserts that 'no confrontation of the historical evidence, perhaps, should seek to answer more questions than to answer' (214). Certainly, ethical criticism of the war narrative should not be solely moral criticism based on moral judgements that are made by readers through the lens of contemporary moral values. As Nie Zhenzhao explains, ethical criticism 'emphasizes "historicism", that is, the examination of the ethical values in a given work with reference to a particular historical context or a period of time in which the text under discussion is written' (84). It is reasonable to argue that with the historicisation of Great War books, and especially of the complexities of living and operating within the physicality, the psychology, and the moral fluidity

of the Great War culture, comes greater empathy for the generation that created the body of literature being studied, a generation that included many cultural, political, and innovative giants of the 20th century.⁵

1.2 Conventions and the War Story

For the purpose of this study, I use Graves's, Borden's, and Jones's texts to investigate issues of ethics, as well as the ethical issues inherent in the art of creating and the act of reading personal war stories. All three authors adhere, sooner or later, to the fundamental conventions of the war book genre that were identified after reading a wide sampling of war texts. After reading dozens of war texts, or texts written during the war book period—including personal war narratives, short stories, novels, and even surgical texts and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)—I identified common rhetorical devices, or thematic material which could be categorised as a set of conventions that characterised the war book genre, particularly the personal war narrative. Part of this consideration took into account Gustav Freytag's *Pyramid* (1863): 'exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and denouement' (Orr, S. 155). I labelled the resulting conventions and used them for the analyses of personal war stories.

While the genre of the personal war story shares many of the conventions that are observable across literature, categorising them in the context of the war book genre may provide insight into subtexts or competing narratives.⁶ The ten conventions that I suggest may be identified across the personal war story genre are as follows: 'the apologia'; 'the establishment of credibility' or 'credentials' (a concept and term that was borrowed from Kate McLoughlin's *Authoring War* [22] and Paul Fussell); 'anticipation or signing on'; 'reality' (as in the preoccupation with materiality, i.e., uniforms or the engagement with the 'things' of war); 'loss of innocence'; 'damage or disillusionment'; 'return'; 'readjustment'; 'silence, or, the shout'; and 'epilogue'. I shall briefly explain each of these further here.

⁵ A comprehensive list is impossible here, but the following illustrate the diversity of those who served in or witnessed the war: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Mies Van de Roe, Virginia Woolf, Otto Dix, J.R.R. Tolkien, Winston Churchill, T.H. Lawrence, Freja Stark, Henry Moore, Carl Jung, Adolf Hitler, Percy Wyndham Lewis, and Edward Elgar.

⁶ For a discussion of other generic schema including Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1958), Max Lüthi, and Marie-Louis Teneze, and others, see: Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The classical genre for children and the process of civilization*. London and New York: Routledge Classics. (2006).

The *apologia* is often found in the preface, introduction, or dedication of the war book. It functions as the author's notice to readers, especially those who served alongside the author, that truth is subjective and frequently incomplete or contradictory. David Jones's *apologia* is found in the Preface to *In Parenthesis*, which he opens with the statement: 'This writing has to do with some things I saw, felt, & was a part of' (ix). Later he states: 'None of the characters in this writing are real persons, nor is any sequence of events historically accurate' (ix). He then exempts himself from the scrutiny of truth through the statement, 'Each person and every event are free reflections of people and things remembered, or projected from intimately known possibilities' (x).

'Credentials' are frequently presented in the introduction or preface, or sometimes in the title of the work, as in the case of *Unknown Warriors: Extracts from the Letters of K.E. Luard, R.R.C.: Nursing Sister in France 1914–1918* (1930). Here Luard provides her nursing credentials, where she served, and for how long. By stating that the book consists of letters, she is proposing a version of historical and personal truth. Robert Graves introduces his credentials on the second page of *Good-bye to All That* through his anecdote describing 'Old Joe, a battalion quartermaster in France' who had 'won his D.S.O.' for work at 'the Passchendaele show' (G14 6), in which he makes his insider's knowledge of the war evident through the use of the ironic soldier code 'show' and the shorthand 'in France', implying that he, too, had been there.

The convention of 'anticipation or signing on', though self-explanatory, may be expressed by the author as the process of enlistment, or the internal struggle of whether or not to join the war effort. In the opening sentence of *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915), May Sinclair summarises the anxiety inherent within this convention—in her case, of actually being *allowed* to go to war with a volunteer ambulance corps:

After the painful births and deaths of I don't know how many committees, after six weeks' struggling with something we imagined to be Red Tape, which proved to be the combined egotism of several persons all desperately anxious to 'get to the Front,' and desperately afraid of somebody else getting there first, we are actually off. (1)

Sinclair's language depicts the experience of entering the war as a birthing process, a 'struggle' filled with anxiety and even fear, not of death, but of missing the chance to experience it. As a writer she is 'afraid of somebody else getting there first'—a less than flattering, albeit honest, reality of the artist impetus for getting 'there' (1). The 'reality' convention may be represented by leave-taking, the acquisition of the uniform, or the discomfort of communal life. The importance of dressing up for role-play in war is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. 'Loss of innocence' comes in the first exposure to the *matériel* of war for some, or full exposure to death and damage. 'The Beach', Mary Borden's vignette from *The Forbidden Zone*, is a brilliant expression of civilian exposure to secondary trauma. 'Damage or disillusionment', sometimes accompanying 'Loss of innocence', may come after years of exhaustion and exposure to war. In his autobiography, Paul Fussell describes his Second World War experience of waking up next to the dead body of a young German soldier and the instantaneous 'loss of innocence' and 'damage': 'My boyish illusions, largely intact to that moment of awakening, fell away all at once, and suddenly I knew that I was not and would never be in a world that was reasonable or just' (*Doing Battle* 104–5). In this, even Fussell the critic can be seen to follow the conventions of the war book genre.

For those who return alive, the convention of 'return' frequently coincides with 'damage or disillusionment'. These conventions have been separated as it is unrealistic to consider all responses to the post-war period to be that of damage or disillusionment. The convention labelled 'readjustment' frequently accompanies 'silence, or, the shout', as the author struggles with repression, depression, and accompanying silence, or the heightened anger or anguish of 'the shout'. Sometimes, however, silence is just that: silence in the business of reintegration, or, perhaps, personal and professional growth through the war experience. As the section on Mary Borden demonstrates, for many, the war brought transformation. Robert Graves writes at length of his disillusionment and damage in *Good-bye to All That*, a narrative that is a piece of *prima facie* evidence of both personal disillusionment and damage unto itself. His short story 'The Shout', discussed in Chapter 3, certainly expresses the existential and psychic pain experienced by Graves in the aftermath of the war.

Finally, the 'epilogue' provides the retrospective voice, the lesson learned, the hopes held, the remembrance, the elegiac, or the bewilderment of feeling lost in the transition to a post-war peace, as the final poem of Edmund Blunden's epilogue to *Undertones of War* (1928) illustrates. Blunden's epilogue is a series of thirty-one poems titled 'A Supplement of Poetical Interpretations and Variations' (211). In the final poem, 'The Watchers', the poet remembers the voice of a 'gruff' sentry (l. 13) with whom he is familiar and who 'kindly' advises (l. 4) the young officer that there is 'someone crawling through the grass/ By the red ruin' (l. 5–6). The sentry tells Blunden: 'So sir, if you're goin' out / you'll keep your 'ead well down no doubt' (l. 9–10). In the aftermath of the war 'as now I wake and brood' (l. 15), Blunden wonders 'when / Will kindness have such power again?' (l. 13–14)—such is the intensity of emotion and action in war that inevitably may leave a void in the lives of some after war, and potentially, even, a longing for those days again.

While conventions may vary from text to text in that some texts may display most, if not all, while other texts may present only a few conventions, the pattern that emerges provides a different way of reading the war story. After reading and identifying the conventions, then removing the expectations of genre, one can look at what remains of the narrative, and sometimes what remains is a surprising story of war.

1.3 A Short Reading of 'Unidentified'

To read the war story, I developed a protocol that identifies and enumerates the schema of conventional formulae operative within the texts in order to identify the unique materials that remain in each. These materials are labelled the author's 'signature', that which emerges once these formulaic elements have been stripped from the text. This method of reading potentially leads readers past an expected narrative arc of the war story genre and allows them to see the other patterns of meaning which may be embedded within the text; it engages the readers' alertness for hints, signs, omens, and recurring traits within the text and the author's wider body of work, which might allow us to decode experiences hidden beneath the text. The patterns and traits that emerge once the conventions have been stripped away may reveal a sub-textual preoccupation by the author, one which may constitute the true heart of the text, rather than being merely the connective or residuum of the text. A very

brief example below illustrates the approach of this methodology using a close reading to strip away the generic conventions from one such text, and identifying Borden's signature that emerges.

Mary Borden's poem 'Unidentified' was written while she was working in mobile hospital units a few kilometres behind the firing line of the Western Front. First published in the December 1917 issue of *The English Review*, the poem was later published as the last of five poems that act as the epilogue to the 1929 issue of *The Forbidden Zone* (TFZ29). Nosheen Khan states that 'Borden's concern in this poem is with the anarchy let loose by world leaders and the nightmarish suffering, borne in vain, of the soldiers' (20). Certainly this analysis is one way of reading the poem, but it might be noted that Khan's statement also contains references that signal to several of the conventions and tropes that have been identified as central to the Great War narrative as a genre—'anarchy', 'nightmarish', 'suffering', 'born in vain'. It is possible to read 'Unidentified' as something more than this.

The central image of 'Unidentified' (TFZ29 193–199) adheres to the 'loss of innocence' convention; the sacrificial Christ-soldier is dying in No Man's Land, and he is 'bent under his clumsy coat like the hard bending of a taut strung bow' (l. 19)—the uniform attests to his credentials. The convention of 'disillusionment' is present from the opening lines of the poem as the narrator depicts churchmen, philosophers, scientists as 'you many legioned ghosts' (l. 9) 'with your shadowy forms' (l. 11), and admonishes them and all onlookers to 'Look well at this man. Look!' (l. 1) as if to accuse them of exploitation and voyeurism. The soldier, Borden writes, has become 'some old battered image of a faith forgotten by its God' (l. 16), and is silent, 'His face remains quite still' (l. 83), though her poem is her 'shout'. The narrator observes the tropes of 'mud and blood' by depicting the soldier's 'scarlet blood' (l. 79), his 'bullet-spattered helmet' (l. 84) and 'bloodshot eyes' (l. 87), and, of course, the 'mud' (l. 16, 19, 26, 103).

But if one strips the poem of the expected conventions of the 'mud and blood' Great War narrative, then what is left? The rhetorical voice—Borden's, one presumes—shouts a series of imperatives: 'Look' (l. 1, 1, 15, 17, 21, 28, 76), 'See' (l. 16, 18); it declaims that 'He [waits, knows, watches, hears, can feel, hears it, hears it, feels, does not move]' (l. 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 38, 39,

40, 82, 83). The narrator challenges the reader to consider 'What holds him' (l. 52), then addresses those who have sent soldiers to war and who have died peaceful deaths: 'What do you say, you shuddering spirits dragged from secure vaults?' (l. 53). Throughout the poem, Borden accuses 'You' (l. 3, 6, 7, 9, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 77) the reader, and the political and social elite. Through a reading that uses the protocol of discounting the conventions, one may perceive that, in the guise of the Poet (capital 'P'), Borden has appointed herself as jury and judge of a society that she finds guilty of mass murder of the Christ-soldier. She then dismisses those she deems culpable, uttering the final imperatives: 'Leave him the grandeur of obscurity' (98), 'Leave in darkness the dumb anguish of his soul' (l. 99), and 'Leave him the great loss of his identity' (l. 100). She tells them to 'Let the guns chant his death-song' (l. 101), 'Let the flare of cannon light his dying' (l. 102), and 'Let those remnants of men beneath his feet welcome him mutely when he falls beside them in the mud' (l. 103). Through these final judgments Borden suggests, perhaps, that only she is capable of finding redemption through the witness of the narrative she provides, if not as nurse and saviour, then as Poet, unelected judge and jury, and mouthpiece for the dead.

But there is more at work in the poem. If one extracts Borden's credentials—in war she has seen 'the horizon like a red-hot wire [that] writhes, smoking' (l. 24) and 'bones of men stick[ing] through the tortured mud' (l. 26)—a contrasting voice emerges, one that belongs to neither a victim nor a traumatised person. While Borden exhorts the reader to look upon the face of the 'Unidentified' she demands perhaps above all that the reader look upon *her* face, to look at her achievements, and to acknowledge her status, and even supremacy, within the war culture she describes. Through war, as this poem demonstrates, Borden has become the consummate professional; from exposure to the everyman soldier in her hospital wards, the 'giant' and 'brute' (l. 70), the 'fornicator, drunkard, anarchist' (l. 71), 'ruthless, seed-sowing male' (l. 72), Borden has become the expert practitioner who can look upon fractured faces 'Made up of little fragile bones and flesh, / Tissued of quivering muscles, fine as silk' (l. 77, 78). She knows, intimately, the '[e]xquisite nerve endings and scarlet blood / That travels smoothly through the tender veins' (l. 79, 80), her insider nurse-knowledge serving to demonstrate her knowledge of anatomy and

medicine. From the head-trauma cases she describes in *The Forbidden Zone*, such as 'Rosa' (TFZ 63–70), Borden demonstrates in this final piece from her text that she knows what a bullet can do to a face instantly; at '[o]ne blow' it can become 'a mass of matter, horrid slime—and little brittle bits' ('Unidentified' l. 81). It is with this kind of evidence gained from applying my protocol to reading 'Unidentified' and presented here, that I believe a beginning of an empathetic, compassionate reading of the poem may be made, one that will push beyond the obvious, expected script of the futility and waste of the Great War.

With the focus drawn away from the obvious 'tricks and tropes' (McLoughlin 20), the light shines directly on Borden, perhaps, as the chapter on Borden illustrates, as I suggest she intended—though she may not have been able to acknowledge this to herself. I believe that it is plausible that Borden positions 'Unidentified' in the final pages of *The Forbidden Zone* in order to signal to the reader who Borden believes she has become, and what she is. While I do not refute the idea that the last two lines genuinely asks the reader to 'Take one last look' (l. 104) at the dying soldier, 'Unfriended—Unrecognised—Unrewarded and Unknown' (l. 105), my reading illustrates that she is also asking the reader to look at *her*, to recognise, to reward, and to know Borden and her achievements. As Khan points out, 'Borden, [was] an aspiring writer who came into her own after the war' (21); in this it is possible to suggest that 'Unidentified', Borden's war-time poem, could be read as her literary calling card.

From this brief, and admittedly rather superficial reading, I propose that it is possible to observe that the application of the method of reading outlined in the thesis might show *how* Borden came into her own during the war, which is one of the major themes that will arise from an analysis of *The Forbidden Zone*.⁷

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

After applying this methodology to Graves's, Borden's, and Jones's texts, a major theme emerged from each author's work—truth, process or transformation through a geographic space, and form, respectively. In the chapters on these three authors, these themes are the focus of readings across

⁷ It is worth noting that Borden's epilogue poems were not published in the 2008 edition. In my view these poems significantly alter Borden's ethical 'signature' of 'becoming' as read within the text and should be included in any new editions.

the war work of each writer. Truth in the war story is the first major theme discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter uses Graves to present an introduction to the discussion on the nature of truth in the war story by looking at testimony, witness, and self-witness. Truth, arguably, is the starting point for most writers of the war story.

The negotiation of truth in the personal war narrative explains why the dissertation has two chapters devoted to Graves, or what appears to be a disproportionate weighting of the thesis on one author. Graves's particularly complex negotiation with truth applies in part to the dilemmas faced by most authors of personal war narratives, and thus the first Graves chapter provides a case study for the empathic reading around the theme of truth that may be applied to the others. This chapter explores at *Good-bye to All That*, Robert Graves's 'recollections' (G14 6) in which he 'tries to recall [his] wartime feelings' (112). Graves's record of the aftermath of his war, which he covers in his text, reveals his artistic and personal struggle with self-conception and the re-storying of self. The chapter explores the phenomenon of *Good-bye to All That*, a text notorious for its fallibility in matters of fact, as evidenced by over two hundred corrective annotations which appear in the 1995 edition edited by Richard Perceval Graves (G95). In Chapter 3 I look at what could be proposed as being Graves's truth technique and illustrates that the subjective truth of Graves's war experience is discernable in the text despite the obvious flaws in the factual evidence it presents. A mapping is made of the traces found within Graves's text that may communicate other forms of truth to the reader beyond those of the expected narrative.

In Chapter 4, 'Mary Borden: Through the Forbidden Zone', the idea of the creative, artistic process, the artist's progress and transformation through the physical forbidden zone of war is examined, as is how the author negotiates and manufactures a war persona in and through war culture and the war space, and the actions performed within the space. The chapter, organised around sub-themes which provide multiple contextual angles to the discussion, considers the war space as a physical and psychological 'forbidden' zone as a performative zone—the theatre of war—and considers clothing, acts, and reactions of the individual to war culture and place. I would suggest that an empathic reading of the Great War personal narrative requires a consideration

of the temporary cultural landscape of the war and the effect that living and operating within the hyper-kinaesthetic war zone has on the individual. In *Ambush* (1930), Herbert Read writes of the landscape in metaphoric terms when he describes the militarily vulnerable strategy of pushing forward into a temporary finger of territory, the salient. He writes, 'A salient is a secret symbol', 'a fixed idea', 'a blind impulse', 'to which hundreds of thousands of lives were sacrificed' (8). For Remarque, '[t]he front is a cage' over which 'Chance' hovers (101). For Borden, it is a place that is both forbidden and alluringly filled with potential. In his Preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones writes of observing his rifle company 'shape together to the remains of antique regimental traditions . . . react to the few things that united us', and 'respond to the war landscape', one he labels 'the Waste Land' (IP x). Borden records the experience of 'fighting the real enemies' (TFZ 155) of infection, shock, and psychological wounds in the surgical suite and the hospital wards. But she also records the extraordinary stance of a woman who found herself in a position of significant power, by giving insight into the transition and negotiation of gender roles in that locale from the point of view of the female civilian operative. In the thesis I explore the author's use of narrative voice to argue that what Borden describes in her preface as being 'fragments of a great confusion' (3) are in fact anything but confused. I would suggest that this chapter encourages a reading of the Great War zone as being a locale of breakthrough rather than solely one of breakdown.

Chapter 5, 'The House of Form', illustrates David Jones's concern with formal aesthetics when ordering the disorder of literary war material. This chapter places David Jones's *In Parenthesis* in the genre of the personal war narrative, despite its apparent diversion from autobiographical conventions. Overtly, *In Parenthesis* is an impressionistic, fictive, biographical account of an army unit heading into battle at the Somme in 1916. Jones's use of form is of particular interest for what could be considered an application of his painterly formality—a septych arrangement—which creates a literary altarpiece that reflects Jones's attempt to portray 'this whole unlovely order this night would transubstantiate' (IP 27). As T.E. Hulme, killed in Flanders in 1916, writes: 'pure geometrical regularity gives a certain pleasure to men troubled by the obscurity of outside appearance . . . something absolutely distinct from the messiness, the

confusion, and the accidental details of existing things' (Hulme x). I suggest that applying Hulme's idea to Jones's negotiations with 'the accidental details' (x) of the war, as seen through Jones's painterly eye, provides a model of one artist's successful organisation of the polyphonic, hyper-sensual, and messy details of war through the geometries of literary form.

1.5 The Moral and Sensual Conversion of the Artist in War

All three authors provide a textual arrangement of the forbidden zones of war and the individual on the Western Front. The experience of war is a process of cognition, of sensually experiencing the war landscape and war culture, negotiating gender roles, and confronting the uncanny of homeliness in the theatre of war, and of war in the home space. War involves the 'stripping of [one's] wonted supports', as Erving Goffman writes of total institutions such as psychiatric institutions, prisons, and the army in his seminal essay 'Characteristics of Total Institutions' (1957) (317). Goffman identifies the process of transformation from civilian life to that of the institution as a 'mortification of the self' that entails 'radical shifts in [one's] moral career' (317). This is 'the moral and sensual conversion' of the artist in wartime, a concept that originates with the sociologist Loïc Wacquant and that Brian Lande employs in his study of soldier culture, 'Breathing Like A Soldier: Culture Incarnate' (2007). In the study, Lande contends: 'The military world demands its members exert themselves constantly, master fatigue, suffer, and exhibit physical dexterity and skill' (97) through adaptation, or, as Lande quotes Wacquant 'a moral and sensual conversion' (Wacquant vii, Lande 98). I suggest that this conversion is key to an empathic understanding of the artist in war, and the artist's self-conceptualisation through and after war.

While Goffman's model of transformation is founded upon conceptualising the army as a total institution, in the theatre of war the army contends with multiple external factors, and in a war of the magnitude of the First World War, these factors are correspondingly large. The scope and magnitude of the Great War environment, with its confluences of so many other social and physical factors, creates a zone that may be defined as one of sanctioned disorder and of hyper-sensuality, an environment of extraordinarily dynamic sensual and emotional stimuli, filled with the unexpected and chaotic at times, and yet

instilled with some semblance of order through military structure, discipline, strategy, and the imperative of survival.

Within this culture, physical, sensual, and psychic re-orderings frequently flourish, as may artistic practices. It was towards this zone that many artists seemed compelled to go from 1914 to 1918, whether they served as combatants or in the auxiliary, support trades as enlisted or civilian operatives. As the Quaker orderly and war artist C.W.R. Nevinson states in *The Daily Express* (25 February 1915): ‘All artists should go to the front to strengthen their art by a worship of physical and moral courage and a fearless desire for adventure, risk and daring and free themselves from the canker of professors, archaeologists, cicerones, antiquaries, and beauty worshippers’ (qtd. in Walsh 98). Nevinson’s language echoes that of F.T. Marinetti’s *Il Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909), in which he urges that ‘[i]l coraggio, l’audacia, la ribellione, saranno elementi essenziali della nostra poesia’ (‘courage, audacity, rebellion will be the essential elements of our poetry’) and taps into war’s primal energy and the artist’s hunger for the experience of war as a subject.

Other artists felt compelled to enter or re-enter the war zone—as in the case of Wilfred Owen in 1917—to fulfil their self-perceived duty. After Owen experienced combat from January to May 1917, on New Years Eve 1917 he wrote to his mother of the sight of the combat-wearied troops he described as having worn an ‘incomprehensible’ expression on their faces that was ‘more terrible than terror, for it was a blindfold look and without expression, like a dead rabbit’s’ (Owen 521). As an artist Owen understood that ‘[i]t will never be painted, and no actor will ever seize it’, but he told his mother that ‘to describe it, I must go back and be with them’ (521). Owen felt compelled to return to the zone as an artist who wanted to attempt to bear witness but also to be in solidarity with his comrades as a part of his military unit, the British Expeditionary Force, and the great collective experience known as war.

Other artists are made by war, as J.B. Priestley remembers in his memoir, *Margin Release* (1962). Priestley recalls meeting the sculptor C.S. Jagger in the aftermath of the war:

I liked him but did not care much for the work of his that I had seen. But that night he showed me a low relief of no man’s land, amazingly skilful, pulling distances out of quarter inches, that had for me great

emotional force. The war, burning in memory, had set the craftsman on fire and transformed him into an artist. (87)

Jagger's work is conventional in its depiction of the sacrificed heroic soldiers, as seen in the Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner. But the bronze relief that Priestley refers to, *No Man's Land 1919–1920* (on view at the Tate Britain and Tate Britain website), is remarkably detailed, less heroic, and impressionistic. The bronze has a documentary feel through its three-dimensional composition, and despite its small scale (1264 x 3075 x 90 mm) or the material (bronze) it is made of. The detail of the relief sculpture, a listening post, is such that Priestley is extremely moved, emotionally, by the memory it triggers in him. In *Margin Release*, Priestley observes that some artists, such as Hemingway and Jagger, 'seemed to feel more confused and unhappy as the war receded, as if they felt they were drifting away from reality, as if a world with its guns silent was an uneasy dream' (87). Then there is Siegfried Sassoon, for whom not only the war and the success of his war writing but his friendship with Owen were to dog him for the duration of his creative life. In a 1951 letter to Charles Causley, he writes that 'of late years, no one under 40 writes to me except with inquiries concerning Owen—my friendship with him being, apparently, my sole claim to recognition—and the verse I've written since 1919 of no account' ('Letter to Charles Causley').

As the individual goes to war, as observed in all three texts in this study, he or she becomes part of a huge, dynamic, and sometimes chaotic collective. Because of this, communal memory is a central concern in the genre of personal war narratives, contingent on the understanding that, as Nancy K. Miller states, 'The memoir and all forms of personal testimony not only expand the boundaries of identity construction and the contours of the self but also lay claim to potential territories of community' (Miller 3). This idea plays into the theme of the tension that the artist experiences when discerning the ethics of the private versus the public performances of personal war narratives. This is witnessed repeatedly throughout stories from within the genre of the Great War narrative and, as discussed earlier, is often approached through the *apologia*. Certainly this tension is not restricted to the war narrative alone, but the opportunity for corroboration by sometimes dozens or even thousands of other

witnesses of a battle, for example, and potentially, charges of exploitation—possibly true of all autobiography—make this a central theme of the ethical project of reading the war narrative.

1.6 Vocabularies of Self-impression in War

These three texts by Graves, Borden, and Jones were chosen from thousands of personal narratives published in the late 1920s to early 1930s for their varying treatment of the story of the artist in war, using biography, fiction, and autobiography, or ‘autobiografiction’. Autobiografiction is an early 20th-century literary term revived by Max Saunders in his 2014 study *Self Impression, Life Writing, Autobiografiction & the Forms of Modern Literature* and describes the early modernists’ development of hybrid forms of self-impression that interpolated the autobiographical with the fictionalised, or a ‘new way to combine life-writing with fiction’ (*Self Impression* 4). Max Saunders contends that ‘the 1870s to the 1930s represent a cusp, in which a variety of forms evolve very rapidly, but share a fascination with the fictional possibilities of life-writing-forms’ (*Self Impression* 11). The publication of Marcel Proust’s *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913–1927) was influential for the Great War generation, who grew up during the time the literary world embraced the possibilities of genre-bending forms. Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* (1928), his fictionalised account of his war, illustrates this genre-bending technique. Max Saunders ponders the idea that the war may have ‘produced a *rappelle à l’ordre*, an impulse to pull back from pre-war modernist experimentation’ (*Self Impression* 162). But he also believes that the war produced ‘its own hybrids’ (162) and that the very concept of subjectivity was reshaped under the pressure of trauma, and the inability of artists to articulate their war experiences.

As Samuel Hynes writes, personal war narratives are ‘something like travel writing, something like autobiography, something like history’ (4–5). Graves’s, Borden’s, and Jones’s texts all display various degrees of genre-bending in the organisation of their war narratives. This genre-bending not only comes from an adherence, more or less, to a stylistic modernism of the era, but also represents an overt engagement by the authors with the difficulty of the personal and aesthetic ethics of composing a personal war narrative. The vocabulary of autobiographical form is, perhaps, inadequate to encompass the triple narratives of the war experience—the personal, the historic, and that of

the unit. Each of the three texts that the dissertation focuses on illustrates some stylistic hybridity—even Graves’s ostensibly linear, non-fictional autobiography. Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* displays, as Max Saunders writes, a ‘heavily stylized and aestheticized set of vignettes testifying not only to the first-hand experience upon which it is based, but also her contacts with pre-war modernists and artists’ (*Self Impression* 162); these artists included Percy Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford, and Gertrude Stein. Robert Graves’s narrative, while more socially and formally conventional, warrants inclusion in Saunders’s classification autobiografiction, as does David Jones’s *In Parenthesis*. Although Jones’s text is overtly a narrative about an army unit rather than an individual, I demonstrate that it contains one of the greatest autobiographical statements made by any of the writers of the Great War canon, in the form of his implicit claim to be the Bard of the Somme.

1.7 The Battle of the Somme

The Battle of the Somme, from 1 July to 18 November 1916, is central to all three narratives under study; and so, all three texts may also be considered, in part, to be biographies of the war space known as the Somme. All three authors survived. In early summer of 1916, Captain Robert Graves and Private David Jones marched with their units into the cornfields and pastures of the Somme Valley. This was a place that Jones described as being where ‘blue-winged butterflies, dance between, flowery banks’ (IP 131). But it was also the locale where ‘adolescence walks the shrieking woods’ (171), that is, the deadly forests that caused soldiers to ‘stumble in a place of tentacle’ (166), as Jones and his comrades did in battle. As part of the 38th (Welsh) Division of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), Graves’s and Jones’s companies were ordered to attack the German line held by the elite Lehr Regiment of the Prussian Guards, a line further reinforced by a second contingent of the 16th Bavarian and 122nd Wurtemberg regiments (Dilworth, *Reading David Jones* 108). The battles were disastrous for the ‘new-army battalions’ (G14 264) that Graves describes; these were battalions made up of amateur soldiers such as Jones, who describes himself through his literary stand-in, Private John Ball. Private Ball is ‘grotesquely incompetent, a knock-over of piles, a parade’s despair’ (IP xv).

On the night of 10–11 July, an exhausted and frightened Jones was shot in the leg at Mametz Wood, a lethal eighty-nine-hectare forest located a

kilometre southwest of Bazentin. In *In Parenthesis*, Jones describes the moment of sensation when John Ball realises he has been hit: 'The warm fluid percolates between his toes and his left boot fills, as when you tread in a puddle—he crawled away' (IP 183). While clarity remained elusive at the time, Jones's attempt to make sense of his wartime experiences would take two decades to articulate, as he wrote in the preface to *In Parenthesis*: 'I have attempted to appreciate some things, which at the time of suffering, the flesh was too weak to appraise' (x). In his autobiography, *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Robert Graves recorded entering Mametz Wood (a week after Jones was hit) to loot German greatcoats 'to use as blankets' (G14 264). Graves found the woods 'full of dead of the Prussian Guards Reserve ... big men ... and of Royal Welch ... little men. There was not a single tree in the wood unbroken . . . a wreckage of green branches' (264). Within days, Graves was injured at High Wood, another deadly copse located less than six kilometres northeast of Mametz: 'I thought that the punch [of being hit] was merely the shock of the explosion; then blood started trickling in my eye and I felt faint, and I called to Moody: "I've been hit". Then I fell down' (G14 272).

Two months after Jones and Graves were injured, at Bray-sur-Somme, less than thirteen kilometres southwest of High Wood, a thirty-one-year-old American Volunteer Aid Detachment worker (VAD), Mary Borden, conducted triage on some of the twenty-five thousand gravely wounded soldiers who passed through her hospital in the early weeks of the Battle of the Somme (Conway 52). Borden writes in *The Forbidden Zone*: 'It was my business to sort out the nearly dying from the dying . . . It was all, you see, like a dream' (TFZ 95). Later, in her Second World War memoir, *Journey Down a Blind Alley* (1946) (*Journey Down*), she writes that the dream was very real and memorable:

I don't know how I got to Bray-sur-Somme in 1916, but the scene is vivid. I imagine that I can still hear the thunder of the guns, the endless rumble of trucks ... smell the smell of gas gangrene that pervaded . . . I see myself sitting in my cubicle with sodden feet on an iron stove. My apron is stained with mud and blood. (*Journey Down* 9)

Borden's narratives of this important time in her life articulate a key issue in personal war narratives, that is, of memory loss, self-editing, and reconstruction of the self in the post-war period. Truth for Borden, as for many of her contemporaries, is camouflaged between the lines. Like many other storytellers, Borden structures her war narratives partially around the expectations of genre—and in the hospital wards of *The Forbidden Zone*, the scene is, predictably, dominated by the tropes of mud and blood. How Borden got there, or, her process or progress into war, was seemingly lost or irrelevant to the author decades later as she expresses in her second war memoir that she could not tell the story coherently (*Journey Down* 6). Yet for the genre of the personal Great War narrative, and of war stories and life-writing more generally, the quest to express how one 'got there' is a key theme, one that one might consider, potentially, to carry ethical implications. The ideas that I am preoccupied in this dissertation with, then, are how the artist gets to war, what happens to the artist in war, and how the artist responds to war in the aftermath through the limitations of human expression and form.

Chapter 2. 'His Method of Truth': Robert Graves and *Good-bye To All That* (1929)

2.1 Introduction

Truth, goes the truism, is the first casualty of war. In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves freely admits that his narrative is porous: he congenitally suffers from 'disconcerting spells of amnesia', a familial condition that 'tends to produce . . . the same sort of dishonesty that deaf people have when they miss the thread of conversation' (G14 17). His wartime poetry is filled with lies, 'falsities for public delectation' (346–7); after the war, he has 'difficulty in telling the truth', finding it 'easier . . . in any fault to lie my way out' (358), and in the final sentence of the autobiography, he boasts that he has 'learned to tell the truth' (446). Quixotically, he qualifies the latter statement by adding '—nearly', leaving the reader to wonder about all that has come before (446). The quest of this chapter is to explore the space represented by the '—' in Graves's statement and to discern where war truth might reside in a text that contains so many verifiable inaccuracies.

To do this, in Part I of the chapter I introduce the idea of self-testimony or the reconstruction of self within the meta-narrative of the Great War, and of self within his generation. This is followed by a contextualisation of the period of anxiety over truth following the publication of 'the literature of disillusionment', as Douglas Jerrold, in the 12 June 1930 *Times Literary Supplement* editorial 'The Garlands Wither', labelled the 1928–30 war books phenomenon (Jerrold 486). Following this, the chapter looks at the flashpoint of the truth debate, before and after the publication of *Good-bye to All That*. Next, comes an examination of the multiple facets of truth in reports of Graves's death at the Somme. Following this, there is a discussion on Graves's attempt to reconstruct or rehabilitate self through 'The Long *Apologia* of Robert Graves', in which he belatedly attends to one of the main conventions of the genre. Digging deeper into the idea of recreating self through the war narrative in 'Truth and Lies', lies and half-lies are considered.

This will be followed by another chapter on Graves that looks at truth techniques of sound and considers the role his epistolary habit, singing, dialogue, and rhyming play in his war narrative. 'Hearing Voices, or, "The Shout"' is a discussion of polyphony in his short story 'The Shout' (1926) and

suggests that the narrative techniques he uses anticipate *Good-bye to All That*. Following this, 'Graves's "Box Office Failure"' looks at his 1930 play, *But It Still Goes On*, citing it as an example of the author's failure to tell his war narrative truthfully and presents an argument as to why it fails. The next section, 'The Heartbeat of the Matter', suggest the nexus of Graves's truth technique and war narrative. The conclusion to this chapter proposes a method of discerning Graves's 'method of truth' and makes recommendations for an ethical approach to his war narrative—that is, one which may open the reader to a more empathic reading of other historically and emotionally laden bodies of personal testimonial literature that seek truth.

While Graves's narrative is often factually false, the chapter presents the idea that Graves encodes *Good-bye to All That* with a truthful soundscape, one capable of powerfully and accurately evoking the sounds and voices of the Great War even when inaccurately describing the events. A discussion follows in which the idea that this may be linked to the fact that when the mind is disordered by 'shell shock', or wounded by the force of percussion, it is often sound that can fix, and potentially unlock, memories whose literal truth may be left hopelessly jumbled even long after war is over.

2.2 Reconstruction of Self

Self-testimony is at the heart of reconstruction of the self in the war story. But as Graves illustrates, through two major editions of *Good-bye to All That* and multiple apologies for his many errors, his process of re-storying himself was one of on-going revisions. He tells us that in 1916, 'on leave in England after being wounded', he had 'stupidly written [his war narrative] as a novel' (G14 122). Graves's self-condemnation over this attempt to fictionalise his story reveals a confusion of truth with genre, privileging one literary genre over the other. This confusion continues as he tells the reader that he had to 're-translate it into history' (122). Graves's choice of the verb 're-translate' reveals his perception that novelisation is almost like composing in a different language, one that he infers is less truthful in comparison to autobiography.

Overtly Graves says that he is willing to give 'proof of my readiness to accept biographical convention' by 'recording my two earliest recollections' (G14 6). He then delivers what appears to be a linear autobiographical text with Captain Robert von Ranke Graves at its heart, and furnishes it with a series of

'anecdotes' (13). The life writing critic Rachel McLennan describes this type of writing as 'explanations of self—how the self came to be, [and] who the autobiographer is as he or she is at the time of writing' (McLennan 5). But in the following passage, Graves's sense of self in the theatre of war is malleable. He writes:

I had now been in the trenches for five months and was getting past my prime. For the first three weeks an officer was not much good in the trenches; he did not know his way about . . . Between three and four weeks he was at his best . . . then he began gradually to decline as neurasthenia developed in him. (G14 217–8)

The use of the first person illustrates an individual experiencing war. But in the next sentence, through the use of the third person, he distances himself from himself. The individual is transformed into the officer who is absorbed into the collective of the army unit. Then, through exposure to the war environment, the officer disintegrates as he develops full-blown neurasthenia, thus becoming categorised as a disease, a liability, or something 'worse than useless', 'no good' (218)—a non-person in a zone wherein functions and fitness seemingly define all and determine the wellbeing of so many others.

Good-bye to All That illustrates Graves's struggle to re-story himself, to make himself, through narrative, whole again after the war. From the opening pages he constructs himself through a litany of characteristics—some of which, including 'my historical method' (G14 10), he claims to have inherited from ancestors. His historical truth, he says, or, 'the geographical treatment of chaps' (5), utilises this methodology to fulfil 'my object [of] simply to find out how things actually occurred' (10). Where this intuitive approach is insouciant at best, as this chapter outlines, even the complexity of document-based truth describing Graves at the Battle of the Somme demonstrates that 'find[ing] out how things actually occurred' (10) is highly problematic. Despite this, Graves continues to present fiction as a lesser order of narrative when compared to history. Yet as Hayden White observes, the identities of historian and storyteller overlap: historical narratives are 'verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in sciences' (White 1537).

White contends that 'histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles' overlaid with a 'mythic plot structure' through a process he calls 'emplotment' (1538). Through 'encodation of the facts', he argues, 'events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of [these stories] and the highlighting of others', utilising 'all the techniques of a novel or a play' (1538–9). Histories, then, are 'events... made into story' (1539); that is, they are creative acts. Yet as Graves implies when he states that he is no longer 'stupidly' trying to write his war story as fiction (G14 122), he believes that to write history is to invoke a hierarchy of literary *gravitas* with historical truth at the top.

History, Graves infers, is verifiable, document-based testimony and therefore more historically important and/or truthful than creative literature. But such testimony can be unreliable, especially when it emerges from the pressurised circumstances of war. While all three narratives have potential for verification through corroborative testimony, the personal war *experience* is utterly subjective and sometimes even an act of wilful communal lies. In 'The Disruptive Comforts of Drag', Alon [Iris] Rachamimov writes of how prisoners of war 'would work together to provide an agreed-upon version of the circumstances of their capture'; of camp life, Rachamimov writes, 'the only wartime place where masculine vigor could undisputedly be reaffirmed' was through the personal narrative which transitioned to memoir in the post-war period (Rachamimov 366). The act of memoir is the act of remembering, but also of forgetting less palatable or acceptable truths; in the case of the prisoners of war that Rachamimov describes, performing feminine roles through drag or acting like the woman/mother figure in camp families was best left behind for some.

Graves opens his narrative with the stated hope that through the act of self-witness, embodied in the authorship of a book for publication, that he is able to utter 'good-bye' to the 'all that' of his war neurosis, his stagnant post-war life, 'and to you', the relationships that no longer have any meaning for him (G14 5). He wishes, moreover, to offer 'a formal' (5) farewell, something published, and therefore, a public statement. This formal statement provides the central paradox of Graves's *Good-bye to All That* and to his life—for in recreating himself through autobiography, all attempts to erase or draw a line

under his past and present fail, as he and his war experience are writ large a full century after the war. Instead of Graves having contained his war-self within a text, as he perhaps had hoped, the controversies surrounding his narrative continued to enlarge and reiterate what he wished to leave in the past.

In Oxford after the war, Graves hoped that he could 'cure [him]self' (G14 388) of his neurasthenia, having already 'made several attempts' to try 'to rid myself of the poison of war-memories' (414). Graves's process of recalling a 'true' war narrative suggests a desire for voiding, or a metaphoric bloodletting, a ridding 'of the poison of war' (414) he carries in his body and psyche. Relieving his poisonous memories takes on a form of confession, almost like a mediaeval 'verbalization as exorcism' (Taylor 23). Ostensibly, Graves appears to attempt exorcism of his war self through the utterance of his poetry, or through his novelisation. Abandoning his war novel, Graves attempts to suppress his memories of war but fails: 'War horror overcame me again' in Oxford in the early 1920s (G14 387). An added complication is that at the time, he feared that 'if I allowed myself to get cured; my *Pier-Glass* haunting would end and I would become merely a dull easy writer' (387).

Here, potentially, Graves is contending with the spectre of survivor guilt, the shame of lying, and the impossibility of telling or facing the truth of his war experience. This aligns with trauma theorist Cathy Caruth's belief that the traumatised are incapable of 'register[ing] the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned' (Caruth 151). Graves could not 'own' his war experience, and during the war he believed he was 'not sure enough of myself to retranslate it into undisguised history' (G14 414). Caruth's model of trauma reinforces the idea that Graves was unable to 'know' the 'immediacy' of the 'violent event'—or in his case, of the multiple, on-going traumas of the Great War, until after more than a decade of what Caruth characterises as 'belatedness' (Caruth 151). Certainly this is observable in the multiple ways that Graves attempts to express his wounding at the Somme as the next chapter suggests. Then too, Graves contended with reintegration as a civilian. In the immediate aftermath, during Graves's Oxford years, he tells us, 'Nancy begged me not to talk about the war in her hearing, and I was ready to forget about it' (G14 397); but Graves was plagued by temporal dislocation, 'still mentally and nervously organized for war'

(357). His struggle to find an aesthetic architecture to house the violent experience of war eluded him.

Richard Perceval Graves (R.P. Graves) claims that it was not until 1929, when Laura Riding exercised her 'intellectual and moral influence over him', that 'for the first time since he was a child', Graves had 'an integrated personality'; he was ready to face the war at last (G95 xi–xii). I disagree with R.P. Graves and believe that Graves's literary output continued to exhibit a divided personality for his entire life. Still, until 1929, as his reflection on the failure of his literary treatment of his war-self illustrates, Graves prosecuted and condemned himself for this failure with a self-persecution that bears some of the hallmarks of the struggle with the reconstruction of the post-war self with which returning soldiers often grappled: he states that he is 'ashamed at having distorted my material with plot' (G14 414). This shame is observed in other Great War narratives such as Ernest Hemingway's collection of short stories *In Our Time* (1925). In 'Soldier's Home', Hemingway uses the fictional Krebs to describe his sense of self-loathing for the lying he takes to post-war: 'A distaste for everything that happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told' (69). These lies, Hemingway writes, were 'unimportant ... consisting of attributing to himself things other men had seen, done or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers' (70). In reality, Hemingway, never a soldier, had bigger lies to contend with, including wearing an Italian military uniform back home once the war was over. Still, his lies made good copy for Hemingway, the journalist turned storywriter.

From the beginning of *Good-bye to All That*, Graves dismisses his story as 'material' (G14 5), with the implication that treating it in this way is exploitative. Yet in 1929, 'money' (5) was one of his motivations for writing, thus turning his record into a type of war profiteering trading on the suffering of self and the deaths of others (5). Secondly, he states: 'If my scruples had been literary and not moral I could have easily have compromised, as many writers have since done' (414). Graves infers that others, such as Siegfried Sassoon, employed 'a pretended diary stylistically disguising characters, times, and dates' (414), leading one to conclude that he perceives war novelists as glorified liars—a hypocrisy, coming from him.

The passage is rich in clues as to how, in 1929, Graves tries to reorient his war story towards a more historical, and supposedly therefore more truthful, compass. In doing so, he shows the difficulty of embracing the self of the past, of first erasing and then remaking oneself in the midst of, and then after, the complexity of war. He writes: '1926 was yesterday, when the autobiographical part of my life was fast approaching the end' (G14 410). He believes that recording the autobiographical details of his life will sever him from the past, and in the dedicatory epilogue to Laura Riding—an inversion of the convention of the epilogue last and the dedication first—he states that *Good-bye to All That* removes him from time altogether, it seems 'to have been written forward from where I was instead of backward from where you are' (447). Graves insists that had he written 'forward I should still be inside the body of it'—that is, still within the linear, autobiographic trajectory of a life story. Instead, he is 'living against kind ... against myself'; through this autobiography, he insinuates, he has stepped out of time.

2.3 The Conventions at Work in *Good-bye to All That*

Following criticism of his autobiography, Graves alerts his readership to his deliberate use of generic conventions in a 26 June 1930 letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*: 'I have more or less deliberately mixed in all the ingredients that I know are mixed into other popular books, specifically food and drink, murders, ghosts, kings, one's mother, T.E. Lawrence and the Prince of Wales' (Graves, 'Garlands Wither', 534). He constructed *Good-bye to All That* in a febrile period of weeks during the height of the war book phenomenon, employing the generic shape of traditional autobiography, the tropes of the trench tale, the published texts of the era, and the arc of Homeric battles. He writes:

And yet even proper chaps have their formal geography, however little it may mean to them. They have birth certificates, passports, relatives, earliest recollections, even, sometimes, degrees and publications and campaigns to itemize. (G14 6)

What Graves admits is a self-conscious act, a commercial decision to combine 'ingredients' of his autobiographical traces, his 'formal geography', in order to fulfil the expectations of a readership and bolster the veracity of his war story. In

this he adheres to many of the war story conventions outlined in this thesis. His war 'credentials' appear throughout his text, particularly through his service with, and fealty to, the Welch Fusiliers, his death experience at the Somme, and his inordinate attentiveness to the details of regimental uniform, in particular the eccentric discussion of the Royal Fusilier Flash (114–8). His attention to the 'signing on' or 'anticipation' convention is evident when he discusses enlisting, believing that England and France had been drawn into the conflict justly. Here Graves issues one of his more blatantly ironic statements on naivety, truth and war stories: 'It never occurred to me that newspaper or statesmen could lie' (94). The 'reality' of Graves's enlistment includes his discomfort as an officer: 'My greatest difficulty was to talk to the men of the company,' he writes, and he describes feeling fraudulent around seasoned old soldiers: 'I disliked bluffing that I knew more than they did' (97–8). His discomfort at faking knowledge signals Graves's *in situ* conflict with truth telling within the war context and the beginnings of his moral and sensual conversion to war.

Graves's 'loss of innocence' is described when he notes that 'the first corpse I saw in France was a suicide' (G14 137). After a night watch he orders a soldier whom he believes has fallen asleep on duty to 'Stand-to, there' (137). He asks the machine-gunner next to the prone soldier, 'What's wrong? What's he taken his boot and sock off for?' and comments that 'I was ready for anything odd in the trenches' (137). Then shaking the man, he realises that the soldier 'had taken off his boot and sock to pull the trigger of his rifle with his toe; the muzzle was in his mouth' (137). Graves's description of the soldier with the back of his skull blown off is bloodless and prosaic; clearly, Graves's moral and sensual conversion to war seems complete as he repeats the story as a mere anecdote, though he claims to disparage anecdotes (450). The language of self in the suicide passage is neutral and lacks self-reflection or traces of emotional register, instead, defaulting to indifference. This is particularly significant given that a suicide is a gruesome, demoralising death for fighting men. Graves employs the understated, dismissive tenor of soldier-code euphemism—the suicide had gone 'a bit queer', though the suicide is a result of despair, fatigue, terror and abandonment by 'his girl' (137). A pivotal moment in Graves's life as a soldier is dismissed by the author as he immediately transitions his narrative

towards a description of a day in the trenches: 'At stand-to rum and tea were served out' (137).

But the story is more complicated than this. Graves is economical, or confused, with the truth. He contradicts an earlier claim made in his 1916 poem 'The First Funeral' in which he writes: '(The first corpse I saw was on the / German wires, and couldn't be buried)' (l. 1). Which corpse was the first? Does it matter? This piece of information does matter. The difference between a suicide and a casualty in the field of war is significant; the former is demoralising while the latter is the objective of combat—kill the enemy. The role of combat stress and the repression of memory may have caused Graves to misremember his first exposure to a corpse in war. Graves was under tremendous combat stress by 1916 and thus either scenario is plausible. A second explanation is that the suicide was the first Allied corpse he saw, and the one hanging on the wire was the first enemy corpse. The implication of this confusion might also be that Graves could not remember anything clearly from that time, that the sight was too shocking, and that his memory conflated the two. In either case, he had lost his innocence.

The convention 'damage or disillusionment' is insinuated in the opening paragraph of *Good-bye to All That* through his desire to say 'good-bye' to 'all that', to settle his mind, and thus never to have to think about it all again (G14 5). His 'general nervous condition' (336), his neurasthenia, presents towards the end of the text at the end of 1918, then throughout his 'readjustment'. 'Silence' or 'the shout' is witnessed through the existence of *Good-bye to All That* and the short story 'The Shout' (1926)—discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

After considering these conventions, the text was reread and I discerned from numerous passages that Graves is preoccupied with a fundamental thematic question of the personal war narrative—the truth of the war experience. While truth may be a preoccupation of much literature, to some extent, in this thesis I would suggest that the war genre carries an extra truth burden. For Graves, it is clear that his truth is not always necessarily fact based, a thought that feeds into what Laura (Riding) Jackson identifies in 'Robert Graves', her 1986 letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* following Graves's

death. Riding writes: 'the lie, [is] his method of truth' (Jackson [Riding] TLS 191). This provokes the question: can a liar tell the truth?

The reader reception of *Good-bye to All That* as a core historically accurate Great War text demonstrates a resistance to accepting the idea that it is a partly fictional work, yet Graves's publication is a performative and quasi-confessional act. As we have seen, for Graves, the guilt of earlier attempts to re-story his war is problematic on many levels, a phenomenon that Chloe Taylor identifies in the work of confession:

The resistance that the subject experiences in speaking is a means of ascertaining the quality of the thought, its truth or falsity, and thus . . . we see that expressions of psychological resistance will always accompany confession, or at least anything worth confessing. (Taylor 24).

Graves's narrative—or rather, his inability to deliver a 'truthful' narrative—may in part have been a manifestation of psychological resistance at the conscious and subconscious levels. At heart it is a mammoth struggle with the idea of self and truth and the challenge in creating an accurate Great War narrative. How does one tell the untellable? Like that great confessor Saint Augustine, one who turned to 'lengthy excuses, blaming social influences such as family and friends' for his failure to do so (Taylor 33), Graves attributes familial 'amnesia' (G14 17) for his uneven facts. Like Augustine, 'drunk on God' as an act of 'self-forgetting' (Taylor 39), Graves at times seems drunk on war story, though he admits that this his story is only in 'caricature' (G14 385, 404) and states that 'those caricature scenes . . . now seem to sum up the various stages of my life' (228).

This section looked at the aesthetic conundrum and confusion on the subject of truth and genre and self in war as confronted by Robert Graves. This is exemplary of many who lived through the war and beyond the war and who wrote personal narratives. The next section contextualises the era that I refer to as the age of anxiety about truth, the period of 1928–37, during which the literature of disillusionment stormed the literary world.

2.4 Ages of Autobiographical Experimentation, Ages of Truth

In 1931, Storm Jameson wrote that '[t]he finest achievement of modern autobiography, and the one that excuses and (you may say) sanctifies any

others, is the war book proper' (Jameson, 'Autobiography and the Novel' 563). By using the verb 'sanctifies' Jameson raises the stakes of the personal war narrative to, potentially, hagiography. She places the construct above generic autobiography, presumably due to the historical resonance it has with her generation. In this, Jackson, like Graves, places the autobiographical war book based on experience, above fiction. But not all readers and critics of the time agreed with Jameson.

The Franco-American critic and veteran, Jean Norton Cru, observes in his critical study of French war narratives *Témoins* (1929), '*Ces inventions gratuites ont été prises pour des fait réels par beaucoup de lectures, car si le public prend les romans ordinaires pour des fictions il a une forte tendance à prendre les romans de guerre au sérieux et comme des dépositions*' (*Témoins* 49–50).⁸ The war story, he implies, is privileged as truth whether fictional or not. But Cru points out: '*Mais ce succès n'est pas la mesure de leur valeur documentaire, ni de l'estime du public dans l'avenir*' (*Témoins* 554).⁹ Cru devotes ten pages of harsh criticism to Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* in comparison to an average of one to two pages accorded other authors. Cru cites Barbusse's inability to capture the character or 'l'âme' [soul] (558) of the infantryman, he errs in factuality, his use of soldier vernacular '*l'argot ordurier*' (564) is exaggerated, and '*En réalité on parlait peu l'argot au front*' [in fact, spoken little at the front] (564), and perhaps worst of all, the dead '*Barbusse les a vus avec les yeux de son imagination chimérique, visionnaire, malade, éprise de monstres. Il a déformé les morts come il a déformé tout le reste*' [he has viewed the dead with the eyes of his fanciful imagination, visionary, sickly, in love with monstrosities. He has deformed the dead as he has all else] (565).

But as a century has passed, contrary to Cru's belief that fanciful war novels should not endure, *Le Feu*, like *Good-bye to All That*, has an enduring reputation as a piece of literary documentary. Three decades and another world war later, Paul Fussell is equally eager to demonstrate that Robert Graves's 'machine gun anecdotes [collapse] as "fact" upon inquiry' as he prosecutes Graves and dismisses *Good-bye to All That* as mere anecdotes (*Great War and*

⁸ 'The public accepts ordinary novels as fiction, but takes war novels seriously, as if they were depositions' (Cru, *War Books* 50).

⁹ 'But this success [of war novels] is no measure of their documentary value, nor of the esteem of the future reader' (all translations, unless noted otherwise, are mine).

Modern 207). Still, to do so he provides his own anecdotal testimony: ‘any man with some experience and a bent toward the literal can easily catch Graves out in his fictions and his exaggerations’ (207). Fussell the veteran should know better than any civilian that soldiers are great storytellers, and sometimes, for good or ill, liars. But does this mean that their stories carry no weight of testimony or truth at the historical or personal level?

To further an understanding of the ethical pressures the author of the war story faces in the context of the overarching war story conventions, alternate war narratives, and authorial ‘signatures’, this next section looks at the pressures around truth-telling that the soldier-narrator experiences during war and long after. Combatants such as Graves may lie, or, as I explore in the next section, they may negotiate with truth on a number of levels and through different literary and psychological techniques. But to dismiss the possibility of truth in the genre is an equally fallible proposition. As Dominic Harman states, ‘imaginary wars recounted in memoirs are so important: with all their contradictions, partialities, fallibilities and mendacities they expand our imaginative conception of war and, in so doing, narrow the unbridgeable gap between literature and life’ (11–12). Harman alerts us to the paradox that by accepting lies we may sometimes be able to understand a greater truth. In contrast, Cru, with twenty-eight months’ experience in the trenches, grew increasingly disgusted at how the war narrative was being claimed by non-combatants during and after the war. Disturbed by ‘*le mensonge de l’anecdote*’¹⁰ (*Témoins* 13) being promulgated in the war book era, Cru states:

*Le mystère ne résidait pas, comme les non-combattants le croient, dans l’effet nouveau des armes perfectionnées, mais dans ce qui fut la réalité de toutes les guerres. Sur le courage, le patriotisme, le sacrifice, la mort, on nous avait trompés, et aux premières balles nous reconnaissons tout à coup le mensonge de l’anecdote, de l’histoire, de la littérature, de l’art. (13–14)*¹¹

¹⁰ ‘the lie of the story’ (translation mine)

¹¹ ‘The mystery [of the devastation of war] doesn’t reside—as non-combatants believe—in the new efficiency of perfected arms [i.e., mechanised warfare], but, rather, from that which makes the reality of all wars. On courage, patriotism, sacrifice, and death, we were lied to, and as the first bullets fell, we suddenly saw the lies of the story, of history, of literature, and of art’ (translation mine).

Cru's anger, writes Winter, 'turned him into a witness, or rather, an arbiter of witnesses, a judge of those who bore witness to war' (*Remembering War* 247). Thus, Cru became judge, jury, and prosecutor for the defence of soldiers' war truth. Cru's fifteen-year-long inquisitional survey, *Témoins*, compared three hundred French war narratives against their authors' military records. Of these only twenty-nine narratives passed Cru's test (Winter *Remembering War* 247). When asked why Cru had not written his own war memoir, considering the length of time he had served on the front lines, he responds:

Pourquoi écrire? . . . Serait-ce pour satisfaire cette fringale du public pour les récits de guerre dits 'histoires vraies', et toujours si bien arrangées et confectionnées suivant l'idée du feuilletoniste? Cela, jamais de la vie! J'ai trop souffert, mes aventures sont trop incarnées en moi pour que je les déforme et les apprête. Reste le cas d'une relation sincère. Cela me plairait fort. . . mais ne saurait être rendu public en ce moment' [lettre de mars 1917]. (qtd. in Lacoste 5)^{12 13}

This statement resounds with Cru's post-war bitterness and hints at academic privilege, or snobbery, based on his credentials as a literary critic and also his belief that he could act as judge and jury of the war narrative due to exposure to front line combat. He writes that his family pressed him to publish his own story, '*mais je pris sur moi de choisir le sujet que j'avais le plus à coeur: non pas mes propres souvenirs mais les souvenirs des autres . . . ceux que j'avais lus et d'autres encore que je lirais, tous, si possible, rassemblés*' (4).¹⁴ He continues: '*Mes propres souvenirs, je voulais les utiliser pour mieux comprendre les récits de mes frères d'armes et pour en faire une critique sérieuse, excluant toute fantaisie littéraire, toute réclame commerciale*' (4).¹⁵

According to Winter, Cru set out to 'strip [the war narrative] of its naturalness, which grows out of unexamined biases in many of these memoirs

¹² 'Why write? . . . Would it be to satisfy the public craving for these stories as 'true history', always written carefully, and deliciously, following the ideal of the author who writes for serial publication? Well never in my life! I've suffered too much, my adventures are too ingrained in me for me to deform them and tailor them. They will remain sincere. That pleases me a lot . . . but they cannot be made public at this time' (translation mine).

¹³ Note that the researcher could not locate Cru's original letters cited in LaCoste or Winter.

¹⁴ 'but I would rather chose a subject dearer to my heart, not my own reminiscences, but that of others . . . those that I have read and will read, all, if possible, together' (translation mine).

¹⁵ 'Of my own memories, I would like to use them to better understand those of my brothers in arms, and to make a study of serious criticism of their work excluding fantasy, and the strictly commercial' (translation mine).

and . . . their tendency to configure the class of arms as an utterly unfounded romantic episode in heroism' ('Moral Witness' 467). In her short biography of Cru appended to *War Books*, Hélène Vogel, Cru's sister, reports that as early as 1916 he was stating: 'If I have a hope it is that this war will generate a realistic literature of combat from the pens of the combatants themselves, the survivors and the dead, whose letters, diaries, and intimate notes will be brought out' (192). Vogel believes that Cru understood his work as 'a sacred duty' that was 'moved by a sense of duty to justice and truth' and that it would lay the foundations for future generations of scholars (193). In this, Vogel valorises her brother as a literary warrior.

Winter believes that Cru 'puts the historian in the story *and* in the evidence' and that Cru felt 'that witnesses . . . [should] be separated from mere storytellers, false chroniclers who knew not of what they wrote' ('Moral Witness' 247). The lexis employed by Cru is resoundingly legalistic, as it evokes ideas of testimony, witness, lies, and above all, truth. Yet, as David H. Jones argues: '[legal] testimony is impersonal: its value is determined by its capacity to enable a judge or jury to reach a decision' (6). The challenge of writing a text made during the intense pressure of war, and its aftermath, is that it may thus contain greater mistakes than one composed under less extreme circumstances. As Jones writes: 'Since testimony points to an event which cannot be properly apprehended *at the time*, the subject of testimony is marked by belatedness and indeterminacy' (5). The 'paradox of identification' (13), then, and the delayed reaction and recording by the creative individual, produce a central challenge in the discernment of truth in literary testimony and memory. This tension parallels the experience of the demobilised soldier—one alternately of relief, euphoria, memory delay or forced suppression of memories, and then the desire for membership in the narrative community of those who have been there. The difficulty for the readers of Great War narratives is that they are, in a sense, called to judge the facts of the Great War objectively. As human beings, readers, through the act of reading, are also called to witness. The provocative stance is the decision whether or not to judge the integrity of the narrator—yet at times this may be a highly subjective, merciful, or, empathic act. For Cru, however, his distress at the great number of 'liars and distorters' (*War Books* 192) set him on a mission to uphold truth, particularly for the dead.

The artist is often called upon to speak for the dead, an overtly ethical impossibility; the artist can only bear witness, or intuit the experience of others, including others who are now dead, and cannot to speak for them. But for Cru, the only true witness was one who ‘aligns history with his or her memory, and thereby speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves—those who fought but did not survive’ (qtd. in Winter, *Remembering War* 247). How this works in the case of the dead soldier is articulated in Cru’s methodology that includes the use of notebooks, diaries, letters, reminiscences, and even fiction, ‘but only when the fiction is merely a transparent veil beneath which one can make out the personality of the author, his experience in the war, his unit, the sector he occupied, in a word, the real facts of his campaign’ (Cru *War Books* 6). What Cru implies is that if the novel portrayed verifiable events, and the author had verifiable credentials, then Cru would consider them more worthwhile than non-fiction accounts that contained material that could not have been witnessed by the author. Here Cru and Graves part ways; in *Good-bye to All That* Graves disparages his own novelisation of his narrative.

One of the novels that Cru endorses is Philippe Barrès’s *La guerre à vingt ans* (1924). ‘*Le roma de guerre de Barrès*’, Cru reports, ‘*fait un heureux contraste avec celui [Henry] de Montherlant [Le Songe 1922]*’ (*Témoins* 566).¹⁶ Cru points out that only eighty-six pages of de Montherlant’s 343-page text concern combat at the front, and worse: ‘*le livre décrit Montherlant, non la guerre; et ce qu’il décrit en Montherlant ce n’est pas un soldat*’ (631).¹⁷ In the 1929 French edition of *Témoins*, Cru goes to great pains to include the war records of the authors, and includes a series of tables at the end of the book that demonstrate a statistical and descriptive analysis of the three hundred authors under study. The tables include a breakdown of his sample into: order of valour (with percentages); genre (journals, reminiscences or memoirs, letters, reflections, and novels); date and location of authors’ births; date and location of deaths, if applicable; professions; regiments; army division; the period covered by the texts; the battles experienced; the dates of publication; publishers;

¹⁶ ‘Barrès’s novel makes a happy contrast to that of [Henry] de Montherlant [*The Dream* 1922]’ (translation mine).

¹⁷ ‘the book describes Montherlant, not the war; and that who he describes in Montherlant is not the soldier’ (translation mine).

pseudonyms; and family names (*Témoins* 661–687). Clearly, for Cru, narrative truth was verifiable.

Cru acts as prosecutor of literary war crimes in his search for authenticity. Nor was he alone in this search: in 1930, B.H. Liddell Hart published *The Real War 1914–1918*, informing the readership that he intended to write a history without exaggeration, or, echoing the common theme amongst critics, ‘for the sake of a popular effect’ (Liddell Hart 9). But unlike Cru, who is adamant that truth in the war story is attainable, Liddell Hart writes in his preface, a *pro forma apologia*, that in his ‘pursuit of truth’ he is ‘conscious of its imperfections’ (9). Yet he believes that by 1930, ‘the time has come when a “real” history of the war is possible. Governments have opened their archives, statesmen and generals their hearts with an unparalleled philanthropy’ (10). He states, misleadingly: ‘It is safe to say that most of the possible documentary evidence on the war has now been published’ and awaits collation (10). He believes that ‘[t]he flood of documents, diaries and memoirs has one outstanding advantage. They have come when they can still be tested by the personal witness of those who took part in the crises and critical discussions of the war’ (10). Like Cru, his use of legalistic terms such as ‘test’ and ‘witness’ show that he believes in a prosecutable sense of history, and he writes: ‘in the application of this test lies the only chance that history may approximate to truth’ (10).

Three years later, Lloyd George published *War Memoirs* (1933–1926). Begun soon after the war, and relying heavily on researchers and ghost-writers, including Liddell Hart, he abandoned the project in 1922 after a rumoured advance of £132,000 was made public and he was accused of war profiteering while so many families suffered (Suttie 13). Later, and with access to documents not made public until the 1960s, Lloyd George returned to the project and produced a popular set of memoirs distributed widely throughout the world in as disparate venues as bookstores, the Dorchester hotel, and automobile clubs—an odd and belated type of war profiteering, perhaps, but one that demonstrates the popularity of the genre (Suttie 12). Like Graves, Lloyd George used memoirs in an act of self-defence against criticism of his part in the war, and as a tool of attack on General Douglas Haig and other senior military leaders. In this, as Andrew Suttie points out, he ‘tapped successfully into a popular mood of disillusionment and disenchantment, and in

turn helped to reinforce some of the central myths of the First World War' (8). In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves recalls seeing Lloyd George speak during the war. He writes that while he was on leave in April 1916 (erroneously dated [G14 460 note 1]), 'the power of [Lloyd George's] rhetoric was uncanny', and though '[Graves] knew that the substance of what he was saying was commonplace, idle and false', he had to 'fight hard against abandoning myself with the rest of the audience' (253). He states: 'The power I knew was not his; he sucked it from his hearers and threw it back at them' (253). Thus, one of the greatest contributors to First World War's mythology sums up the mythologising powers of another.

But myth and reality are complicated; Fussell and Cru subscribe to a combat realism that testifies to what actually happened rather than what was *experienced* by the combatant. They privilege this as a higher order of truth, one that James Campbell identifies as questionable, exclusive, and hierarchical in his essay 'Combat Gnosticism' (1999). Not only is the warrior's account privileged by critics such as Cru, Cyril Falls, and Fussell, but as Campbell suggests, some, such as Cru, prescribe an aesthetic. In *Témoins* (1930), Cru cites the Belgian combatant Jean Drève's view of war narratives as an aesthetic: '*Non seulement la guerre n'est pas fraîche et joyeuse . . . mais elle n'est même pas à chanter, sur aucun mode*' (qtd. in Cru, *Témoins* 295).¹⁸ The war narrative, Cru believes, must be '*bref, raisonnable*' (129) et '*pas riche, ni rare, ni créé*' (249), '*sans réticences comme sans exagération*' (131) (qtd. in Lacoste 11).¹⁹ In almost every stance, Graves's narrative would fail Cru's prescription.

Cru's didacticism implies capriciousness in the authors of the war texts of the era. He depicts their accounts as 'fresh', 'joyous', even tuneful, all of which compels him to remind the reader that war 'cannot be sung in any mode'. His protocol for truth consists of comparing military service records and first-hand witness. But as Paul Fussell points out a generation later, the problem of 'facts' is rendered even more acute by the fallibility of official histories, particularly military histories. Decades after the Second World War, Fussell recalls reading the army's official citation that commended a series of actions performed by

¹⁸ 'Not only is the war neither fresh nor joyous . . . at the same time it cannot be sung in any mode' (translation mine).

¹⁹ 'brief, reasonable, unemotional, and without reticence or exaggeration' (translation mine).

Fussell's senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) before the man died. Fussell had watched his NCO get hit and die, and yet every detail of the official citation was a fabrication (*Doing Battle* 158). Fussell writes: 'The effect of this general order . . . was to augment my already intense scepticism about official utterances of any sort . . . It further persuaded me that medal citations, despite the quoting of them in the official multivolume history . . . are the worst possible documents for historians to evoke for any purpose, except satire' (*Doing Battle* 160). A generation apart, the two war narrative critics have opposing beliefs in the worth of military documentation. In 'The Garlands Wither', Graves critiques Cru, saying that Cru's criteria 'cannot be applied so strictly [to the personal narrative]. It was practically impossible (as well as forbidden) to keep a diary in any active trench-sector, or to send letters home which would be of any great post-War documentary value' (534). A further irony of Graves's statement is that, according to William Graves, *Good-bye to All That* was largely informed by the transcription of his letters to his parents (W. Graves 'Hello Good-bye' 2).

Graves opines that Cru's method is applicable only to 'the history of a unit or of a campaign' ('Garlands Wither' 534). This is inaccurate, naïve, or an example of Graves's predilection for antagonising some of his readership. The history of a unit is fallible *in extremis*, as noted in Fussell's anecdote, and was one of the reasons that Graves's regimental surgeon Captain James C. Dunn began to collate remembrances after reading the official history of his regiment. Speaking like an old professional soldier, Dunn states that 'aside from technical books, most of [the war books] have come from writers whose emotions have been quickened by the penitential mood that follows all great wars' (Dunn v).²⁰ Dunn account is based on letters and diaries written by soldiers from his regiment, many of which corroborate each other's stories. Dunn carefully attributes each 'sketch' at the header of each page to combatants as an assurance of truth for his readership. The contradictions and complexities of

²⁰ The title and subtitle of Dunn's book lay out his credentials, his methodology, and his ethical bias towards the war story: *The War the Infantry Knew 1914–1919. A Chronicle of Service in France and Belgium with the Second Battalion his Majesty's Twenty-Third Foot, The Royal Welsh Fusiliers: Founded on Personal Records, Recollections and Reflections, Assembled, Edited and Partly Written by One of their Medical Officers*. In his preface, Dunn, the professional soldier, critiques the war book phenomenon, stating: 'War is neither a glitter of high lights nor a slough of baseness: it calls for the best that is in the human spirit; its worst aspects are found far from the battle-line . . . What was achieved [in battle] is made radiant in my memory by the gay self-sacrifice of junior officers and non-commissioned officers' (vii).

these men's stances are multiple; Cru demands accuracy based on combat experience, while Graves says that only regimental histories have this kind of accuracy. Meanwhile Graves says the personal narrative cannot be completely accurate because of a lack of useable diaries and letters, and yet he bases a large part of his narrative on letters home, and Dunn asserts that multiple testimonies verify truth.

If official histories are flawed and personal accounts are flawed, then how does one discern truth in the war narrative, and how do external pressures influence or inhibit the war story? War books and war stories of the Great War had a large readership which had direct contact with the war through mass mobilisation of military service, allied work, such as munitions and support trades, and on the home front through mass volunteerism, a form of participatory citizenship. This comprehensive engagement encompassed all ages, classes, and professions and the mass exposure to war culture engendered the 'age of anxiety' over war narrative truth. Holger Klein writes in *The First World War and Fiction* (1976): 'Fiction here had an immediate factual correlative of which millions were aware and the overriding criterion applied to war fiction was truth' (Klein 4). It was certainly a criterion which they applied to *Good-bye To All That*, as seen in letters housed in the Saint John's College Archives, Oxford, and addressed to Graves and Jonathan Cape. These letters, often hostile and combative, came from veterans, sons of combatants, and editors, and include some from Wilfred Owen's brother, Harold who asks for a type of literary mercy.

2.5 Dear Robert: 'It Still Goes On'

A 5 November 1930 letter from C. Heath, Hon. Treasurer of the 20th Royal Fusiliers, U.P.S. Union, corrects Graves's account of the 1916 battle at High Wood. Writing on behalf of his membership, he states:

As the members of the above are mainly survivors of that action, I am writing to say that we have irrefutable evidence to the contrary of your statement, and I would be glad to have your apology at once, and an assurance that you will withdraw your remarks in the press at your earliest. (Heath)

Using the terms ‘evidence’, ‘statement’, and ‘irrefutable’, Heath signals legalistic truth and threat. To emphasise his stance of witness and testimony to the ‘action’, the Battle of the Somme, he adds ‘(one of the survivors)’ in ink after his signature (Heath). Ostracism from the regiment is an implied punishment for transgressions against the regiment, and Graves is advised to ‘withdraw’ in the public forum of ‘the press’. In a note dated 11 November, 1930, and appended to the letter, Jonathan Cape asks Graves how to respond, then adds, ‘It still goes on!’—clearly delighting in the publicity that Graves’s book continued to generate (Cape).

Dating from 1929 to the period after the 1957 reissue of *Good-bye to All That*, the letters at Saint John’s praise or damn Graves’s war account and reflect the readership’s response at the time of original publication.²¹ Harold Owen’s August 20, 1957 letter suggests Graves’s 1929 allegations that Wilfred acted in a cowardly fashion caused ‘unhappy conjecturing’ for the Owen family. Harold hopes that ‘the unfortunate paraphrasing’ would be excised from the 1957 edition and ‘finds it difficult to believe that [Graves] could purposely perpetuate a smear—even an unintended one—upon a young poet and fighting man, killed in our own special war’ (H. Owen). The bond of ‘our own special war’, it seemed, made Harold loath to call Graves to task.

A letter from E.C. Peterkins, a Barbadian Royal Welch Fusilier, states that he is portrayed unflatteringly as ‘Jamaica’ (see G14 199–201): ‘the facts stated there are so garbled from beginning to end, it has naturally caused me a great deal of worry’ (Peterkins). Peterkins methodically prosecutes Graves, citing many errors and correcting them: incorrect rank (‘2nd Lieutenant (Temporary)’); ‘Trench Mortars . . . did not improve until we got Stokes; the rescue of ‘The Boy’—‘I spent half to three-quarters of an hour bringing him in on my back’; the

²¹ The file at Saint John’s contains a photocopy of a note in Graves’s handwriting to Alan Steele from the inside leaf of *Good-bye To All That*, dated November 1929. The note states: ‘N.B. not for publication: Key to characters
Dirty Williams – Dirty Edwards
Buzz-off = Clegg Hill
Surreyman = Drake Brockman
Actor = Wynn Edwards
Delilah Becker = Angel Hearens
Philips = Philpot
Jamaica = Peterkin
Private Robinson = Private Prolegne [sp?]
Scatter – Minshiell – Ford’ (Papers of Robert Graves: Correspondence concerning “Goodbye to All That.” 1924-1973. GB 473 RG/K/GTAT. St John’s College Archives, Oxford).

'gross lie' of the 'story about the actor [a company officer] meeting me and kicking me back to my guns', and other details. Peterkins believes Graves has 'misstated the facts in every statement except that I commanded the Battery and Mr. Tiley was my second in command' (Peterkins). He requests that Graves withdraw the statements. Graves did not.

The file also contains a telegram, a press clipping, and a letter from an Australian editor, Thomas Dunbabin, in reference to an article in *The Daily Mail*, 27 December 1929, 'Bombing Captives: Gen. Monash Denies a war allegation'. General Monash publicly refuted Graves's anecdote of ill treatment of prisoners of war by the Australians and Canadians. Dunbabin writes:

Following on my letter of December 24, I enclose the proof setting out a statement by Sir John Monash regarding the treatment of prisoners. Sir John does not quite seem to have realised that you give the Morlaincourt episode as a brag, and rather suggest that the narrator was trying to make his hearers' flesh creep. (Dunbabin)

As his reading of 'the Morlaincourt episode as a brag' indicates, Dunbabin understands that Graves's narrative is, above all, an entertainment. But as this sample of letters illustrates, the mood of Graves's readership was not for 'brag', and many correspondents had proof that Graves lied.

Contemporary assessments of the truthfulness of Great War narratives were intense, sensitive, and appeared to have little forgiving margin of error, either in private or in the public forum of print. After war, Graves states: 'I would even paradoxically say that the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences are not truthful unless they contain a high proportion of falsities' ('Garlands Wither' 536). In saying this, Graves strikes an odd conditional: if one is to tell the truth in the war story, perhaps one must lie. Still, the ambiguity of the argument allows that while suffering and extreme experience might produce false witness, the possibility remains that latent truth may be embedded in the narrative. The question is: Where?

As Graves writes, with the proximity to high-powered explosives recall is disjointed or lost and the memory of what is experienced is mixed up:

High-explosive barrages will make *a temporary* liar or visionary of anyone; the old trench-mind is at work in all over-estimation of

casualties, 'unnecessary' dwelling on horrors, mixing of dates and confusion between trench rumours and scenes actually witnessed. ('Garlands Wither' 536)

Graves's belief that 'unnecessary dwelling on horrors' is a result of 'the old trench-mind' illustrates the circularity of post-traumatic stress disorder, as discussed earlier. His letter, 'The Garlands Wither', is among many other things an ethical call for mercy to a readership that is hungry for the truth, and despite some protests otherwise, the entertainment of war.

Graves characterises 'old trench-mind' as a condition that warrants '[g]reat latitude . . . be allowed to a soldier who has since got his facts or dates mixed' ('Garlands Wither' 536). The soldier cannot always tell the truth, an observation confirmed by 21st-century research into brain damage incurred through exposure to explosives (Trudeau et al.). Blast injury has significant effect on memory, ordering, and narrative integrity, and research is only now beginning to understand one of the physical *loci* of post-traumatic stress disorder, the physical origin of Graves's war horror, as experienced by soldiers. Neurological evidence illustrates the genesis of the disordered logic of Graves's post-war self that leads him to believe that he expresses far more truth through falsities than through facts (Stetz; Trudeau; Warden). Even with blast injury, one might become a 'temporary visionary'; and though the soldier is impaired by brain damage, a type of truth may be formulated in his narrative, one that is less about the recall of historical events and more about the recall of emotional states. Thus, Graves tells the reader that 'I will try to recall my war-time feelings' (G14 112).

While the success of *Good-bye to All That* testifies to some acceptance of the temporary visionary Graves, his reviewers and peers were not always willing to accept the aesthetics of such visionaries, particularly their blending of genre, the intensely personal experience of war, the graphic details, and the exploitation of others' stories. Because of this, the aesthetics of Graves's and many others' war stories were perceived, inevitably, as embroidered or inaccurate. In his 1930 editorial, 'The Garlands Wither', Douglas Jerrold, author *The Lie About the War* (1930), bemoans the phenomenon of war books for their sensational, limited vision. Jerrold, self-described as 'an uncompromising controversialist and something more than an amateur of war' (*The Lie of War*

2), writes: 'The recent flood of the "literature of disillusionment" or of "War books"—a phrase which has just acquired this special significance—differs from what has gone before only in that it is a flood in place of a trickle and that the water has grown decidedly muddier' (Jerrold, 'The Garlands Wither' 485).

Jerrold characterises the novelisation of 'War Books' as 'brutal, debauched, cowardly, and unjust' and castigates authors who insist 'upon [recording] the most horrible features of warfare—as ghastly wounds, flowing blood, stinking corpses, rats feeding upon the slain, lice, mud, whole units mown down by machine-gun fire, military executions—to the exclusion of all others' (485). Jerrold observes that the literary climate had swung to despair and pessimism from the earlier patriotism of 1914–1919, a view corroborated by Kate Macdonald's study 'The Woman's Body as Compensation for the Disabled First World War Soldier' (2016). In her study of the portrayal of disability in the war story, for which she surveyed four thousand popular press short stories, Kate Macdonald found the predominant war narrative to be of patriotism, even in the context of the wounded soldier as dictated by the era (Macdonald 2). By 1928–1937 the mood had decidedly changed and the battle was over truth.

Graves's response to Jerrold's editorial, 'The Garlands Wither', questions the definition of truth in war books:

But what is meant by the *truthfulness* of war-books? It seems that there are at least four war-book classifications to each of which a different truthfulness should be applied:—the history of a unit or of a campaign; the personal memoirs of a combatant; the propaganda novel; the *genre* novel. ('Garlands Wither' 536)

Graves observes that different genres carry 'different truthfulness', implying that different types of war books are read and received with varying expectations: the official history for verifiable and significant facts; personal memoirs for insight into the combatant; propaganda novels for ideological effectiveness; and '*genre*' novels for entertainment and the fulfilment of readers' expectations. Graves categorises *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Le Feu* as propaganda, 'only to be judged, if at all, by their effectiveness as propaganda . . . As propaganda they are the more effective in that they are not dated records but

dramatic generalizations, and not so critically vulnerable' (536). Positioning these books as tools of social change, and citing abolitionist fiction, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*," [as] their forerunner,' Graves believes that Remarque and Barbusse's books were 'written untruthfully in order to make people recognize the truth' (536); he extrapolates that as 'the institution of slavery was not in keeping with humanitarianism, so "Le Feu" and "Im Westen nichts Neues" make the same statement with regard to modern war' (536). In *Good-bye to All That*, he reports that 'pacifists were urging [Sassoon] to produce something red hot in the style of Barbusse's *Under Fire*' (G14 320). Clearly, during the war and long after, the surveillance of authors on authors, the pressures on authors, and the fight over words was as 'red hot' as the war words themselves.

But Graves's view belies the possibility that *Good-bye to All That* is an amalgam of all four types of war books. The portrayal of his growing anti-war stance and of the war-sick Sassoon could provide some evidence that the text might be considered in part as propagandistic in the aftermath of 1929, when the tenor of war books had turned towards the pity of war. His 'geographical treatment' (G14 6) of himself resembles personal memoir, while the ghost in the family castle (29) and a 'haunted family' and family murderess (12) belong to a genre novel, and the extended military detail appeals to a military readership. Graves tells his story with adventure and local colour, as if *Good-bye to All That* is a war novel featuring the anti-hero Captain Robert Graves:

Just at that moment there was a noise of whizz-bang shells about twenty yards off, a cry of alarm, followed by: 'Stretcher-bearers!' The adjutant turned quite white and we knew without being told what it meant. We hurried out. Pritchard, having fought his duel all night, and finally silenced the enemy, was coming off duty. A whizz-bang had caught him at the point where the communication trench reached Maple Redoubt; it was a direct hit. The casualties of that night were three officers and one corporal. (249)

The tenor of this passage shares traits seen in popular war stories as demonstrated through the action and dialogue of the unattributed voice calling for 'Stretcher-bearers!', the noise of shelling, and simple narration articulated through short, breathy sentence structure, using the lexicon of the trenches. The following passage from Barbusse's 1917 *Le Feu* serves in comparison:

Dans la vibration phosphorescente du canon, saccadée comme au cinématographe, on aperçoit au-dessus du parapet deux brancardiers essayant de franchir la tranchée avec leur brancard chargé.

Le lieutenant, qui connaît tout au moins le lieu où il doit conduire l'équipe des travailleurs, les interpelle :

– Où est-il, le Boyau Neuf ?

– J'sais pas.

On leur pose, des rangs, une autre question: 'À quelle distance est-on des Boches?' ils ne répondent pas. Ils se parlent.

– J'm'arrête, dit celui de l'avant. J'suis trop fatigué.

– Allons, avance, nom de Dieu! fait l'autre d'un ton bourru en pataugeant pesamment, les bras tirés par le brancard. On va pas rester à moisir ici.

Ils posent le brancard à terre sur le parapet, l'extrémité surplombant la tranchée. On voit, en passant par-dessous, les pieds de l'homme étendu; et la pluie qui tombe sur le brancard en dégoutte noircie.

– C'est un blessé ? demande-t-on d'en bas.

Non, un macchab, grogne cette fois le brancardier, et i' pèse au moins quatre-vingts kilos. Des blessés, j'dis pas – d'puis deux jours et deux nuits, on n'en déporte pas – mais c'est malheureux d's'esquinter à trimbaler des morts. (339-340)²²

Barbusse's poetic and visual imagery is grounded in a common language that mitigates the experiential gap between the soldier and the home front, and that reflects the toning-down of more graphic imagery for the 1917 readership of the monthly serial *L'Oeuvre*. Barbusse's guns are vibrant and 'phosphorescent', they shimmer like a cinematograph, an image from the dark and still magical cinemas of 1916. Structurally both excerpts resonate with the short, sharp

²² In the phosphorescent vibration of cannonade, jerky as a cinematograph, one can discern two stretcher-bearers above the parapet trying to cross the trench burdened with a stretcher. The lieutenant, who at least knows the place well enough to direct the team of workers, shouts out to them: 'Where is the New Trench?' —'I dunno.'

From the ranks another question: 'How far are we from the Boches?'

They don't answer. They talk amongst themselves.

'I'm stopping,' says the one in front. 'I'm too tired.'

'Get going, *nom de Dieu!*' says the other in a gruff tone and floundering heavily, his arms extended by the stretcher. 'We can't stay and stagnate here.'

They lower the stretcher onto the parapet, the edge of it overhanging the trench, and we see as we pass beneath, the wounded man's feet extending from the stretcher. And the rain that falls onto the stretcher drips, blackened.

'Is it one of the wounded?' asks someone down below.

'No, a stiff,' grumbles the bearer this time, 'and he weighs at least eighty kilos. The wounded, I don't care—for two days and two nights we haven't left off carrying 'em—but it's nasty, exhausting yourself hauling dead men about' (translation mine).

language of the military communiqué and the popular, often serialised novel.²³ Graves's use of military code, substituting 'silenced' for 'killed', 'whizz-bang shells' for high-speed 77mm German field guns, and situating the death of Pritchard as 'a direct hit', adheres to the conventional war lexicon (G14 249). But again, Graves's anecdote lacks blood and human body-parts, making it potentially a conscious decision to write more palatable passages that will appeal to a wider audience. In Barbusse's passage, rainwater drips from the stretcher ominously darkened, hinting at blood and creeping death. In contrast, a similar passage by Remarque portrays hyper-graphic images of a young officer with his head 'torn off' and 'blood spout[ing] from his neck like a fountain' (Remarque 115). This provides the reader with a fantastical, rather thrilling image from a battle scene.

In *Good-bye to All That* Graves's language is most often comparatively sanitised, perhaps for the sake of the expediency of the anecdote, his inability to capture the scene, his Georgian aesthetic, or, potentially, for his own sanity.²⁴ But there are a few times when he seems to be able to gaze directly into his memory, as seen in a passage recalling a time at Mametz Wood in which he loots greatcoats to use as blankets for his cold, wet men: 'I had to pass by the corpse of a German with his back propped against a tree. He had a green face, spectacles, close shaven hair; black blood was dripping from the nose and beard. He had been there for some days and was bloated and stinking' (G14 264). The anecdote is lifted almost verbatim from Graves's poem 'A Dead Boche', first published in *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1918). In the poem, the corpse 'scowled and stunk' (l. 9) and sat 'in a great mess of things unclean' (l. 8). Even franker passages such as this, however, appear to demonstrate how incapable Graves is of approaching the truth of what he saw, or of diverging from the Georgian aesthetic of pastoralism, a style of lyrical poetry that employs

²³ *Le Feu* was serialized in *L'Oeuvre* from 1916 onwards and published in full in early 1917. It was an immediate best-seller, and Barbusse won the *Prix Goncourt* in 1917; by 1918 it had sold over 200,000 copies. Barbusse became a veterans' rights activist and a celebrity (Winter, 'Sites' 181). Owen read a translation of *Le Feu* in 1917, the resonances of which may be discerned particularly in 'Strange Meeting'.

²⁴ Margot Norris writes: 'it should be argued that pastoral poetry offered not merely an escape or a poetic regression to soldiers. Instead of a retrograde Romanticism, as the Modernists believed, the anti-mechanistic ideology of the Georgians may have attracted the soldier-poets. Georgian poetry anthologies and magazines, such as the journal *New Numbers*, thus became hospitable havens for the trench poets' (Norris 140-1).

traditional poetic form.²⁵ In 'A Dead Boche', he uses the euphemism 'mess' for human matter, in comparison to a more graphic passage of Isaac Rosenberg's poem 'Dead Man's Dump', in which 'A man's brains [are] spattered / on a stretcher-bearer's face' (l. 48–49), the narrator sees and hears a dying man stretch out his hands, and then 'our wheels grazed his dead face' (l. 50). This frankness, told through simple but explicit imagery and language, is what makes Rosenberg a great war poet, whereas Graves often seems incapable of staring down the truth and chooses to hide behind wit, disguise or euphemism. Further, Rosenberg's background was that of one who came from a poor background, who as an enlisted man sought the financial stability that the army enabled. He was an accomplished painter whose studies at the Slade School of Art combined with what Robert Magella identifies as his 'detached objectivity'; these attributes differentiated him as a poet from his contemporaries (18).

As this section reveals, for Graves the subject of truth in the war narrative is variable, ineffable, unverifiable, or unapproachable, and yet authors and readers in the era of anxiety over truth desire it. Truth was a flashpoint for the readership, the critics, and the writers of the Great War narrative, who wrote and published under vicious and competitive scrutiny; yet, as observed earlier, Graves, potentially one of the more unreliable narrators, offers an entrée into an empathetic protocol for the reading of the Great War story—an ethical act. This comes when he argues that '[g]reat latitude' ('Garlands Wither' 536) be given the veteran of violence—their truth may lie between the lines or within the lies. The next section looks more closely at truth and lies and the variability of recording a war story. It begins with a summary of how Robert Graves's death and his Lazarian rise at the Battle of the Somme was reported, or misreported, for almost a century. Following this, the chapter identifies how Graves addresses the subject of error in *Good-bye to All That* through multiple *apologia* over the course of decades.

²⁵ Robert Magella writes that 'the term refers to the "Georgian renaissance," a poetic repudiation of both the didactic imperialism and the overly introspective beautified verses of the Aesthetes at the turn of the century' (3). He identifies two trends in this 'revolt': one avant-garde 'Vorticists, Futurists or Imagists...', and those 'closely associated with the Marsh/Brooke crowd, whose poetry sought freshness and modernity in tone but remained fairly conservative in its loyalty to traditional poetic form' (3). Graves belongs to the latter, and as Magella argues, Rosenberg belongs strictly to neither yet both aesthetics are traceable in his work.

2.6 The Many Deaths of Robert Graves

...but I was dead, an hour or more...

Robert Graves, 'Escape' (l. 1)

Six days after being shot in the groin, his thoracic cavity pierced by shrapnel, his forehead embedded with marble splinters ricocheting off a tombstone, and left for dead in an abandoned German dressing station after the Battle of High Wood, Graves wrote to Eddie Marsh:

As you may have heard, the old Bosche has punctured me with a 5.9 howitzer shell clean through chest and back, but I'm ridiculously well considering and my cheerfulness and good condition go on improving each other like wild-fire. It was in an attack in High Wood. (O'Prey 56)

His hubristic language employs soldier code—'the old Bosche' has not killed him, and the bullet went 'clean' through him. Blood, mud, and guts are absent in the narrative, though a tonality of 'the modern spirit' rings out, one that Storm Jameson describes in 'Ha Ha Ha I'm Laughing', as a tenor consisting of disillusionment combined with mock hilarity (Jameson 20). But the incongruously euphoric 'wild-fire' mood of Graves's letter conveys something beyond 'modern spirit'; it may also reflect the spirit of narcotics, combined with a faux-hilarity of the near-death experience. Certainly the tone displays the beginning of Graves constructing a post-Somme persona for his audience—in this case, Marsh. He describes his life-changing moment through the use the present-perfect—'the old Bosche *has punctured me*' (emphasis added) which blurs the past and present; Graves employs the tense of something on-going, transformative and of temporal confusion. It reads as if he cannot quite place himself at High Wood. Further, he minimalises the physical trauma of catastrophic wounds as if he is incapable of engaging with the mental trauma of a near-mortal wounding. Nor does he seem able to express the emotional reality, the shock, of being abandoned to lie and die amongst the corpses of his fellow soldiers in a corner of an overcrowded medical post. While clearly unconscious, then semi-conscious at the time, he recalls only scant details: 'I was done for. The next morning, the 21st, when they were clearing away the

dead, I was found to be still breathing' (G14 274). This understatement reads of a post-war dis-ease with what must have been his terrifying reality—remembered fully or not.

Yet Graves was clearly angry in the days following High Wood, and he points the finger directly at his regimental doctor. In another hospital letter, to Sassoon, he states: 'I hope you haven't taken the casualty lists seriously again. . . . The rumour of my death was started by the regimental doctor and the Field Ambulance one swearing I couldn't possibly live' (O'Prey 57). While he is 'modern spirited' in his satirical tone, Graves inserts a serious yet subtle accusation of medical malfeasance against Captain James C. Dunn. Dunn initiated 'the rumour of [his] death'. The letter presents as if Graves is rallying memory. Ultimately, no one knows the exact events at High Wood, but the aftermath offers a case study for the complexity of document-based truth and anecdote in war, as the next section illustrates through a closer look at the many deaths of Robert Graves at the Somme.

On 20 July 1916, Graves's commanding officer sat down to write several letters to the next of kin. Graves reproduces the letter to his mother in *Good-bye to All That* (G14 274). Using words that every next of kin dreads, the colonel writes: 'I very much regret to have to write and tell you your son has died of wounds' (274). His message contains the *pro forma* lie of war: 'he was in no bad pain' (274). The formal tone reflects procedural language as he reassures the Graves family that Robert had been 'gallant' and acted well in the face of death. In his diary, Dunn records: 'When the death of Bowles and of Graves was reported through the Field Ambulance, nine days ago, the customary letters were written to their kin' (Dunn 246). Customary letters are lies as Graves testifies as he recalls a fellow officer reminding another after a subordinate's death: 'don't forget to write to his next-of-kin . . . Usual sort of letter, cheer them up, tell them he died a soldier's death, anything you like' (G14 137). The officers intend to lie; the second officer states: 'I'm not going to report it a suicide' (137).²⁶

But as other letters recording Graves's death at the Somme demonstrate, further complications of timing of delivery and miscommunication can entrench

²⁶ Owen and Sassoon address officers' practice of lying in letters home to next-of-kin in their poems 'S.I.W.'—Self Inflicted Wound—and 'The Hero', respectively.

lies further. After hearing of their son's wounding Alfred Graves went to London to get more information, Graves's mother received several letters in succession. The first, Alfred states, reported: 'there was little haemorrhage . . . a shell splinter had passed clean through his right lung without turning, and he had minor wounds as well', but that he 'was sleeping well' (A.P Graves 31). But the wound was severe, as Robert recalls in *Good-bye to All That*: 'I was amused to watch little bubbles of blood, like red soap bubbles that my breath made when it escaped from the hole in the wound' (G14 275). A head nurse's letter next reported serious injuries and 'that everything possible was being done for him', inferring Robert might die (A.P. Graves 331). Later came the official letter of condolence, dated 20 July 1916. The same day, another letter from Robert arrived. Written from the hospital train, Alfred comments that '[h]is handwriting was normal . . . so we were not unduly anxious' (A.P. Graves 331), an extraordinary effort, as Graves remembers 'the journey only as a nightmare' of pain (G14 277). On 25 July 1916, a letter from Robert arrived saying he was 'eating and sleeping well and . . . his heart, which had been forced out of place, was becoming normal' (A.P. Graves 331), a fact that Robert reports in *Good-bye to All That* (G14 280). His lung had haemorrhaged on the train journey, and his thoracic cavity filled with blood and fluid, 'pressing my heart too far away from to the left of my body' (G14 280). While the letter might have comforted his parents, communication channels between the army and the Graves family grew increasingly worse.

Alfred states: 'There was nothing to tell us which letter had been written first, and we feared that Robert had collapsed and died after writing to us' (A.P. Graves 331). On 27 July, another letter arrived from Robert, saying he was progressing well and was 'asking for melons' (A.P. Graves 332). Then, disastrously, on 28 July, a long telegram 'from the Army Council confirmed his death' (332). On 31 July, the family received the definitive statement of Robert's death. They were notified that 'his personal belongings were being sent home' (332). Feeling 'crushed', Alfred 'took a last look at the letter and found to my joy that it had after all, not come from the hospital, but from [Robert's] soldier servant at the front' (332). The servant had assumed that his officer had died en route to England and was forwarding Graves's possessions. Finally, a telegram from a Cooper aunt in Rouen confirmed Robert's survival and imminent transfer

to an English hospital (G14 277–8). On 24 July 1916, his twenty-first birthday, Robert received news that he had died at the Somme while reading death notifications in *The Times*. Despite Graves writing to the paper to announce his survival, on 4 August 1916 the paper listed Graves in their ‘Died of Wounds’ list (G14 462). Two weeks after Graves was injured, resuscitated, and transferred by hospital train to Rouen, then by boat to England, he was proclaimed dead. In *Good-bye to All That* he writes that after learning of his death, jokes about it ‘contributed greatly to my recovery’ (G14 281).

Dunn’s diary records another perspective. Dated 31 July 1916, he writes: ‘Graves had a bad chest wound that few recover from. And so, while we just waited on events and orders, the hours sped’ (Dunn 231). Dunn’s language is void of medical terminology—the wound is ‘bad’, the type that ‘few recovered from’. He describes an act of battlefield triage: ‘we just waited on events’ (233). Graves recalls the moment before losing consciousness at the Casualty Clearing Station and hearing: ‘Old Gravy’s got it, all right’ and that the colonel ‘was told I was done for’ (G14 273). But Graves’s recall is suspect: ‘What the battle that [two soldiers from his unit] missed was like I pieced together afterwards’, he writes, ‘My memory of what happened then is vague’ (G14 272–3). A coda comes in Dunn’s diary: ‘Now Graves writes to the C.O. that the shock of learning how much he is esteemed has recalled him from the grave, and that he has decided to live for the sake of those whose warm feelings he has misunderstood’ (Dunn 246).

These multiple accounts represent the forces of the kinetic and reactive realities of the operational war zone. The Battle of the Somme was of unprecedented proportions, and the magnitude of complexity and possibilities of crossed communications were inherent in a British postal service that handled over 12.5 million pieces of mail per week between the front lines and Britain. But the story still goes on almost a century later. In 2014, William Graves found a handwritten note by Robert in his father’s personal copy of *Good-bye to All That* in Graves’s library in Deya. In it Graves notes a 1968 visit from his army comrade, O.M. Rogers (Owen): ‘I had forgotten when I wrote this book that it was this same Owen who had put me on the stretcher and sent me down to the casualty clearing station’ (W. Graves, ‘O.M. Rogers’). Fifty years after the war, Graves was still trying to piece together the story that could never be recalled

by him or anyone else in its entirety. Graves never learned what happened on 20 July 1916 though he believes that 'I was able to work that out afterwards by the line of my wounds' (G14 272). Through a forensic divination of wounds—perhaps using his insouciant historical method 'analepsis' in which he holds ancient coins or objects and 'throws [him]self back in time' (qtd. W. Graves, *Wild Olives* 103)—Graves attempts to reconstruct his narrative.

The expectation of truth within the personal war story, as the previous series of official and personal miscommunications illustrates, is ambitious at best. And yet truth remains a central ethical preoccupation for the artist and the audience of the Great War narrative. Truth and his war story haunted Graves for his entire life, with details continuing to be recorded incorrectly ninety years after. Miranda Seymour's 1995 biography of Graves dates the colonel's letter as 22 July 1916, while in 1996 Richard Perceval Graves dates the letter 21 July 1916 (Ward 148). As such variations make clear, even simple factual evidence such as a date is problematic and requires a nuanced approach while reading, one that demands due diligence of multiple substantiations. In the next section, Graves's decades of literary apology are discussed as the artist attempts to rectify misunderstandings and mistakes, many of which could have been avoided had he simply adhered to the genre's convenient convention of the *apologia* in his first edition.

2.7 The Long *Apologia* of Robert Graves

Scholars have been unable to substantiate the authenticity of illustrations, documents, photographs, letters, and maps in the 1929 edition of *Good-bye to All That*. Certainly they enhance the text. Steven Trout believes Graves added the extra-autobiographical materials to lend 'an air of concreteness and reliability' to his narrative (*Good-bye and Other Writing* xvi). He cites Graves's style of 'factual rhetoric, a rhetoric that *claims* direct referentiality and absolute exactness' (175). What follows is a review of how Graves addresses the discrepancies and the reliability of his narrative through a series of *apologias*.

In the 1929 edition, Graves omits the most consistent convention of the war story genre—the *apologia*. Had he included it, he would have avoided accusations of misrepresentation of facts from his readership. In its place he positions Laura Riding's 'World's End' as a preface and in doing so gives her voice a place of precedence, then bookends his autobiography with his

'Dedicatory Epilogue' to Riding (G14 447). In the heavily revised 1957 edition, Graves removes all traces of Riding and inserts a conventional preface-cum-*apologia*, one of a long series of apologies that Graves issued over a period of forty years. But the 1957 *apologia* would not be enough.

Graves's first apology for his autobiography was addressed to Sassoon in the weeks before his text was published. Others he apologised to include literary and military colleagues, friends, family, Sassoon (again, in the 1957 edition), as well as Edmund Blunden and Eddie Marsh through more letters and in print. His apologies vary widely in tone. Writing to Eddie Marsh, Graves employs the tenor of the bad schoolboy. Accused by Marsh of inventing a 'Rupert Brooke Fund . . . [for] "needy poets with families"' (O'Prey 195), Graves replies, 'Dearest Eddie: . . . I am *awfully* [italics original] sorry about my stupidity' (196). Partially dependent upon Marsh as an editor and patron, Graves sounds more like a young soldier caught stealing than a 33-year-old veteran officer of the Great War: 'The book was written in a great hurry and I didn't have time to check references. The phrase "needy poets with families" I remembered from a letter of yours quoting something Rupert once said' (196).

In 2014, William Graves writes that 'a letter came into my hands' dated 14 May 1930 from Graves to an American publisher, testifying that "'the book [was] dictated and the typescript corrected in a hurry, in illness"' (W. Graves and Graves, qtd. in W. Graves 4). In the letter to the publisher, Robert also admits '[t]o the notorious blindness of an author to mistakes in material which he knows only too well' (qtd. in W. Graves 4). The subsequent *erratum* inserted by his publisher in early editions foreshadows Graves's complicated relationship with his war text: 'Since this paragraph was printed, I have heard from Mr. Marsh that the facts are not quite as I have stated them, and that there is not really any "Rupert Brooke Fund" administered by Mr. Marsh. I much regret this error which arose from an imperfect recollection' (G14 470). Graves, forced to publicly admit he has 'imperfect recollection', issues an uncharacteristically humble response using plain language (470). But the message contains the qualifiers 'not really' and 'not quite', implying that Graves cannot confess willingly. In 1941, Graves and Alan Hodge write in *The Long Weekend*, their study of Britain and the interwar years: 'Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* [was] another best seller of the time[; it] was neither a war-book nor literary, but a reckless

autobiography in which the war figured, written with small consideration for anyone's feelings' (Graves and Hodge, 216).

Using literary ventriloquism (via co-authorship with Hodge) Graves issues another *mea culpa* to his readership for multiple literary and historical transgressions. In doing so, he signals that he is re-story-ing himself. In the detached third person, the authors write:

Graves had been a 'Georgian' and later in his *Poetic Unreason* and other critical essays had set a fashion in psychological analysis of the effect on readers of various poetic devices. He was now declaring his intention of becoming a poet in a more responsible sense: considering the intrinsic truth of his statements rather than their probable appeal to anthology readers. (Graves and Hodge 216)

This strange passage, which declares Graves will be a more 'responsible' poet who will consider 'the intrinsic truth', summarises the challenge of reading Graves's narrative—nothing may be taken at face value, as he admits it is a 'reckless autobiography' (216). Further, he identifies solely as a poet in this passage on his intentionality towards truth.

Graves's apologies are not limited to *Good-bye to All That*; he writes that his play *But It Still Goes On* (1930) is 'a tactful reshuffling of actual events and situations in which I had been more or less closely concerned' (Graves, *Occupation Writer* x). Scenes that have some resonance with his experiences include the death of Charlotte, who throws herself 'over the banister' then lives for 'thirty-six hours' before dying (164), a scene that echoes Riding's 1929 self-defenestration.²⁷ Still, he is 'more or less' present (Graves, *Occupation Writer* vii). Through this qualifier Graves reminds the readership that he is, perhaps, a wilfully unreliable narrator.

In the heavily revised 1957 edition, *Goodbye to All That*, Graves finally proffers a formal *apologia* through the use of a conventional prologue:

²⁷ Parallel to Graves's Biblical return from the dead at the Somme, Riding's resurrection is described by Geoffrey Phipps: 'Laura was Jesus—she dies but has risen again' (qtd. in D. Baker, *In Extremis* 197). In a letter from Gertrude Stein to Graves, Stein writes: '[The leap and subsequent recuperation] will make Laura a very wonderful person in a strange way, a destruction and recreation of her purification' (qtd. in O'Prey 191). In the poem 'In Portents', Graves sees the mystical Riding: 'If strange things happen where she is, / So that men say that graves open / And the dead walk, or that futurity / Becomes a womb and the unborn are shed, / Such portents are not to be wondered at' (l. 1–5).

A good many changes have been made in the text—omission of many dull or foolish patches; restoration of a few suppressed anecdotes . . . correction of factual misstatements; and a general editing of my excusably ragged prose. Some proper names have been restored where their original disguise is no longer necessary. (G57 13)

Graves apologises for aesthetic blunders; he has rid the text of ‘dull’ patches and ‘ragged prose’. But he assures his readers that he has restored ‘a few suppressed anecdotes’ and corrected ‘factual misstatements’ (13). A decade later, in *The Paris Review*, Graves states: ‘In 1957 I entirely rewrote *Good-bye to All That*—every single sentence—but no one noticed. Some said: “What a good book this is, after all. How well it’s lasted.” It hasn’t lasted at all. It’s an entirely new product’ (Buckman and Fifield n.pag.). This is provocative; the 1957 edition varies considerably from the 1929 edition through additions of some material, and subtractions (notably anything that refers to Laura Riding, and Graves’s protracted mental suffering), thus ‘an entirely new product’ is a literally truthful statement given the commercial value of the reissue, but the narrative arc and material substantially remains the same.²⁸ The 1957 edition of *Good-bye to All That* provides evidence that, for Graves, the struggle with his war truth still goes on.

Graves’s near-death experience at the Somme, a central dividing event of his life into a before and after, informs the central thematic material of loss, confusion, and the attempt to re-story self through war, throughout his war texts. How he handles this in *Good-bye to All That* illustrates the complexity and fallibility of first-hand and secondary witnesses, testimony, and official records in the theatre of war, with Graves’s methodology frequently reminiscent of the predilection of front-line soldiers for theft from other units or from the dead. Graves’s attitude towards the theft of material provides a metaphor for his literary inventions. Looting greatcoats for his men at Mametz Wood, he states: ‘I found myself still superstitious about looting or collecting souvenirs. The greatcoats were only a loan, I told myself’ (G14 264). Graves appears to have no qualms with the literary looting of Sassoon’s poem ‘Letter to Robert Graves’ in the 1929 edition, and as Fran Brearton points out, he altered this ‘particularly

²⁸ Not only does Graves remove references to Riding in the 1957 edition, he also removes the hyphen in the title.

in the layout (thereby destroying its rhyming structure); he also edited content and omitted lines' (G14 466n11). This act of aesthetic aggression, however, betrays the pact of private correspondence and constitutes a transgression of copyright; and though the publishers removed the poem a few months later, 'A Suppressed Poem by Siegfried Sassoon' was published under the imprint 'The Unknown Press' with the epigraph: 'Saul Cain says ... good-bye to all that ... gravely' (Sassoon, *A Suppressed Poem*, title page).

The act of defacing Sassoon's poem, and the theft and manipulation of material for the purpose of his narrative, echoes Graves's struggle to erase and reconstruct the narrative of who has become self defaced and constructed through war. Yet as with the poem, a remnant of truth remains embedded beneath the skin of war stories. William Graves remembers that as a boy, he sat on his father's lap after bath-time and would reach up and touch the lumpy shards beneath Robert's brow (W. Graves, conversation with author, September 2014). Metaphoric shards and scars embody and embellish his father's spectacular, unfathomable (to William) story, and yet they provide a trace of evidence. Graves's gift is to transform his war and time-compromised memory into something mythical yet believable. How he does this, and how others, such as Laura Riding, tried to hold him to a higher truth, is discussed further in the next section.

2.8 Truth and Lies

Mark Jacobs states that Riding urged Graves to write his war story as a way of 'keep[ing] him out of her hair' while she recuperated in the hospital from their double defenestration ('Laura Riding'). For three years, Riding and Graves had been deeply engaged in a 'word for word collaboration' (*Survey of Modernist Poetry* note, n.pag.), a joint philosophical inquiry into truth and poetry criticism. Yet by 21 February 1985, shortly after Graves's death and four decades after their bitter separation, Riding wrote the letter 'Robert Graves' to the *TLS*, portraying Graves as a hollow man: 'there was no solid interior, here, only the stuff of literary ambition tirelessly fashioned into semblances of genuine concern with literary verity (Jackson [Riding], 'Robert Graves' 191). Damningly, she added, 'the lie [is] his method of truth', painting Graves's work as 'semblances' of truth born of the vanity of 'literary ambition' (191). Yet her annotations of Graves's poetry at the time of composition urged Graves towards

a greater sincerity and at times challenged the veracity of what he wrote. A draft of 'The Castle' (1929) includes her comments that his words 'nightmares, nightmares' were 'not true, not true' (Graves, *Collected Poems* v. 2 276). Carla Billitteri sees Riding's corrections as 'an evident effort at creating a "sincere" and more controlled, less romanticized or melodramatic representation' of the subject he tackles, whether of love or war (Billitteri 93).

Certainly, comparing the two poets' styles, Riding's seems more controlled, less romanticised, and more cerebral. Contrasting Riding's poem 'With the Face' with Graves's 'The Man in The Mirror' (1957), we observe two very different conceptualisations of self through the use of the central image, the face reflected in the mirror. Riding's is an emotionally arid and fearless exploration of transcendence of self to that of looking outward to where 'Death, the final image, will shine' (l. 23). In contrast, Graves's is rooted in the recovery of, or his fearful attempt at reconciliation of, self. Graves displays an emotional mystification, looking as he does at his 'drooping eye' (l. 2) caused by the missile fragment embedded in his forehead, the 'foolish record' (l. 5) of the Great War. 'With a face goes a mirror' (l. 1) Riding writes in a poem that is free of self and devoid of the personal pronoun, 'I'. But for Graves the confusion of identity persists, personified by the narrative transition from the personal to the third-person pronouns as he does in *Good-bye to All That* in his description of the officer at the Front (discussed on page 33 of the thesis): 'I pause with razor poised, scowling derision / At the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention (l. 11–12), seeing only a stranger stare back at him. He holds his face up to the mirror and sees someone in need of 'my attention', someone with a war embedded under his skin. Yet as this chapter demonstrates, Graves cannot fully articulate the truth of either his self or his placement within the war.

The Laura Riding scholar and defender Mark Jacobs writes:

the matter of 'truth'—belongs wholly to Riding, by the way, not Robert Graves. Its first appearance is in *A Survey Of Modernist Poetry*, which is based on Riding's *Contemporaries and Snobs*, where it is given some extended treatment. It is also in her first volume of poems, *The Close Chaplet*, published in 1926. Graves only, shall we say, adopted it from her writings. (M. Jacobs, e-mail to author, 15 January 2014)

In her Introduction to *Collected Poems of Laura Riding* (1938) Riding's conviction is that 'a poem . . . is an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth' (i). Further, as Luke Carson writes, Riding believed that truth wrought through poetry 'has no consequences for social or political life whatsoever; measured entirely by the experience of the poet in the act of making a poem, it is purely aesthetic in being an end in itself' (Carson 1). The implications of Riding's stance run contrary to Graves's war oeuvre, however, and illustrate the poets' fundamental aesthetic and philosophical differences. Still, I argue that it is through Riding's influence that Graves's poetics communicate a sense of truth that he could not, perhaps, overtly and unabashedly express. In the collaborative period, Riding actively held Graves to a higher artistic truth. In her annotations of his poem 'Against Kind' (1929), she suggests: 'get more feelingful word' than 'private' (st.3 1.2); 'over-simple' (st.4 1.2) is 'not quite right' (*Collected Poetry* v.1 276). Exasperated, she writes: 'I have not gone on correcting this—because I don't think it's a sincere poem, especiall[y] as it goes on—a sort of duty-poem, its emotions not the same as *your* emotions' (276). By labelling Graves's poem a 'duty-poem', she queries the sincerity of the poem's heart, its truth.

Given this influence, Graves's message to Riding that 'you will be glad to find no reference at all to yourself in the body of this book' (G14 447)—*Good-bye to All That*—appears confused and specious, as Riding bookends the text and exercised an influence over Graves insofar as she acted as a voice of conscience similar to Graves's mother, Amy. Both called Graves to a higher expression of truth; but where Amy's was an order of truth of devout Christianity, or 'a literal fundamentalist interpretation' of The Bible (G14 21), Riding's is a higher order of aesthetic truth. Riding identifies Graves's hyperbole, his lack of sincerity and lack of emotional integrity, in a way that mirrors the war generation's subjection of each other and their narratives to a high standard of truth and sincerity on the subject of the war. Still, Graves seems to have been incapable of truth, as a critic like Jean Norton Cru defines it—or perhaps, as Riding suggests, he is uninterested in it. However, another possibility exists, one that is illuminated by Graves's use of half-truths.

If lying involves a conscious breach of trust through false statements, then by definition, Graves lies. But rather than dismissing Graves as a liar, one may find that Luke Carson's definition of half-truths applies in this context:

One common way of spinning events involves stating 'half-truths.' Half-truths are true statements or sets of true statements that selectively emphasize facts that tend to support a particular interpretation or assessment of an issue and selectively ignore or minimize other relevant facts that tend to support contrary assessments. (Carson 58–9)

One of Graves's half-truths in *Good-bye to All That* is his description of his battalion before the assault on High Wood. He states that the battalion sustained 'a large number of casualties and was now only about four hundred strong' (G14 270). The implication is that the remaining four hundred combatants await a similar fate and the battalion will be almost entirely destroyed. What Graves is doing here is failing to describe non-combatants or those in the support trades as soldiers and thus discounting their numbers from the battalion's ranks.

In the 1957 edition Graves portrays a battalion's makeup more accurately by noting that the battalion included 'transport, stretcher-bearers, cooks, and other non-combatants' (G14 461n6). His 1929 depiction of the battalion is a misremembering or misrepresentation of the collective that forms a rifle company—all battalions have to have resuppliers, cooks, surveillance and reconnaissance teams, transport, and a myriad of other support service duties. While not condemning half-truths, Carson warns: 'Often, for the purposes of assessing a controversial issue, knowing or accepting a half-truth puts one in a worse cognitive position than knowing nothing' (Carson 248). If this is the case, then to approach Graves's war narrative through an empathic reading requires the reader to look for the other half of the truth embedded within it and ask, perhaps, how many soldiers in an infantry battalion are combatants and how many have been held back? Where the truth resides in the 1929 version is that Graves provides insight into how combat veterans often understand their battalion; they dismiss the auxiliaries that support the forward roles and see

only those at the forward as being real soldiers.²⁹ Graves's statement may be truthful in that it is they whom they fight alongside and watch die that make up the combatant's war truth—this is how war feels to them. To risk simplistic generalisations, to take the narrative at face value opens the risk of being seriously misled; and yet, I would suggest that it is the half-truths (and lies) in Graves's war story that might present a valuable insight into the historical experience of the Great War and the generations that lived through it. Perhaps for the post-war Graves who recalls the hours before High Wood, his reality was of a battalion of four hundred made up entirely of combatants, all heading into the fight of their lives.

In this chapter I have examined the idea of self-testimony within the meta-narrative of the Great War and its aftermath, and provided the context of the literary experimentation of the era and the period of anxiety over truth, as observed with reference to Jean Norton Cru and Douglas Jerrold. This anxiety is illustrated through Graves's decades-long *apologia*, which demonstrates his on-going discomfort over his truth-telling in *Good-bye to All That*. The ideas of truths and half-truths, or lies, inform a reading of Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, and as the chapter discusses, the difficulty of finding a singular truth in war is elusive. This is the case even in document-based historical records such as those surrounding the death and Lazarian rise of Graves at the Somme. In the next chapter I propose that despite Graves's text being riddled with errors, or even what some label as lies, one may read a different kind of war truth in *Good-bye to All That*, a truth that continues to attract a loyal readership a century after the war.

²⁹ This continues in the modern Canadian army. Non-combatants are called 'WOGs', a derogatory term that means Without Guns. It is untrue as even the medics carry weapons and shoot; the only soldiers without guns are not soldiers—they are the chaplains.

Chapter 3. Graves's Technique of Truth

3.0 Introduction

Distracted or fulfilled by tropes of genre, the reader may fail to recognise the locale of the author's war truth, or, as I argue, to read empathetically; in Graves's case, the reader may find that a type of Great War truth is delivered through his innate poetics and ear. At the beginning of *Good-bye to All That*, Graves recalls the magical powers of language: 'I had started Latin and I did not know what Latin was or meant; its declensions and conjugations were pure incantations to me'; uttering 'strings of naughty words' caused him to be expelled (G14 30). For the poet and memoirist-to-be, these were important lessons to learn in the power and sounds of language and the consequences of using it in different contexts. I suggest that Graves achieves a type of truth in *Good-bye to All That* through sound cues that functioned in the composition of it as *aides mémoires*, and that perform a unifying technique that enhances the believability of his narrative in the finished work in which the majority of pages contain dialogue, references to songs, rhymes, and the sounds of war.

Good-bye to All That was dictated by Graves to Jane Lye over eight weeks in the late spring and early summer of 1929. According to William Graves, Robert's 'PTSD' manifested through a heightened sensitivity to noise that made the sound of the typewriter unbearable and concentration on the project impossible ('Welcome Back' 2). William believes it is the only book his father dictated (W. Graves, 'Laura in Hospital'). I consider that *Good-bye to All That* is, fundamentally, a type of spoken text, and that Graves's heightened sense of hearing combined with his predominantly sound-based (rather than image-based) memory provide an accurate transcript of his recollections of the kind of language used by soldiers in the Great War, and the kind of sonic world they inhabited. I suggest that Graves's war text is encoded with sound cues that include speech, nursery rhymes, songs, and sounds that suggest an evocative truth of the war experience even if the events are variably fictional, exaggerated, or genuinely misremembered.

3.1 The Spoken 'I': Letters

Graves states that it was impossible to write letters home of 'any great post-War documentary value' ('Garlands Wither' 536), yet he reports the use of

letters as primary sources in the reconstruction of Chapter XIII of *Good-bye to All That*: 'Here are extracts from letters that I wrote at this time' (G14 141). In the annotated 1995 edition, R.P. Graves comments that the letters Robert reproduces are 'heavily rewritten' and 'dating is unreliable' (G95 340). Whether dates are precise or passages are rewritten, as seen in a letter to Eddie Marsh, discussed below, I suggest that Graves encodes his letters with vocalisations and recreations of sounds which he may have used as memory cues in the construction of his autobiography. Other letters, such as a 2 May 1916 letter to Sassoon, are useful in that Graves articulates his limitations and aesthetics as a writer: 'I can't do purple patches well, but Merioneth now is nothing but bright sun and misty mountains and hazy seas and sloe blossoms and wild cherry and grey rocks and young green grass' (qtd. in W. Graves. 'RG War Letters'). Here Graves's repeated use of 'and' creates a driving, poetic rhythm within his prose, and his use of simple adjectives to describe the landscape and colours adhere to his fundamentally Georgian pastoral aesthetic ('sloe blossoms', 'wild cherry', the 'rocks', 'sun', and 'young green grass'), while demonstrating his inability or reluctance to provide lush imagery ('purple patches') of what must have been an evocative and beautiful locale. In a 1918 letter to Arthur Waugh, he enthusiastically discusses musical settings for his poetry: 'The music I like extremely: the poem Cherry Time especially wants what I call "elder sister" music: anything elaborate and sophisticated would crush the words' (qtd. in W. Graves. 'RG War Letters').

In a 1963 letter to his muse, Cindy Lee, Graves offers another clue to his compositional technique. Sending her 'Consortium of Stones', he writes: 'The poem is always the real letter; the prose is the straw & tissue paper and cardboard & string with a scribbled kiss somewhere' (Aemilia Laraçuen [Cindy Lee] Correspondence). In this Graves articulates a hierarchy of truth within form; poetry is the heart of the matter, and the 'straw & tissue paper' prose is merely packing material. In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves provides another clue to the location of his truth. Discussing his Oxford graduate thesis on the 'supra-logical element in poetry', he proposed that 'the obvious prose meaning was often in direct opposition to the latent content' (G14 407). Here Graves's poetics convey 'the real letter' of *Good-bye to All That* through the 'supra-logical element', the 'latent content' (407) that is sound-based, or, his spoken or sung

truth.³⁰ Further, the link between anecdotes in *Good-bye to All That* are traceable to poems such as 'Escape' or 'A Dead Boche', written during the war or shortly after. 'Pure fiction,' Graves writes, 'is beyond my imaginative range. . . though occasional names and references have been altered' (*Collected Short Stories* viii); he is unable to 'write pure fiction', implying an inability to disentangle the act of fictionalising or embellishing anecdotes in *Good-bye to All That* from what is factually correct. This could explain his struggle with and abandonment of his war novel. In the next section I propose that his short story 'The Shout' (1926) provides evidence of the aesthetic traces of Graves's Great War narrative, his signature, as articulated through a polyphonic narrative of voice and sound in a piece of fiction, and that the story is the beginning of his truthful telling of his war narrative.

3.2 'The Shout' or Hearing Voices

'The Shout' (1926), one of Robert Graves's more complex and disturbing short stories, can be found in his collection of essays, plays, and stories titled *Occupation Writer* (1951).³¹ Overtly, the plot explores a series of encounters between an anonymous narrator (henceforth Narrator 1), a young man named Richard, his wife (Rachel), and a supernaturally powerful madman, Charles Crossley. Crossley is confined to an insane asylum where Narrator 1 has come to keep score for a cricket game between the townspeople and the inmates.³² The story can be seen to demonstrate that Graves's experimentation with fiction and voice is a form of testimonial to his Great War experience.

Grevel Lindop describes the story as 'labyrinthine . . . a tale of puzzling surface' and argues that it asks 'questions about the nature of reality itself' (365). The story also asks questions about the sonic and interior nature of the post-war experience. In the epilogue to *Good-bye to All That*, Graves writes:

³⁰ After Graves finished his marathon dictation of *Good-bye to All That*, he felt it difficult to stop 'talking' and began a diary in which he addressed 'himself' [Graves] and 'myself' [Graves]—a form of conversation with self (Baker 272). If *Good-bye to All That* was intended to provide a formal exit from self, it was a failure. The author's next project was 'The Autobiography of Baal', published in *But It Still Goes On: An Accumulation* (1930), and was a bizarre interrogation of God.

³¹ In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves writes that he composed 'The Shout' 'two years ago' [1927] rather than in 1926, as he states in *Collected Short Stories* (1968). R.P. Graves states that it was written in 1926–1927 (G95 382). I agree with R.P. Graves and consider that it was written during the Riding era, for reasons expressed in this section of the chapter.

³² For a detailed discussion of the plot and Graves's deployment of indirect narration and punctuation, see Grevel Lindop's "'A Fine Milesian Tale": Exploring Robert Graves's "The Shout"'

'The Shout which though written two years ago, belongs here; blind and slow like all prophecies' (G14 449–50). It is plausible that 'The Shout', written in a heightened period of nervous sensitivity following the war, represents an investigation by Graves into form and that it provides another piece of evidence that Graves's truth technique is based on sound.

Lucia Graves says she witnessed many events central to several of her father's short stories, and that his work 'was strictly autobiographical, or . . . based on events which he heard either first-hand from friends or family' (*Collected Short Stories* viii). Her use of the qualifiers 'strictly' and 'based on' acknowledge the challenge of discerning between Graves's fiction and his non-fiction. Only 'three tales of Roman times, and "The Shout"' are fictional, she writes, yet in *Occupation Writer* (1950), Graves contradicts this claim and states that 'Richard in "The Shout" is a surrogate for myself: I was still living on the neurasthenic verge of nightmare' (*Occupation Writer* vi). This 'verge of nightmare' describes a liminal state of the soldier's post-war moral and sensual conversion, or cultural re-patterning, a difficult or sometimes impossible transition that leads back to the civilian mode of existence (Lande 96).

Graves's re-conversion begins in 1918, when he starts to feel 'uncomfortably military' in the presence of Ivor Novello (G14 311). In 1921, he is in a 'haunted condition', and his '*Country Sentiment* mood was breaking down' (377). He tells the reader that his collection *The Pier Glass* (1921) reflects this state, as does the title poem in which 'the sullen pier-glass cracked side to side' (l. 15), a mirror and a life that hangs suspended: 'here no life, nothing but the thin shadow' (l. 19). Through his allusion to Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' Graves evokes a sense of loss of the deep (pre-war) past, and a desire to escape the mental funk of the present as well as the life that consists of 'nothing but the thin shadow / And blank foreboding' (l. 9–10). Graves appears to identify with Tennyson's Lady of Shalott who, when her mirror cracks 'from side to side', cries, 'The curse has come upon me' (Tennyson l. 116); he wrote 'The Shout' at Oxford after the war, when 'war horror' (G14 387), his curse, was fully developed. A letter to C.W. Scott Montcrieff dated 11 February 1918 confesses this: 'Your letters comforted me in an evil moment: my fit of "horrors" that comes on every two months and lasts two days came two days ago and has ended today. You know: the bursting shell and the dead men in holes' (qtd. in W.

Graves, 'RG War Letters'). Graves writes frequently about his 'horrors' at the end of the war in *Good-bye to All That*, though he rarely articulates how they manifest in such detail as this, yet it may be argued that 'The Shout' is his attempt to do so.

'The Shout' is a maze of interwoven narratives that explore a central theme of the split or distributed personality, madness, and supernatural experiences. Graves explores this idea through several divided or conjoined relationships or personalities: the Narrator 1 and Crossley; the couple, Rachel and Richard; Richard and Crossley; Crossley and Rachel; Crossley and Crossley; and the townspeople and inmates of the nearby asylum. Though Graves overtly states that he identifies with Richard, there are similarities between Crossley and Graves: both are literary men, 'of unusual force . . . even perhaps . . . of occult powers', who speak with a 'college voice' (*Occupation Writer* 72). Crossley's name evokes the image of the sacrificial Christ-soldier, the meeting place or crossroads, or the crossing over to death or to somewhere less sane, such as the asylum in which he has been placed 'for delusions that he's a murderer' (71). It is no stretch to imagine that Graves and his cohort of veterans may, in the post-war years, have reflected upon their murderous acts.³³ Though Graves eluded the asylum, saying he 'learned rudiments of morbid psychology from talks with [W.H.R.] Rivers' (G14 388), his feeling of the 'haunted condition' of shell shock resembles Crossley's 'other delusion' that 'his soul [was] split into pieces' (*Occupation Writer* 71).

I propose that the central theme of 'The Shout', the split personality and split experience, is observed through Graves's polyphonic treatment of narrative. Sound images and the threat of sound provide the story with an overarching, terrifying, and unifying narrative force. The story's outer voice belongs to the anonymous Narrator 1 attending a cricket match. The second belongs to Crossley, a third to Richard, a musician who dreams of 'conversation' and who experiences a dream life 'as though I were living or thinking . . . as a bell, or as middle C . . . as though I had never been human'

³³ In a 1982 BBC broadcast of *Meridian*, Martin Seymour-Smith reports that in 1977 Graves had admitted to him: 'I've murdered a lot of people ... at High Wood' (12:51-13:10). In a 1982 BBC broadcast of *Meridian*, an interviewee reports that in 1977 Graves had admitted to him: 'I've murdered a lot of people ... at High Wood' (12:51-13:10). See: Frank Delaney. "Meridian." BBC World Service. London, UK. 30 November. 1982. Radio.

(*Occupation Writer* 82). The narrative of Richard's wife, Rachel, is embedded, reported through Richard's narrative. Some of what she recalls are dreams; in this Graves offers a tertiary layer of reality, or dis-reality. The fear of breakdown can be read into the breakdown of the linear narrative of 'The Shout'—this is the fear of psychic destruction. From the beginning of the story, the narrative lines quickly break down with polyphonic textures of voices that commingle and confuse the reader. Lindop refers to the story as a 'hall-of-mirrors' (352), but it may alternately be perceived as a literary texture that is cacophonous, and sometimes fugal, rather than mirrored—aural rather than visual. A particularly complex passage embeds four narratives told by three main characters: Narrator 1; Crossley the madman; Richard; and Crossley narrating Crossley in the third person (*Occupation Writer* 19). The result is a *mise en abyme* with narratives that overlap and echo and contribute to the confused, nightmarish tenor of the story; Graves's fictional technique may reflect the experience of cacophony in the front line, the military unit, and the hospital wards after his wounding at the Somme. The formal organisation of the anxiety tale is something that I argue presents a model of the psychological legacy of the interior experience of the battlefield, particularly the suppressed shout.

Crossley asks Richard whether he has ever heard a 'terror-shout' (*Occupation Writer* 78). Richard replies, 'I have read of the hero-shout which the ancient Irish warriors used, that would drive armies backwards' (78). He asks, 'did not Hector, the Trojan, have a terrible shout?' (78), one that could 'infect men with a madness of fear' (78). In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves recalls bayonet instructors in the bullring screaming at troops: 'BITE HIM, I SAY! STICK YOUR TEETH IN HIM AND WORRY HIM! EAT HIS HEART OUT!' (G14 296). The men, he writes, were instructed to 'make horrible grimaces and utter blood-curdling yells as they charged' (295). Then too, orders such as 'Stand-to!' are shouted, and Graves is 'alert in a second' (266), while in another passage a soldier with a stomach wound lies 'screaming for hours . . . begging for morphia' (203). In 'The Shout', Richard recalls the powerful shriek in the *Mabinogion*, one that pierced 'through the hearts' (*Occupation Writer* 78); this is the shriek that 'came on every May-eve, over every hearth in the Island of Britain' and was powerful enough to rob men of 'their hue and strength, and the women their

children, and the young men and the maidens lost their senses, and all the animals and trees and the earth and the waters, were left barren' (Guest 55).

It is also a shriek such as one Graves recalls in *Good-bye to All That*; a guide had become 'hysterical and [who had] forgotten the way' in a sector they traversed through heavy shelling—'we put him under arrest' (G14 265) because the necessity for vocal control under duress meant the survival of the military unit. Graves recalls the shouts of a commanding officer at Cambrin: 'Company forward', and 'the company went forward with a clatter of steel' to perform their own destruction in what would become a disastrous battle for the battalion (193). Here the shout anticipates disaster. Graves describes the extent soldiers would go to in order to avoid shouting; clearing the battlefield he describes: 'The first body I came upon was Samson's. I found that he had forced his knuckles into his mouth to stop himself crying out and attracting any more men to their death' (202). Suppressing his cries, 'hit in seventeen places' (202), Samson saved lives through suppressing his dying shouts.

In 'The Shout', Graves employs musical references, contrapuntal vocal lines, memories, conversations, and dream states to tell a story that describes the destructive, manipulative power of sound. The story explores the gradual disintegration of the human psyche that comes from absorbing a knowledge of ever-present mortal danger, that is, death by bombardment delivered with noise. 'Sound is a curious thing,' Richard, the musician, tells Crossley. He recalls 'a King's College man' whom he heard reading the evening lesson in Church: 'he had not spoken ten words before there was a groaning and ringing and creaking . . . pieces of wood and dust fell from the roof' (*Occupation Writer* 81). The man's voice 'was exactly attuned to that of the building, so he had to stop, else the roof might have fallen' (81). Graves's, or Richard's, conception that sound may destroy buildings, or even tiny objects, is reinforced when he states: 'you can break a wine glass by playing its note on a violin' (81). His theory mirrors Graves's mental disintegration from the sound of a typewriter—thus his dictation of *Good-bye to All That*—a sensitivity provoked, to the end of his life, by loud or sudden, startling sounds according to William Graves (William Graves 'Conversations').

I identify Graves's characterisation of Richard and Crossley in 'The Shout' as distributed character—or the spreading of the author's biographical attributes

across characters. It is curious that Graves overtly identifies with Richard rather than Crossley, despite the fact that Richard is presumably the same age as Graves, old enough to have served in the Great War, whereas Crossley, at 'forty or fifty' (*Occupation Writer* 71), has been away in Australia for two decades; Richard does not appear to be a veteran, nor overtly mad, whereas Crossley seems to be both. Through distributed character Graves deploys some of his own identity. Crossley has 'an 18th century naval uniform to wear as [his] ceremonial dress', used when originally he lived amongst 'black tribes' and was 'a Devil not that very long ago' (*Occupation Writer* 76). This suggests a grafting of Graves's war story onto Crossley's. Certainly years spent in the trenches may have felt twenty years in duration as Graves describes the normalisation of the experience: 'There was no excitement left in patrolling, no horror in the continual experience of death' (G14 216). And like Crossley's time spent amongst the 'black tribes', the population of the trenches was cross-cultural; Graves reports meeting: 'Turko' (Turks) (G14 235), 'Mohammedan Indians . . . Algerians' (232), and 'niggers' (240) at the Front. Then too, iconic photographs of the military tribes of the Western Front illustrate soldiers' faces blackened by mud, smoke, munitions, and war work.

At the time he was writing 'The Shout', Graves believed he had lost his mind trying to suppress or drown out memories, many delivered by noise. In 'Dawn Bombardment', bombardment is 'the yell of doom' (l. 3), and as late as 15 July 1971, in an interview in *The Listener*, Graves states: 'Noise never stopped for one moment—ever' (Smith 74) during the war. For Remarque, the sound of trains and lorries is an 'everlasting, nerve-wracking roll behind enemy lines' that 'our artillery fires on . . . continually, but still it does not cease' (Remarque 104). In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves reports that he can't sleep because of the 'continuous roar of artillery' and 'shells bursting'; 'I lay in my bed and sweated' (G14 142). But for some, sound becomes naturalised to the extent that the men state: 'Where the gunder ended and the thunder began, was hard to say' (143).

In 'The Shout' Crossley's death-delivering cry appears to have absorbed the kinetic power of high explosives and of constant bombardment, with threat and reality hammered into the nerves, body, and mind of the Richard/Graves. But the fear of letting it out—as in the failure of Graves's earlier attempts to tell

his war story, and through the suppression of his war poems (G14 460n3)— suggests that the soldier Graves believes doing so may provoke mass destruction. In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves dreads a cure because he fears that the ‘the power of writing poetry, which was more important to me than anything I else did, would disappear if I allowed myself to be cured’ (387). Yet I perceive that ‘The Shout’ is evidence of Graves tentatively releasing his war narrative, and that it is a precursor to the act of dictating *Good-bye to All That*.

The quality of Crossley’s shout is indescribable; it is ‘not a matter of tone or vibration but something not to be explained . . . It is a shout of pure terror’ with ‘no fixed place for it on the scale. It may take any note’ (*Occupation Writer* 81). Graves attempt to use musical references to illustrate the extent of terror is limited. Instead, he resorts to a folk lexicon of descriptors, as seen in an earlier letter to Eddie Marsh, as he struggles to articulate the sounds of war. Facing a return to the trenches in the middle of the war, Graves writes: ‘I have to get used to all the old noises’ (O’Prey 42). He employs onomatopoeia, word fragments, and repetition as he describes the ‘crack! rockety-ockety-ockety-ockety-ockety of a rifle bullet’ and the ‘boom! ...swish...swish...Grr...GRR! ... GRR!...ROAR!’ of the fifteen-inch shell’ (O’Prey 42). He uses hard, guttural plosive Gs and Ks to mimic the percussive sound of bombardment. Oddly, he shifts to the rather prosaic, albeit onomatopoeic, word ‘Roar!’ as if defaulting or diffusing the imagined sounds to a childish register. This comes before he announces, fearfully, that ‘there are a lot of new terrors since last December’ (42). Graves backs off, or fails to find the language to express these ‘new terrors’. The passage thus provides a relatively benign, toned-down experience of the Somme soundscape. In contrast, in a 1918 article ‘Battle’, for *The Musical Times*, Cecil Barber attempts a more sophisticated rendering of war noise:

Here is a combination of all ... the wildest harmonies—of colour and form and sound, with Night for manuscript! And Murder is the motto-theme ... wholesale murder, in fact Then, without warning ... the storm bursts, *ffff*. The pentacostal calamity is at hand, with its might rushing wind and tongues of riotous fire, above the strident blast of the batteries. For the guns ... supply a pedal to the frantic exordium; and superimposed on this, as the textbook have it, move notes of lighter calibres, all vociferous however and deadly in their utterance.... The various timbres stand out clearly the melancholy passage of great shells, the whiz and bang of smaller ones, the long

swishing strides of the gas shells, the almost farcical crack and stentorian echo of the Stokes contingent, and the constant spurt of snipers' fire, *molto staccato*, in stupendous counterpoint. (qtd. in G. Watkins 63)

The musicologist writes for a musically literate audience who can imagine the decibels suggested by a quadruple forte, '*ffff*', and that the machine-gun sounds out a '*molto staccato*', or that the battery will 'blast' like a 'strident' brass section. Musicians and aficionados will understand the significance of his denoting the sound of the guns' 'pedal' note as a relentless basso continuo that sustains, and sometimes haunts, the harmonic progression of the battlescape. What Barber's passage illustrates is a somewhat desperate attempt to convey the sounds of war as a musical score of contrapuntal sound and through the limited references of musical notation and dynamics. In contrast, David Jones's attempt to describe the soundscape of the Somme in *In Parenthesis* provides a more convincing description of the disordered sense of sounds during bombardment:

all-filling screaming, the howling crescendo's up-piling . . . the pent violence released a consummation of all burstings out; all sudden up-rendings and rivings through—all taking out of vents—all barrier-breaking—all unmaking . . . the dissolving and splitting of solid things. (IP 24)

Jones compounds adjectives and fragments syntax; he describes the unnerving, pervasive violence of sound as 'howling', 'screaming', 'barrier-breaking', and sexual—it is 'pent', 'released', 'a consummation' of 'unmaking'. The fractured or manufactured words—'up-piling', 'up-rendings', 'rivings', 'burstings out'—capture the 'dissolving and splitting of solid things' (IP 24). Graves, Barber, and Jones attempt to mimic or describe external sound; I argue that in 'The Shout', Graves conveys his internal anguish.

3.3 Controlled Anxiety and Release of the Shout

External sounds compete with the exhausting, self-imposed control of the officer trying to suppress the terror-shout before battle. Graves reports that on the eve of a major deadly assault: 'Orders came that we were to attack again. Only the officers knew, the men were only to be told just beforehand. It was difficult for me to keep up appearances with the men; I felt like screaming' (G14

207). Graves has to keep the orders secret—a necessary but terrible betrayal of trust between an officer and his troops—and he is filled with fear. Yet he must control this fear through the faux confidence of bravado. His suppressed scream may have felt like Crossley’s shout—‘pure evil’ and of ‘pure terror’—the magnitude of which could kill either himself or others (*Occupation Writer* 81). The experience parallels Graves’s disintegrating sense of self-integrity in the aftermath of the war, following ‘[m]any deaths and a feeling of bad luck [that] clouded those years’ (G14 411); still, Graves resorts to a ‘war-time technique of getting through things somehow, anyhow, in the hope that they would mend’ (412).

At times, Graves’s neurasthenia seems to cause the soldier in him to turn into living stone, as villagers are turned to stone in ‘The Shout’, and as he will later describe ‘human souls’ as turning to stone in ‘Consortium of Stones’ (*Complete Poems* v. 3, 81, and note, 263). After war, he found that ‘[t]he noise of a motor-tyre exploding behind me would send me flat on my face’ (G14 331). In the poem ‘Incubus’, from *The Pier Glass*, Graves personifies war-terror as a creeping predator. Writing from the first-person point of view—acknowledging that the terror comes from within—he asks, ‘[B]ut who am I?’ (l. 4) and describes the terror ‘[s]tooping, muttering in [the sufferer’s] ear’ (l. 6) while the victim lies ‘[h]orror bolted to lie still’ (l. 9). He has become predator and ‘prey’ (l. 12), one ‘[w]ho dumbly must obey’ (l. 16). In ‘The Shout’, Crossley represents the incubus. Once he unleashes the terror shout the landscape is strewn with dead creatures, and Richard, Graves’s stand-in, lies frozen and unconscious. This image resonates with those of shell-shocked soldiers featured in the British Pathé newsreel *War Neuroses* (1917–18), shot at Seale Hayne, the Devon nursing home for shell-shocked veterans, and the Royal Victoria Hospital in Netley. In the film, veterans are paralysed through shell-shocked nerves; they have been physically astonished by the magnitude of war experience, their bodies transformed into a kind of living stone.³⁴ This is a state that W.R.R.

³⁴ Edgar Jones’s research indicates that Major Arthur Hurst’s film contained “‘before treatment’ shots [that] were re-enacted for the camera’ (345). *War Neuroses* caused considerable debate as Jones states: ‘While re-enacting illness for the camera and practicing deception on patients were both considered acceptable practices at the time, making premature claims for treatment was a serious charge’ (367). For a more in depth contextualisation of the film see: Edgar Jones, ‘[War Neuroses and Arthur Hurst: A Pioneering Medical Film about the Treatment of Psychiatric Battle Casualties](#)’. *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67.3 (2012): 345-73. Print.

Rivers describes when observing paralysis and mutism in soldiers as a form of 'substitution, in an imperfect form, of an ancient instinctive reaction in place of other forms of reaction to danger' (Rivers 135)—fight, flight, or freeze.

In *Poetic Unreason and Other Studies* (1925), Graves remembers a story from 'a hospital record' that recorded a prank played by soldiers at the front (*Poetic Unreason* 142). The soldier is awakened in his dugout to the sound of a 'hissing' bomb that is blocking his escape route; he becomes paralyzed with fear, caught 'between the terrible strain of this immediate, but insoluble conflict between the all-or-none principles of flight and aggression'; it is a situation that brings about 'a complete breakdown' (142). The bomb is not charged, but the soldier is invalidated out with paralysis induced by shell shock. Another version of the story appears in *Good-bye to All That*, in which Graves recounts a 'company commander called Furber, his nerves are in pieces, and somebody played a dirty joke on him the other day—rolling a bomb, undetonated of course, down the cellar steps to frighten him (G14 154–55). One may wonder which story was true, as both are believable. The structure of paralysis and anxiety is the same that is threatened by the power of a real or imaginary sound that informs the 'The Shout' through the central preoccupation of when, not if, the bomb of Crossley's shout will detonate. A secondary consideration is whether or not the wax Richard puts in his ears will protect him from catastrophe. Whether or not Crossley's shout is real, the reader is led to believe in its reality: Rachel dreams of a 'terrible thing', like an 'evil light' that 'pierced through and through' (*Occupation Writer* 83); after the shout is reported by Richard, the local doctor describes 'an earth tremor' (85), 'the country people said that it had been the Devil passing by' (85), and 'Jones, the gamekeeper, [was] found dead' (85). Yet Richard never actually hears the shout but faints as he is exposed to it; terrifyingly, he has seen Crossley's face 'hardened to a rough stone mask, dead white at first, and then flushing outwards from the cheek bones red and redder, and at last black' (82) as he prepares to shout. It is possible that anyone who has experienced bombardment may recognise this description of fear and the redness of Crossley's face as a representation of the feelings and response of one experiencing actual bombardment or the face swelling then turning black after death .

The suppressed fear of the shout, the wax earplugs, the enormity of the shout's implied decibels suggest that this is the veteran Graves's remembered experience of the guns, bombardment, and feeling of fear and suppression of fear in battle, particularly the experience of being forced to return to battle, as we see in his letter to Marsh. In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves recalls being stationed outside Liverpool at a 'bombing-field' distant from the Brotherton's munitions factory, 'where a specially sensitive explosive for detonators was made' (G14 255). One of the main subjects of conversation in the mess was what would happen if the factory blew up. Graves writes: 'Most of us held that the shock would immediately kill all the three thousand men of the camp' (255). Graves's description of the ever-present, low-level anxiety over the catastrophic consequences of the munitions factory blowing up certainly might have informed his conceptualisation of Crossley's shout as one which percussion waves alone would kill for miles around. This undercurrent of knowledge of sudden death is seemingly ubiquitous in the warzone experience and one that I propose is represented through the ever-present anxiety of 'The Shout'.

Ian Firla suggests that 'The Shout' is mimetic: 'Crossley's psychological traumas can be paralleled easily with Graves's own . . . Where Crossley represents magic and experience, Graves, the neurasthenic soldier-poet in the story-as-autobiography can be clearly detected' (Firla 108–9). Firla suggests that "'The Shout" can be considered a reflection of Graves's particular revulsion to the psychoanalytic methods of W.H.R. Rivers's formula . . . a metaphor for Rivers's prescription of purgative writing of poetry to vent the psychological traumas of a neurasthenic patient' (108). The analysis is compelling, but it might be proposed that 'The Shout' is not an expression of rejection or revulsion towards Rivers' methodology, which was one of telling one's story; instead, it is the beginning of Graves's investigations into 'the danger area of his insanity' (G14 388), and thus represents the slow release of his war story, or *Good-bye to All That*, inchoate. While Graves presents 'the notion of self' as 'fragile and easily fragmented', as Firla suggests (Firla 107), 'The Shout' and *Good-bye to All That* demonstrate an application of Rivers's prescription for shell-shocked soldiers, in which war experiences and feelings are refashioned into 'tolerable, if not pleasant companions instead of evil influences which forced themselves upon his mind whenever the silence and inactivity of the night came around'

(Rivers 189, 200). Rivers's challenge was to find 'some aspect of the painful experience in a way which would allow the patient to dwell upon it in such a way as to relieve its horrible and terrifying character' (190–2). For Graves, his sense of self and memories are grounded in a type of noise-memory (vocal and sound based) defused through words that evoke sounds, music, and speech. The safety of Graves's descriptions of potential annihilation by German shells sounds like something out of a children's story or fairy tale, a subject discussed at the end of this chapter: 'whooo-oo-ooooooOOO-bump-CRASH! twenty yards from the party [of soldiers]' (G14 126).

'The Shout' requires several readings to determine which narrator is speaking at each point, and close attention must be paid to Graves's subtle use of polyphonic authorial voice in order to track the various narratives. The supernatural aspects of the story, combined with the topography of a pastoral landscape littered with the bodies and souls of the dead—whether fractured or turned to stone—reflects the hyper-sensuality of the battlefield, the military unit in action, and the psychic consequences of the aftermath for the veteran.

Voicing his story methodology, Graves/Crossley states:

My story is true . . . every word of it. Or when I say that my story is 'true', I mean at least that I am telling it in a new way. It is always the same story, but I sometimes vary the climax and even recast the characters. Variation keeps it fresh and therefore true. If I were always to use the same formula, it would soon drag and become false. I am interested in keeping it alive, and it is a true story, every word of it. (*Occupation Writer* 72)

Graves is once again negotiating with truth through the retelling. He did this again when he revised *Good-bye to All That* in 1957. By 1926, when 'The Shout' was written, Graves was preparing to release the long-suppressed shout of his own war. His experimentation with authorial voice is an attempt to contain the cacophony and confusion of thought and experience through a manageable literary form, the compact form of a short story. His portrayal of the shout, and the death of Crossley in 'an indescribable pang of fire' (*Occupation Writer* 91) by lightning bolt, represents the beginning of release for Graves's suppressed war cry, one which was released over several feverish weeks in 1929 when he

dictated *Good-bye to All That*. In the next section I look more closely at how Graves does this by revisiting the language and music of childhood.

3.4. Song, Nursery Rhymes and Memory

To you who'd read my songs of War.

Robert Graves, first line, crossed out, 14 July 1916 draft of 'Bosche'
['Dead Bosche']

Songs, nursery rhymes, and music are among Graves's compositional preoccupations, a means to stitch together the loose narrative of anecdotes which constitute *Good-bye to All That*. Music, the spoken word, and singing were central to Graves's early life in the form of family prayers, recitations of his parents' Shakespeare reading group, family songs, and his father's traditional folk songs, such as 'Invention of Wine' (G14 16); Graves tells the reader that he sings 'some of [Alfred's] songs . . . without prejudice, when washing up after meals or shelling peas' (23). According to William Graves, his father had a good singing voice and sang at social gatherings. William reports that Robert and his sister Rosaleen composed music together, especially when they went walking in the hills ('Robert Graves and Singing'), and many of Graves's poems continue to be set to music.

Graves states that he had 'been able to draw on contemporary records for most of the facts' but that for some 'passages memory has been [his] only source' when composing his war narrative (G14 444). He writes that his 'memory is good but not perfect' and demonstrates his musical memory: 'I can after two hearings remember the tune and words of any song that I like, and never afterwards forget them; but there are always odd discrepancies between my version and the original' (444). He states that he remembers, more or less, but feels free to change specifics, apparently believing that he if gets the tune correct but changes or misremembers the words, the overall musicality of it will still constitute reliable memory.

After a diversionary British gas attack on the German trenches, Graves and his men are ordered to stand to and wait 'on the fire-step from four to nine o'clock, with fixed bayonets, for the order to go over' (G14 190). Graves records that '[m]y mind was blank except for the recurrence of "S'nice smince pie... I

don't like ham, lamb or jam and I don't like roley-poley" (207). Dumb with fatigue and anxiety, he awaits the call into battle. Only the earworm from the popular Jay Laurier song filters into his consciousness. Under stress, he defaults to music. He recalls: 'The men laughed at my singing,' and then '[t]he sergeant who was acting company sergeant major said to me: "It's murder, sir"' (207). "Of course it's murder, you bloody fool," Graves replies, "But there's nothing else for it, is there?" (207). Miserable, cold, and wet, Graves starts singing again: "But when I see's a s'nice smince spie, I asks for a helping twice." . . . At nine o'clock we were told that the attack was put off; we were told to hold ourselves in readiness to attack at dawn' (207). The clipped verbal exchange between officer and subordinate is split with the refrain from 'Oh I Do Like a S'nice S'mince S'pie!', highlighting Graves's ironic stance—the confluence of extreme violence and nonsense lines that hint darkly of what may happen to the soldiers if they go ahead with the attack: German machine guns will literally turn them into minced meat. 'I don't like ham, lamb or jam,' Graves sings (207). Using this technique, he offers double recall—one of himself in active duty and another directed towards his readership's musical memory.

Whether or not the scene happened as Graves tells it, the reader's imagination may be triggered by musical hooks of the era that ground the anecdotes in an imagined time and a real place—the Great War era and the music hall. Graves is conscious of the reactive and musical emotionality of his soldiers. When the Royal Welch Fusiliers march, they sing 'comic songs instead of Welsh Hymns: *Slippery Sam*, or *When we've Wound up the Watch on the Rhine*' (191), or 'Coolness under Fire' (G14 143). When the soldiers are afraid, his soldiers sing Welsh hymns, 'each man taking a part' (126); this detail resonates with the idea of a polyphonic narrative in 'The Shout' and with the war's soundscape of harmonies and dissonance. Music, Graves reports, was used in the trenches for commentary; men mocked a shirker by singing 'Cock Robin' in his presence (111). Graves characterises a company commander describing him as singing 'sentimental cockney songs at the Brigade gaffs when we [were] back at Béthune' (155) and recalls the enemy's music: 'a German lying on his back . . . humming . . . "Merry Widow" waltz' in No Man's Land (180) and singing 'Wacht am Rhein' (181). He recalls the Royal Welch Fusilliers 'never sang out of tune' (111) and that his fellow officer 'Edmund Dadd sung like

a crow' (244). His hearing is acute having been trained to discern ordinance from a distance:

I find my reactions to danger are extraordinarily quick. We can sort out all the different explosions and disregard all the ones that don't concern us—the artillery duel, the machine-gun fire at the next company to us, desultory rifle-fire. But the faint plop! that sends off the sausage or the muffled rifle noise when a grenade is fired, we picked out at once. (G14 148)

Graves recalls a sergeant make an observation that shell-casings hitting the ground have orchestral tones: 'They calls them the musical instruments' (127); fired shells have 'a curious singing noise in the air, and then flop! Flop! Little pieces of shell-casing came buzzing down all around' (127). His acute hearing carries on into peacetime as the new father Graves states: 'I could recognize the principle varieties of babies' screams' (394). As with munitions that were out of range, Graves 'learned to disregard all but the important' cries of his babies (395). His transference of acute hearing gained through war, one of life-saving importance, into peacetime becomes a tool of domestic peace for the struggling Graves as he tries to escape his noisy war.

War literature, personal diaries, and oral histories of soldiers and support trade workers, like Graves, recall the noisy, singing, screaming, chattering world of the Great War. In 'The Extra Turn' (1931), Edmund Blunden reflects on how hearing music on a reconditioned gramophone instantly transports him to the battlefields. He writes, 'No, it is all still [present]' (*Fall In Ghosts* 76); wartime had never ended for Blunden who personifies the gramophone, using the third person: 'There he goes again, "One Hour of Love With You"; and we are about to return from Mont to the Menin Road in the collapse of 1917' (76). Blunden recalls '[h]ow immensely hard our gramophone worked in 1916, obedient to the commands of *The Bing Boys!*'; the colonel 'would listen to [Beethoven's] "Largo", and assert presently that for him there was one of the outstanding and permanent things in the shaken world' (73). Music anchors Graves, Blunden and the others, and animates the inanimate: Graves tells us that a gramophone is 'singing happily' (G14 165); the gramophone in Blunden's quarters becomes 'a friend of ours in 1916' (*Fall In Ghosts*, 72), and 'the gramophone in the ward plagued [Sassoon] beyond endurance', according to Graves (G14 319).

Machine guns sing antiphonally during the German stand-to each evening as Graves reports British guns ‘rap out the familiar call [of prostitutes] . . . Me-et me do-wn in Pi-cca-dill-y’, and the German guns reply, ‘Se-e you da-mned to He-ll First’ (G14 217). Graves’s narrative employs a unifying lexicon of sound, music, and speech; the men shout and recite rhymes and sing throughout—finding comfort and creating a new normalcy at the front, furnished with the language and sounds of early childhood and home.

An advertisement in the 23 June 1930 *Times Literary Supplement* states that the songbook *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier: 1914–1918* (1930) ‘will have its sane and earthy side. Many will find it a mirror for memory’ (529). Graves’s use of many of these songs, dialogue, and the sounds of munitions act as *aides mémoires*, mirrors for memory, in *Good-bye to All That*. How they function is discussed in the following section, which outlines the relationship between music, poetry, and memory and the physiological responses these elicit in the human brain. A brief look at neurology and music as it relates to soldiers who are exposed to repeated ordinance offers insight into how Graves’s use of cognitive sound cues plausibly works to create a text that sounds like historical truth.

3.5 Sound and Memory

Shortly after reaching Cambrin, Graves’s company was ordered to support the first wave of counter-attack on the German lines. Situated in reserve trenches, they were ‘cold, sick, and tired, not at all in the mood for battle’ (G14 192). The counter-attack was ordered to prepare the release of ‘the accessory’—gas—but Graves’s company, impatient to engage in battle, were confined to the trenches until orders came through to engage. Graves writes:

What happened in the next few minutes is difficult for me to now sort out. It was more difficult still at the time. All we heard back there in the sidings was a distant cheer, confused crackle of rifle-fire, yells, heavy shellings on our front line, more shouts and yells and a continuous rattle of machine-guns. (192)

What followed, Graves discovers, was confusion and disaster in the front lines as the British were gassed by their own gas due to inadequate equipment; communication lines went down, and casualties were great. The passage

reminds us that Graves, sensorially limited by the narrow field of vision of areas of operations near the Front, relied upon sound to ascertain the direction the battle was taking. He pieces together a conception of the battle through sounds that are fixed to the time and place, and provides an impression of a sequence of events that are still 'difficult for me to now [in 1929] sort out'. Late in the war and after being withdrawn from the Front due to neurasthenia, Graves recalls a route march through Liverpool during which he catches a 'glimpse' of three men in gas-masks 'bending over a dead man' gassed in an industrial accident. The scene 'was so like France I all but fainted' (G14 328). His nerves were 'bad' he writes, but the 'band music saved me' (328). Several things are at work here: the power of music on Graves's emotions; the power of marching music's rhythm and energy to immediately recall Graves to the moral and sensual conversion of his military training, through an instant physiological response to the military music, one that required breath and movement; and finally, how sound fixes memory in the brain.

The tendency to associate familiar music with strong memories and emotions is common knowledge, yet research has only recently identified the physiology of these relationships and the shared neurological *loci* of memory response, music, literature, and poetry (Janata; Zeman). The healthy brain has a strong cognitive connection with music, but compromised brains, as in Alzheimer's patients, respond profoundly to music from their deep past. Petr Janata's investigation of music, memory loss, and memory recovery concludes that the medial prefrontal cortex acts as 'as a hub that associates features of the music with autobiographical memories and emotions' (1). He proposes 'that a piece of familiar music serves as a soundtrack for a mental movie that starts playing in our head' and that 'it calls back memories' (Janata qtd. in Greensfelder). Janata's use of the verb 'to call' is intentional, as he connects 'the association between . . . music and the memories' as one of recall (Janata qtd. in Greensfelder). The prefrontal cortex is the slowest part of the brain to deteriorate in Alzheimer's patients, and it retains the capacity to recognise meaningful music and invoke subsequent emotional responses.

For combatants with traumatic brain injury (TBI), the memory of songs, fragments of conversations, poetry, and nursery rhymes may provide the impetus for restoring narrative, as Major F.W. Mott reports in his lecture 'Effects

of High Explosives upon the Central Nervous System' (1916). Mott describes a shell-shocked soldier who is exposed to whistled melodies then returns to playing the piano, something he had entirely forgotten how to do. Mott observes: 'His associative memory and recollection of music was in advance of other associative memories' (Mott 456). Another patient's comrades urged him to sing along with them, and Mott reports that the patient 'seemed to know without remembering' (456). The implications of 21st-century research, and Mott's 1916 observations, support the idea that aesthetic sound traces may have helped in the scaffolding of Graves's war memory. Using sound markers throughout the text, Graves recomposes how he perceives himself during, and after, the war. In an anecdote from early in the war, Graves describes a particularly 'nasty salient' near Béthune. He remembers making his way through the trenches, 'whistling *The Farmer's Boy*, to keep up my spirits and coming upon a group of men bending over a dying soldier . . . making a snoring noise mixed with animal groans' (G14 150). Graves looks down, sees the man's 'cap splashed with his brains', and remarks, 'I had never seen human brains before; I had somehow regarded them as a poetical figment' (150). And though Graves does not overtly articulate his emotional reaction, he summarises the death as so terrible that 'even a miner can't make a joke about a man who takes three hours to die after the top part of his head [was] taken off by a bullet fired at twenty yards range'; the sound of a man dying a long, agonising death is unforgettable. Here, sonic recall is the basis of Graves's truth-memory. In the next sections, I discuss the role of soldier-vernacular, profanity, the dialogue of the everyman soldier, and Graves's poetics of sound based on fairy tale, nursery rhyme, and poetry, in the composition of *Good-bye to All That*. This will support the idea that a form of truth based on sound resides in Graves's autobiography despite the text's many fabrications.

3.6 Lars Porsena

After the war, Graves reports that John Galsworthy asked for his help with 'technical questions about soldier-slang' (G14 310) for an unnamed trench play [*Loyalties* (1922)?]. Graves's recall and recreation of soldier dialogue in *Good-bye to All That* is another way that sound-based cues are used to evoke the sonic landscape of the war. The following anecdote illustrates that, even when relaying others' stories, he provides the immediacy of first-hand witness:

[The officer] jumped up from his shell-hole and waved and signalled 'Forward.' Nobody stirred. He shouted: 'You bloody cowards, are you leaving me to go alone?' His platoon sergeant, groaning with a broken shoulder gasped out: 'Not cowards, sir. Willing enough. But they're all f—ing dead.' (G14 199)

Though this is 'a story . . . one of the officers told me', Graves imbues the anecdote with vitality by describing the sergeant 'groaning' with pain and by using direct and implied profanity, 'bloody' and 'f—ing'. Graves's gift is to capture the power of the spoken word, knowing how many prepositions to leave out and how to condense military language through the power of profanity. The immediacy of the ludicrous scenario is communicated through the believable response of the sergeant saying, 'But they're all f—ing dead.' Graves knows the power of words.

Graves reports having been 'taken away after a couple of terms [from school] because I was found to be using naughty words' (G14 30). This seemingly minor detail in his autobiography informs *Good-bye to All That* through Graves's use of articulated, or implied, profanity. The use of profanity in his war text provides what sociologists suggest is a language that gives a 'sense of solidarity' with his fellow soldiers, one that 'stimulates group binding' and that may be used 'as a clarification of a certain group identity' (Vingerhoets et al. 301). This code is used to 'elicit humour' among the group, or to divert fear (301). Another example is Graves's recollection of Boy Jones, a fourteen-year-old soldier up for '[t]he greatest number of simultaneous charges that I ever heard preferred against a soldier' (G14 109). 'He was charged with, first, using obscene language to the bandmaster; the bandmaster, who was squeamish, reported it as: "Sir, he called me a double effing c—t"' (109). Through the combination of profanity with the missing 'un', as implied by the em-dash, Graves is able to offer the reader a *faux*-insider view while at the same time triggering memories for veterans of soldier culture—making the passage believable. But what is soldier-vernacular, and what is its function?

Matti Friedman, a veteran of the Israeli army, explains that '[t]he soldier's vernacular must supply words for things that civilians don't need to describe'; 'some of the more perilous and awful parts of the soldiers' lives are concealed

under acronyms of bureaucratic triviality: a “VBIED” sounds a lot safer than a car bomb, for example. A “KIA” might be a tax form rather than a human being killed in action’ (Friedman n. pag.). He states that ‘language can add some dignity to grim business, and by doing so becomes an intangible but important weapon in a soldier’s mental arsenal’ (n. pag.). Soldier vernacular varies from army to army, and as Joe Lunn observes, in *Good-bye to All That*, ‘Graves is recording the oral histories of his regiment’ (Lunn 720)—this is an aurally based text that, at times, employs inferred profanity as sound anchors.

In 1926, Graves published ‘Lars Porsena or The Future of Swearing and Improper Language’ (1926), an essay published in pamphlet form as part of the *To-day and To-morrow Series* (1923–31). Graves states that his ‘language soon recovered much of its war-time foulness’, and while teaching English in Egypt, he ‘wrote [*Lars Porsena*] for want of nothing better to do’ (*Occupation Writer* v). The ‘recovery’ of ‘war-time foulness’ indicates the transitional state of the post-war Graves as he attempts to build a post-war self through the release of language, this ‘short enquiry into the nature and necessity of foul language’ (v). ‘Of recent years there has been a decline of swearing and foul language in England,’ he writes, and he proposes that this decline ‘shows every sign of continuing indefinitely until a new shock to our national nervous system—such as war, pestilence, revolution, fire from Heaven, or whatever you please—revives the habit of swearing, together with that of praying’ (v). Graves sees a direct correlation between the shocked nervous system—national and otherwise—and the necessity for foul language (as well as prayer) as a type of armour against the insanity of ‘a new shock’ (v).

Swearing, cursing, and prayers belong to Graves’s sense of language’s potential for power and its use as a pressure valve, one which may have ‘the life of emergency that a bos’n or sergeant-major leads’ (*Occupation Writer* 27)—that is, it is lively, colourful, and profane. ‘Lars Porsena’ is a *mélange* of research into historical and mythical sources that cites James Frazer and Oscar Wilde, and employs Graves’s research methodology of *mélange* that is later seen in *The White Goddess*. Graves’s essay is filled with opinion, anecdote, song, and rhyme and contains examples of profanity interwoven with some of his own war experience. He states that profanity is what ‘others call . . . poor man’s poetry’ (*Occupation Writer* 27). ‘Occasionally,’ he states, ‘one hears a

labourer use a picturesque ancient, or a lively modern, oath and feels an invigorating thrill course up the jaded spine' (27). Graves uses this kind of 'invigorating thrill' effectively in *Good-bye to All That*. Graves and his men are ordered 'to shout across to the enemy and induce them to take part in a conversation'—a ruse for determining their numbers—but the Germans 'would not talk any military shop' (G14 181). Instead, the British 'shouted out, 'Les sheunes madamoiselles de La Bassée bonnes pour coucher avec. Les madamoiselles de Béthune bonnes aussi, hein?' (181). The anecdote is effective on many levels: for its humorous transliteration inferring mispronounced French, its poor grammar, its sexual innuendo, and its sonic cues—one can imagine the scene vividly by imagining hearing the shouts. Joe Lunn observes that *Good-bye to All That* is '[v]oiced in the conventions of the music hall, incidentally, and not the theatre, as Fussell suggests—to convey a more accurate sense of his and their wartime experience' (Lunn 720), the music hall being the theatre of Everyman, not of the literati. Graves records the black humour of infantrymen who pass the corpse of one of their sanitary-men, killed the night before, whose body remains in the trench. They push his stiff arm out of the way and speak to it: 'Out of the light, you old bastard. Do you own this bloody trench?' (G14 149). Graves tells his reader that '[o]f course, they're miners and accustomed to death' (149), and address death accordingly.

Lunn comments that 'in addition to offering another subjective evaluation of the war in the language of a well-educated British officer, Graves is also attempting to express his fidelity to the trench experience as the soldiers themselves expressed these to each other' (Lunn 720). In this way, Graves proclaims fealty to his men over his superiors through establishing a relationship grounded in the specific use of profane language. For Lunn, this is a 'stylistic device that not only was popular with readers, but would also have been appreciated by the rank and file of the Royal Welch Fusiliers as they swapped stories around their campfires at night' (720). Graves bridges the territory between civilian and military life, transporting images and sounds from the combatant's brazier at the front to the homely fireside. His ear captures and exploits history through the crisp, hard consonants of profanity, notably omitting softer vowel sounds from the curses with the use of the dash, thus defusing them of overt shock-value for the 1929 reader.

To summarise this section, I suggest further that Graves musical ear picks up the multiple human and mechanical sounds of war and often translates them into analogous peace-time sounds:

Last night a lot of stuff was flying about, including shrapnel. I heard one shell wish-whishing towards me. I dropped flat. It burst just over the trench. My ears sang as though there were gnats in them and a bright scarlet light shone over everything. . . . The vibration made my chest sing, too, in a curious way, and I lost my sense of equilibrium . . . the sergeant major came along the trench and found me on all fours, because I couldn't stand up straight. (G14 148)

This description of concussion following the percussion of bombardment is made entirely imaginable with its sound references of gnats. That Graves's chest vibrates so hard that it seems to 'sing' is plausible even to those who have been in proximity to high-powered explosions; certainly a civilian readership can identify with the annoying, pervasive buzzing of gnats.

Michael Longley reports that *Good-bye to All That* 'awakened my own memories of my father's infrequent [First World War] reminiscences' and consequently considers it, of all Graves's prose, to have 'made the deepest impressions' on him, for revisiting 'the psychic quagmire of the trenches' (xiv). Notably, Longley refers to an aural reminiscence of his father's war experience rather than his own, growing up in Northern Ireland's war zones. He recalls the occasion when he brought a harmonica home from school and his father picked it up and played. It was the first time his father had played the instrument since being in the trenches. Whilst music provoked memory in Longley's father, and sound is used to the same effect in *Good-bye to All That*, the same cannot be said of Graves's play, *But It Still Goes On* (1930). Graves's exploitation of his war experience and the associated dialogue is half-hearted in the play and provides evidence of Graves's failure to write something believable.

3.7 Box Office Failure

Following the success of R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* (1928) and Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, Maurice Brown commissioned Graves to write a trench play. Instead, the producer received *But It Still Goes On* (1930), a cross-generational drawing-room sex farce. On 12 June 1930, Geoffrey Dearmer of the Play Reading Section sent Graves the following rejection notice:

[W]e think your play would be prejudicial to your present well-deserved popularity . . . our objection to the play implied our belief that the public would not welcome it. . . . Perhaps in 1945 or so, 'when we catch up in time with modernity', we may ask to see the play again . . . Whatever we may think about 'BUT IT STILL GOES ON' it did not bore us. (RG/K/BSGO)³⁵

The play was dismissed, ostensibly, for its thematic material on homosexuality, the dramatisation of sexual transgression, and the play's latent and overt violence (a contradiction considering the remit was for a trench play). It was labelled as being ahead of its time; in 1993, however, Leonard Pearcey of the BBC wrote to Lucia Graves that 'the piece really is not performable' ('Letter to Lucia'). In my view, the play is not performable because large sections of dialogue and its pacing are un-theatrical—many passages sound dull or pedantic. The play is neither entertaining nor truthful and probably would have flopped.

Like 'The Shout', *But It Still Goes On* illustrates Graves's preoccupation with triangulated relationships, complicated plot lines, and sexual or literary rivalries. The play is Graves's attempt, through the guise of Dick Tampion, to begin 'a romping elimination of the unfit' (*Occupation Writer*⁵¹ 227), another attempt at 'good-bye to all that' through a literary revenge analogous to one he alludes to in *Good-bye to All That*; Graves writes of the nineteenth-century painter Richard Dadd who created 'a list of people who deserved to be killed', the first being his father (G14 319). Certainly Graves commits literary patricide in the play. A number of the play's characters stand in for those in Graves's life: Dick Tampion, a veteran and a writer (Graves); David Casselis/Sassoon, a homosexual architect; Dorothy Tampion/Rosaleen Graves, Casselis's virginal love interest; the lecherous father figure Cecil Tampion/Alfred Graves, a successful writer. Others include Cecil's mistress, Elizabetta, and Charlotte Arden, a lesbian once in love with Casselis and now in love with Dorothy, though pregnant with Dick Tampion's child.

³⁵ Dearmer was a veteran of Gallipoli serving with the Royal Fusiliers (London) and the Western Front serving with the Royal Army Service Corps. His mother, Mabel Dearmer, nursed in Serbia and died there in 1915 of enteric fever.

The play is camp and includes a suicide, an attempted murder, and a murder, all of which lie within the realm of what Max Saunders labels the 'almost autobiographical' (*Self Impression* 302) of Graves's life. The play appears purposive, intended to advance his and Riding's theories of history and time, and to say 'good-bye' once again, through antagonism, to literary and personal nemeses. The plotlines are complex and worked out with excessive symbolism, as in the literary patricide through the use of the son's army revolver.

I consider that *But It Still Goes On* fails because the dialogue of the first and last acts is frequently didactic, stiff, unrealistic, or dull. The tenor lacks Graves's satiric, ironical edge and the natural fluidity of his musical ear, as the following demonstrates. In the scene Dick is disillusioned and blasé, with 'every possible etcetera' of what he considers a dead world walking: 'It still goes on', he says, 'like—like the watch in the pocket of a dead man' (*Occupation Writer*⁵¹ 311). David challenges him to explain and asks, 'When did it fall out, then? In the War?' (212). Dick replies:

No, the War came later. The War was a diversion, to distract public attention from the all-important loss. The War is always made to account for every remarkable change in human affairs that has happened since the true catastrophe. The pretence is that the War was only a temporary morbidity, and that these changes are morbid hang-overs from war and so only temporary too. (313)

Graves/Dick proposes that a cataclysmic fracture has happened in the world, one attributed to the war. Graves proposes a cultural and spiritual malady, positing that the war was a 'mad' reaction and that 'the war was—the loudest noise' that human beings could make 'to relieve their feelings' (*Occupation Writer*⁵¹ 313). Dick adds, 'That's what the war was—the loudest noise humanly possible, a counter-noise to the noise the bottom made falling out of things' (313). Here Graves/Dick defines the war as the 'loudest noise' in human history, and yet Graves acute ear fails to communicate the dimensions of this noise.

Further, where Graves fails is through the telling rather than showing his beliefs about the war; he commits the theatrical sin of having Dick talk *at* his audience in stylistically pedantic language. And though Dick speaks '[i]ronically' of '[m]y musical voice!', the only part of the play that sounds believable is in the

scene in which Graves/Dick reflects on his service revolver: 'that Webley . . . bought . . . at that Ordnance Depot at Havre in 1917' (*Occupation Writer* 314). Dick keeps the pistol 'loaded . . . in the drawer of my worktable' and believes that it is 'like the human skull, or the coffin, that holy men in the middle-ages used to keep about the place to remind them of death' (314). The pistol, Dick's *memento mori*, illustrates the intimate relationship the soldier has with his weapon and with an ever-present death memory from the war—the sexual allusions (Dick, pistol) operate in the play at another level of juvenile irony entirely. Dick reveals that the revolver was used '[f]our times' during the war, 'not counting rat-shooting':

Once to kill a pack-mule, wounded in the belly—guts hanging out—once in that raid near Bouchavesnes to plug a German—it took the top of his head off—once at Bullecourt—you weren't with us then—on a man of my own company—91 Evans his name was—when he wouldn't get out of the trench to attack. And once on myself the same night when I came back alone and found 91 Evans' corpse grinning at me with a bloody mouth, the only other man in the trench. A shell burst just as I pulled the trigger and it spoilt my aim. The bullet glanced off. Here's the scar. It gave me the devil of a headache—knocked me out for a couple of hours. (*Occupation Writer* 314)

The liveliness of the passage is attributable to Graves's verbal display of combat credentials and soldier vernacular: a 'raid near Bouchavesnes'; the word 'plug' instead of the more prosaic 'kill'; the mule's 'guts hanging out'; the grinning corpse is identified by name and serial number; and the reference to the 'scar' (314). As in *Good-bye to All That* Graves uses his war scars as a form of script. Theatrically, the revolver dialogue is one of the more successful scenes in a play that Paul Fussell characterises as 'a Shavian comedy about two nice young people . . . in the standard postwar house-party' (*Great War and Modern* 274). Yet Fussell also writes that '[o]f all the memoirs of the war, the "stagiest" is Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*' (203). The following excerpt illustrates Graves's stagey technique at work in his war narrative in contrast to his play. Inspecting the front lines, Graves and his fellow officers have to stand aside while a stretcher-case is carried by:

'Who's the poor bastard Dai', the guide asked the leading stretcher-bearer. 'Sergeant Gallagher,' Dai answered. 'He thought he saw a Fritz in No Man's Land near our wire, so the silly b—r takes one of them new percussion bombs and shoots it at 'im. Silly b—r aims too low, it hits the top of the parapet and bursts back. Deoul! man, it breaks his silly f—ing jaw and blows a great lump from his silly f—ing face, whatever. Poor silly b—r! Not worth sweating to get him back. (G14 130)

This is Graves at his 'stagiest' and yet, potentially, his most truthful. Using the soldier vernacular, through dialect, the repetition of 'silly', and implied profanity he records his exposure to one of the most devastating types of injuries of the war—the faceless soldier—with an almost farcical tenor. And yet he is able to make the scene believable through his theatricality. Ironically, Graves's play isn't stagey enough as his theatricality is false, frequently sounding like Riding's philosophies in *faux*-translation, as if the play is an act of ventriloquism and misplaced intellectual authority. The play simply lacks Graves's poetic charm. While it is impossible to substantiate the idea that *But It Still Goes On* is a Graves and Riding collaboration, stylistically it appears as such.

Consider the following from Riding's 'prologue' to *Good-bye to All That*, the poem 'World's End': 'The sense has overlapped. / Sense itself is transparent. / Speed has caught up with speed' (G14 3 l. 3–5). These ponderous, philosophically driven lines look outwards, beyond the self to something ongoing and deeply objective. In *But It Still Goes On*, Dick makes a similar and syntactically complex observation: 'Well, take Time for instance. In pre-catastrophic days afterwards always came after before' (Graves *Occupation Writer* 51, 359). In contrast, Graves's musical and picaresque poetics are present in 'End of Play', a poem that observes a similar theme: 'We have reached the end of pastime' (l. 1). But as Michael Kirkham notes in 'Robert Graves's Debt to Laura Riding', the opening line is the only one that attempts the suprapersonal (35). Instead, what Graves gives the reader is a poem of personal experience, of the poet after war, one who tries to articulate the resurrection of self through love: 'Yet love survives, the word carved on a sill' (Graves, 'End of Play' l. 17). But Graves is still engaged with the nightmare of the neurasthenic, describing an execution of the self that prevails: 'Under antique dread of the headman's axe . . . We stare at our dazed trunks at the

block kneeling'. In contrast, Riding, a survivor, though not of war, writes of disembodiment: 'No bodies in bodies stand' (l. 11). Where Riding extolls a sense of being, of utter timelessness, where '[l]ogic has logic' (l. 19), Graves continues to observe a world and existence through the lens of the past, a past fixed from the ground up of the battlefield:

Though life may still seem to dawdle golden
June landscape among giant flowers
The grass to shine as cruelly green as ever,
Faith to descend in a chariot from the sky – ('End of Play' l. 1–4)

Once again, Graves seeks the reconstruction of self after the war, a place wherein grass, at times, shines 'cruelly green' with normalcy. There too, faith belongs to golden June, and Elijah may return again (*The Bible King James Version* 2 Kings 2:11). Where Riding uses prosaic language, Graves returns to the poetic: 'A foolish smiling Mary-mantle blue [sky]' (l. 4), and the classical tropes of chariots and a 'chaste Christ' (l. 12).

The style and content of the play leads me to believe that Riding played a significant part in the composition *But It Still Goes On*. This may explain Graves's (or Graves's/Riding's) failure as a playwright: the dialogue is uneven, message-laden, and sounds theory-driven. In contrast, if one considers that *Good-bye to All That* was spoken aloud to a scribe while Riding was in hospital—that is, out of her daily, direct influence—one can understand the fundamental musicality of the text. Its musical, dialogic performance provides an immediacy missing particularly from the play's first and last scenes. Consider the following passage from *Good-bye to All That*, in which a young officer confides in Graves:

It's not fair, Robert. You remember A Company under Richardson was always the best company. Well, it's kept up its reputation, and the C.O. shoves us in as the leading company of every show, and we get our objectives and hold them, and so we've got to do the same again the next time. And he says that I'm indispensable in the company, so he makes me go over every time instead of giving me a rest and letting my second-in-command take his turn. I've had five shows and I can't go on being lucky every time. The colonel's due for his C.B. Apparently A Company is making sure for him'. (G14 264)

Out of the earshot of his men and his senior officers, Lt. Dadd complains that he and his men are being sacrificed for the careerism of the colonel. The clipped dialogue (of which we only hear one side) reflects the young officer's exhaustion and fear. Protective of his men, he acknowledges that his chances of survival are slim, in entirely believable words that Graves probably remembers verbatim. Though *But It Still Goes On* exposes the complexity of relationships in war's aftermath through triangulation, fractured relationships, and rivalries, and employs some of the conventions of the war narrative genre, such as the loss of innocence (sexually and through suicide), what seems to be missing is Graves's 'technique of truth', musicality, and a poetic voice. The dialogue between Dick Tampion and David Casselis illustrates Graves's ineptitude as a playwright.

In the opening scene the two veterans and friends are talking about Dick's theory of the malaise of modernity, that the 'bottom of [the world] has fallen out I don't mean catastrophe in any tragic sense. Tragedy and comedy both fell through the hole. So did optimism and pessimism. And rebellion and reaction' (*Occupation Writer* 108):

Dick. I can't put it more clearly. If I try to define it in religious terms or social terms or philosophical terms or aesthetic terms or any other terms, it's not the truth.

David. When did it drop out, then? In the War? (109)

The passage, in which the characters discuss truth, continues at length and in a similar didactic and dull tenor. Further—and bizarrely, given Graves's trademark negotiation with truth through half-truths and his insouciance—the static, matter-of-fact dialogue seems to be a mark of the play's failure. In 2015 I gave a copy of the play to a group of undergraduates to read through. Their director, Charlotte Evans, a veteran actor, reported that the first and last scenes drag the entire play down. Some parts of the middle scenes are humorous and convey a 'drawing room farce' sensibility, Evans reports (Evans). The summary of reactions from Evans's actors is that when the play is not used to attempt literary assassinations on his father, sister, Sassoon, and others, it commits the crime of boring its audience.

As this section demonstrates, despite a murder, an attempted murder, and a suicide, *But It Still Goes On* is pedantic and lacks real pathos, one that could have been wrought of Graves's acute sense of sound, one that I suggest in the next section is based on his connection to the poetry and song of childhood. A less self-conscious, more musical writing—one less cynical, or possibly, less truthful (in its desire for relevance based on his and Riding's philosophies)—could have produced a more believable play that evoked the aftermath of war. The next section looks at Graves's connection to the building blocks of his literary sensibility in order to give a deeper understanding of how truth is conveyed through sonic landscape in *Good-bye to All That*. The final section looks at how Graves's poetics engage with fairy tales or nursery rhymes and how this informs and anchors recall, and a type of truth, in *Good-bye to All That*.

3.8 The Heartbeat of the Matter

In his 1920 treatise, W.H.R. Rivers observes that the severity of nightmares experienced by shell-shocked soldiers is 'of exactly the same order of the night-terrors which are so frequent in childhood' (150). Rivers states that the extent of the populations' night terrors is a phenomenon that he has never witnessed in healthy adults, and he proposes that the nightmares represent the 'all-or-none' manifestation of repression of traumatic memory as released through dreams (150). Rivers argues that these men are 'incapable of expressing their fears with words . . . and they release memories and feelings through nightmares the way that children do far back in the process of development' (148), before 'the influence of parents, teachers and tradition' (150). This section looks at how Graves reaches to the poetics of distant childhood—primary-level language, rhyme, and simplistic Grimms'-fairy-tales-like imagery—to control the release of emotions and to recall memories in *Good-bye to All That*. Tonally, Graves's enlistment of a register of childhood throughout his war text is what I identify as the locale of his ethical signature, that is, his truth in the music of his words.

I propose that Graves's early attempts to communicate the feeling of war came through the sonority of fairy-tale and nursery rhyme poetics in his early collection *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917), and through his identification with the Georgian aesthetic. Anticipating criticism, he advises in the opening poem 'To An Ungentle Critic': 'You'll only frown; You'll turn the page / But find no glimpse

of your “New Age / of Poetry” in my worn-out words’ (l. 12–14). Certainly there is nothing in the poems comparable to the hyper-realism of Isaac Rosenberg’s ‘Dead Man’s Dump’ (1917). Instead, Graves juxtaposes storybook poems such as ‘The Caterpillar’ against a war-infused poem, ‘Sorley’s Weather’, both with a simple lexicon and simple imagery. The former is written from the first-person point of view of a caterpillar: ‘I crawl on my high and swinging seat / And eat, eat, eat—as one ought to eat’ (l. 23–24). The latter concerns the poet who is snug by the fire, reading poetry and contemplating returning to the Front: ‘I’m away to the rain-blown hill / And the ghost of Sorley’ (l. 19–20). But the effect of both is what compels a reader such as Michael Longley to wonder how a deceptively simple, nursery-rhyme poem such as ‘Allie’ ‘is . . . so heartbreaking’ (xiv). The poems in *Fairies and Fusiliers*, and ‘Allie’, written in the post-war period, might be seen to provide a clue as to Graves’s conflicted moral and sensual conversion from civilian to soldier to civilian again, and that they offer the reader insight into how Graves organises his war narrative during the war and after, culminating with his dictation of *Good-bye to All That* over a few weeks in the spring and summer of 1929.

After the war, suffering from neurasthenia, Graves collaborated with the illustrator Nancy Nicolson, his wife, and struggled to support his family by taking ‘any writing job to bring in money . . . a series of rhymes for Huntley and Palmer’s biscuits . . . silly lyrics for light opera . . . translations for German and Dutch carols’ (G14 414). Instinctually gravitating to verse, Graves was also responding to the cultural *zeitgeist*. During the war, many volumes of nursery rhymes were published. Initially intended for children, they also resonated with adults. In *Nursery Rhymes for Fighting Times* (1914), Elphinstone Thorpe describes her collection as ‘a memory-waking little volume’ (5). The collection is filled with G. A. Stevens’s propagandistic illustrations for the author’s violent, satiric twists upon old standards such as ‘Ride-a-cock horse’. In Thorpe’s version, ‘Puffing [Kaiser] Billy’ has ‘blood on his fingers and shells for his foes’, and ‘he shall be hated wherever he goes’ (14). Soldiers’ adaptations include ‘Jack and Bill’ poems, by ‘Nil Desperandum’, published in *The Minden Magazine* (Lancashire Fusiliers) (1916):

Jack and Bill
Went up a hill
To see a Frenchman's daughter;
The Censor's here,
And so I fear
I can't say what they taught her. (14)

Through the use of sexual innuendo and bitching soldier-code ('The Censor's here'), the new version of the old nursery rhyme records the bond of humour-identity between soldiers and reflects their extreme youth. The role of nursery rhymes in fixing memories is worth considering in the context of *Good-bye to All That*. In Major Mott's 1916 lecture on the effect of high explosives on the brain, he observes that 'in amnesia, rhymes are recalled very easily, especially if they have been learned early in life' (547). In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves's anecdotes are embedded with small details that reference nursery rhymes or traces of fairy tales. The reader learns that early in the war, Graves's familiarity with popular songs and nursery rhymes, the *lingua franca* of the troops, made him more palatable as an officer to the ranks. He describes how he crosses the class divide early in the war when one of his troops asks him: "You've been to college, sir, haven't you?" (G14 138). Graves responds: 'Yes, I had, but so had Crawshay Bailey's brother Norwich' (138) (Crawshaw being the name of the commanding officer of Graves's battalion). He explains his 'wonderfully witty answer. *Crawshay Bailiey* is one of the idiotic songs of Wales...(Crawshay Bailey himself "had an engine and couldn't make it go"...)' and notes that after that, he 'had no trouble with the platoon at all' (138).

Another reference that resonates with fairy tales is Graves's recollection of 'a bright moonlight night' mission along the Bazentin-High Wood road (G14 267). He sees a dead German soldier lying spreadeagled in the middle of the road, a sergeant major, 'a short powerful man with a full black beard', who 'looked sinister in the moonlight' (267). Though he was dead, Graves felt 'I needed a charm to get myself past him' and remembers that '[t]he simplest way, I found, was to cross myself' (267). Further down the road, Graves sees a number of dead Gordon Highlanders from the same battle. He describes how the soldiers caught in a counter-attack 'had done no more than scrape hollows in the lower part of the bank. To a number of these little hollows wounded men had crawled, put their heads and shoulders inside and died there. They looked

as if they had tried to hide from the black beard' (263). His simple language sounds like reportage in its reference to the dead German, but the singular detail of the 'black beard' evokes a sense of fairy tale that belies the complexity of emotion and exposure to trauma experienced by Graves at the sight of the dead Highlanders. The wounded men are described as if they are children engaged in a game of hide and seek in which they have been tagged 'it' and then 'died there' (263). Characteristically for Graves, there are no bloody details of dismemberment or suffering. Instead, he reaches for the tenor of nursery terror-tales to convey and manage the surreal situation.

Another example of nursery-rhyme references embedded into Graves's text comes in a passage in which he describes waiting for orders to fight: 'Before the shelling had started a tame magpie had come into the trench' (266). Believing the bird was a pet that had belonged to the Germans, he observes, 'It was looking very bedraggled,' and he adds, 'That's one for sorrow' (266). Triggering the memory of the old nursery rhyme, Graves fixes the scene through a common cultural touchstone and provides a mood of foreboding, while at the same time communicating the superstition of soldiers at the front. Randall Jarrell comments, 'Graves had never forgotten the child's incommensurable joys; nor has he forgotten the child's and the man's incommensurable, irreducible agonies' (Jarrell 81). Other soldiers would also reach for the lexicon and imagery of childhood fairy tales to describe wondrously terrible sights of the war; Charles Carrington, a soldier fighting at the Somme, describes the Butte de Warlencourt, a hill so continuously under bombardment it 'became fabulous' (qtd. in N. Saunders, *Matters of Conflict* 10). Carrington reports: 'It shone white in the night and seemed to leer at you like an ogre in a fairy tale . . . it haunted your dreams' (10). Carrington overtly refers to fairy tale and personifies the hill, perceiving it alive, leering, and an 'ogre'.

Devindra Kohli writes: '[T]he traumatised Graves found the poetic value of nursery rhymes in their communal intonation, hypnotic rhythms and condensed thought and symbolism' (Kohli 'Dream Drums' 76). Graves appliqués the simple tropes of the nursery story and the rhythms of the nursery rhyme with combinations of soldiers' intonations, the hypnotic rhythms of the marching song, adapted nursery rhymes, racist patois (he transcribes a story of a Turk ['Turco']) and a French woman: 'Oh la, la, la Johnny, napoo pozzy tomorrow' and

'me get Fritz head tonight' [G14 235–236]), and he even explains to his readers 'rhyming-slang' ('pig's ear' for 'beer' and 'a pint of broken square') (112). In his 1961 *Oxford Addresses*, Graves cautions his Oxford audience to 'let us not undervalue Mother Goose's nursery rhymes, and Edward Lear's nonsense rhymes, and sea shanties, and occasional so-called minor poems by . . . Poe, Stevenson, Longfellow [and] De la Mare' (*Oxford Addresses* 107). This class of poetry, Graves argues, had been denigrated through being labelled 'quaint [and] homely', even though it is well crafted (107). By contrast, contemporary poems are 'one-man-shows intended for the critics, and wholly lacking in quaintness' (107). This identifies the loss of a shared community of poetic voices, exchanged for a closed system of critics and poets writing for one another. This insight into the 'communal intonation' of memory—for what is more memorable than our first nursery rhymes and lullabies?—is what Kohli refers to as 'condensed thought and symbolism' (Kohli 'Dream Drums' 76).

Historical 'encodation' (White 1538) can be made through song, intonation, and ritualistic recitation. For soldiers, this includes marching patterns, regimental songs, commands, the sounds of different types of ordinance and of significant military events, military folklore (such as the apocryphal story of the crucified Canadian soldier), adaptations of nursery rhymes or fairy tales, or even fragments of sound. Shortly before deploying to France, Graves recalls how the enlisted men mock Private Robinson, who refuses to be deployed overseas with the battalion, with 'a popular chorus' (G14 106). They call the shirker—ordered to wear the 'peace-time' red tunic in an attempt at shaming—'Cock Robin', a reference to the heroic figure of the nursery rhyme. They mockingly 'sang a popular [music hall] chorus at him' (106), 'Robin Redbreast', of which Graves reprints two verses. But the song is in its original, unmodified form, unlike the following soldier version, which was recited on the Western Front at the time:

Who killed Cock Robin?
'I,' said the Hun,
'With my machine gun.
I killed Cock Robin.'

And the pilots who were there
Said, 'Fuck it we will chuck it,'

When they heard Cock Robin
Had kicked the fucking bucket.³⁶

Through the encodation of simple sound patterns and end rhymes, such as in this soldier version of 'Cock Robin', and blending them with cultural touchstones from childhood, profanity, and the music hall, a sonic landscape is constructed and committed to memory. This soundscape may later unlock and evoke, powerfully, past experiences or even communal memories that have not been directly lived. In cases of exposure to trauma, Raymond M. Scurfield, a pioneer in post-traumatic stress therapy and research, reports that the traumatic response hooks onto 'noteworthy "time anchors" . . . sights, sounds, or smells that are suggestive of the warzone; certain melodies or lyrics; experiences involving significant losses . . . or conflicts with authority' (Scurfield and Platoni 1). I suggest that Graves embeds time anchors into *Good-bye To All That*, particularly in scenes which incorporate nursery-rhyme symbolism, and it is this consistent cultural coding that differentiates his account from other personal war narratives, such as Blunden's, which is far more introspective and descriptive. His 1917 poem 'Escape' continues to explore the poet out of the nursery, though as one who continues to return to the rhythm, sound, and images from the nursery, the schoolroom, and mythology.

The contrast and combinations of Graves's simple poetic language, his employment of mythology and fairy tale, and the exposure of his own war trauma, pared down through unsophisticated language, provide the reader with Graves's signature of self in transition—a man-boy somehow fixed in timeless war. Dominic Hibberd believes that Graves's use of childish rhymes in his war texts provided the poet with a palette with which he could attempt to address his experience as someone very young thrown into the land of lost innocence. In his 1915 poem 'Free Verse', the soldier Graves writes: 'I now delight' (l. 1) in 'Just any little rhyme / In any little time / That runs in my head' (l. 10–12). He vows that his little rhymes 'no longer shall stand arrayed / Like Prussian soldiers on parade / That march, / Stiff as starch' (l. 14–17). Graves's little rhymes then

³⁶ For more soldier rhymes see 'Brothers in Arms: Soldiers' Songs of the Great War.' The Western Front Association webpage, Tim Kendall's *Oxford Poetry of First World War: an Anthology* (2014), and John Mullen's *the Show Must Go On!: Popular Song in Britain During the First World War* (Chapters 5 and 6).

take on a sinister pallor as he writes of taking 'A merry little rhyme' (l. 34) and how he will 'poke it, / and choke it' (l. 36–7), 'chop and chew' (l. 42), 'hack and hew' (l. 43) and 'weld it into a uniform stanza' (l. 44); the poet will transform the childish free verse, like a new recruit, and through drilling and cutting it down to size and clothing it in the uniformity of the stanza, will ready it for the conformity of the 'Academic extravaganza' (l. 47), or Graves's war of words!

Consistently Graves uses little rhymes that belong to the communal narrative of childhood to evoke innocence and terrors. These are the poetic tools with which he weaves the sonics of his war into scenes of pathos about the post-adolescent experience of war, his generation's devastatingly confused rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Hibberd states: 'If [rhymes] were an attempt to forget, they were none too successful: themes of haunting, fate and death kept recurring' (301). Graves employs a childlike ear and the mythology of the nursery even in his most serious poems preoccupied with his death at the Somme. In 'Escape', Graves addresses his 1916 death and resurrection through classical tropes:

But I *was* dead, an hour or more.
I woke when I'd already passed the door
That Cerberus guards, and halfway along the road
To Lethe, as an old Greek signpost showed. (l. 1–4)

Through the emphatic use of the italicised '*was*', Graves asserts that he had actually died at the Somme, and that after High Woods he passed 'halfway along the road', past the three-headed dog Cerberus to the other side, towards the river Lethe. Graves resurrects the dreadful narrative of his near-death with a simplistic but rich beauty and rhyme in his final stanza:

And sleep lurks in the luscious plum and apple.
He crunches, swallows, stiffens, seems to grapple
With the all-powerful poppy ... then a snore (l. 29–31)

The simple music and images of the words 'plum' and 'apple' could be lifted from a first-grade reading primer, yet they evoke a sense of lusciousness, a simple deliciousness that conjures up how good the very ordinary can taste after a near-death experience. In a scene from *Good-bye to All That*, Graves

recalls lying in bed at a hospital at Heilly and crying when told by a doctor that there was no fresh milk for tea (G14 275). When Graves asks for fresh fruit, the doctor says, 'I have seen no fruit for days' but returns a few hours later and gives him 'two rather unripe greengages' (275). Graves writes: 'I felt so grateful that I promised him a whole orchard when I recovered' (275). In 'Escape', Graves employs chewy, onomatopoeic words such as 'crunch'. He gives us the unexpected rhyme 'grapple', the humorous, onomatopoeic word 'snore', and, in later lines, fairyland images that evoke the beast of death as 'monstrous' and 'hairy', a 'carcass, red and dun' (l. 32–33), the latter evoking the same kind of terror and thrill of a Grimms brothers' fairy tale. These images contrast starkly with the epigraph at the head of the poem, the official newspaper reportage of Graves's restoration to life:

August 6, 1916.—Officer previously reported died of wounds, now reported wounded: Graves, Captain R., Royal Welch Fusiliers.
(‘Escape’ n.l.)

But the juxtaposition of Graves's use of naïve images against the war experience was unsettling for others such as Sassoon. On 21 August 1918, he made the following annotation on Graves's manuscript of *The Patchwork Flag*: 'Book seems short of guts, somehow. I don't like the few grim war things mixed up with all the irresistibly nursery and semi-serious verses . . . It's like turning the pages of a scrapbook. Perhaps you mean it to be' (Sassoon, *Annotations* n.p.). Sassoon adds, however, 'I dunno . . . I'm almost dotty,' admitting he feels that he has lost his critical ability and confidence in himself as a veteran of Craiglockhart. Graves's scrapbook technique follows through to subsequent narratives, as seen in his collection *The Whipperginny* (1923). In the Author's Note to the collection, Graves declares that he is changing direction and advises that readers 'who demand unceasing emotional distress in poetry at whatever cost to the poet' should look elsewhere (v–vi).

Graves's emotional distress, though not of the unceasing kind, was certainly present in his post-war works such as 'The Presence' (1925). The poem describes a post-war home front. In it, Graves turns to the cadence of Biblical language in the opening lines: 'Why say "death"? Death is neither harsh nor kind: / Other pleasures or pains could hold the mind (l. 1–2). The parody of

the popular wedding verse from 1 Corinthians 13:4 sets up the scenario of a dead wife who 'fills the house and garden terribly / With her bewilderment, accusing me' (l. 12–13) and haunts the widower. Written during marital crisis, the poem's safe, rhymed couplets convey a musical irony of an obsessional guilt: 'If she were truly dead' (l. 8), the husband thinks, then perhaps 'Other pleasures and pains could hold the mind' (l. 2). But though the wife is 'Lost beyond recovery and need' (l. 4), she is 'But living still' (l. 5). 'The Presence' is filled with 'reproaches'; in death, the narrator's wife 'pierces' the husband with stares—a verb associated with shrapnel—and he asks the question that resonates, defensively, with survivor guilt: 'Do I still love her as I swear I do?' (l. 12). Images throughout the poem echo with the battlefield as described in *Good-bye to All That*; the wife's body is 'Lost beyond recovery' (l. 4), unburied. She is 'Discarded, ended, rotted underground' (l. 5). She becomes like one of the half million unidentified war dead 'Of whom no personal feature could be found' (l. 6), such as those Graves sees 'buried too near the surface' at Fricourt (G14 244). She is as rotten as the body he crawls over in No Man's Land: 'through our own wire entanglement and along a dry ditch . . . I snatched my fingers in horror from where I had planted them on the slimy body of an old corpse' (G14 169).

'The Presence' appears to express the haunting of one who attempts to communicate an aftermath of war and a wish for the death of the war memory, through the poetic metaphor of the death of a wife. While we know Graves's marriage was troubled at the time he wrote 'The Presence', it is not difficult to imagine that the death he articulates in the poem expresses a desire to bury his war past. As Douglas Day comments, 'such poems as these prompt us to believe that there was more than a little justice in Graves's correlation between his neuroses and his best poetry' (Day 88). The same link could be made between *Good-bye to All That* and how Graves handles his feelings of the war, his memories, through the sonic landscape of his war poetics. The poem illustrates that Graves, through turning towards the domestic, begins to release the controlled emotions that he speaks of in the 1971 interview for *The Listener*: 'I was never afraid. One wouldn't allow it . . . You didn't venture to look deep down' (74). I suggest that it is only through sound that Graves ventures to look into his feelings at all.

Michael Joseph writes of a sense of pervasive 'dread' in Graves's poem 'Child's Nightmare', believing that 'dread is where the influence of War is most intense' (1) in Graves's poetry. Dread was a feeling that would continue throughout Graves's life. In a 1970 letter, Graves writes to his brother Charles about his sense of fractured time and his ill health, implying that the war continued to disturb him: 'My poems continue a bit scary, having broken a time-barrier . . . ill health is wholly psychosomatic in my case' ('Letter to Charles'). The letter alludes to but does not speak directly of his past; Graves's sense of self and time continues to be fractured decades after the war. As Joseph writes, 'Graves both writes and *does not* [italics original] write about the War, itself, just as he writes and does not write about childhood' (9).

In some of Graves's poems, one can discern different versions of scenes he recalls in *Good-bye to All That*. 'Ghost-Raddled' (1919) tells 'clouded tales of wrong / And terror' (l. 3–4), 'lust frightful, past belief' (l. 17), 'of a night so torn with cries' (5), a night of 'Unrestrainable, endless grief' (l. 19). Graves describes a night like this in *Good-bye to All That*, in which he recalls staying at 'the house of a First Battalion friend . . . His elder brother had been killed in the Dardanelles' (G14 289). 'About three o'clock I heard a diabolical yell and a succession of laughing, sobbing shrieks that sent me flying to the door' (290), he reports. A similar sensation is conveyed in 'Ghost-Raddled': 'Honest men sleeping / start awake with glaring eyes, / Bone chilled, flesh creeping' (l. 6–8). In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves tells of awakening and telling his friend (Sassoon) that he is leaving immediately because the noises that have kept him up all night are 'worse than France' (G14 290). The friend reports that his mother has been 'trying to get in touch with my brother' through spiritualism; 'the rappings are most disturbing sometimes', (290). In 'Ghost-Raddled', the poet relocates the scene—'Of spirits in the web-hung room / Up above the stable' (l. 9–10) but records the sound of 'groans, knocking in the gloom / The dancing table' (l. 11–12) of the séance. The house in both the poem and the autobiography are beyond redemption; 'What laughter or what song / Can this house remember' (l. 22–23) he asks in the poem, and in the autobiography, Graves quotes his friend as saying, '[T]he maids think the place is haunted (290). The scene prompted Edmund Blunden to write to Sassoon in November 1929: 'The coarseness of the expression, and cruelty of the journalistic

description of such a distress, will be punished' (*Sassoon and Blunden Letters* 243).

In *Good-bye to All That*, Graves writes that he and Sassoon 'defined the war in our poems by making contrasted definitions of peace' (G14 289). Sassoon used pastoral imagery, whereas 'with me it was chiefly children' (289), and Graves adds that in France, he spent 'much of my spare time playing with the French children . . . I put them into my poems, and my own childhood at Harlech' (289). In 'Recalling War' (1938), Graves embeds his war narrative with childhood imagery, but with a greater emotional detachment:

And we recall the merry ways of guns—
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall;
A sight to be recalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair. (l. 38–46)

Graves mocks war, recalling 'the merry ways of guns' (l. 38). 'What, then, was war?' (l. 11), he asks in the poem, but 'an infection of the common sky' (l. 12). The image of 'guns / nibbling the walls of factory and church' combined with 'Like a child, piecrust' provides the uncanny juxtaposition of the extraordinary state of violence of war with the comfort of the child who sits and nibbles pie. Graves repeats a patchwork of the uncanny—the ordinary and extraordinary—and evokes mirror images of artillery corps 'felling groves of trees' as if they are children felling 'dandelions with a switch'. This recalls an image of wanton, amused destruction witnessed by young soldiers, many of whom are, legally, still children; in *Good-bye to All That*, Graves writes: 'it was fun to see the poplar trees being lopped down like tulips when the whizz-bangs hit them square' (G14 141). With this, Graves conflates the naughty child felling dandelions in the garden with the sheer awe of nineteen-year-old soldiers witnessing the scale of firepower. Graves's ear is informed, intrigued, and assaulted by four and a half years of 'whizz-bangs'; as Michael Longley states, the singsong nature of the nursery rhyme in Graves's work conveys a 'preternaturally acute ear return[ing] us magically to childhood's half-remembered arcanum' (xiv). As Graves returns

the reader to childhood, he provides a language with which to transport the reader through the recalled soundscape of war. Graves's capriciousness, his ability to act as a scribe who records the black humour and language of troops, combined with half-truths, convince the reader to imaginatively engage with the sonic experience of the soldier in the Great War. The result is a text that remains believable to some readers, no matter how often it deviates from the literal truth.

3.9 Conclusion

Good-bye to All That can be seen to aspire to a type of truth via a scaffolding of colloquial speech, references to singing, popular songs, outbreaks of profanity, the intrusion of ordinance, and other noises encountered in the war zone. Additionally, Graves's poetics of nursery rhyme, fairy tales, and song evoke a psychological truth and early childhood memory of a war that attracted the youth of the world to its theatre of operations, including over 250,000 underage British soldiers. Deborah Baker writes that 'scraps of song, nursery rhymes, Biblical passages, Welsh and Irish ditties haunted [Graves] under fire. Singsong fantasies of a fairy's life, however ridiculous they rang in the bloody thunder of war and death, sustained him' (Baker 117). For Graves—one who faced the sights and sounds of total mechanised war, or experienced *in extremis* the pathos and absurdity of war—childhood literature could offer a lexicon of absurdity, of the topsy-turvy, with which to attempt to describe the truth of his war experiences.

Andrew Frayne observes of the war book era that 'more modernist authors and thinkers were starting to reassess [genre] ... and sought alternative traditions' (9). This suggestion dovetails into the argument that to read Graves's war with compassion, or as a project with a sense of 'ethics', one must look across genre and form. I propose that to read Sassoon's war narrative is to read a quartet of novels and poetry. To read Ford Madox Ford is to read a quintet of novels and his essays. To read Blunden's war is, I suggest, to read *Undertones of War*, his poetry and essays. For Graves's war one might read the following sextet of texts (and Graves would be pleased to know that his war narrative took the reader through six pieces of his work—more than his rival-friend Sassoon): as a Preface, one might read the short story 'The Shout' (1926), to set the

psychological metronome of Graves's war; his *apologia*, may be found in 'The Garlands Wither' (1930); the body would include *Good-bye to All That* (1929), followed by the play *But It Still Goes On* (1930), and finally, his epilogue could be the essay, 'Post-script To All That' (1930). To round off the sextet, one could read *Selected Poems by Robert Graves* ed. Michael Longley (2013), within which the reader might discern the long view of the war embedded in Graves's poetry.

But Graves, perhaps, deserves the final say in this chapter. The poet's Great War poem, 'Dawn Bombardment' brings the reader full circle to where this chapter began. In his letter to Eddie Marsh from his 26 July 1916 hospital bed he describes his cheerfulness and wellness feeding like 'wild fire'. And though Graves survived the Somme, the 'visiting angel' of the 'wildfire hair' who 'reassured us', lasted in him forever.

Dawn Bombardment

Guns from the sea open against us:
The smoke rocks bodily in the casemate
And a yell of doom goes up.
We count and bless each new, heavy concussion—
Captives awaiting rescue.

Visiting angel of the wild-fire hair
Who in dream reassured us nightly
Where we lay fettered,
Laugh at us, as we wake—our faces
So tense with hope the tears run down.

In conclusion, I contend that Graves's war narrative is embedded with residual truth through his principle method of truth, the sonics of lullaby, song, nursery rhyme, and conversation. My argument contends that the reader of Great War narrative wishes to glean 'facts', entertainment and, perhaps, reassurance (i.e. of nation state, communal, or familial myth), from the testimony of combatants who were there. The previous chapters looked at witness, testimony and confession, and the negotiation of vocative truth in *Good-bye to All That*, a representative, robust combatant memoir of the Western Front. In the next chapter I pull the narrative back from the front lines into the *zone interdite* (the forbidden zone) wherein

civilians and support trades converged with combatants. The case study is Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929). Borden's narrative of 'vignettes' (TFZ 3), written between 1915 and 1929, describe four years of her work as a VAD in the second battlefield of the surgical wards of the Great War. This work took place in the zone, a 'strip of land immediately behind the zone of fire in which [she] served' (3) and thrived. I suggest that the zone is a performative locale of witness, in which sanctioned disorder in the alternately chaotic and organized theatre of war, offered tremendous opportunity for innovation.

Chapter 4. Mary Borden through *The Forbidden Zone*

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapters I examined the moral considerations of truth and the pressures the artist experiences in the creation, and subsequent critical reception, of the personal war narrative. In this chapter I consider the physical and psychological process and progress of the artist through the theatre of war. I would argue that the compassionate, or empathic reading of the war story requires the reader to identify the use of generic conventions within the story as preparatory to a more nuanced reading. Following an analysis of Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929) using the protocol as outlined, the theme of process, or progress, of the individual entering war and existing in war, came to the fore. I suggest that *The Forbidden Zone* illustrates a war narrative that records the process of becoming someone else through the war experience. Specifically, I argue that the text demonstrates Borden's progress from civilian to active player as manifested through her relationship with the war environment (physical and psychological), the things or materiality of war (objects specific to the war context and landscape) and the actions that she performs in war. In *The Forbidden Zone* (TFZ), the war space is depicted as a place that absorbs much suffering and destruction throughout the war, yet Borden's navigation of 'that old war zone' (*Journey* 5) also represents the zone as a place of breakthrough and innovation. In retrospect she writes:

It is fascinating and instructive to contemplate in retrospect one's minute blind burrowing progress through the dark night of events that we imagine to have been vivid and luminous. I see myself as a very small mole nosing its way with comic assurance through the roaring gloom of that old war zone. (*Journey* 6)

Only with hindsight, after layers of 'twenty-five years of crowded life' (*Journey* 5) and another 'even more terrible' (6) world war, does she depict her 'progress' (5) through the zone as 'blind' and 'burrowing' (6). I suggest that Borden's depiction of self in *The Forbidden Zone* is less mole-like and more lioness. Borden's aptly describes war as 'vivid and luminous', especially with respect to the woman who authored *The Forbidden Zone* and the five wartime poems that form the epilogue of the 1929 edition. In her post-war novel *Jane—Our Stranger* (1923), Borden's protagonist describes the war as a time when '[m]en were changed into soldiers, all alike. Women were turned into nurses.

Their personalities fell from them, they appeared again, a mass of workers, colourless, uniform, with white set faces in professional clothes' (*Jane* 316). The operative here is 'changed' as Borden describes the process of moral and sensual conversion as one of shedding personality and becoming something 'colourless', a 'mass'. Certainly Great War literature abounds with narratives that describe soldiers or nurses feeling they have been reduced to the existence or sentience of insects, rodents, or machines. But the premise of this chapter is that if one may be reduced to the state of the insect or rodent through the war zone, through a more nuanced, empathic reading one may equally observe the actor in war transform into a giant.

Borden's seventeen 'true episodes' or 'fragments' (TFZ 3) from *The Forbidden Zone*, her Second World War memoir, *Journey Down a Blind Alley* (1946), and some of her First World War letters addressed to Louis Spears form the basis of this discussion. To begin, I look at the conventions at work in Borden's narrative. I follow this by examining the complex physical environment in which Borden operated, and the narratives left behind in soldier graffiti as examples of other narratives that provide insight into the multi-layers of war stories embedded within the forbidden zone. These narratives support my central thesis that for Borden, and many others, entering the forbidden zone of war, it was an experience of energy and empowerment, and not solely destruction and loss. Structurally, this chapter evokes an understanding of the experience of the operative in the hyper-sensual forbidden zone as being haphazard, complex, contrary, subversive, and unexpectedly, one of agency. To do this I look at the zone from multiple angles. These include: the underground narrative of the war zone; the act of defining the zone; the zone as a place of innovation through ethical free-for-all; entering and encountering the uncanny of the war zone; time and materiality in the zone; the zone as queer space; gender fluidity within the zone; ward wards; playing dress up for war; fetishism and the pornographic; castration and en-masculation; and finally, the idea of moral witness. Throughout, I discuss Borden's use of narrative voice as she tries to encapsulate this complex environment and experience. To begin, I review the conventions at work in *The Forbidden Zone* to illustrate Borden's adherence to genre.

4.1 The Conventions at Work in *The Forbidden Zone*

The preface to *The Forbidden Zone* provides a micro-study of the ethical concerns and conventions that have been observed in the personal war narrative and outlined in this thesis. The identifiable conventions include ‘credentials’—‘four years of hospital work with the French army’ (TFZ 3). Using military language, Borden signifies her ‘signing on’, as she tells the reader she was ‘stationed . . . behind the zone of fire’ (3). Military terms imply compliance with and belong to a culture based on orders and rank and signal her moral and sensual conversion to the regimented life, a process that requires the sloughing off of self as a prerequisite to service. Though her work was medical, it was structurally embedded within the French military, and the nursing staff acted in a quasi-military hierarchy, with Borden as a type of Officer Commanding.

‘Reality’, or Borden’s relationship with the materiality of the war is present throughout *The Forbidden Zone* and is a central issue of this chapter, while her ‘loss of innocence’ is described by ‘the bare horror of facts’ (TFZ 3). Her mud and blood narrative asserts that she has sustained ‘damage or disillusionment’ in that she is compelled to blur the ‘bare horrors . . . because I was incapable of a nearer approach to the truth’ (3); this, one might argue, functions as a quasi-‘*apologia*’. *The Forbidden Zone* is her ‘shout’ from her ‘return’—though, she implies, ‘these pages’ are intended to communicate for those who may be unable to speak, the *poilus*, rather than solely being her personal statement. Borden predominantly privileges the soldiers’ over her nurses’ narratives, stating that they are the ones who ‘know, not only everything that is contained in [the text], but all the rest that can never be written’.³⁷ In this, she seems to undermine the gravity of her own war experience and especially the narratives of the women who work alongside her. Finally, she provides the ‘epilogue’ in a short collection of poems. The two conventions overtly missing from *The Forbidden Zone* are ‘anticipation’ and ‘readjustment’. This is a result of Borden’s stylistic choice to present her narrative as one of ‘impressions’ (3), using the anonymous nurse narrator, rather than following autobiographical convention.

While Borden’s preface adheres to many of the identifiable generic conventions, it also illustrates the three major themes that underpin the genre of

³⁷ Acton and Potter identify this as a feature of nurses’ and other medical personnel’s accounts throughout the 20th century—see *Working in a World of Hurt: Trauma and Resilience in the Personal Narratives of Medical Personnel in War Zones* (2015).

Great War narratives as outlined in this thesis: truth, process, and form. Certainly all writers are preoccupied with these themes, but in the context of war, there are three competing narratives—the meta of the war, the meso of the unit, and the micro of the individual. The combination of these three potentially creates extra pressures for the artist attempting to recount her or his personal war narrative. Borden addresses truth and form throughout the preface; in the opening paragraph, she unambiguously claims truth, telling her readership that her seventeen vignettes and five-poem epilogue are ‘true episodes that I cannot forget’ (TFZ 3). Yet she does not address the fallibility of memory, though she admits that five of the ‘stories’ have been ‘written recently from memory’—a time lapse of over a decade since the events she ‘recount[s]’. In the second paragraph, she describes her ‘stories’ as ‘a collection of fragments’ (3)—that is, they are incomplete pictures, which brings to mind the question: What truth is Borden leaving out of the narrative? In the third paragraph, Borden issues her most contradictory statement of all: she states that she has ‘softened the reality [of her war stories] in spite of myself’ (3). With this statement she admits to modifying the reality, the harshness of the experience, despite having said that she feels she has an imperative to tell the unvarnished truth—that is, a mud and blood narrative.

Formally, Borden reveals that she has organised ‘these impressions’ into ‘fragments of a great confusion’ and has made them, aesthetically, ‘unbearably plain’ because ‘I was incapable of a nearer approach to the truth’ (3). Borden further contradicts her claim that she has ‘not invented anything’ and ‘[a]ny attempt to reduce [these stories] to order would require artifice on my part and would falsify them’, then adds that a ‘dimmed reality [is] reflected in these pictures’ (TFZ 3). The irony of this opening statement to *The Forbidden Zone* is that her material is self-conscious, and her fragments are anecdotes rather than pastiche. Later, writing from the perspective of 1946, she is unwilling to, or incapable of, fully portraying ‘those years of unparalleled slaughter’ (*Journey* 9). Twenty-five years after the Great War, she recalls that ‘during a battle there would be as many as eight hundred men, in long rows under the peak of that shed’; it was ‘a dreadful place under the flickering light of our hurricane lanterns’ (9). Her truth similarly flickers, as does the voice of the narrator of *The Forbidden Zone*, through its variable tone and point of view.

Borden signs the Preface of *The Forbidden Zone* 'The Author', rather than Mary Borden, or Madame Mary Borden-Turner-Spears (as she was in 1929), or *La Diréctrice, L'Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No. 1*. The absence of her formal signature and ambiguity of the designator 'author' suggests that what follows may not be autobiographical, or testimony, but rather a recreation of scenes, amalgamations, or inventions. Through the combination of *apologia*, the mask of 'The Author', and the ventriloquism of her anonymous nurse narrator, Borden potentially faces down any anticipated enmity from critics or family that her publication may risk. This technique sheds light on the nurse-narrator's transformation from an individual observer to an intensely capable Boudicca of the bedpan, without implicating the real Lady Mary Borden-Turner-Spears. But the audience she wishes to please is ostensibly the same as Jean Norton Cru's, 'the poilus' (3). The French soldiers are, she writes, the ones she has 'dared to dedicate these pages to—"the poilus"' (TFZ 3). Using the modal verb 'dared', Borden acknowledges the risks of criticism but also asserts that she presents her text with humility to those whom she perceives as having really suffered—the French soldiers. This is one of the book's greatest flaws, one that will be looked at later in the chapter: the overall omission of her female staff's stories.

The preface, Borden's opening statement of her war narrative, is a self-conscious act of narration and modernist experimentation that foreshadows, through a dozen first-person pronouns, that the underlying process of the war for Borden was one of becoming an omnipotent 'I'. Through the collective war experience, Borden is empowered with the possession of agency. The preface contains clues which may help us to understand the process of the artist in war: Borden tells us that the title *The Forbidden Zone* was chosen because this was the 'strip of land immediately behind the zone of fire'; '[w]e were moved up and down inside . . . [O]ur hospital unit was shifted from Flanders to the Somme, then to Champagne, and then back again to Belgium, but we never left *La Zone Interdite*' (TFZ 5).³⁸ For Borden, as for soldiers, the act of moving 'up and down inside' the hyper-kinetic war zone, and the actions and reactions of the

³⁸ The term '*La Zone Interdite*' is found in few contemporary French sources and maps that I surveyed. According to Colonel (retired) Phillip Robinson of the Durand Group, a historian and author of the Western Front, the area was known as 'the zone des armées' (P. Robinson, conversation with the author, April 2015, Western Front).

individual to the physical and psychological landscape of war, led to a new persona. But identifying that persona is complex in the context of the geographic and literary legacies of the Great War as evidenced in the following discussion of the lesser-known war space, the underground.

4.2 Beneath the Forbidden Zone

In contrast to the presence of many kilometres of discernable trenches at the former Front, a visit to the former forbidden zone of Northern France and Flanders reveals few traces of the locale as the site of the once lively culture of the mobile hospital units. At Bray-sur-Somme, nothing remains of the largest military hospital in the French army—Mary Borden's. Instead, one finds the remains of trenches, craters, and graveyards, all emblematic of destruction. Yet the multi-layered war zone contains an astonishingly complex narrative that encompasses much more, as Borden's witness to the work of the surgical unit testifies. While Borden's war texts depict the Great War experience as a 'dark night of events', she frequently alludes to the bright light of her time in the war space, one that includes the exhilaration of the 'roaring gloom' of the Front (*Journey* 6). Commenting that the 'prevailing meta-narrative' of the war is one of 'victimhood and trauma', Christopher Schultz observes that 'If one returns to the trenches . . . one encounters a sentiment not always of victimhood, but sometimes of empowerment and control' (Schultz 564-5). Certainly, as my 2015 investigation into the soldier narrative of graffiti in the narrow, dimly lit white chalk souterrains and tunnels under Vimy Ridge revealed, the predominant narrative of thousands of carvings and drawings on the surfaces is one of regimental loyalty, empowerment, adventure, humour, and sheer pragmatism, rarely of trauma. By looking at this energetic underground narrative, I suggest one may have a greater understanding of the war culture that Borden clearly enjoyed and fully participated in.

Modern conflict archaeologist Andrew Hawkins, of the Durand Group (with whom I toured the souterrains of the Western Front) reports that he has not found a single piece of graffiti protesting the war, maligning the enemy, or denigrating superior officers in over 1,700 pieces he and his team have catalogued in the Maison Blanche souterrains. Hawkins writes: 'Through their graffiti and carvings they had the opportunity to express disquiet about the events unfolding around them; that they choose not to is surely a sign that they

understood the situation better than most, that their morale remained high and that they needed to get on with the war' (Hawkins 52). Another conflict archaeologist with the Durand Group, Matthew Leonard, observes the differing styles of graffiti: the prosaic name, rank, and serial numbers of the British; the religious or national pride of the French; and German 'notations in the chalk encountered during fieldwork range from images of imperial iconography to practical signposting' (Leonard 80).

During my tours of the Goodman Subway, a tunnel that runs from kilometres behind the lines to the Front, I had the chance to spend several days underground with Durrand Group archaeologists and bomb disposal experts examining hundreds of carvings, and some ink drawings on the walls of the underground. Many of these were particularly finely made and evoked a sense of homeland, as in the carving of a sailboat, or the regimental home or badge, or the spiritual home of the memorial cross (Figure 1). The sense that I had of these battlefield sites—virtually unchanged for a century because of their danger and inaccessibility—was an environment strangely alive with the creative energy of those who had inhabited them long enough to carve these beautiful souvenirs; some of these men had been temporarily housed there, then safely transported to the Front and back on the subway, while others served extended periods of time there as 'listeners', engineers, and medics.



Figure 1. Three pieces of soldier 'graffiti' in the Maison Blanche souterraine at Neuville-Saint-Vaast, France. Photograph: S.M. Steele April 2015.

Overwhelmingly, the textual and visual narratives that I read and observed underground were not of trauma; though the white chalk caverns are cold and dimly lit, the sites feel less tomb and more womb—that is, spaces of refuge or even gestation. The graffiti I saw overwhelmingly illustrated an expectant

energy rather than one of mourning and grief.³⁹ The graffiti depicts fealty, but it also depicts love, and even farm animals, and humour, such as the inked drawing of a soldier having sexual relations with a pig (an NCO perhaps). In these texts one can observe the subversive humour, or satire, of the soldier in the tunnels at the Front awaiting or returning, with no sense of trauma. This narrative, I suggest, is not fully known, and I suggest that it is a narrative that might underpin what I suggest is the empathic reading of Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* as far more than of trauma.

Santanu Das describes the *The Forbidden Zone* as a “traumatised” text *par excellence*, with sentences ‘hammered out’ as ‘an act of penance’ or a ritual of ‘atonement’ (*Touch and Intimacy* 223). But Das’s perception of Borden’s writing as ‘a mode of recovering and transmitting traumatic memory’ through the modernist aesthetic (223), is more applicable to the plotlines of Borden’s post-war works that may be perceived as manifestations of post-traumatic stress. These novels present circular, repeated narratives, with temporal and memory gaps, confusion, and a pathological revisiting of the time of excitement and engagement, reflect what Cathy Caruth refers to as the ‘endless testimony’ (62) in search of restless resolution. The loop of memory may be observed in Borden’s post-war novels, *Sarah Gay* (1931) and *Jane—Our Stranger* (1923), in which she retells a story of marriage breakdown, war, injury, love affairs, and a protagonist who is always in the role of the ‘outsider’.

In *Journey Down a Blind Alley*, Borden attempts to re-enact or ‘confront’ her previous war experiences, although she states that she ‘could not tell a coherent story if I would of my life in the French army during the First World War’ (6). But memory gap clearly does not prevent Borden from retelling her story in four succinct pages—she remembers particularly the most dramatic experiences at Bray-Sur-Somme, and ‘the early adventure [that] began almost by accident’ in which she was ‘wafted . . . as if by magic to Dunkirk’ (6). Borden’s signature, the ethical heart of her narrative, should not be read solely as one of trauma; certainly her work displays ‘a kind of ‘symptomatic writing . . . of the trauma of nursing’, but this should not be confused with ‘unwitting’ or ‘unconscious testimony’, as Margaret Higonnet suggests (Higonnet 101).

³⁹ From the thousands of tattoos I saw on soldiers during my work with the army, I think it is reasonable to say that the iconography of the underground and the iconography of Canadian soldiers’ tattoos share similar themes of regimental fealty.

Though *The Forbidden Zone* is at times harrowing to read, particularly through the use of the narrator's chilled, detached voice, as in 'Paraphernalia', it is not a study in victimhood. Borden remains clearly in charge and enjoys it. In 'Blind', Borden's narrator must triage, and make Solomon-like decisions:

I was there to sort them out and tell how fast life was ebbing in them. [. . .] The dying men on the floor were drowned men cast up on the beach, and there was the ebb of life pouring away over them, sucking them away, an invisible tide [...] If a man were slipping quickly, being sucked down rapidly, I sent runners to the operating rooms [. . .] It was my business to know which of the wounded could wait and which could not. I had to decide for myself. (*TFZ* 95)

In this passage Borden's sense of the empowered self, 'I', is at its most heightened as she describes the act of reading how much life remains in the wounded and how she must sort those who might live from those who will certainly die. Through her actions and reactions in the dynamic atmosphere of the surgical hospital she learns: 'If I made any mistakes, some would die on their stretchers on the floor under my eyes who need not have died' (95). For Borden, the forbidden zone is a place of power and opportunity. Where Higouret reads the nurse memoir from the point of view that 'triage came at a cost to those who performed it' (98), *The Forbidden Zone* presents a text of empowerment and authority earned through the mastery of triage and numerous medical acts, or performances, made in the public venue of the surgical ward near the front lines. I suggest that through the nobility of moral witness and actions that one may also find some sense of redemption, certainly of self, and perhaps something greater than oneself within the forbidden zone of war. But for Borden, self-witness, particularly as an 'underground' lover, informs an understanding of the complex experience of war and the author's narrative, *The Forbidden Zone*.

4.3 Dispatches from the Zone

From early 1917, Mary Borden wrote dozens of letters to her new lover, Captain Louis Spears, a British liaison officer, from her hospital unit behind the front lines. During this time, she frequently retreated to her 'chalet', a private, portable hut (Figure 2) that she had installed in relative isolation from the other buildings within the compound of the hospital she funded and managed on

behalf of the French army. Some of the experiences that Borden recorded *in situ* form the basis of *The Forbidden Zone*, and details of this time appear in her post-war novels and memoir. While the public space of publication offers a sense of Borden the Volunteer Aid Detachment worker and her changing sense of identity and purpose from civilian volunteer to expert, like soldier graffiti, her personal letters reveal the private woman's interior experience of undergoing analogous and fundamental changes through her work in the war zone.



Figure 2. 'The Chalet', Mary Borden's hut in Mobile Surgical Hospital No 1., Western Front, 1917–1918. Source: Australian War Memorial website (public domain)

In a letter to Spears written whilst she was lying 'on a very hard, narrow bed', Borden writes: 'Think of me as a nun, cloistered in a tiny hut that is streaming with rain' ('Letter to Louis Spears' file 1 of 3, n.d.). She clearly enjoys the fantasy of 'the severity of cloistered life because she [referring to herself in the third person] knows that one day she will escape, straight to the arms of her lover'. She describes herself as 'a nun, cut off from the world, who goes to sleep in the company of voluptuous dreams' ('Letters to Louis Spears' file 1 of 3, [n.d.]). Borden's description of herself as a celibate, a nun, when in fact she was a married mother, illustrates the highly charged environment of the war zone where the opportunity for role-play, sexualized or not, exists perhaps more overtly than in the rigid, class-conscious society of pre-war London. Certainly, as we see in Figure 3, her costume, her uniform, lends itself to this fantasy.



Figure 3. Portrait of Mary Borden by Clovis Trouille, 1915.
Historial de la Grande Guerre, Peronne, France (photograph by S.M. Steele)⁴⁰

In another letter to Spears, Borden breathlessly describes their affair as having ‘a geography all our own’ (‘Letters to Spears’ n.d.). She lists the locales of assignments, including Bray-sur-Somme, Amiens, and Paris, and tells Spears that these are ‘the places I remember because of you’. Like many new lovers, Borden experiences the geographies of militarily strategic, as well as well-known places, as if for the first time; the love affair, like war, sharpens her senses of surroundings and gives everything a fresh appearance. She writes, ‘I was born in your arms—and I would die there—in that place I love and know so well,’ and all is of ‘phenomenal newness’ (‘Letters to Spears’ file 2 of 3, n.d.). Her moral and sensual conversion to the intensity of the war zone is eloquently illustrated in these letters. While much of what Borden writes echoes recurrent themes of love affairs in war—longing, separation, worry, the recollection of intense visits unfolded in a series of rooms and spaces over compressed periods of time and sometimes in physical danger where one might actually ‘die’ in another’s arms—what is notable in the context of this chapter is that the affair was born within the geographies of Borden’s self-created mobile army hospital and her war-specific spaces. Borden’s creative journey was purchased, and being there was, as she wrote to her mother, ‘the thing that every woman in England would give her eyes to get and can’t get’ (qtd. in Conway 41–2).

⁴⁰ Trouille identifies his subject as ‘The American Nurse Madame Borden Turner at the front of the Somme 1915’ [translation mine], but this appears to be an error in dating—in 1915, Borden served in the requisitioned casinos, the typhus hospitals near Dunkirk. After the establishment of her mobile hospital, she was relocated to Rousbrugge, Flanders, in July 1915. She did not move to Bray-sur-Somme until October 1916, three months after the beginning of the Battle of the Somme.

With money, personal drive, stamina, and constant creativity, Borden decorates her war; she writes to Spears: 'Tomorrow I shall put up cretonne curtains and have the floor scrubbed. But how to give this whole ugly show style? It must be done—Green paint—tubs of geraniums—some trees in pots' ('Letters to Spears' file 2 of 3, [n.d.]). Borden's insistence that 'it must be done' includes grafting cretonne—a blowsy, cheap, albeit homey fabric—onto the prosaic windows of the 'whole ugly show', her war hospital's wards. But Borden's egotism, as a woman of action, is such that she perceives her task of lending 'style' as extending to the bigger 'show', the war. She manages the war zone by having floors scrubbed, installing potted geraniums, and having walls painted a life affirming green. In *The Forbidden Zone*, one learns that the beds had 'coverlets . . . from Selfridges', 'two shillings apiece' (105), and that the coverlets 'made the difference sometimes between a man's slipping away or back into the world when he awoke' (105)—such is the power of normalcy, or home, and, perhaps, Borden's good taste in the time of war.

For Borden, war is a domestic affair and she is the self-proclaimed Chatelaine of the Somme. Borden's narrative illustrates her total engagement with war, an engagement that extends to the creation and management of the acts that occur within the spaces she, her staff, and her patients inhabit. The creative impulse of the war aesthetic that Borden conceptualises while operational within the zone is revisited through the *sui generis* literary arrangement of *The Forbidden Zone* in which she arranges her literary vocabulary like furniture. Before the war, Borden was a popular novelist, a creator, and a decorator who though successful, gravitated towards the artistic practices of others. In peacetime, she cultivated relationships with the avant-garde and hosted literati such Ford Madox Ford, E.M. Forster, Gertrude Stein, and painters such Percy Wyndham Lewis. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein recalls that 'Mary Borden-Turner had been and was going to be a writer. She was very enthusiastic about the work of Gertrude Stein and travelled with what she had of it and volumes of Flaubert to and from the front' (170). Stein caustically portrays Borden as an artistic wannabe, a hanger-on. Operating in the war zone, however, enabled Borden to create on a previously unimaginable scale. Where in peacetime she proposed creating a

gallery for Wyndham Lewis's paintings, in the Great War her own canvas was of an unprecedented scale—war size.

In *Journey Down a Blind Alley*, Borden recalls being offered 'my own hospital' (7) after tearfully expressing her frustration with her early VAD experiences in the Dunkirk typhus hospital:

I dashed off a letter to General Joffre on a sheet of hotel note paper offering on certain conditions to equip a field hospital of a hundred beds for the French Army. Four months later the huts of *l'Hopital Chirurgicale Mobile No. 1* were set up in a field in Flanders outside the village of Ruysbrock. (*Journey* 8)

Borden's bargain with Joffre entailed purchasing 'the complete equipment of a surgical hospital of 100 beds on the understanding that the French Army . . . would provide the officers, N.C.O.'s and orderlies and appoint me as *directrice*' (8). Significantly, Borden demanded that she have 'absolute authority over all women employed in the hospital and the right to recruit my own nurses' (8). With recognition and acquisition of total power over her female staff, Borden asserts that 'I was confident that the hospital would be a success' (8). The hospital was 'unique, an experiment that was watched by envious eyes and expected to fail', an experiment that 'grew out of all recognition' (8). In entering the war zone, Borden discovered an environment in which quick actions and reactions counted—so unlike the introspective pre-war world of the London literati. Through war, as her letters and *The Forbidden Zone* attest, Borden had finally found her creative *métier*, an outlet for tremendous creative energy and the success she longed for in peacetime but never quite found as a person of literary *gravitas*.

4.4 Defining the Zone

In the fragment, 'The Square', Borden observes a thriving market town at the literal crossroads of war and peace, in which 'a struggle is going on between the machines of war and the people of the town' (TFZ 17). The army and the citizens of the town are vying for access to the square on a Saturday market day. Borden's narrator looks out a window and observes in the square below men 'lying in the dark canvas bellies of the ambulances staring at death' (17). The narrator observes that the soldiers' suffering is almost invisible to the women and children, 'busy with their market' (17). Yet it is not entirely invisible, as the women 'try to push the monsters away' (17). The narrator comments:

‘The business of killing and the business of living go on together in the square beneath the many windows, jostling against each other’ (18). The forbidden zone is alive with commerce, innovation and hyper-productivity, especially in Borden’s surgical unit, a teaching hospital situated near the Front with its endless supply of subjects.

Where the normative falls there is tremendous opportunity, often born of necessity, for accelerated innovation, change, and agency. This applies to the realm of literature, resulting in convergent styles as well as transitional literary texts and forms. Max Saunders writes that *The Forbidden Zone* is ‘a heavily stylized and aestheticized set of vignettes, testifying not only to the first hand experience on which it is clearly based, but also to [Borden’s] contacts with pre-war modernists writers and artists’ (*Self Impression* 162). He suggests that Borden’s account, with its unnamed nurse-narrator, needed a highly fictionalised approach to the war ‘that would otherwise be unbearably close [and] impossible to achieve any aesthetic distance from’ (162). But Borden’s aesthetic control appears to be both a self-conscious performance for a literary audience and a distancing from the material. Her performance employs variable literary genres and narrative tenors, providing a different approach to truth than through a conventional personal war narrative with a beginning, a middle part, and an end. This, I suggest, echoes the malleable forbidden zone.

The zone is a transitional social space, a social product that acts as a type of contact zone at the psychological and physical level. The dominant culture in Borden’s forbidden zone is the ostensibly ‘ordered’ military culture with its uniforms, chains of command, rites, rituals, language, territory, *matériel*, and laws, while subordinates are represented by civilian actors, observers, and auxiliaries in paramilitary roles. The zone is a space in which actions and duties, while often carefully scripted, frequently require a high level of improvisation—Borden, a civilian who conducted triage, would never have had such access to life-and-death decision making in hospitals located outside the zone. In the zone there is a margin of tolerance for deviation or variation. The VAD Borden presents is a narrator who is alternately a healer, an interpreter, a tour guide (‘Come, I’ll show you’ [TFZ 7]), a dramatist (‘In the Operating Room’ 85), a voyeur (‘*Enfant de Malheur*’), a narcissist (‘Unidentified’), and a renegade.

Above all, Borden is the star of hospital theatre. And for Borden, this is an exciting place to be as other writers observed.

During the war Edith Wharton wrote:

War is the greatest of paradoxes: the most senseless and disheartening of human retrogressions, and yet the stimulant of qualities of soul which, in every race, can seemingly find no other means of renewal. Everything depends, therefore, on the category of impulses that war excites in people. (53)

Wharton was correct when she observed how men and women from over one hundred nations brought with them an unprecedented mix of cultures and skills into the often close and pressurised environments found within the war zones. This nexus of culture and craft contributed to the febrile environment of losses and gains observable in many wars. Borden's 'vignettes' offer a literary space wherein the empathic reader may revisit and potentially understand the complexities of this difficult, important terrain. The materiality and voice of Borden's narrative mark it as one of the most effective narratives of Great War literature; it is a Baedeker to 'the festering bowels of the earth' ('Unidentified' I. 21–2), the body of war, but it is also a guide to a woman artist's sensual and moral conversion to something that resembles what Brian Lande describes as the *military habitas* (Lande 97); this, for Borden, temporarily at least, was a locale of agency. In the next section I contextualise the Great War as a moveable event that occurred during the already transitional era at the beginning of the century.

4.5 A War Caught Between Ages

In *War Surgery* (1915), a comprehensive guide for First World War surgeons, General Delorme noted the presence on the battlefields of an unusual classification of 'cold steel' wounds made 'with sharp serrated edges' (2). Wounds from bayonets, knives, swords, and lances had rarely been seen 'in recent wars', including the 1870 Franco-Prussian war in which Delorme had been a young infantryman (2). The injuries had increased 'in number in the proportion of 5 per cent' (2) in the first two years of the Great War. These injuries warranted special attention, and it was Delorme's job to teach new war surgeons how to treat these seemingly anachronistic injuries in an era of

mechanised warfare. The medical system was clearly caught between eras. By early 1915, medical corps were forced to mobilise en masse towards the Front after it became clear that they were fighting a twentieth-century war with nineteenth-century medical protocols; thousands of soldiers were dying of shock, bleed out, and sepsis while en route to the well-organised hospitals located far behind the lines at the coast (Mayhew 5–6). Among those leaving the coast and heading towards the ‘bleeding edge, the trenches’ of ‘war . . . growling beyond the horizon’ (TFZ 7) was the VAD Borden.

The mobilisation of medics, compounded with the environment of opportunity, twinned with necessity, produced a febrile operational zone of experimentation and innovation. Medical developments of this period include Marie Curé’s mobile X-ray unit, transfusion, triage, mobile surgical units, and numerous new surgical protocols. H. Winnet Orr (1877–1956), author of *An Orthopedic Surgeon’s Story of the Great War* (1921), writes:

The war gave us a marvelous opportunity to learn something about accident—injury—reconstruction—orthopedic surgery. The war hospitals were an enormous laboratory for surgery. Many experiments were tried. The careful students learned much. Those who saw a great deal and worked hard arrived at certain conclusions.
(10)

When we read between the lines, however, a potentially more revelatory, or possibly, more sinister narrative presents itself in the loosening of ethics as expressed by Orr, and as described in a passage by Remarque in which a surgeon is ‘overjoyed’ at the opportunities the war presents (Remarque 259). The surgeon, Remarque tells the reader, ‘goes absolutely crazy whenever he can get hold of anyone’ to perform an experimental procedure upon: ‘what he wants is little dogs to experiment on, so the war is a glorious time for him, as it is for all the surgeons’ (259). The zone the medics entered was a locale of sanctioned disorder, their presence as civilians allowed, their deployments ordered by military protocols, but the presence of overwhelming numbers of casualties created tremendous chaos and the necessity and opportunity for improvisation. The surgeons and medical students at Borden’s unit responded with alacrity. She captures this ethos in *The Forbidden Zone* when she describes the narrator announcing to a surgeon who has just finished a major

operation that there are 'three knees, two spines, five abdomens, twelve heads. Here's a lung case—haemorrhage' (100) that need attention. Patients are reduced to parts.

Within the pressurised zone of a war surgery unit such as Borden's, an environment too busy for normal surveillance and ethical reviews, one learns of surgeons experimenting with anatomy and surgical techniques, and untrained nurses such as Borden who perform triage and treatments (95). 'Where's that knee of mine?' (100) a surgeon calls out mid-operation. The nurse replies that another surgeon has boiled it up in a saucepan 'for an experiment' (100). In an environment where norms break down, opportunities for experimentation and innovation open up, not only in the technical field of medicine, but also in art, as observed in Nevinson's attestation to war being a rich subject for art; and this opening up of new artistic methods is evident in the work of painters such as Otto Dix or André Breton, whose work in psychiatric wards filled with shell-shocked soldiers contributed to the development of Surrealism. If, as the German surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch wrote, war is a 'bloody teacher' (qtd. in van Bergen 190), it is also a bloody rich subject for the artist, a writer such as Borden, and presents the ethical dilemma of the exploitation of subject—of self, and others.

Borden's hospital was filled with opportunity for innovators, as it 'throbbed and hummed . . . like a dynamo . . . [with] operating rooms ablaze; twelve surgical equips . . . boilers [that] steamed and whistled' (TFZ 146). In these lines we hear the war hospital machine, powered by the adrenaline of those living and creating within the war zone. Her unit includes 'a French C.O., a British *directrice* [though she is in fact American], French surgeons, doctors, chemists and administrative officers, British and American nurses' (*Journey* 8). What begins as 'a pleasant affair of neat huts standing firmly in a green field' in Flanders 'suddenly' becomes 'a vast enclosure resembling a lumber camp surrounded by seas of yellow mud' (8). It is in this space that Borden is, perhaps, most alive, as she is utterly purposeful in her work in the heady atmosphere combined with the presence of death and threat by bombardment. If the war was a 'bloody teacher', the schoolroom of war required personalities willing to improvise, gain new vocabularies, and assume new personae. The

process and struggle of becoming an operative in the forbidden zone is observable through Borden's letters and public narratives.

4.6 Stranger in a Strange Land

Borden's first war vignettes and war poems were published in the United States under the *nom de plume* Bridget Maclagan; later she published as Mary Borden-Turner, and finally as Mary Borden. Borden varies her authorial signature as much as she varies narrative perspectives in *The Forbidden Zone*. Through an anonymous narrator Borden is able to write about herself in a biographical yet creative mode; an anonymous narrator differentiates the speaker of the text from Lady Louis Spears (Borden), the diplomat's wife, thus preserving his privacy; further, she is free to portray the nurse, like Graves, as an anti-hero, a super woman, and a medical warrior. Certainly, and perhaps predictably, the tenor of prose sections of *The Forbidden Zone* bears little resemblance to Borden's numerous wartime love letters to Spears. The bulk of these letters portray an increasingly needy, sensual, selfish, and remarkably repetitive or confused woman who writes manipulative messages:

But I wanted you. I wanted you to come. I am terribly disappointed—I've no more courage now—I had just enough to bring me this far. . . . You tell me to get well & that you will come—but it is now—now that I need you—it has been—I can't explain but I've no more strength & no more courage . . . how could you not come B—? Nothing can ever take away this hurt that's hurting me so—I'm hurting once too much . . . I am frightened—I am afraid you will not be there—I am afraid that you will never be there—where I am – May. ('Letters to Louis Spears' 1 of 3 files, n.d.)

This letter, quite representative of her letters to Spears, resounds with hyper-emotionality. In the same way Borden uses anaphora in her poetic epilogue to *The Forbidden Zone*, she repeats, 'I wanted you. I wanted you to come,' begging that 'I need you' ('Letters to Louis'). Frequently Borden writes to Spears messages such as that without him she has 'no more strength' nor 'courage' ('Letters to Louis'); the extremity of emotion—she is 'frightened', 'afraid', 'hurt', 'hurting'—bears witness to the pressures of her war. Unlike her published narrative, the private space of the intimate love letter (as for most of us) is where she expresses her fears and desires, yet the letters appear consistently manipulative—she is frequently 'disappointed' that he has not come

to her. Borden's love letters rarely detail her war work—a major disappointment for the researcher looking for evidence of *The Forbidden Zone*—with the exception of a letter in which she announces details of her new hospital at Bray-Sur-Somme:

My hospital is to be a big affair—800 beds. I am increasing my nursing staff to forty. I cannot get free from it—& it is as if I were a dead person running it.
I am as if dead—my aching body is lying here tossing and feverishly throbbing—and my soul & my heart are always looking for you. It is all incredible & dreadful.
I wonder, since it is not true that I can be with you—since fate is lying so cruelly with me—why I did not die the other day. I must have lived in order to find out and know all the secret and profound facts of pain—suffering—longing—guilt—helplessness—loveliness—despair. I am afraid that I am writing like a mad person-but-dear-I am not very sane-I am merely an ill-thing.... ('Letters to Louis Spears' n.d.)

Though she supplies Spears with some details of her considerable war work, she quickly defaults to a very young tenor rather than that of a twenty-nine-year-old married woman. She looks to Spears for fulfilment, definition, escape, and sympathy, despite her position as *Madame la Directrice*. Her heart is no longer in the task, she is 'dead', 'ill', 'mad', and defaults to guilt, despair, and fatalism. Desperate to understand the meaning of the experience, Borden attempts to discern why she is suffering. While one can certainly read into these letters the presence of well-developed post-traumatic stress (repetition, depression, fear, illness), she is able to recognise that the war experience is 'incredible' ('Letter to Louis' file 1 of 1), even if she is referring solely to their love affair playing out against the dramatic backdrop of the Great War.

Unsurprisingly, in contrast to the intimate space of love letters, Borden's 1929 public narrative is controlled even in dramatic portrayals of scenes from the wards, such as the 'last act of the drama' (TFZ 60) of the dying *Enfant de Malheur*, or the 'last fumbling and desperate act' (70) of a suicide-driven soldier who calls out for 'Rosa' through his bullet-shattered mouth before he dies. Borden use of various rhetorical styles compel the reader to question that most of *The Forbidden Zone* was 'written between 1914 and 1918' (3); Borden admits that 'five stories' were 'written recently from memory' (3). Some of *The Forbidden Zone* appeared in *The English Review* and *The Atlantic Monthly*

during the war; the larger manuscript was withdrawn owing to censorship, but the most powerful works, 'Paraphernalia', 'Blind', and 'The Operating Room', appear so different, stylistically, that they suggest a later composition date. 'Blind' reveals a detached, professional voice of a woman utterly at home in her home-away-from-home in the war zone: 'my kitchen' is stocked with 'my syringes and hypodermic needles and stimulants' (TFZ 94). She is engrossed in work and purpose, she is 'in a trance' (99), managing a unit with a mortality rate reduced from thirty to nineteen per cent: 'We could revive the cold dead' with 'zinc pails of hot water and slabs of yellow soap and scrubbing brushes' (99). Where Robert Graves is Lazarus, Borden, singularly, and her *équipe*, collectively, represent the Christ-medic capable of raising the dead to life.

Where Graves repeatedly employs the smokescreen of the autobiographical to portray himself as officer and anti-hero, Borden's uses the anonymous nurse-narrator to portray an observer and the observed. Her identity as an official hero is reinforced through identification with the military; she 'serves', 'takes leave', and the hospital ward 'is the second battlefield' (TFZ 97) of the war. In contrast to Graves's battle for men's lives in the field of war, and for Sassoon in the military court, Borden's battle is over the bodies of wounded soldiers and citizens brought into her unit to be restored: 'It is we who are doing the fighting now, with their real enemies' (97). With this she establishes membership in the collective military war and privileges the medical battle, a constructive and innovative battle, over the destructive force of combat.

The narrative of *The Forbidden Zone* reads as an authentic war narrative particularly as a result of the use of an alternating subversive tenor of objectivity and hyper-emotionality. The author uses multiple rhetorical forms: the first person peripheral ('Belgium'); a dramatic monologue ('Paraphernalia'); a play ('In the Operating Room'); a gothic tale told in the register of a popular romance ('The Beach'); and intensely personal poetry (the epilogue). The tenor she employs in 'The Operating Room' is clipped, controlled, and factual: 'The operating room is a section of the wooden shed. . . . There are three wounded men on three operating tables. Surgeons nurses, and orderlies are working over them' (85). In contrast, at times Borden lapses into a hyper-emotional register, particularly through the use of anaphora and irony in her poetry. Of the Christ-soldier she writes: 'His head is crowned with a helmet of mud. / He wears it well.

/ He wears it as a king. / He has set a new style in clothing; / He has introduced the chic of mud' ('Mud' l. 13–17); it is as if through repetition she wishes to hammer the emotional message of war's wastage into her readers' ears. I contend that Borden's varying uses of rhetorical devices demonstrates a civilian artist struggling to interpret and reinterpret the progress and process of a civilian through war; she is a stranger in a strange land who grapples with the physical and psychic landscape, the language and protocols within. Part of this struggle is coping with the strange sense of time one experiences within the war zone.

4.7 Time, Transformation, and the Things of War

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever
Isaac Rosenberg ('Break of Day in the Trenches' (l. 1–2))

Samuel Hynes argues that for soldiers, exposure to war 'made the state of their nerves more important than the state of their bodies' (71). This nerve time contributes to the sense of timelessness, or confused time, that one feels in the war zone. As Robert Graves expresses in 'It's a *Queer Time*': 'It's hard to know if you're alive or dead / When steel and fire go roaring through your head' (l. 1–2). Nerve time is present throughout *The Forbidden Zone*, as reflected in Borden's development of an aesthetic that employs vignettes rather than a holistic or linear prose narrative such as in Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*. Borden's rejection of the linear narrative of events, and her use of several rhetorical techniques, illustrates how she attempts to convey an expression of a time in her life that felt out of time—or, more precisely, a nerve time experienced through exposure to war. This is what drives Borden to innovate with a narrative form that is *sui generis*.

In *Journey Down a Blind Alley*, Borden expresses the timelessness of the war experience. Through repetition of nursing acts from the 1914–18 war, she conflates the two wars and recalls seeing herself, again, as 'a blind woman, doing what I seemed to have to do' (350). At Beaulieu she observes: 'So many hospitals, and all of them the same . . . A place of refuge, a resting place, but dramatic, at a crossroads between life and death' (351), and finds the requisitioned hotel to be 'vaguely reminiscent of that old derelict casino in Malo-

les-Bains, Dunkirk in 1914' (351). Her sense of time is warped as she 'pass[es] from bed to bed', repeating acts that make her feel that 'the clock had been put back thirty years—or more exactly twenty-five—and that I was entering on my tenth year of service with the French Army (351). Through her identification as one who has served 'with' the army, and acts of visiting 'bed to bed', she perceives time has 'merged into a single whole and held me bound, a prisoner of habit and associations' (351).

The fundamental circumstances of attending the needs of the wounded in the wars, it appears, have created a seamless sense of time in the war zone, one which returns her much older self to that of her youth. But in these statements Borden gets time mixed up—her work in the First World War as a VAD commenced in 1915, not 1914, and she corrects the number of years the 'clock' has 'put me back' from thirty to twenty-five. Time preoccupied Borden's and Graves's generation, who grew up with H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), witnessed the publication and advancement of Einstein's 1915 theory of relativity during the war, and then read J.W. Dunne's influential *An Experiment of Time* (1927). While the *Times Literary Supplement* of 2 December 1915 (Issue 724, page 442) reviews a monograph discussing Einstein's theory, it is not until after the war that one begins to see numerous reviews and articles on the subject. Dunne's work on precognition countered Einstein's theory through a proposal of 'serialism'—that is, he suggested that several planes of time simultaneously exist within others, and human beings may exist in these planes at the same time, explaining the sense of *déjà vu*. In *Time and the Conways*, one of Priestley's characters states:

But the point is, now, at this moment, or any moment, we're only cross-sections of our real selves. What we *really* are is the whole stretch of ourselves, all our time, and when we come to the end of this life, all those selves, all our time, will be *us*—the real you, the real me. And then perhaps we'll find ourselves in another time, which is only another kind of dream. ('Time' 153)

Graves's library at Deià contains *Experiment With Time*. In *The Long Weekend*, Graves and Alan Hodge comment how influential Dunne's book was in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It is not excessively speculative to suggest that Borden knew of Dunne's theory and probably read the book.

A few of the writers and veterans who were influenced by Dunne include J.R.R. Tolkien, J.B. Priestley, Aldous Huxley, John Buchan, and Robert Graves. In *Margin Released* (1962), Priestley writes: 'I think the First War cut deeper and played more tricks with time because it was the *first*, because it was bloodier . . . a giant crack in the looking-glass' (*Margin Released* 86). He continues, 'After that, your mind could not escape from the idea that the world ended in 1914 and another one began about 1919, with a wilderness of smoke and fury, outside sensible time, lying between them' (86). Like Graves's cataclysmic smashing of time in *But It Still Goes On*, and David Jones's parenthetical wartime, Dunne's theory resonates with literary manifestations of time in the war zone as queerly static yet fluid. Through engagement with war, one steps out of ordinary life and yet life continues at home and in the war zone. Time, as Robert Graves reminds us, 'still goes on' in the battlefield, even 'in the watch in the pocket of a dead man' (*But It Still Goes On* 311). A surreal timelessness continues in the memories or feelings of veterans not only during the war but long after. Ford Madox Ford uses an episodic, non-linear sense of time throughout his tetralogy *No More Parades* (1925–8), just as Borden's nurse-narrator experiences time mediated by excessive adrenaline in the 'dynamo' of the battle for lives (*TFZ* 96) under bombardment and the vacant stillness of waiting for death's mercy.

In 'Moonlight', Borden's narrator states that 'I have lived here ever since I can remember' (40), as she takes a moment from her duties in a unit so overworked that '[s]ometimes legs and arms wrapped in cloths have to be pushed out of the way' and 'thrown on the floor' (41). Soldier anatomy has ceased to be human and becomes object only, and a nuisance as the medics 'have cocoa in there next to the operating room' (41). The narrator catches a breath of night air and looks up at the moon, which she personifies as feminine, 'her', 'lovely and lunatic' (41), and then speaks to the moon in the second person, presenting a transitional sense of time as ever-present yet non-linear: 'you recall a world that I once knew in a dream' (41). All seems present, and all seems absent in Borden's forbidden zone. Intense silver light originates from a moon that she 'can almost see' (39).

But at times the ever-present, timeless moon is only a 'pool of silver on the linoleum floor', one that 'glints' (39) casts shadows and doubts on the reality of

the scenes the nurse surveys. The nurse cannot see her unit clearly; even the Front itself is a distant glow of bombardment over the horizon—though she knows it exists. The only place the nurse sees war up close is at the intestinal or microbial level of ‘the yawning mouths of . . . wounds’ (80) on the soldiers she tends, and the stories these mouths tell provoke ‘shame’ (80) in the nurse at her ‘curiosity’ and ‘discoveries [made] within his body’ (80). Still, the war moon is beautiful and wretched, ‘reflected in the slop pail’ (39)—a slop pail inevitably tinged red and filthy with the detritus of suffering. Yet the filth reflects Borden’s aesthetic depiction of light as a metaphor for the sense of timelessness in the forbidden zone of the war. For Borden, the moon’s progress across the sky is used to measure the length of time that it will take for ‘the little whimpering voice of a man who is going to die in an hour or two’ (39) to fall silent. In *The Forbidden Zone*, Borden’s nurse relates consistently to the continuity of the moon, the sun, and the elements for companionship and comfort, as do the soldiers in the trenches, only 10 kilometres forward of her unit. For many citizen soldiers and allied workers living in the elements within the confines of a sandbag dugout, or the fragile canvas and tin huts of hospital units, far from the furnishings of home, the seasons and daily timetables were marked by the progress of the sun and moon as the only real measure of time.

Nurse and soldier share a similar sense of war’s time—improvisatory yet often filled with repetitious duties. The extemporal experience of war ‘draws no dividend from time’s tomorrows’, as Sassoon writes in ‘Dreamers’. Borden’s sense of time is analogous; her war encompasses past and present, but within it, in contrast to Sassoon’s growing fatalism, she has a profound sense of meaning. She believes that through paring down the self to one of occupation amidst the bare necessities of life, she is where she must be, and who she must be. For Borden, ‘War [is] the Alpha and the Omega, world without end—I don’t mind it. I am used to it. I fit into it. It provides me with everything that I need, an occupation, a shelter, companions, a jug and a basin’ (TFZ 40). This psalmic affirmation is conceptually at one with Isaac Rosenberg’s expression of time in the war zone. ‘It is the same old druid Time as ever’ (‘Break of Day in the Trenches’ l. 2), Rosenberg writes—the ever-present time of sacrifice, ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ (TFZ 40) of war, as Borden states. Rosenberg’s poem, written soon after he arrived at the Front in 1916, while his unit waited for the beginning

of the Battle of the Somme, exists in a time when 'darkness crumbles' ('Break of Day in the Trenches' 1); though he writes literally of dawn, on the battlefield it is always the 'druid' time of human sacrifice. Time is collapsed, crumbled, and seamless in war, where one's 'war nerve' senses that life may end at any moment. There is no past or future, only war time; because of this, everything appears or feels heightened, or luminous, even something like a rat, as Rosenberg writes, 'a live thing' (3) that 'inwardly grins' (l. 13) in anticipation of its next meal, a soldier's corpse. Borden's nurse correspondingly witnesses and conceptualises wartime as luminous. In *Journey Down a Blind Alley*, she writes from the perspective of peacetime: 'How strange to realize that now looking back that when I landed on the quay at Dunkirk in 1914 I could not look forward and observe what was to happen twenty-five years later' (5). She asks why 'no glimmer shone back out of the future to my tiny present' (5). Her complex understanding of wartime is luminous and seamless, as if the interwar years 'had never been' (5).

While operational, Borden and Rosenberg identify the central paradox of existing in the war state—the somnambulism of the human being at war despite being in the midst of a hyper-kinetic zone, or what Rosenberg describes as 'shrieking iron and flame' ('Break of Day in the Trenches' l. 15). Both writers express the feeling of being drugged, lulled by the sounds of war, and ground down by fatigue in the trenches or hospital wards. Borden reports that she is 'drowsy and drugged with heavy narcotics, with ether and iodoform and other strong odours' (TFZ 42). She has become so tired that she 'could sleep with the familiar damp smell of blood on my apron' (TFZ 42). The nurse is drugged with overwork and the poppy-derived chemicals that she handles in the course of her duties in the thrumming 'dynamo' of the surgical unit. Rosenberg's poppies represent the drugged state of war, blood-red flowers 'whose roots are in men's veins' (23). For both Borden and Rosenberg, the addictive drug is war. Both writers exist in altered war states wherein even the most ordinary things take on different meanings, different uses. The rat in Rosenberg's poem is queer and sardonic, anticipatory of its next meal, whereas Borden's apron is not a cooking apron but a thing soaked with soldiers' blood, yet it has become so 'familiar' to her that she easily sleeps near it—utterly unimaginable outside the zone—as easily as the soldier addresses the rat.

In the zone, people act many roles as they may become something other, or appear as something other. Borden describes surveying the landscape and seeing troops set up camp: 'Swarms of little men were housekeeping in the open. Their campfires, their pots and pans, and their garments hung out to dry on bushes, twinkled and fluttered on the furbelowed countryside' (TFZ 21). For Borden, the zone has become enchanted, populated with parties of male soldiers acting as housewives and worker-bees. Their khaki laundry 'twinkles' as it dries above a landscape adorned with furbelow, womanly frills. Borden juxtaposes the things of home in her unsettling yet anchored narrative through her fixation on objects. The things found within the forbidden zone of war, the evanescence of which contributes to the power of the narrative, bear witness to the transformative effect within the zone, particularly through one's relation to these objects.

In 'Moonlight', Borden's preoccupation with the material object is shown as her narrator takes a break from a long day in her surgical unit. She looks around her billet and sees that '[e]verything in my cubicle is luminous . . . My clothes hang on pegs, my white aprons and rubber boots, my typewriter and tin box of biscuits, the big sharp scissors on the table—all these familiar things touched with magic and make me uneasy' (TFZ 39). For Borden, the objects in her hut seem alive with a luminosity borrowed from the timeless moon; they are 'magic' (39). Further, they are an extension of all she has magically created—a hospital unit imagined, built, and imbued with vitality, 'one that grew out of all recognition' (*Journey* 8), funded and staffed by Borden. Her hospital is a wondrous success. Though filled with death, her surgical unit is rattling alive with 'the pulse of the War' (TFZ 46), war's energy, so much so that '[t]he thin wooden walls of my cubicle tremble and the windows rattle a little' (TFZ 39), not only under bombardment, but with a feeling of excited energy. Still, the objects that define her role clearly make her 'uneasy' despite their 'magic'. This disease corresponds to how her narrator acts and portrays herself throughout the text as alternately uneasy and coolly competent; she is the life-giver but she is also the murderer of her own heart: 'She killed it. She could not bear to hear it jumping in her side, when Life, the sick animal, choked and rattled in her arms' (TFZ 43).

Borden's hut exists in a malleable temporality. During bombardment its windows 'rattle', just as the mobile (transitory) surgical hospital exists within an ambiguously delineated zone that also has malleable boundaries, yet she writes, 'I have lived here ever since I can remember' (TFZ 40). Like Borden's role that consists of multiple duties and locations within the war zone, the unit may be packed up and transported or closed down within hours. Critically, though, it will look more or less the same no matter where it is located. This adds to the sense of timelessness in the surreal, destabilised atmosphere and weirdly luminous war zone. Borden's experience is hyper-real, hyper-sensual, dreamy, and weird, a time in which *quotidian* things such as aprons, rubber boots, scissors, and boxes of biscuits are imbued with intense meaning; everything is 'touched with magic' (39), in an observation similar to David Jones's description of the war zone as 'enchanted' (*In Parenthesis* x). This magical place, like operational time in the field, is capable of offering a space of engendered comfort; in the zone one feels utterly alive and at the same time ill at ease, knowing the fragility of one's life and all the lives of all around. It is a place that can be demoralising and energising, as the American entertainer Elsie Janis recalls of performing for troops at the Front: 'You see it's really splendid playing under shell-fire. It "peps" you up so; not knowing which song may be your last makes you do your best' (Janis 135). This sense is apparent particularly when the nurse stares at the 'things' in her room and is psychologically transported somewhere else while another 'harvest' (TFZ 44) of wounded soldiers arrives from the battlefields, the human wheat and barley fields of the Western Front, in convoy of 'panting and snorting' ambulances and transport trucks (TFZ 46). Stylistically, Borden alternates between the self-reflective lyricism of 'Moonlight' and the short, truncated, and objective observations of 'The City in the Desert', in which men have transformed from 'wounded cat[s]' (TFZ 41), as described in the former, to lifeless 'bundles inside this shed' (TFZ 76). Through the shift in narrative style, we see a parallel shift in the psychology of the narrator, who has become a seasoned professional, one who has become detached enough to 'lay odds on [the patient's] chance of escape' (TFZ 80) from death.

Borden's narrative is particularly effective when she handles the materiality of the crossroads of war and peace. Where the soldier narrative

struggles for vocabulary and imagery to capture total war—often resorting to the pastoral—in the ‘second battlefield’, Borden employs the lexicon and imagery of the womanly arts through the juxtaposition of the domestic alongside graphic medical images of the surgical unit. The transmogrification of objects begins in the early vignettes of *The Forbidden Zone*. In ‘The Square’, saucepans and bundles belong to wives and children busy shopping in the Saturday market town on the edge of the zone (TFZ 17–20). In the operating theatre at the Battle of the Somme, saucepans have transformed from domestic objects that provide sustenance to containers for boiling knees, commonplace buckets transform from objects for cleaning houses to becoming places for storing pieces of human brains, and bundles morph into dehumanised, dying lumps of injured soldiers (TFZ 100). In ‘Conspiracy’, soldiers are brought to ‘the place where they are mended’, where, the narrator tells the reader, ‘[w]e have all the things here for mending, the tables and the needles, and the thread and the knives and the scissors’, then adds, ominously, ‘and many curious things that you never use for your clothes’ (TFZ 79). Once the soldiers arrive, they transform into baked goods as they are ‘pulled out of the mouths of ambulances as loaves of bread are pulled out of the oven’ (79). In the surgical wards they become ‘shadowy suffering forms’ or ‘worm[s]’ (56). This is a strange land, filled with strange sights.

In ‘The Regiment’, the forbidden zone is filled with ‘snug villages tucked between the fields of high golden corn, and scattered clumps of woodland’ are transformed by the presence of the army into humming ‘beehives’ (TFZ 21). Army camps ‘near a stream, [resemble] a cluster of tents, gaudily painted, suggest a circus’ (21) and the sky becomes a type of amusement park with aeroplanes ‘visiting the romantic city of the sky . . . fearless, capricious, gay glittering creature[s] of pleasure . . . [flying] through the glistening portals . . . bent on mysterious adventure’ (21). To the newly arrived narrator, the forbidden zone has become a landscape transformed into something new and magical: ‘There was no horror in the heavens or upon the earth’, she proclaims with a biblical tenor. Instead, she tells the readers, ‘War that day had the aspect of a country fair’ (21), and one gains insight into how she sees the war zone as an adventure, like a grand day out. Clouds, Borden’s narrator observes, are ‘superb castles of white vapour’, even though they are ‘floating towards a land

called No Man's Land' (TFZ 21). But to the newcomer to war, No Man's Land has not yet been experienced; it is only a name for something terrifying. The 'white vapour' contrasts starkly with the gas that creates 'damp greenish bodies of the gangrene cases' she will hold in her arms (43).

Borden's juxtaposition of the glittering, colourful yet ordinary things of these early scenes with the filth and suffering of injured, disfigured soldiers masterfully sets the tone of the text, in which a regiment appears as 'a column of hunchbacks, a herd of deformed creatures . . . each one like another one' (22). Borden's technique is to lull the reader into the quasi-familiarity of the ordinary sight then to slowly drain her scenes of light and colour, or conversely, to shine an ultra-bright and uncomfortable operating room light into places one would rather not look, as in 'Paraphernalia' and 'The Operating Room'. Borden is particularly effective through her use of colour—sunrise on the surfaces of buildings is 'pale rose and primrose' (TFZ 12), the roads are white, the beach is white (13), the buildings below 'gleam like a varnished map' (12), and a surveillance balloon is 'an oyster in the sky' (15). The landscape under bombardment is personified: 'Gashes appeared in streets, long wounds with ragged edges. Helpless, spread out to the heavens, it grimaced with mutilated features' (13). Borden has grafted what she sees in the hospital ward onto the landscape of the forbidden zone.

Borden creates a narrative that shifts alternately from observation of the horrendous to the nearly bearable through the gradual accretion of the uncanny placement of familiar, homey objects in the often-grotesque locale of the surgical unit. Margaret Higonnet's observation 'that women's war writing shifts . . . the focus from military to social subjects' ('Women in the Forbidden Zone' 202) holds true to some extent in *The Forbidden Zone*, but Borden shifts social subjects to the military and back again. 'In the Operating Room', while Borden's surgeons and 'medical students' (TFZ 95) experiment and amputate, they discuss whether or not 'that chap got the oysters in Amiens! Oysters sound good to me' (90). Her narrator continually pushes the narrative forward then pulls it back, particularly when employing the technique of the inserting the uncanny in her descriptions of traumatic details. Using this push-and-pull method, Borden increases the power of the imagery and manipulates the reader's imagination through harrowing passages, frequently distracting the

reader with images of the sky or the moonlight perhaps. In 'Moonlight', the author inserts the small yet recurring detail that dying men sound like 'mewing' kittens (44). The contrast between the beautiful moonlit night, female ('In a dream I see her' (41)), and the doleful, protracted mews of dying men acts to destabilise the scene. The dying soldiers are not depicted as wounded lions but as domestic cats—more pathetically, kittens, 'a thing that is mewing' (44)—in an inversion of hard soldier power.

This reduction of combatants to mewing kittens creates a distressing role reversal as the nurse-narrator wields needles and scissors like weapons and rips bandages off heads in the course of duty ('I said: His brain came off on the bandage' (TFZ 94), she tells a surgeon). Borden's portrayal of the untrained nurse managing morphine levels, soothing and tormenting her patients, and sometimes ignoring them to death, is often conveyed with what might be characterised as a fetishistic attachment to the things of nursing, particularly to the shiny glass and metallic needles, her '*piqûers*', her 'long saline needles' or 'short thick camphor oil needles' (96). In *Journey Down a Blind Alley*, Borden remembers her 'dozen fine needles on the boil' (JDBA 8) and moving 'quickly from one to another [patient] with my injections of camphor oil, or caffeine, or morphia' (8). Her narrative is one of expressed self-satisfaction in what she has become through these repetitive actions in the theatre of the Great War (for where else would an untrained worker be given the power to perform life and death acts, one surmises).

Borden refers to 'needle[s]' twenty-two times in *The Forbidden Zone*, that is, over seven times as frequently as she uses the word 'soldier' and six times more than the word 'bombardment'. In 'Blind', her kitchen houses 'hypodermic needles and stimulants' (91) 'boiling in saucepans' (94) and she recalls 'a dozen beautiful new platinum needles' she has 'received by post that same morning' (94). Holding one of the needles up and 'squirting the liquid through it', she says 'to one of the dressers . . . "Look. I've some lovely new needles"' (94). Her syringes and needles are 'arranged' according to 'different sizes', and 'large ampoules of sterilized salt and water and dozens of beautiful sharp shining needles are always on the boil' (97–8). In 'Paraphernalia', she states rhetorically, 'I know that you understand all these things. You finger glass syringes exquisitely and pick up the fine needles easily with slender pincers and

with the glass beads poised neatly on your rosy finger tips you saw them with tiny saws' (79). Her detachment illustrates that she has now become the observer and the judge of the nurse, and the one who surveys and triages the wounds of the second battlefield. Even the *Enfant de Malheur's* tattoos had been made 'by some sailor in a North African port [who] had dug needles of blue ink into the marble flesh of his arm' (47).

This section on needles illustrates how the civilian nurse, through repeated and often public acts of inflicting pain, becomes a detached expert, one who is able to pick out the living from the dead—as a soldier in a blue- or red-lamp brothel might pick a woman. Needles, her 'steel things' (83), take on a strange sexual allure for Borden who uses them to penetrate her patients' bodies, a masculine act at its basest. The power transaction between the nurse and the once strong man, now impotent 'in the convulsions of the maddened earth' ('Unidentified' l. 47), is observed by Borden the poet, as she describes his 'quivering muscles fine as silk' and 'Exquisite nerves, soft membrane warm with blood / That travels smoothly through the tender veins' (l. 93-94). In a detached tenor she predicts: 'One blow, one minute more, and that man's face will be a mass of matter, horrid slime and little brittle splinters' (l. 96). This writing is a type of clinical exhibitionism, a demonstration of the author's medical knowledge and prowess, and a form of exploitation of the dying soldier as material for the artist's war narrative. But Borden, one presumes, might argue otherwise, that she is using her art to convey all that is terrible about war.

'Unidentified' does not ring as testimony but rather as a somewhat sadistic performance through exposing the details of an imagined death at the front—Borden probably never witnessed front-line combat. Borden's artistic exhibitionism and voyeurism is echoed in 'The Beach', a slow-boil gothic narrative that employs the tenor of contemporary romance novels rather than that of the war dispatch and depicts the power dynamic between a severely wounded soldier and his lover. Borden opens the story with the description of a 'beach that was long and smooth and the colour of cream' (TFZ 33). The author's soothing narrative invites the reader into a story that at first appears to be a scenario of hope, two young lovers reunited in war at the seaside on the coast of France, but as the reader quickly learns, the male protagonist is irreparably damaged, physically and mentally. Any hope for transcendence and

rehabilitation is truncated as he slowly deflowers his lover of her war innocence, clearly threatened by the power imbalance as she pushes his wheelchair along the promenade of the beachfront.

In a macabre parody of a wedding night that the couple will never have, he reveals to the young woman that the casinos and big houses of the former holiday destination are now hospitals filled with the dead, the dying, and the disfigured. 'He could only make her suffer' (TFZ 36), the narrator's omniscient voice observes. The soldier fills his lover's imagination with details of men whose faces have been blown off and describes wards full of the suffering, despite her pleas that he cease: 'Stop darling—stop' (36). He mercilessly continues and describes luggage tags used as body tags, and croupiers inside the 'casino' as sadistic doctors who operate under the façade of 'big crystal chandeliers' and 'gilt mirrors'—things that speak not of war, but of the golden life of before war (36). The soldier 'was rotting and he was tied to her perfection,' the narrator observes. His uncanny existence takes place where chandeliers and gilt mirrors intersect with stinking, gangrenous wards. This is Borden at her gothic best as she seeds her writing with a creeping sense of disease in preparation for the section of the text that takes place in the heart of the *zone interdite*, the Somme. Of all the vignettes, 'The Beach' is Borden at her most manipulative, as she forces the reader to witness the emotional assault, the robbing of the young woman's innocence, by her wounded soldier lover. Wheelchair bound, bitter and impotent, the injured soldier invites her to 'Come closer', 'I'll whisper it. Some of them have no faces . . . you don't even need a face to get in' to this casino (35). In his bid for some power, the soldier destroys any loyalty the young woman has towards him, stripping her of innocence in public. This innovative blending of genre sums up Borden's fascination with her own war story, one she describes in *Journey Down a Blind Alley* as being a 'mixture of romance and horror' (8). Borden's handling of the material creates an entirely new genre—the gothic war story told in the timbre of popular romance.

Throughout *The Forbidden Zone*, Borden records many acts of inflicted suffering and received suffering, all of which occur in the public spaces of the hospital ward or surgical theatre. These power transactions, public acts, are performed under dubious surveillance and are subject to accusations of

voyeurism and exploitation of subject; the elasticity of actions and identities operating within loose ethical circumstances within the zone offer insight into the opportunities that presented there for practitioners. In *A Surgeon in Belgium* (2015), the English surgeon Henry Souttar observes the following transformation of roles and opportunities that war presents:

What we have seen is a world in which the social conventions under which we live . . . have been torn down. Men and women are no longer limited by the close barriers of convention. They must think and act for themselves, and for once it is the men and women that we see, and not the mere symbols which pass as coin in a world at peace. To the student of men and women, the field of war is the greatest opportunity in the world. It is a veritable dissecting-room, where all the queer machinery that goes to the making of us lies open to our view. (Souttar n.p.)

For Borden, men in war have been transformed first through the battlefield experience, then again after transportation into the hospital zone. Men who were once ‘real, splendid, ordinary, normal men’ (TFZ 44) are then reduced to mewling creatures in her hospital wards. Sometimes she describes the wounded as ‘[c]rops’ who have been ‘cut down in the fields of France where they were growing’ (44). They have been ‘mown down with a scythe’ and ‘gathered into bundles, tossed about with pitchforks, pitchforked into wagons and transported great distances and flung into ditches and scattered by storms and gathered up again and at last brought here—what was left of them’ (44).

The zone, often perceived as a place of anatomical, gender, and spiritual breakdown, is for Borden and her *équipe* demonstrably an environment of breakthrough and innovation in concert with other technological developments during the 1914 to 1918 time period—her unit included a surgical training unit. Socially, throughout the *zone*, through necessity and opportunity came a breakthrough of gender-assigned roles. Women learned to haul buckets of blood, to drive ambulances, to work as mechanics, to cook for the masses, to become chauffeurs, and farm labourers, to perform mortuary duties, to run banks or chemistry labs, and to become munitions workers. For many, the forbidden zone was a place of power. How this happened is the subject of the next section on the forbidden zone as a conceptual, transformative locale. I will propose that through the falling of the normative, a queer space is opened up,

one in which gender roles are interchangeable or moot. This argument depends upon a fundamental understanding of the process that the individual experiences upon entering into what Iris [Alon] Rachamimov, a former Israeli officer, expresses as the explicitly queer zone of the army and of war (Rachamimov, conversation with author).

4.8 Man, Woman, or Just Plain Queer

But beyond the measure of its own direct work [ambulance corps, surgical hospital, reconstruction], the unit by its example performed three great services on this front, to my mind, of incalculable importance. Our Hospital served not only as a model of what an advanced hospital might be made under war-zone conditions, it broke the iron traditions that women could not be allowed to nurse near the front, and led to the later regular introductions of Nurses to posts within the danger zone.

From the December 1918 report by G. Winthrop Young, Director, The First British Ambulance for Italy (found in the private papers of Freya Stark, c/o John and Virginia Murray, n.p.)

While the discourse of war—its rhetoric, its vocabulary, the lionizing of masculine violence—appears heavily gendered, the reality of army culture is much more subtle; gender roles and acts of kinship are played out in many army units, or in sub-cultures of war, such as prisoner-of-war camps (Rachamimov, 'Camp Domesticity' 295). Rachamimov describes these predominantly homosocial societies as having 'intricate power relations, allures of bonding, domesticity and "normality"' (292). Family groups and alliances are part of camp life and include prisoners taking on the roles of "mothers", "fathers", "aunts" and "uncles", alongside "nephews", with the latter representing the roles played by soldiers in the 'absence of children' (302). Acts of 'camp domesticity', including customising domestic spaces, are priorities for prisoners-of-war upon arrival (295).

In the trenches, behind the lines, and in the hospitals, within the ambulance corps and the home front, gender roles by necessity become malleable (Higonnet et al. 1997). John Masefield's letters to his wife are filled with graphic details of the wards and of his difficult, dirty, and heavy work. Many of his letters contain observations of professional nurses and VADs, whom he

describes as 'catty young minxes' who display 'catty society ways of wheedling, when it is a question of carrying stinking blood in a bucket' (Masefield, *Letters* 57). His letters are filled with hospital ward gossip: the matron is an 'insufferable woman who asks me to come in & read to her'; a VAD, 'Miss Strong the singer is here ([she is a] very capable soul); '& a host more women [are here] when God knows we have already too many' (59). But he has admiration for '[t]he really hard, trained nurse who knows her work, [and] is a fine soul' and, he adds, is 'capable' (57). Many of Masefield's letters reflect an anxiety to get to the 'real war', that is, to the Front, to be amongst the men doing genuine war work. He expresses his discomfort at being so close yet so far from real war and states that he is '2 counties breadth away from the [real] war' (59). From 'the garden gate' he 'could smell the war, & realize that stink comes from beautiful human flesh which is all mangled to death through the bloody damned lust of the Bosche' (59). This short passage, written far from the front lines, reveals the power play between 'matron' and Masefield, the presence of a celebrity volunteer, 'catty' women, and Masefield's frustration at doing 'women's' work. But the comment also reflects the visceral allure of war—Masefield can 'smell' it, and he is anxious to inflict some revenge on 'the Bosche' (59). Masefield's letters reinforce the idea that the work and the narrative of the non-combatant was less important than those of individuals at the Front, though theirs were dirty and dangerous jobs too.

Yet recent scholarship recognises the significance of studying the war narratives of VADs and professional nurses from historical and literary perspectives as a way of broadening our understanding of the First World War (Hallett 76). This relatively recent field of study looks at women serving as VADs, professional nurses, FANYs, and military nurses. Kate Hunter, in 'Diaries and Letters as Testimonies of War', states that there is a paucity of nurses' written accounts in comparison to those of the male soldier (Hunter 2). Hunter believes that this phenomenon reflects the lives of VADs and nurses who entered the war as young unmarried women, who then after the war continued their nursing careers, remaining unmarried and leaving no direct heirs to preserve and disseminate their papers after their deaths (2). Further, many of these women who served in the war zone, consistent with their soldier peers who survived the war, suffered from poor health and premature death owing to

the harsh physical and psychological conditions of their war work, with its resultant long-term implications (2). There are some notable exceptions to the phenomenon of these rare or 'missing voices', the most well known being that of the VAD Vera Brittain, who began writing her *Testament of Youth* (1933) in 1929 (Bostridge 4). Brittain had previously published a book of poetry during the war, *Verses of a VAD* (1918), and at the time had also prepared a war novel with the provisional title of *A Pawn of Fate, or Folly's Vineyard*, but she withdrew the novel, afraid 'of potential libel action' (Brittain 4).

Ellen N. La Motte's *The Backwash of War: The Human Wreckage of the Battlefield as Witnessed by an American Hospital Nurse*, published in the United States in 1916, was considered too graphic and damaging to the war effort and never appeared in Britain or France during the war. Similarly, Borden voluntarily withdrew the manuscript of *The Forbidden Zone*, which she had prepared for the London-based publishers Collins, after military censors insisted on the removal of explicit, disturbing content which might harm recruitment for the war (Conway 77). Censorship, particularly problematic for writers corresponding from the war zone or wishing to publish, had been invoked on 8 August 1915, four days after war was declared. The multiple interpretations of the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) enabled the censorship of any reporters' dispatches, soldiers' letters, and, inevitably, the work of artists (Puissant 14–15). But women's writing had to contend with a much more formidable foe than DORA. Women serving in convalescent hospitals, in ambulance corps, in surgical units and casualty clearing stations near the Front, and in the munitions factories back home competed with each other in the war for words. The fight wasn't pretty, and contrary to Das's observation that the female experience within the zone was one of 'communality' (*Touch and Intimacy* 183), evidence shows that sometimes it was not.

4.9 Ward Wars

Christina E. Hallett's study of British, American, and Canadian nurses' war accounts contends that the written accounts of VADs and trained nurses at the Front should be viewed as distinct from one another. She suggests that many VADs, often wealthy socialites, had self-promotion and publication in view at the start of their service, in contrast to nurses who wished to put their clinical skills to the test in an active war zone. 'Nurses tended to write in a less emotional

style than VADs,' she notes (68, 72). Hallett, a nurse, clearly believes in an inner 'terrible knowledge' (Das 'Touch and Intimacy' 182), brought solely through training and long experience. She implies a superior sisterhood of trained nurses—that of the ward-inured 'nurse-combatant'—and dismisses VADs' experiences as potentially exploitative, therefore rendering their voices less valid than those of professional nurses. Certainly, these attitudes are reflected in the conflict one observes between the professional nurse and author Ellen K. La Motte and Mary Borden, as this section demonstrates.

If there is a 'combat Gnosticism' (Campbell), a privilege of the combatant narrative, then there is a parallel nurse Gnosticism in the personal accounts of the Great War. This conflict of authority has a foundation in early twentieth-century social class behaviours and attitudes, and the war nurses' sense of professionalism. But as Vera Brittain points out, the professionals had too big a job to handle—too many casualties for too few nurses. Brittain notes of the early war years:

At that stage of the War the military and civilian professional nurses who had joined Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service or the Territorial Force Reserve were still suspicious of the young semi-trained amateurs upon whose assistance, they were beginning to realise with dismay, they would be obliged to depend upon for the duration of the War. (206)

Brittain writes of the harsh conditions endured by VADs during their novitiate—a month-long testing time which 'over-worked and under-trained young women' faced *before* they moved towards the Front (208). Billed far from hospitals, in substandard conditions, the women were 'continually in contact with septic wounds, cups and bed pans'. Inevitably, some VADs became ill and died or were sent home—unable to cope with long hours or difficult nursing duties—long before they heard the sounds of artillery at the Front (208). But for those who survived the winnowing, Brittain remembers, 'Every task, from the dressing of a dangerous wound to the scrubbing of a bed-mackintosh, had for us in those early days a sacred glamour which redeemed it equally from tedium and disgust' (210).

Clearly, to the experienced professional nurses, the presence of young, inexperienced women in the nursing wards filled with 'our wartime enthusiasm'

(210) needed to be kept in check. *The Forbidden Zone* demonstrates Borden's perception of a similar 'sacred glamour', but as one reads in Borden's correspondence to Spears, the light she shines most brightly is always on the combatants. In 1917 she writes:

I have been down to the little cemetery tonight—those rows of crosses in the twilight are so pitiful—on each one written 'Mort pour la France.' I am going to put a monument here in marble for my infermieres, in memory of their patients—I have begun to have that desire, so common to so many, to place [?] this swift and dreadful current of life, something that will last a little while. Soon, we will all be gone from here & no one will remember & no one will know how these men died—I suppose the "fount" of ambition is the desire not to be forgotten. ('Letters to Louis Spears' 1917)

Here Borden writes about installing a monument for the dead soldiers on behalf of her nurses rather than a monument dedicated to the nurses. Again, as Acton and Potter point out, this privileging of the male combatant narrative is seen throughout nurses' and other medics' accounts of war throughout the twentieth century.⁴¹ Borden's comments take a patronising stance and one built on Borden's ego, as the last line indicates, 'ambition is the desire not to be forgotten.' And Borden was an ambitious woman of her class.

Janet S.K. Watson argues that class perception was partially to blame for the conflicted relationship between the two types of nurses at the Front; professionally trained nurses came mostly from middle-class backgrounds, and they perceived the VAD as a 'primarily socially privileged' dilettantes (Watson 486). Recent scholarship, however, shows that though the stereotype of the flighty, experience-hungry socialite heading into the war zone has some validity, it is far from conclusive. According to a 1916 survey, twenty-five per cent of VADs had previously worked for wages in factories and as domestics in service to the wealthier classes before deployment in the wards of war. To discount VADs' and others' accounts of the First World War is, therefore, to muffle important voices of workers both apart from and of the privileged nursing classes.

⁴¹ Acton and Potter write: 'Alternative narratives, at times fragmented, ambiguous, and contradictory, defined as much by what is left unsaid as by what is said, legitimize an aspect of the war experience that remains largely unheard: how medical personnel perceived and negotiated the physical and psychological context in which they worked' ('These frightful sights' 62).

The enmity between the nurses reportedly began from the moment the VAD started training. 'There is something so starved and dry about hospital nurses—as if they had to force all the warmth out of themselves before they could be really good nurses,' Vera Brittain observes following her first weeks as a VAD training at the London General Hospital, Camberwell, in preparation for her 1915 deployment to France (Brittain 211). Brittain believes that her love for her fiancé, Roland, is what saves her from losing her 'personality' or 'even hav[ing] it extinguished' through a transformation brought by this work and hospital society (212). She expresses a dread, not of the terrible parade of wounds she must attend to, but of becoming a member of an incipient 'starved and dry' (212), de-sexed (or inverted) womanhood. This womanhood is the professional spinster, the career nurse. After dressing her first gangrenous wound, 'slimy and green and scarlet, with the bone laid bare' (211), Brittain admits that what makes her truly sick is not 'the grotesque mutilations of bodies and limbs and faces'; it is '[t]he sight of the 'Bart's Sisters, calm, balanced, efficient, moving up and down the wards self-protected by that bright immunity from pity which the highly trained nurse seems so often to possess' (211). She feared that she too might '[merge] [her] own individuality in the impersonal routine of the organization' (211). What Brittain does not yet realise is that it was the routine of the impersonal, the severing of the heart that Borden admits to at times in *The Forbidden Zone*, which would ultimately save her. Thus, through repeated acts, often of great intimacy and often in public, Brittain was transformed from an individual into a member of the professional medical collective, albeit at a price. Borden's transformation was far more complex, particularly with her nurses.

Borden's relationship to Ellen N. La Motte provides another point of view in the ward wars. The innovative, specialist nurse, trained at Johns Hopkins Hospital and a veteran of tuberculosis wards of early twentieth-century Baltimore, owed a great deal to Mary Borden. Prior to joining Borden at the front, La Motte was stuck working in an over-supplied but underused American Hospital in Paris in the early years of the war. Eager to participate as closely as she could in the war experience, she had crossed the Atlantic in 1914, possibly with the help of Gertrude Stein, who describes La Motte as 'gun shy' in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (158). But if La Motte was gun shy in Paris,

she was not to prove 'gun shy' in the word wars of the Great War years, nor in the cool, dispassionate tone of her hospital sketches. In 1915 she came to Borden's *L'Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No. 1* near the Front. With the publication of *The Backwash of War: An American Hospital Nurse* (1916), La Motte published her accounts thirteen years before those of her superior in the theatre of war, Borden. Despite La Motte's energetic acknowledgement of Borden's contribution to her success at getting to the Front, she frequently demonstrates her professional expertise throughout her account, as the subtitle, *An American Hospital Nurse*, testifies. La Motte is the professional practitioner in contrast to her VAD boss, Borden. This illustrates the dynamics of a relationship consistent with the claims of Janet S.K. Watson:

The volunteers saw hospital nursing as their contribution to the war effort, a parallel service to that of men in their families and among their friends who were serving in the military. The nurses, in contrast, though certainly also patriotic, found in the war a special opportunity to demonstrate the essential and unique skills that only graduates of recognized nursing training programs possessed, as part of their efforts to be recognized professionally. (Watson 486)

Consistent with Watson's observations, La Motte reassures the reader of her professional stature throughout her narrative, frequently resorting to cool, objective reportage—specifically through her use of medical terminology, a hallmark of professionalism:

At last they said [the wounded soldier] was ready. He was quiet. During his struggles, they had broken out two big teeth with the mouth gag, and that added a little more blood to the blood already choking him. Then the *Médecin Major* did a very skilful operation. He trephined the skull, extracted the bullet that had lodged beneath it, and bound back in place that erratic eye. (3)

La Motte's account reads like a medical chart that details the number of broken teeth, the application of the mouth gag, how much blood choked the patient, and finally her summary of the surgeon's 'very skilful operation'; the story of the trephined skull is told wholly without reflection or compassion. La Motte the professional is wholly in control, as she has always been in the professional environment.

K.E. Luard, like La Motte, was a professional nurse working at No. 32 Casualty Clearing Station at Brandhoek, Belgium. The seasoned 'veteran' of the Boer War also furnishes her credentials in the title of her book: *Unknown Warriors: Extracts from the Letters of K.E. Luard, R.R.C.: Nursing Sister in France 1914–1918* (1930). Further enhancing her credibility, Luard's book is endorsed by Field-Marshal Viscount Allenby. Nowhere in her account does she mention the presence of VADs. Like La Motte, Luard uses medical terminology to establish her professionalism, citing: 'wounds to the pericardium', which she explains as 'the covering of the heart' (206); a 'paralysis of the transverse colon' (32); 'smashed kidneys' (217); 'abdomens, chests, and femurs' (218); and wounds efficiently 'X-rayed, operated on, shrapnel found, holes sewn up, salined and put to bed' (204). The class-conscious Luard identifies one of her patients as 'Capt. C., V.C. and Bar, D.S.O., M.C., R.A.M.C.' (204), recording his honorifics as efficiently as temperatures on a chart. Accordingly, in *The Forbidden Zone* Borden infers that she has personal knowledge of the King of Belgium, generals, and other high-ranking officers, establishing her place in the hospital hierarchy.

Despite Luard's demonstration of clinical practice and comfort in a paramilitary setting, her language slips into sentimentality as she describes a child hit by shrapnel 'in the tummy, thigh and foot, very white and quiet', a 'poor lamb' (25). This narrative contrasts with La Motte's unsentimental portrayal of another dying child. In 'A Belgian Civilian', La Motte records treating a ten-year-old who has been wounded in the abdomen. Using a clinical narrative, she declares that the child is 'an imposition' on the unit, 'dumped . . . unceremoniously', and that he 'would die without an operation, or he would die during the operation, or he would die after the operation' (17). The repeated use of the conditional underlines the futility of the child's situation and the frustration La Motte feels at being responsible for him. The boy, she implies, is taking her away from her real work, namely, wounded soldiers: 'The patients were greatly annoyed by this disturbance' (17). Again, La Motte is clearly as unmoved as her wards are by the pathos of the situation (17). Accustomed to the forbidden zones of hospitals, she shows little process in the field of the war zone, unlike Mary Borden. La Motte's narrative is consistent, bordering on flat in comparison.

In 'A Belgian Citizen', La Motte introduces the reader to Borden, her patron and a literary rival:

The *Directrice* of this French field hospital was an American, by marriage a British subject, and she had curious, antiquated ideas. She seemed to feel that a mother's place was with her child, if that child was dying. The *Directrice* had three children of her own whom she had left in England over a year ago, when she came out to Flanders for the life and adventures of the Front. But she would have returned to England immediately, without an instant's hesitation, had she received word that one of these children was dying. (18)

La Motte's language is judgmental of and retaliatory against Borden, whom she portrays as self-absorbed, one who has abandoned her own children for 'the life and adventures' (18) of the Great War. This is a judgement one doubts she would level at a male combatant. La Motte uses the sketch to denigrate both the mother of the injured child and Borden, whom she refers to not only as 'the *Directrice*' but also as 'the Boss':

The *Directrice* explained the child would not live through the night. The Belgian mother accepted this statement, but again asked to be sent back to Ypres. The *Directrice* again assured the Belgian mother that her son would not live through the night, and asked her to spend the night with him in the ward, to assist at his passing. (18)

The Belgium mother reluctantly stays at the casualty clearing station, but La Motte criticises Borden:

The *Directrice*, who had a strong sense of a mother's duty to the dying, commanded and insisted, and the Belgian woman gave way. The mother sat by the bedside of her crying, raving young son all night until he died at three in the morning, then left [after] *Madame la Directrice* had promised to have a mass said at the burial of the child. (18)

La Motte uses the vignette 'A Belgian Civilian' to illustrate that Borden's 'sense of proportion and standard of values' are clearly 'all awrong'. This is a judgement, perhaps, on Borden's marital status and role as a mother who is absent from the home front (18), but it may also reflect the hierarchy of

command that she resents—Borden is *Madame la Directrice*. But La Motte reserves her harshest judgement for the nurse who cares for the dying child, portraying her as the worst kind of professional shirker, the sentimental nurse. Borden describes a parallel character in '*Enfant de Malheur*', but unlike La Motte she portrays the nurse with some compassion. Borden's 'Pim' (sweet as Pimm's cup), is a pious, sexually innocent spinster, a daughter of the English cathedral close, whose response to her patient's 'verbal streams of obscenity', words of 'putrid psychic sewage', is: 'I don't understand his language, so what difference does it make' (TFZ 53).

Pim, a 'Madonna-like woman with [a] cold, white, calm face' and 'cool maiden eyes', exudes 'the presence of the beautiful Mother of God' (TFZ 51). Borden notes Pim's perfection: 'Her blue uniform was always stiff and starched, her cap and apron were immaculate' (49). With admiration she describes Pim's solid professionalism, her unchanging dependability: the 'perfectly assured impersonal gentleness of an excellent surgical nurse' (TFZ 49). But Borden is ultimately condescending in her depiction of the nurse as something not quite a woman: 'she was not interested in Frenchmen, nor in any man. She knew no men. She knew only her patients' (49). She infers that the closest Pim gets to sexual passion is through her physical care for the dying soldier, *Enfant de Malheur*, who though like a 'lovely Greek god' is a '*damné* of [a] vile savage rat from the sewers of Paris' (51). Of Pim's intimate and platonic partnership with the priest Guerin—another celibate who has given his life to his profession—one whom Borden's narrator sees 'late in the evening swabbing tables, boiling up instruments, or writing letters to someone's dictation', working alongside the spinster nurse (50), she comments dryly: 'They were a very satisfactory couple' (50). What Borden observes is the nurse and priest's intense and immutable professionalism; her depictions of the pair are admiring yet also damning; after the *Enfant de Malheur* dies a long and terrible death, Borden reduces the priest, whom she has admired throughout the ordeal, to 'an insignificant little man' (61).

Her scorn of Pim seems to be based on the latter's inability to embrace the zeitgeist of the zone, the excitement, daring and drama, the love affair with war and the sexual intrigue to be found there. Borden repeats this view when she describes her head nurse, 'frail Miss Warner', in *Journey Down a Blind*

Alley (6). She writes of 'Miss Warner with her eye-glasses and gray hair', who at Borden's bidding 'came to Dunkirk from Philadelphia in 1915 as my head nurse' (6). Borden tells the reader that she 'put her down on her slender feet in one of the wards at St Jean le Bassel behind the Maginot Line' (6), writing of the capable and senior head nurse as if she were one of her possessions, furnishings for the hospital she has imagined into reality. Again patronisingly, Borden describes Warner as a 'valiant women who answers the call of pain, disease and death' (6). For Borden, Pim or Miss Warner are not autonomous; she refers to them possessively, as if she has purchased them for the duration of the war, even though she admits, at the start of her war: 'My nurses told me what to do and I did it to the best of my ability' (7). But the sisterhood of professional nurses was anything but a sisterhood to non-professionals, as Olive Dent reports:

The nursing profession was at that time regarded as very inhospitable to outsiders. No doubt we should be despised and abused, considered as very raw recruits and given only the donkeywork to do. . . . We had before heard unheeded tales of the edged tongues of women of the nursing profession. (15, 29)

Ward wars appeared in other quarters. Evadne Price, writing as Helen Zena Smith in a narrative which was heavily based on the diaries of the ambulance driver Winifred Young, writes: 'the [professional nursing] sisters treat us like lumps of dirt. They simply loathe the V.A.D.'s, and seem determined to make us sorry we ever enlisted' (Price 82). Being patronising and bullying, or denigrating other women's war efforts, was not confined to the wards. These attributes may, perhaps, explain the immediate disappearance of *The Forbidden Zone* after 1929–30; other VADs or professional nurses and combatants were not looking to Borden's narrative for a sense of recognition, nor were the Modernists.

Stein and La Motte use literary ventriloquism and irony to repudiate Borden, perhaps jealous of her growing status and recognition in the theatre of war. Stein uses the literary persona of Alice B. Toklas to criticise Borden as a writer, and La Motte uses the dying soldier Marius to openly denigrate Borden as a nurse, despite her dedication of *The Backwash of War* to Borden. La Motte's 'La Patrie Reconnaissante' provides another version of a scene from

Borden's *Enfant de Malheur*. La Motte's Marius is dying a 'filthy death' (10), his wound stinks of gangrene, and he curses and hallucinates in a death delirium. La Motte writes that he could 'express himself as he chose. There would be no earthly courtmartial for him—he was answerable to a higher court' (10). As *La Directrice* (Borden) approaches him, he cries out: 'And what do you know about illness such as mine? . . . Yet here you all are, in your wisdom, your experience, to nurse me! Mobilized as nurses because you are friend of a friend of a deputy! Whilst I, who know no deputy, am mobilized in the first line trenches!' (La Motte 10). La Motte's resentment is implicit in Marius's accusation of cronyism—delivered, impossibly, in full sentences by the dying man. Borden's contrasting version describes the gangrenous soldier languishing and lashing out at Pim. He 'raged at her, cursed her, Guerin [the priest] and God' (TFZ 53), then he lashed out at Borden's narrator: 'As I passed he gave a vicious leap toward the bed, flung his tortured body past the priest's head, hit at the Christ with his fist, and, grinding his teeth, yelled out a hideous curse into the shadows' (58). In a letter to Spears, Borden recalls a more peaceful scene between a priest and the patient:

[The priest] put all his thoughts, all his faith, all his tenderness at the disposal of that boy and he reached across the chasm and got to him—Guerin, by force of his own will, changed for that wretched terrified child, the character & quality of death. It was as if he quite simply, lifted him up and carried him across the river— Surely, if one human being can do for another timorous being what Guerin did for that boy, then human intercourse is a very wonderful thing. ('Letter to Louis Spears' file 1 of 3, n.d.)

Here we have three versions of the same story: the sketch from La Motte's *The Backwash of War*, a vignette from Borden's interpretive *The Forbidden Zone*, and an excerpt from a personal letter from Borden to Spears. La Motte handles the material as a short story filled with dialogue and medical detail. Her work has a rushed sense, as if for immediate publication, whereas Borden's vignette provides thoughtful character sketches of the priest Guerin and the nurse Pim, and introspection on the part of the nurse-narrator. The letter to Spears concentrates on the spiritual power of Guerin, who is able to transport the 'wretched terrified child . . . across the river' to death ('Letter to Louis

Spears' n.d.).⁴² In each of these versions, the authors use the story to position themselves professionally or emotionally. La Motte's version illustrates her command of the situation as a professional, as Borden's version in *The Forbidden Zone* portrays her sense of command of the subordinates Pim and Guerin. But in her letter to Spears, she is portraying herself as someone of character and grace.

Inevitably Borden's position of power alienated people and engendered jealousy, and privately it brought her feelings of guilt. In a 1917 letter to Spears after being awarded the *croix de guerre*, Borden states: 'E. Craven has done all the work here—I can't bear for her not to be rewarded—why should everything come to me? It's not fair' ('Letter to Louis Spears' n.d.). Borden chooses not to write about E. Craven in *The Forbidden Zone*, as if Craven's conventionality and her steadfast, quiet, and professional service does not fit the remit of an exciting experiment in the personal war narrative. Ironically, though both Stein and La Motte imply that Borden is a dilettante, La Motte quit the Front in 1916 and Stein fled to Majorca before returning to drive supplies to French hospitals located a distance from the danger zone. Whatever Stein or La Motte believed of her, Borden funded and managed a complex, busy, and successful surgical unit at the Western Front for over three years. She was able to do this through creativity and her ability to respond quickly to her environment. Existing within the zone demands response, through necessity, to adapt or develop one's personality in new ways and to acquire new skills and roles, often cross-gendered roles. The next section proposes a reading of the war zone as a queer zone, a place of gender-acts that shift boundaries, and a location that offers a space for intense creativity.

4.10 How Shall We Know Them?

There is a spot on your apron; but you are superb, and here are all your things about you, all your queer things, all the confusion of your precious things.

Mary Borden (*TFZ* 84)

⁴² The dating of the letter is confusing. *The Backwash of War* was written in 1916, yet Borden's letter to Spears is catalogued as 1917, that is, the year in which she met Spears. This implies that Borden is recounting older stories to Spears.

The excerpt above summarises the ambiguity, despoilment, and confusion that Borden's narrator experiences with self within the war zone. She is a powerful, efficient woman and one whose sense of gender wears down over the course of the war. In 'Moonlight', a nurse crosses the compound to do rounds in the gangrene ward. The narrator describes her transitioning from maternal compassion to heartlessness. 'A nurse comes around carrying her lantern,' she writes, and she is spectral, a 'white figure' in the moonlight (TFZ 43). She is seemingly dispersed into the night air, as if she were entirely without physical substance. She becomes an impotent Florence Nightingale figure, 'no longer a woman' (43). She displays public acts of compassion, 'holds to lips a cup of cold water', then transforms into a sadist as she pierces 'a shrunken side with a needle' (43). The nurse 'is dead. . . . already as am I—really dead, past resurrection. Her heart is dead. She killed it' (43). To be a woman working at the Front, Borden implies, is to die or, worse, to commit spiritual suicide. And yet a central irony of *The Forbidden Zone* is that Borden and her writing are filled with life in this zone of utter transgression. Borden is a woman transformed who leaves behind the protocols of wife and motherhood and becomes someone else, someone in control, someone who is both extremely feminine and masculine.

In the theatre of war, soldiers and auxiliaries routinely interchange roles traditionally considered gendered—cooks, service corps, medics, officers, and non-commissioned officers. Through the shedding of the gender identity of female softness, a Nightingale image, women in Borden's unit transform into capable journeymen. These women become hand-men, perhaps, rather than handmaidens of war. And orderlies, 'old men' (TFZ 91), who undress the wounded and wash the feet of the wounded so tenderly, become women-like (91). Guerin, the priest in '*Enfant de Malheur*', is 'a priest mobilised for war . . . [who] was so efficient as a nurse' (50). Clearly, the war zone is a space in which traditional gender roles are not always gendered, as the priest adopts the then womanly role. Rachamimov argues for a more nuanced understanding of gender boundaries and identity. She sees cross-dressing as a form of 'disruptive comfort', as played out in theatricals.⁴³ For some prisoners of war in

⁴³ Approximately eighty per cent of military divisions operating in the Eastern and Western Fronts had theatrical subunits attached to them during the war (Boxwell 5). These 'concert

Russia between 1914 and 1920, acting out cross-gender roles was a form of transgression that was 'liberating' (Rachamimov, 'Disruptive Comforts' 299).

Santanu Das proposes that sexual fluidity within soldier culture became more overt during the First World War as a result of exposure to '[m]utilation and mortality, loneliness and boredom, the strain of constant bombardment, the breakdown of language, and the sense of alienation from home' ('Kiss Me Hardy' 52). He argues that this 'led to a new level of intimacy and intensity under which the carefully constructed mores of civilian society broke down' (52). But I suggest that this demonstrates Das's fundamental misunderstanding of roles and gendered acts with the military unit in peacetime as well as within the war zone generally. The repetition of feminine or masculine acts in the field of war may be misread as latent or overtly homoerotic. But as Rachamimov points out, the 'male friendship paradigm' of homosocial societies is often culturally and conceptually acceptable for the duration ('Camp Domesticity' 299). These roles, she states, do not always conform to the 'spousal model'; they may be 'generational' (302). Further, the idea of 'non-sexual homosexuality', as proposed by the former German prisoner of war Paul Cohen-Portheim, is worth considering. In 1932, Cohen-Portheim writes: 'To my own knowledge there was nothing of what is called homosexuality . . . no hard and sharp division between what [the majority] admit to sexual acts or sensations' (qtd. in Rachamimov, 'Camp Domesticity' 301). Richard Aldington insists that soldier intimacy was not homosexual: 'No, no. There was no sodomy about it. It was just a human relation, a comradeship, an undemonstrative exchange of sympathies between ordinary men racked to the extremity under a great common strain in a great common danger. There was nothing dramatic about it' (Aldington 27). The intensity of the soldier-soldier bond is clear: 'I think we helped to keep each other's "souls" alive' (28). In the prologue to *Death of a Hero*, Aldington describes the ethos of the male-male relationship in war:

parties' were made up of enlisted men and officers, many of whom had been involved with theatre before the war. Originating in the YMCA tents behind the lines, concert parties were adopted by military officials who saw them as an asset for entertaining, distracting, and boosting morale in the proximity of the firing lines. By 1917, concert parties were ubiquitous, highly popular entertainments throughout the army, featuring a star system of 'soldier-divas' upon whom 'entire productions were built' (20). Private Purkiss, a soldier-diva, is featured in the wartime magazine *Play Pictorial*. The magazine includes a story sequence of photographs titled, 'The Arrival of a Lady Upsets the Major', in which Purkiss, 'judging by the photographs[, looks] astonishingly effective' (20).

Friendships between soldiers during the war were a real and beautiful and unique relationship which has now entirely vanished, at least from Western Europe. Let me at once disabuse the eager-eyed Sodomites among my readers by stating emphatically once and for all that there was nothing sodomitical in these friendships. I have lived and slept for months, indeed years, with “the troops,” and had several such companionships. But no vaguest proposal was ever made to me; I never saw any signs of sodomy, and never heard anything to make me suppose it existed. However, I was with the fighting troops. I can’t answer for what went on behind the lines. (26–27)

‘Soldiers,’ Robert Graves observes in *I, Claudius*, ‘really are an extraordinary race of men, as tough as shoe-leather, as superstitious as Egyptians, as sentimental as Sabine grandmothers’ (231). As Cohen-Portheim proposes, a better model of gender roles and acts in the forbidden zone might be one that understands relationships as fundamentally ‘attractive and complementary’ (301), or non-gendered. And in a non-gendered zone, the individual’s potential might be limitless. As we see in Borden’s narrative, she is overtly playing a traditional woman’s role, that of the nurse. Yet through her actions, particularly those entailing the power to perform triage, to choose life or death for patients, and through the wielding of powerful instruments of pain and release (morphine), she has adopted a masculine control over her environment and those who exist within it. Stylistically, *The Forbidden Zone* stands out from many Great War narratives through the tenor that Borden employs to portray the ‘mud and blood’. This is so much so that a critic in the 1930 *Saturday Review* gave it the following notice:

This reviewer has read many war books, particularly during the past year, but not one, even of German origin, which exceeds this in the horror of its descriptive passages. ‘The Forbidden Zone’ is a very horrible book, but as a sketch book of the war, seen from a particular angle, it should be faced and read, for it is written by one who can not only write, but can nurse and soothe maimed Poilus through the terrors of death. (‘A War Book’ 83)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Other women’s narratives, such as Enid Bagnold’s earlier account *A Diary Without Dates* (1918), certainly portray the ‘mud and blood’, or in the case of Bagnold the ‘the blood and puss’ (141). I argue in this chapter that what differentiates Borden’s account, what makes it more ‘horrible’, is its non-linearity, its use of multiple rhetorical devices and genres that destabilise the

The critic is comparing *The Forbidden Zone* to Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and finds that it 'exceeds' it 'in the horror of its descriptive passages' (83). This might be seen not only as a reaction to the descriptions of harrowing scenes in the text, but as discussed in the present chapter, may also be due to the disturbing narrative progress. Borden begins with the expansive and visual opening vignette, 'Belgium', and wends its way towards *The Forbidden Zone*'s most climactic sections, 'Paraphernalia' and 'The Operating Room', both of which exhibit the extremities of fascination with and detachment from the things of medicine and bodies as parts, bordering on fetishism and even torture. The expansive, excited, and welcoming narrative voice from the beginning of the text, as in 'Belgium', transforms into a self-controlled and controlling figure by the time she arrives at the Somme. There, she becomes a nurse who rips bandages off patients, taking parts of their brains as she does so—and we thereby see that the moral and sensual conversion of the woman in war is complete.

4.11 Playing Dress-up, or Getting Ready for Theatre

The overarching theme of this chapter is that observing the process of the artist in war—their moral and sensual conversion—is an empathic act. This empathy encompasses the recognition that through donning of drag, uniform, or costume, the sensual materiality and symbolism of clothing allows for civilian norms to fall away and a sense of otherness to prevail. Borden's priest, Guerin, does not look like a priest. In the freedom of the war zone he wears a neat 'blue corporal's uniform with his bright alert eyes looking out through his pince nez' (TFZ 50). Guerin does not look like another priest, a patient whom Borden encounters, 'in a black cassock' (50). Guerin undergoes a metamorphosis in the zone, becoming a spiritual husband to the virginal Pim. Borden observes that 'they worked together as if they had been born to this, and this alone' (50), 'a curiously harmonious couple' (51) and depicts them costumed for their roles as war-husband and war-wife.

In 2015, I discovered an unlabelled watercolour of Mary Borden (Figure 3) in the lower reaches of a glass case at the *Historial de la Grande Guerre*. It was

narrative arc, particularly Borden's use of variable narrative points-of-view in the voice of an anonymous narrator.

nestled amongst the ephemera of what the museum displays as the secondary—non-combatant—narrative of war. The portrait, by the minor Surrealist Clovis Trouelle (1889–1975), clearly shows Borden’s sense of self in the costume of *La Diréctrice* of ‘L’Hopital la plus chic sur tout le front’, something, she tells Spears in a letter of 18 June 1918, that General Pétain described her unit when awarding her the *croix de guerre* (‘Letter to Louis’ file 1 of 3). The conventional watercolour presents a portrait of a very sophisticated looking woman who appears attached to her chic image of the nurse veil, the blue uniform, and the casually draped red cape that looks more like a stole or a soft shawl. With her cigarette holder poised in her left hand, her pinkie finger outstretched, and her sensual closed eyes, Borden is veiled like a nun and clearly sanctioned to be in the zone as an iconic healer in her bright red and blue uniform that contrasts with her pale, slightly rouged skin. She appears to be someone utterly at ease in war, as her closed eyes appear elegant and not fatigued.

Clothing, style, and uniform, as the portrait of Borden reproduced on page 122 illustrates, provide a visual code that signals purpose and belonging in the zone. FANY costumes, or uniforms, illustrate this point; originally, FANYs’ work uniforms were made of long, red skirts with jackets, but after 1912 they adopted a culottes-type skirt or breeches, along with boots, puttees, and a ‘solar topée hat’ (Lee 145). This latter, more masculine uniform caused the FANYs to be perceived as ‘mannish’ or possibly ‘inverts’—lesbians (142). The messaging of uniforms is discussed by May Sinclair, who mocks her ambulance corps’ war-zone attire. It is an obsession:

We had never agreed as to our uniform, and some of us had had no time to get it, if we had agreed. Assembled in the vestibule, we looked more like a party of refugees, or the cast of a Barrie play, than a field ambulance corps. Mr. Grierson, the Chaplain, alone wears complete khaki, in which he is indistinguishable from any Tommy. The Commandant, observing some mysterious inspiration, has left his khaki suit behind. He wears a Norfolk Jacket and one of his hats. Mr. Foster in plain clothes, with a satchel slung over his shoulders, has the air of an inquiring tourist. Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil in short khaki tunics, khaki putties, and round Jaeger caps, and very thick coats over all, strapped in with leather belts, look as if they were about to sail on an Arctic expedition; I was told to wear dark blue serge. (Sinclair 10)

The attire of Sinclair's ambulance unit varies from that of the war tourist, to the Tommy, to a character in a J.M. Barrie play. And though her ambulance equipe's uniforms are varied, they nonetheless provide a form of sartorial passport, the costume needed for crossing the boundaries into war. For Sinclair it was a choice between wearing the linen costume of a feminine angel or going home (she did both). Sinclair's Belgian Red Cross uniform transformed her into one of 'the angelic beings' (10); clothed in 'white linen overall and veil which you must wear if you work among the refugees' (24), she takes what she perceived to be a limited role (caring for refugees) and is clearly disappointed not to be wearing khaki and puttees and getting close to the Front, where the real action is. The irony of Sinclair's perceived failure to get to the front lines is that her narrative provides an excellent account of the marginal transactions of spies, courtesans, war profiteers, and war tourists in the forbidden zone.

As Boxwell notes in 'The Follies of War', the question of uniforms, or 'women in drag' (19), was a subject of feminist critics '(from Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* forward); military uniform is itself a kind of drag, a costume instantiating and subverting gender norms' (20). For Sinclair, the overtly feminine uniform that she purchased on the outskirts of the zone relegated her to handmaiden status rather than the more overtly masculine status of the cross-dressers, the khaki-clad Amazons. But perhaps it was better to be an angel than a devil in the zone. Borden's narrator, as we will see, was both, and in this she was keeping with her times.

4.12 Sideshow: Sadomasochism, Pornography and the Great War

Perhaps one of the strongest arguments for an empathic reading of Borden's war narrative lies in the reader's acknowledgement of Borden's willingness to expose herself in the role of sadist and masochist through her public and private acts of inflicting pain and sexualising the near-dead. Carolyn J. Dean contends that the narrative of unprecedented and sustained violence of the war transformed 'the male body into "pornographic" spectacles . . . [and] unravelled conventional boundaries between the moral and immoral', and that the war 'dissolved gender distinctions . . . and precipitated a reinscription of masculinity and femininity in new terms' (Dean 61). Dean's work explores the association between sadomasochism and the female figure as the embodiment

of war in French literature during and after the war. But this section also looks at the idea of women and their consumption of the male figure, specifically Borden's nurse narrator in *The Forbidden Zone*.

Violent erotic fiction existed in the late nineteenth century, but Dean contends that critics at the time believed it to be individualistic, reflecting the predilections of its authors and readers. During and after the war, a major cultural shift occurred, as indicated by the plethora of pornography available to the common man. It 'no longer remained behind the closed doors of rich men's studies and infiltrated locales where it had no business being' (68). In content, pornography lost the 'restrained, aestheticized voluptuousness of late-nineteenth-century sadomasochistic ritual . . . [with] its aristocratic decor, its props and fetishes, its calculated and cold violence. Instead, sadomasochism loses its theatrical quality and becomes atrocious because the violence is transparent' (69). Sadomasochistic pornography during and after the war, states Dean, transformed from that of 'undisciplined sexual pleasure' to that of discipline as pleasure (61). A sense of this sadomasochism is traced in *The Forbidden Zone*, particularly in the context of the nurse's conflicted roles of healer and pain-giver, as I will discuss in greater detail below.

By examining the plethora of pornography, including novels such as Marcello Fabri's *L'Inconnu sur les villes: roman des foules modernes* (1921), Dean identifies a central trope of war, represented as a blood-sucking female vampire. Certainly this is plausible given the experience of the soldier in a surgical unit such as Borden's, where men were poked, prodded, and eviscerated. In the novel, war is no longer a 'patriotic self-sacrifice . . . no longer a dignified, because freely chosen, gesture, but a pleasurable, irresistible, virility-sapping perversion' (63). Another novel, *Les Androphobes* (1930), by Charles-Noel Renard, allegorises war as 'a wild pack of vampire lesbians whom men find irresistible' (63). Pornography, and particularly sadomasochistic pornography, became so prevalent during the war that in 1917, the French government commissioned the poet and critic Edmond Haraucourt to investigate the phenomenon and write a report on the subject of degradation, pornography laws, and the effect of the literature on the population. *La Démoralisation par le livre et par l'image* reported an alarming normativity of pain and death in the general population: 'At the end of this long alert [the war]

which unleashed violent instincts, we can expect to find those instincts alive and well. . . . We will continue to kill a great deal after the war' (qtd. in Dean 61). For Haraucourt, 'patriotism no longer served to heal wounds but became a pretext for inflicting more wounds, more eviscerations' (61). War was no longer Marinettiesque, a 'hygiene' that 'cleanses the national body of sins' through a process of wounding followed with healing (61). As Haraucourt observes in his report, pornography became 'one of the primary vehicles through which the "contagion" of war, the "attraction to death" is sustained and delivered' (61). Where then are women in all of this?

In Sassoon's 'Glory of Women', he points the finger of blame for the war and maiming at women, perversely, for they are the nurses that wash and heal the soldier. For Sassoon, women are the ones who 'make us shells' with their ignorance of war. Dean cites Georges Anquetil's novel *Satan Conduit le bal* (1925), in which men are contaminated in the 'brothel' of war:

The war is turned into a transnational brothel, another eroticized *mise-en-scène* in which the body's private pleasure and pain become public affairs. In short, he represents 'depraved morality' as an eroticized quest for death whose most privileged embodiment is sadomasochistic spectacle: the body bound, unclothed, mutilated, humiliated. (63)

Similar themes of public mutilation, humiliation, pain, and sadomasochism are echoed, albeit more subtly, in *The Forbidden Zone*. In 'In the Operating Room', the narrator is at her most controlling, detached, and sadomasochistic as she enumerates rubber tubes, glass syringes, steel, and cotton items which have become instruments of torture and self-torture. In a breathless, unpunctuated narrative, she states: 'Here are blankets and pillows and tin boxes and needles and bottles and pots and basins and long rubber tubes and many little white squares of gauze' (TFZ 83). She is the consummate professional, addressing herself at the same time as her readership: 'You show off the skilled movements of your hands beside the erratic jerkings of [a wounded soldier's] terrible limbs' (83). In this passage, the soldier is like a sick marionette and the nurse a puppeteer. She 'rubs his grey flesh', then she sticks 'the needle deep into his side' with her 'rosy fingertips' and 'splendid eyes'—she has become a

masterful mistress of torture, no longer a 'receiver' of pain but in control, emotionally and physically (TFZ 83–84).

Throughout Borden's account, the nurse-narrator portrays herself alternately as an angel of mercy and a sadistic torturer. Critically, the nurse-narrator sexualises and objectifies the wounded male in '*Enfant de Malheur*' as she perversely admires the 'Apache' (TFZ 47) with the 'face of an angel' (48), one of a group of 'handsome young men . . . assassins, thieves, pimps and traffickers in drugs—with sleek elastic limbs, smooth polished skins and beautiful bones' (47). In spite of the fact that the young soldier is mutilated and dying a slow, terrible, death, the narrator admires his body, his tattoos, and speculates that 'some sailor in a North African port had dug needles of blue ink into the marble flesh of the indelible words—*enfant de Malheur*' (66). Borden's fascination with needles has become fetishistic and sadistic, a sadism that was discussed earlier in the context of the 'The Beach'. Characters, things, and, by extension, her readers are manipulated as she exposes the psychological assault of the young lover, the mewing soldiers as they die, the '*Enfant de Malheur*' and his long, slow death, the attempted suicide Rosa with his mouth blown off, and the dying soldier of 'Unidentified' at the end of the collection. Clearly Borden has crossed the boundary of her popular fiction into the forbidden territory of graphic, masculine war books and in doing so has created a new genre of war story, particularly in 'The Beach', a popular war-romance-cum-gothic tale. In this she rewrites a new version of herself as a practitioner of sadomasochism, through her sadistic presentation of human suffering and psychic torture as played out through narrative tenors and anecdote.

4.13 Crossing Borders: The Age of Castration and Emasculation

In 1918, Marie Stopes published *Married Love*. Popular with soldiers and their wives, the book was reprinted five times within the year. In 1935, Stopes wrote, 'Modern marriage is often undermined by one of the direct or indirect aftereffects of the War', and that was a 'lack of normal virility in men who pass, externally, for healthy specimens' (147). Stopes had direct experience of this with a war-wounded, albeit virile-looking, husband (147). After the publication of *Married Love*, Stopes received thousands of letters from men and women, many addressing the issue of impotence as a result of the war. The theme of

the castrated male as a condition of the aftermath of war contributes to the idea of the war zone as a locale of transition and new identities.

Throughout *The Forbidden Zone*, Borden's wounded and dying soldiers frequently appear as genderless: 'Certainly they were men once. But now they are no longer men' (TFZ 44). They have been emasculated, castrated physically by armaments or mentally through shell shock. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that the theme of emasculation '[recurs] with unnerving frequency in the most canonical male modernist novels and poems' (Gilbert and Gubar 36). Among these are the 'cuckolded Leopold Bloom' in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the Fisher King in *The Waste Land*, Hemingway's 'eunuch Jake Barnes' in *The Sun Also Rises*, 'the gelded Joe Christmas in *Light in August*', each one of them 'maimed, unmanned, victimized characters . . . obsessively created by early twentieth-century literary men', or as Gilbert cruelly labels them, the 'No-Men' of the Great War (36). In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Clifford Chatterley represents Lawrence's central theme of suffering and wastage as a result of the war; Lawrence, famously a war outcast, and an objector, creates in Chatterley a class system rendered legless through war. This characterisation may be interpreted as a war-induced feminisation of the post-war injured male, specifically, a demoted squire overshadowed by Mellor's hyper-masculinity. Landscape and the history of the country are embodied in Chatterley's paralysis 'from the hips down, paralysed for ever' (Lawrence 2), and though the war 'brought the roof down over [Constance Chatterley's] head' (2), it transformed her into what her father calls 'a demi-vierge' (22); through her relationship with the gamekeeper/soldier Mellors, she becomes a sexually autonomous player. For Chatterley, however, dependent upon his wife, who lifts his 'inert legs . . . in her arms' while transferring him from one chair to another (68), the greater tragedy is that he survived the war.

In Lawrence's novel the war zone has transformed the aristocrat Chatterley into a helpless dependent, Constance Chatterley, a VAD in London (11), into the powerful, superior position of the able-bodied wife, and Mellors, a temporary gentleman, into a 'Lieutenant' (132), someone who has 'picked up certain tricks . . . and improved upon his position' (98), one who is bold enough to cross class boundaries and become her lover. And he is one for whom, after the war, 'it isn't easy . . . to get back to his own level' (132). Where Mellors and

Lady Chatterley have had their station in life magnified by war, Clifford Chatterley becomes, temporarily, 'a child-man' (431), until he becomes 'a REAL businessman . . . an absolute he-man, sharp as a needle, and impervious as a bit of steel' (431). Not until Chatterley challenges his striking coal miners and takes control of his ailing coalmines does he move again, become a man again.

But Borden's narrator portrays soldiers at their most genderless, at their most innocent, or often as something non-human, reduced to animals or things. In '*Enfant de Malheur*', the tough street fighter is reduced to 'a small weak child' as he lies dying, 'confessing his sins' to the priest Guerin (TFZ 60). In the zone of the surgical ward, the narrator tells us that '[t]here are no men here', only 'mangled testicles'; patients are reduced to being 'heads and knees' and ' chests with a hole as big as your fist, and pulpy thighs, shapeless; and stumps' (43–4). Their eyes are not human; they belong to 'sick dogs and sick cats, blind eyes, eyes of delirium; and mouths that cannot articulate, and parts of faces—the nose gone or the jaw' (43–4). The narrator questions her sense of gender, asking, '[S]o why should I be a woman?' (43), and concludes: 'It is impossible to be a woman here. One must be dead' (43).

In *Testament to Youth*, Vera Brittain records analogous sentiments when she describes how she feels after the war is over. Peace is 'nasty', and the celebrations of 1919 are 'horrid' (Brittain 468). After studying at Oxford, she describes a dissolving personality and in her letters begins to show 'a dark, foggy confusion, uncertain of what had happened' to her mind (470). Learning of a close friend's peacetime death, Brittain throws herself into a whirlwind of parties because she is 'sick beyond description of death and loss' (484), yet she cannot shake pain. Then, 'with a sense of incommunicable horror', she begins to detect in her 'face the signs of some sinister and peculiar change' (484); '[a] dark shadow . . . across my chin; was I beginning to grow a beard, like a witch?' (484). Brittain is convinced that she is becoming what she expressly feared at the beginning of the war—a sexless, sexually impotent woman, loathed, loathing, and filled with shame. In '*Dulce et Decorum Est*', Wilfred Owen describes another transformation, troops 'drunk with fatigue (l. 7) becoming old men—'All went lame / went blind' (l. 6)—who then transform into old, and by implication, useless, women: 'Knock-kneed, coughing like hags' (l. 2). Owen's poem '*Disabled*' records the transformation through the emasculation of the

amputee, one who returns home and dons a 'ghastly suit of grey, / Legless, sewn short at elbow' (l. 2–3). The poet describes a once-man who now notices 'how the women's eyes / Passed from him to the strong men that were whole' (l. 43–4). For Owen, then, war is a chrysalis in reverse. Human beings, forced to perform *in extremis*, in war, are transformed into opposite genders or are neutered, as in Owen's 'Disabled'; yet others, as Borden illustrates, find a heightened sense of self, an autonomy unimaginable before war.

4.14 Moral Witness

Margaret Higonnet writes that Borden's writing is 'not spontaneous truth telling' but rather a careful literary treatment employing Modernist techniques available at the time of writing: 'fragmentation, abrupt juxtaposition, deadpan description, and intrusively vivid images' (100–1). This section proposes that through an empathic reading the reader may observe that what Borden presents is a form of moral witness, primarily to herself. The war story is often filled with exaggerations, inventions, or misremembered narratives, yet this neither invalidates an account nor robs it of truth. For Borden, and others working in the zone, it was indisputably a place of witness to great suffering and destruction, exploitation, voyeurism, yet also, through the act of moral witness, sometimes a redemptive act.

The moral dilemma for the creative artist, though, is that the zone frequently functions as a place of agency—in Borden's case, for her own autonomy and identity. Avisha Margalit defines moral witness as that which 'involves witnessing actual suffering . . . knowledge-by-acquaintance' (147). The moral witness is 'a species of eye-witness' (163). Certainly, the evidence for this stacks up in Borden's favour. 'Moonlight', perhaps the most harrowing account in *The Forbidden Zone*, describes the price of this witness through the dissociation of the nurse from self, the nameless nurse, and death, whom she calls the soldier's 'monstrous paramour', 'she-devil . . . Elemental . . . Diva'. Her patients have been reduced to duties, functions, body parts: 'the Heads'; 'the Knees', the 'Elbows', and 'the fractured Thighs' (TFZ 43). 'Three knees have come in,' she informs surgeons in the overworked surgical suite, 'two more abdomens, five more heads' (89). But the nurse crossing the camp courtyard has become deaf because she cannot 'bear to hear Life crying and mewling', and she has become 'blind so she cannot see the torn parts of men she must

handle. Blind, deaf, dead' (43). Paradoxically, 'she is strong, efficient, fit to consort with gods and demons—a machine inhabited by the ghost of a woman—soulless' and 'past redeeming' (43). Through repeated actions and reactions in the surgical wards of the forbidden zone, Borden's narrator has become omnipotent, a consummate professional, a machine of efficiency with the power of life and death in her hands. But she has also become a 'ghost' of her former self, and it will take years for Borden to reconcile the ghost of the woman she was and who she has become. In *Journey Down a Blind Alley*, Borden reflects on the forbidden zone and sees herself with 'a dozen needles on the boil. I have been on duty thirty-six hours and am become a sleepwalker, an automaton' (9); she remembers 'the French poilus of 1914–1918' and believes she must return and 'take up again the work that was interrupted' (9–10). Clearly, this is the time in which Borden feels most engaged and alive, and as with Jean Norton Cru, she feels compelled to return to the hospital unit as a form of active witness to the 'dogged, patient, steady men, plodding to death in defence of their land' (9). She adds, 'I shall never forget them' (9).

But witness is nuanced, as morality is nuanced. When, for example, does Borden bear witness to those she nurses, and where do she and others, such as the professional nurse and writer Ellen La Motte, exploit these sufferers? For Margalit, whose work in Holocaust testimonial encompasses the subject of war testimony, moral witness requires 'sincerity' and 'authenticity' (170). 'An authentic person is one who gets rid of all his personae (masks) and gives expression to his "true self," especially in the extreme circumstances of being unprotected by a civilized moral environment' (170). This is problematic when the witness is operating in a complex, fluid environment such as the *zone*. Negotiation of self in war consists of donning uniforms, roles, or types of masks and entering a zone in which normal gender roles are substantially moot. Potentially, though, given the mediation of time between the war and the publication of Borden's collection, it is the wearing down of the author through exposure to mass suffering that may contribute to a more sincere witness. Still, as we see in her poem 'Unidentified', not only does Borden demand that the reader cast the gaze on the dying soldier, but she wants us to look at her and her great (and substantial) achievements—and why not? This state of

narcissism is one that war may engender, a survivor's instinct, or one that is warranted for those who seize the opportunities found within.

4.15 Conclusion

The conflict archaeologist Nicolas J. Saunders describes the 'conflict locations' of the Western and Eastern Fronts as a 'complex palimpsest of overlapping, multi-vocal landscapes' (*Matters of Conflict* 7) and the material culture of the war as an entrée to 'the physical and symbolic worlds that war has created' (5). Clearly, neither a single chapter in a thesis, nor a book, nor thousands of books can possibly provide an accurate picture of the forbidden zone. This cacophonous chapter attempts to portray a tiny sample of the contradictory, multiple dimensions of the landscape through exploring a long-dormant voice, that of the civilian operative nurse in the war zone. Borden's narrative of actions and reactions to the zone provide insight into another type of witness—the transformation of self. In her 1929 response to the war book phenomenon, Borden addresses the war through multiple voices, using a variety of rhetorical devices to translate her experience, her transformation to one of temporary agency through exposition to, and actions within, the hyper-kinetic, socially fluid war zone. *The Forbidden Zone* is complex and overlapping, with multiple landscapes and the voices of the human experience within the deeply sensual, symbol-laden war zone of the surgical unit. Borden's response, through the voice of her unnamed nurse-narrator, illustrates the process of creativity and agency wrought through the artist's total engagement with the war zone.

In *Jane—Our Stranger*, the nurse protagonist eagerly packs up her household and accompanies a woman, clearly modelled on Borden, to the Front with the woman's 'équipe of nurses' (316). Of the household she has left behind, Jane states, 'I forgot them . . . I forgot everything' (316). Later, she turns the 'house that I had hated into a hospital' (316). Through war, she finds purpose and deliverance from domestic unhappiness, converting her home into a place for the wounded: 'I enjoyed filling the place with rows of white iron beds and glass topped tables and basins and pails and bottles and bandages' (316). Critically, she turns her 'boudoir into an operating room' (316)—her total destruction of the domestic and intimate opens up the physical space for work and purpose, and for redemption. The proposition is that an empathic

engagement with the war story is enhanced through understanding the relation of the individual to the landscape, culture, and material of war—the things of war such as uniforms, weapons, dwellings, even landscapes, or, in the case of medics, tools and specialist equipment, the paraphernalia of the surgical unit—and the transformation that subsequently occurs through exposure to the hyper-kinetic, socially fluid war zone.

In the context of a war zone, to live in the ‘margin’ is to be continually dislocated under the threat of ultimate loss—psychic or physical dismemberment, or death—yet paradoxically, some, like Borden, experience a growing sense of being ‘found’, as her deftly handled narrative portrays. And within the sense of being found, there is the opportunity for real empathy. ‘I had a sense of great power, exhilaration and excitement’ (*Jane* 96), Borden writes; ‘A loud wind was howling . . . throwing itself like a pack of wolves against the flimsy wooden walls, and the guns were growling. . . . I was happy’ (97). In her highly autobiographical novel, Borden is unambiguous:

I enjoyed the War. It set me free. I reverted to type, became a savage, enjoyed myself. In a wooden hut, on a sea of quaking mud under a cracking sky, I lived an immense life. I was a giant—I was colossal—I dwelt in chaos and was calm. With death let loose on the earth, I felt life pouring through me, beating in me: I exulted. Danger, a roaring noise, cold, fatigue, hunger, these my rations, agreed with me. I was a giantess with chilblains, and a chronic backache. (317)

Via the narrative voice of Jane, another nurse, Borden uses a technique of literary ventriloquism to reaffirm the sense of agency she experiences through acts of work in the chaos of the war zone. Jane, or Borden, is ‘calm’ in the place where ‘death let loose on the earth’ and where hardships have become her ‘rations’, her daily bread. But the scale of her agency is far greater than coming into one’s own; she declares that she has become a ‘giantess’, powerful, capable, and happy, one who feels ‘life pouring through [her]’. She describes the sensuality of the act of nursing: ‘I lifted battered men in my arms, soothed their pain, washed their bodies, scrubbed their feet’ (317). Danger and dirty work, for Jane/Borden, appear to be almost aphrodisiacal: ‘I enjoyed scrubbing them’ (317). Again, she turns to the things of the zone to describe the actions and reactions of her protagonist in war: ‘I had, for the business, pails of hot

water, scrubbing brushes, the kind one uses for floors, and slabs of yellow soap' (317). What is absent from this description is the pain inflicted on the men as she scrubs them clean using the hard, bristled brushes made for floors, not flesh. All has become 'the business' of war. Clearly, the narrator has entered the second battlefield, and in doing so she has become someone new, someone outsized with her ruthless efficiency.

Geographically and operationally, the forbidden zone was a sector of dead ends with the Front acting as the barrier, and yet the wall that was the Front frequently moved, exhibiting the mutability of the physical frontier as a sign that it was a locale not only of death but also of life. The scope of, potential for, and magnitude of change experienced by those entering the zone is fundamental to understanding how Borden and other artists become quite other—for better or worse—and how the sector becomes a place of innovation through experience. Tactile knowledge gave the nurse the ability to determine how battles were going on multiple fronts through reading the wounds, tallying the numbers, and observing the types of uniforms. In this, the medics' perspective and intelligence were broader than those of the 'mole' men who lived in the trenches.

At her surgical unit near the front, Borden is neither 'lost' in the wilderness nor without direction—she is determined and at home, as is Elsie (Knocker) T'Serclaes, who writes: 'Only in war have I found any real sense of purpose and happiness' (213). Borden is filled with the purpose brought to a woman through 'an occupation, a shelter, companions, a jug and a basin' (40). In her memoir, *Flanders and other Fields* (1964), T'Serclaes states: 'For me war has meant excitement, fulfilment, happiness even. It has brought me face to face with death at its ugliest and most painful' (213). Like Borden, who funded another mobile medical unit in the Second World War, T'Serclaes 're-enlisted' in the Second World War in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Her testament contrasts with that of an officer such as Edmund Blunden, who writes that he is 'trying to remember the way to freedom' the closer he gets to the Front (*Undertones of War* 22). Borden's narrator paradoxically *finds* freedom the closer she gets to the lines, her text deeply engaging in the 'crossroads' where 'Germans shell . . . beyond us or the town behind us' (40), the zone where action and circumstance forge something new.

What is noticeable in *The Forbidden Zone* is how Borden employs a variety of registers to distance herself from the war, or to close up the distance between the reader and the realities of the war. The narrative voice oscillates between the objective and the deeply personal. In 'The North' and 'Belgium', the narration is close to documentary in style, a type of War Baedeker told sometimes in the third person peripheral. In an opening fragment, the narrator states: 'Mud: and a thin rain coming down to make more mud' (TFZ 7). Later, Borden's narrative register flips to a type of moral reportage, as in 'The Priest and the Rabbi', the story of a general who enters the forbidden zone of the surgical unit to decorate 'every man who had lost a leg or an arm with the *Médaille Militaire*' (105). It is rumoured that the senior officer gives 'all his pay to the men', and yet he is utterly oblivious to the suffering around him, particularly a man whose skin is 'burnt black' from proximity to shell burst (105). Despite his public performance of compassion, he seems only to focus on the soldier's coverlet, decorated with pink roses, and not the man beneath it. His parting shot, and the morally damning comment to the narrator, is: 'Maybe the wife could get one like it' (108). The narrator responds that the coverlets 'come from Selfridges ... they cost five francs. I'll send you one when the war is over' (108). A more interior register is demonstrated in 'Conspiracy', 'The Operating Room' and 'Paraphernalia' from the Part Two of the text, 'The Somme'. In both of these fragments, Borden writes at her barest and most suffering; paradoxically, these two segments use the most detached tenor. Morally damning of the self in war, in 'Conspiracy', the collective 'we' are complicit in the arrangement 'that men should be broken and that they should be mended. Just as you send your clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back' (79). 'We have all the things here for mending' (79). In 'Paraphernalia', Borden uses an accusatory second person, 'you', to excoriate the nurse-narrator (herself), whose proficiency is such that she has become impatient with her suffering soldier patients: 'Hush, you are making a noise,' she tells them, 'Why do you make a noise? . . . You are filling the room with sound' (84). The inconvenience of the 'foolish business' (84) of dying has ground compassion from the nurse, and she is reduced to an efficient, 'superb' (84) automaton.

The 1929 edition of *The Forbidden Zone* concludes with the poem 'Unidentified', a choice of register that demonstrates Borden's morally superior

voice as being of one who has been there and cleaned up the mess and who wishes her readers to look at the mess and at how expert she has become at handling it. Throughout her text Borden experiments with narrative techniques that encompass the vocally dispassionate third person, the psychologically revealing first person central, or peripheral (the cool but present observer), the second person didactic, all of which create an uneven, destabilised narrative, and which points towards the idea that within the war zone multiple personae are possible. *The Forbidden Zone* articulates how one artist experienced the war zone and yet it is possible to extrapolate that many, many others experienced the war similarly. The experience Borden expresses is where military and medical culture, civilians, and professionals collide and coincide in a land stripped of the metaphysical, a land of smashed crucifixes and other broken things, and a land of opposites—of new and sometimes luminous things.

To read the war script empathically, one may read between the lines of Borden's *The Forbidden Zone*, look at the relationship of the narrator, the zone, and the things of war, and understand transformation and the becoming of someone new. In the text one perceives that Borden's hyper-sensual landscape is made of apocalyptic mud and fire, from which God is missing ('Where is Jehovah' [TFZ29 183]); but one may also see that in the wilderness, through one's actions and reactions, agency and wondrous things such as the reinvention of oneself as a figure of extraordinary power may also be found.

Chapter 5. David Jones and The House of Form

Enough has been written in recent years on the subject of Art in almost every possible relationship to make one chary of adding more, nevertheless, the heightened sense of the nature of our age which the war has occasioned, brings a new necessity to examine some of those relationships.

David Jones, 'Art in Relation to War' (1942–3), *The Dying Gaul* (123)

5.0 Introduction

The war book era was crowded, noisy, fractious, and highly competitive. Its authors offered the readership a panoply of formal responses to the Great War through poetry, prose, novels, plays, experimental literature, and highly conventional memoirs. David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937), the late arrival to this publishing phenomenon, stands out for its distinct formal outline and literary texture, one frequently deemed difficult to comprehend. As multiple drafts of Jones's war narrative demonstrate, he was preoccupied for almost a decade with finding a formal textual and physical outline for his war narrative. His struggle, and his genius, was to apply his painterly aesthetic to his organisational and narrative strategies. Through a reading of Jones's text using the protocol set out in this thesis, the empathic reading observes struggle for form, and the message Jones conveys through this form, as the focus of his war narrative as discussed in this chapter.

In Herbert Read's 1937 review of *In Parenthesis* (IP), the decorated war veteran, poet, and critic observes: 'Those who are closely familiar with modern painting will know Mr. Jones as a singularly independent artist whose compositions, generally in water-colour with a fine nervous outline, recall some medieval Harrowing or Last Judgment in their complex pattern of realism' (Read 457). Read understands that Jones's organisation of his narrative is born of the visual artist's mind and states, 'It is interesting to see the same qualities in his writing producing a complete synthesis [of the war experience]' (457). Read understands that Jones's organisation of his narrative is born of the visual artist's mind. As Jones writes to Harman Grisewood in 1938: 'my equipment is of a painter, not a writer' (*The Dying Gaul* 83). Jones's painterly 'equipment', and his quest for a formal organisation for his narrative, resulted in what Read

recognises as an ‘epic of war’ (457), and Read, a war-tested veteran, states that *In Parenthesis* is ‘like no other war-book because for the first time that experience has been reduced to a “shape in words”’ (457). The latter quote is from Jones’s Preface, in which he explains that his quest has been to find a form with which to organise his war: ‘I have only tried to make a shape in words, using as data the complex of sights, sounds, fears, hopes, apprehensions, smells, things exterior and interior, the landscape and paraphernalia of that singular time and of those particular men’ (IP x).

Where Read enthuses that the book is ‘a miracle’ (Read 457), Jones’s opinion is more modest—he has ‘only tried’ to gather in the complex sights and sounds and emotions of the war experience of ‘this writing’ (IP ix, xiv, xv). Jones’s apologetic modesty continues as he cites Michael Drayton: “if I have not done her right, the want is in my ability, not in my love” (xv). It is Jones’s love for his infantry unit, and his feelings of responsibility to the unit, particularly the dead, that compels him to articulate this struggle and his sense of the weight of responsibility to do it ‘right’. Where other narrators use texts for revenge (Graves through autobiography) or self-aggrandisement (Borden through fragments), Jones’s impulse, in the end, is one of holistic, communal love and remembrance. How Jones solves the conundrum of his narrative offers the reader an insight into a fundamental ethical engagement confronted by artists and their war narratives: the struggle for form.

To determine the subject, form, the reading protocol that I set out in this study was employed to identify the generic conventions within Jones’s text, and to look beyond to his signals and signs, his ethical signature, within the text. Jones conveniently lays out many of the text’s conventions within his Preface. In the first paragraph, he provides his ‘credentials’, the dates of ‘my going to France’ (ix). He follows this with the ‘loss of innocence’: ‘From then on things hardened . . . took on a more sinister aspect’ (ix). Anticipation is recalled in his memories of ‘the earlier months [when] there was a certain attractive amateurishness’, and ‘reality’ is expressed through his preoccupation with the material things of his war: ““toffee-apples” (a type of trench-mortar bomb so shaped)’ (ix). ‘Damage or disillusionment’ comes early in the Preface as he describes ‘[t]he wholesale slaughter’ of the later years of the war, while the conventions ‘return’ and ‘readjustment’ are expressed in a short sentence: ‘Just

as now there are glimpses in our ways of another England—yet we know the truth' (ix). Jones's 'silence' convention is witnessed by the passing of nineteen years from war's end to the publication of *In Parenthesis*, and 'the shout' is observed in Dai's boast (79–84). His 'epilogue', his last word, is twofold: a seven-part text in capitalised Latin and English, its subject being the scapegoat and containing Biblical references, and Jones's illustration of a goat entangled in barbed wire, a longbow piercing him side-to-side, stranded in the wreck of a devastated woods.

As I discussed earlier in the thesis, the challenge to select and synthesise from the visual, aural, sensual, psychological, and historical complexity of the war experience and to fashion the 'data' of war (IP ix) into something aesthetically whole creates several opportunities and roadblocks. This chapter draws together the components of Jones's struggle from the point of view of the artist's ethical struggle with the aesthetics of shape. To begin, I look at the separation of the individual from home and self and the process of becoming part of an army unit. Following this, I examine what Jones refers to as 'Zone Mind' in a letter to Harman Grisewood (*Roman Quarry* 84), as a prerequisite to successful transition to the war zone. Then I discuss the concept of adaptation to the theatre of war in 'At Home Under Fire'. This is followed by looking at exile and the artist, or 'Into the Zone'; following this I apply the concept of adaptation to form and narrative, or 'The House of Form and the Great War'. In this section I consider form in a scene from Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* and a John Allen Wyeth sonnet as comparatives in the discussion of Jones's aesthetic choices *In Parenthesis*. In the final sections of the chapter I discuss 'David Jones and Form', 'The House of the Spirit', or *In Parenthesis* as a soldier liturgy; finally, I propose that through overt form, Jones claims his role in the Battle of the Somme as the Bard of the Somme. Thomas Dilworth cites Dai's boast as being 'the riddle at the heart of the poem' and the Queen of the Woods, in actuality, 'the climactic countercentre', 'its answer' (*Reading David Jones* 95). While Dilworth's point of view warrants acceptance, this chapter suggests that the boast, centrally placed, represents Jones's self-perception as the bard figure of his unit and of the battle at Mametz.

5.1 The Conundrum

How does one begin to articulate a war culture landscape, one that Jones reports often speaks ‘with a grimly voice’, a landscape of ‘sharp contours and unformed voids of that mysterious existence’ in the war zone (IP ix)? As Jones writes, therein lie ‘the sudden violences and long stillnesses’ of war, a place and experience that ‘profoundly affected the imaginations of those who suffered it’ (ix); Jones takes the complex landscape, a place filled with the ‘stumbling dark of the blind’, one he believes that ‘Brueghel knew about’ (31), as Jones describes the march towards the Front, and brings a painterly light and arrangement to the social narrative of his subject. Like Pieter Breughel the Elder in his paintings, Jones creates small literary groupings, or narrative houses, made of poetry, prose, and typography nested in something much larger—the canvas of a book-length ‘work of literary art’, as T.S. Eliot describes *In Parenthesis* (vii). Compositionally, Jones’s work, like Breughel’s, appears overfull with minute details of soldier or peasant life, war, and death, and it is filled with satire, jokes, fantasy, pathos, and realism that perform double duty as art and as a type of visual or textual sociology. For this reason, *In Parenthesis* is as much an evocative ethnography of an infantry unit as a personal narrative of the Great War, one that is manifested formally, or housed, in a pictorial arrangement.

The text is organised chronologically within a structure that Read identifies as a ‘series of seven parts’ that comprise ‘the stations in an infantryman’s progress’ (Read, ‘War and the Spirit’ 457). The sevenfold arrangement represents the seven months that Jones’s army unit took to make its seven stations of the cross to the Golgotha of the Front lines at the Battle of the Somme. But the number seven extends to Revelations 5:6 and the conceptualisation of perfection through God’s sevenfold revelation—the seven spirits of God, and the role of the seven legal seals as seals of Christ, the universal witness: ‘And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth (*King James Version*). Herein is Jones’s statement of personal witness, times seven, or his seven psalms of the soldier-lamb, or the soldier-Christ. As he writes in the Preface to *In Parenthesis*: ‘He is instructed to

sing first to [the Queen] a song in honour of God. He must then sing . . . the song of treachery and of the undoing of all things' (xiii). Thus, Jones's text is a sevenfold song that brings his witness of his fellow rifle company to bear in the content, the typographic layout and organisation, and the two illustrations included in the text. In this, I suggest however, rather than solely oratorio or psalmic, one may perceive the formal outline of Jones's war texts resembling the structure of an elaborate septych, a fugue of a medieval altar such as Jones might have seen at the National Gallery in London or perhaps some of the great cathedrals. At the centre of the text is Dai's boast (79–84), a five-page litany of cultural memory that incorporates references to Mallory, the Welsh bards, the Romans, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the Bible, and that asks the question central to the text: 'Why?' (84). The significance of Dai's boast will be looked at in greater detail later, but I suggest that whereas the altar-makers filled their works with images of angels, the suffering, rewards, and punishments of saints and sinners, the birth and death of the Christ figure, and the resurrection, Jones fills his altar with what Read calls 'a true record of our suffering' (Read, 'War and the Spirit' 457). Jones's poem is a formal monument to the suffering of the soldier, but it is more than a monument—it is a ritualistic text that bears witness to redemption through words, actions and faith.

Jones is concerned with what comes of suffering, for the acceptance of redemptive suffering, as cited by Peter (1 Peter 4:13), is one that Jones would have accepted through his Catholic conversion. Here he provides a text that offers redemption, as in 1 Peter 4:13, where Peter asks the disciples whether they wonder at all at the 'fiery trial which is to try you', then states, 'But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy' (KJV). In the astonishing denouement of *In Parenthesis*, the wounded Dai and the dying men who surround him pray to the goddess/Mary figure, the Queen of the Woods, in German, vernacular English, and English:

Maiden of the digged places
 let our cries come unto thee.
Mam, moder, mother of me
 Mother of Christ under the tree. (IP 176)

Through his typographical layout of the passage, specifically the double indentation that marks a long pause, Jones suggests an antiphonal, psalmic call and response at the moment of the soldiers' passings. Here Jones demonstrates that all soldiers are brothers, all cry out for their earthly and heavenly mothers at death, even the 'ENEMY FRONT-FIGHTERS WHO SHARED OUR PAINS AGAINST WHOM WE FOUND OURSELVES BY MISADVENTURE' (IP Dedication, n.p.). This is another of Jones's acts of witness and compassion for all Christ-soldiers of all nations.

While the text has a polished and clearly intentional sevenfold form that uses section breaks and thematic progression to echo the stations of Jones's Christ-soldier's progress, Jones struggled to shape the text into the proper typographical form; the layout and contents of his final 1937 text indicate this struggle. The result of Jones's artistic struggle is a 187-page text of poetry, prose, and prose poetry that includes two illustrations, a seven-page Preface, title pages, typographic dedications, and thirty-four pages of detailed notes. Initially, Jones had 'intended to engrave some illustrations' (xiii), but he was prevented by the constraints of the publishing house. As his typographer, René Hague, reported, Jones wanted a typographic layout of 'a two-column crown folio', but that too was considered problematic, and the pair had to settle for 'a demy octavo' (*Dai Greatcoat* note on 54). Struggling with the formal limitations of the language and layout, Jones comments: 'It may be well to say something of the punctuation. I frequently rely on a pause at the end of a line to aid the sense and form. A new line, which the typography would not otherwise demand, is used to indicate some change, inflexion, or emphasis' (xi).

Further evidence of Jones's struggle for form is seen in numerous drafts of *In Parenthesis* housed at the National Library of Wales that bear witness to the compositional stages the writer worked through. In these one sees Jones's visual aesthetic bleed, characteristically, through words and images into the edges of his drafts. In later drafts, his busy compositional techniques appear almost frantic until the final drafts which appear calmer, more controlled. One sees the same compositional technique at work in his personal letters, as illustrated in Figure 4, a letter to René Hague. The letter is busy and colourful, filled with scribbles and jokey marginalia in different colours of ink and with a central image of a goddess or Mary figure. 'I do think it nice,' Jones writes to

Hague in a little aside, ‘—the things chaps say.—I like the way they call each other bastards’ (‘Easter Letter to Hague’).

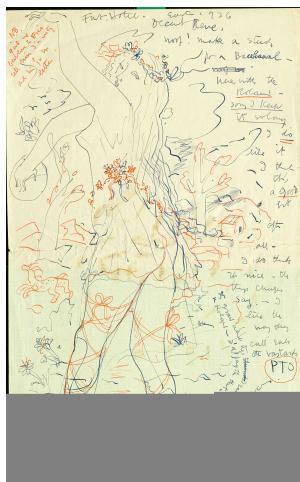


Figure 4. Letter from David Jones to René Hague, ‘Easter 1936’ (photograph by S.M. Steele).
With permission: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto
(Jones (David) Papers MS Call 00196/Box 1)

The letter’s style of composition illustrates the creator Jones in mid-flight as painter-cum-writer or writer-returning-to-painter, struggling to find a final home for his Easter message to Hague. The same struggle between visual form and content, between writer and painter, characterises the many drafts of his war narrative as they progress towards his final masterpiece text. In 1938, Jones writes to Harman Grisewood that ‘*I.P.* was chained to a sequence of events which made it always a straightforward affair’ (*Dai Greatcoat* 86). But while the content was straightforward, the composition and search for form was anything but. For Jones, the confining dictum of paper and ink presented a formidable organisational problem for a formidable subject: the infantryman and his rifle company in the Great War. As he writes in the capitalised dedication to *In Parenthesis*, these were ‘THE BEARDED INFANTRY’ with whom he had fought ‘IN THE COVERT AND IN THE OPEN FROM THE BLACKWALL THE BROADWAY THE CAUSEWAY THE CUT THE FLATS THE LEVEL THE ENVIRONS’, and ‘THE ENEMY FRONT-FIGHTERS WHO SHARED OUR PAINS’ (n.pag.). *In Parenthesis* looks, at first reading to be a dense and chaotic literary portrayal of the war—thus its perceived difficulty as a text—but it is not. Jones’s arc of his road to war displays a formal wholesomeness that reflects his ethical engagement with the war narrative.

5.2 Separation

Enlistment requires leaving home, or leaving one's home self and reshaping one's life and herein lies perhaps the greatest opportunity for an empathic or compassionate reading of the war narrative—the imaginative engagement with the idea home-leaving not only from one's place of origin, but also from one's own sense of existing in a linear time, and most disturbingly, of leaving one's body as one knew it, and perhaps worse, one's mind. Jones's entire poem conveys this feeling of entering a place that is set out of time—parenthetical (IP xv)—and it is one that encompasses the longing for the real home, and the home imagined or idealised, as wrought through the separation of war. In the context of Jones's heavily Welsh-influenced text, the metaphor of *hiraeth* is applied to this idea of form, as Jones illustrates how the infantryman will situate and assuage the dislocation of this emotion through war. In his *The Anathemata* (1952), Jones defines *hiraeth* as: 'the Welsh word for yearning and longing . . . found in place names in the Hiraethog Hills . . . there is a theory that connects the word to a site-name' (200n2). In the *Dictionary of Welsh Language*, *hiraeth* is defined as 'grief or sadness after the lost or departed, longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness, homesickness, earnest desire' ('Hiraeth'). In *The Anathemata*, Jones writes of Manawydan, out to sea 'two hundred and twenty nautical miles' southeast of the Fareo Island, 'on the whale-path' (*Anathemata* 199), whale hunting, with his '*hiraeth* upon him' (200) like a cloak, or a mist of homesickness. While Jones does not refer directly to *hiraeth* in *In Parenthesis*, his war narrative is likewise filled with the *hiraeth* longing of home, allusions to an idealised ancient Wales or the ever-shifting sense of home, as his rifle company edges closer and closer to the Front. But wherever the soldier goes, a great deal of time is expended on customising surroundings, especially one's uniform and weapons, to make them more comfortable or homely.

There is a poignant photograph of David Jones slipped inside the leaves of his parents' personal copy of *In Parenthesis* (1937), now held in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. It depicts Jones on leave in what appears to be his parents' leafy suburban yard. He wears civilian clothing and holds a walking stick at a jaunty angle. In comparison to other wartime photographs of him that depict a small boy-man in an oversize military uniform, in this

photograph he looks relaxed and assertive, and he grins widely. His eyes sparkle and lack the war weariness that prematurely ages his boyish face in so many wartime photographs. On the back of the photograph a note states: 'DJ about 1917' (insert, n.pag.). Inside the book is a handwritten annotation on the onionskin that covers the title page of the book: 'His sword rang in his mother's head' (n.pag.). This is a translation of the epigraph on the title page of *In Parenthesis*, which reads '*seinnyessit e gledyf ym penn mameu*' [emphasis original], a line from the medieval Welsh poem *Y Goddodin* (IP, 191n4). With this Jones summarises a central truth of war—the separation of person from person, person from home, and person from self, and the fear of the mother. With seven words, Aneurin, who excels at depicting gory slaughter on the Welsh battlefields, suddenly becomes thoughtful and encapsulates the suffering of the parent of soldiers. In 'Art in Relation to War', Jones tells us that the scene comes after a passage describing a battle in which great swordsmanship has been exhibited and praised. The juxtaposition of the two sentiments, beauty inherent in something well made, that is, in a battle well fought, and the pure love and anguish of a next of kin, the mother's terrible imagining of swords ringing out, presents the issue at the heart of all war art, as well as of the art of war. As Jones states, it is one of 'the conflicting and unresolved emotions' of 'our shared dilemma' (*Dying Gaul* 130) that in war one finds the greatest and most admirable of human qualities, including imagination, innovation, and action, mercy, and compassion. But one also witnesses the worst of human behaviour and existence, embodied in the idea of the brutal death of a mother's beloved child. With the death of the child, the woman's past, present, and future are unalterably changed and at some level lost. War brings the desecration of home and of a mother's sense of natural order.

Jones's choice of the passage from *Y Goddodin* underscores the poet's profound empathy with the suffering of his own mother from 1915 onward after he joined the Royal Welch, shipping out soon after for France. This is a sort of separation that Ivor Gurney articulates with uncharacteristic empathy (according to Gurney scholar Tim Kendall) in his poem 'To the Mothers of Them', written circa December 1918. This is a grief that encompasses the worst that mothers fear, with the reckoning that 'Earth has taken / Once more your best beloved to Earth again / Of double passion made and lonely sorrow' (Gurney, l. 2–3. The

biological mother knows the 'double passion' of the physical making and delivering of a child, and 'the lonely sorrow' of her unique loss, as even the father can never know the depth of separation of 'a best beloved' in the same manner.

War, at its core, is dislocation—the removal of one from one's home and culture, and the beginning of a strange combination of *hiraeth* and personal liberation. At the most intimate level, war is the separation from family, home, community, and self, physically, psychologically, and spiritually, and it may provoke the questions 'Who am I?' or 'Who have I become?' and sometimes the dauntingly speculative 'Who will I be?' or 'Will I be?' 'War experience,' Eric Leed suggests, 'was nothing if not an experience of radical discontinuity on every level of consciousness' (3). I propose that understanding these questions, asked by those who experience war, forms the basis of an empathic, compassionate reading of war. The next section looks at the idea of separation of self from home in the context of the Great War, and adaptation as an underpinning concept in David Jones's handling of his war narrative.

5.3 Adaptation at Home and Under Fire

On 2 January 1915, Jones left his family home to join the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and as he began living in increasingly reduced spaces (first in billets, then army camps, trenches, command posts, observation posts, open bivouacs, and finally, hospital beds, before demobilisation), he re-engaged with the idea of family—both mourning the family and home he had left behind and creating a new family, a brotherhood with his fellow infantrymen, born into war. Over the course of the seven sections of *In Parenthesis*, the reader follows an infantry company from their training camp in England to the Battle of the Somme. There is a psychological and physical transition into and through 'the Zone' (*Roman Quarry* 207), where 'Frenchmen's children are at play about the steep weed-grown incline of a '14 Johnson hole' (IP 92), and the 'south-east wind came to sway . . . beanstalks, to mingle with the drone' of bees (117). This is the edge of war where the familiar is weirdly embedded with the deeply unfamiliar, the machinations of war. And for the soldiers, this is the time of preparation for their rebirth, after 'serving their harsh novitiate' (70), that is, their training for the monkhood of war. They are becoming brothers as they march with 'a corporate will the soldierly bearing of the text books maintained' (7); they have studied

and now are becoming a unit that marches on 'catechumen feet' (44). They are overseen in the early stages of mustering by 'the [officers] Quilters and the Snells', who command them 'with a more persuasive intonation, with almost motherly concern' (7). Later and closer to the Front, however, officers are like indulgent parents who 'let [the troops] lie till ten o'clock' in forced rest. Later, officers appear to the troops as 'four horsemen speak[ing] comfortable words', though they have really transformed into the four horsemen of the apocalypse delivering orders for the men to head towards doom. As they enter the battle zone, soldiers are huddled and hooded in the rain, in the monastery of the trenches, 'in sackcloth' (70), with the membrane, foetal coverings, their 'rubbersheets for caul' (76). They are being born of the slime and mud of the trenches, 'a little flock' (to the slaughter) led by the 'western-hill shepherd', the officer Mr. Jenkins, whose 'armed bishopric' goes with 'weary limbs' towards battle (31).

Mother war, who gives birth to the band of army brothers, has also given birth to 'sister death', the one who by the time the company makes it to the Front 'has gone debauched' (162) as she gathers up 'Tristram', 'Lamorak de Galis', 'Alisand le Orphelin', 'Baeumains who was youngest', the 'sweet brothers Balin and Balin', 'Jonathan my lovely one', 'Peredur of steel arms', and 'thirty thousand other ranks' (163). What Jones presents through these references to the knights from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and accompanying images, is the bizarre and contradictory emotionality of the binding and unbinding of family units through the process of war. He does this throughout *In Parenthesis* using formal typography, such lists such of the names of the dead (163) or anaphoric lines that hammer out 'key-fingered' (125) typed orders 'for', 'for', 'for' (125), then juxtaposes these breathy lines with passages of prose. These accordion-like emotions or disconnects are resolved through his overarching formal outline, through the septychal layout, one that I suggest grasps at a mending of the severed form of the military unit, a severing wrought by battle. This is Jones's grasp to bring together once again all that once was and that can never be again.

As Jones observes, the soldiers 'stumble at the margin of familiar things—at the place of separation' (IP 70) in the process of their military induction, an initiation adhering to the model of what Jay Winter identifies as a 'fictive kinship'

or 'functional kin' brotherhood ('Kinship and Remembrance' 40). The infantry company becomes, like the monkhood, an extended family once the men don uniforms and erase the verbal codes of the civilian family and the familiarity of the home; they experience the moral and sensual conversion of being reborn into the military unit in '[t]he Zone . . . a prepared womb from which they spring' (*Roman Quarry* 208). As *In Parenthesis* illustrates, all that was once strange about army life to Jones or Ball—camps, bivouacs, transport vehicles—has become as familiar as the home and kin left behind, and as the born-again soldier, who is now the rifle company entering the 'wonderland' of battle or 'the Zone' (*Roman Quarry* 207).

In 'the Zone', '[y]ou feel exposed and apprehensive in this new world' (IP 9). The Zone is both a literal place, 'based upon the camp at Winnol down, near Winchester, from which the 15th R.W.F. marched to Southampton on 1 December 1915 to embark for France' (*Dai Greatcoat* 90), and a metaphorical place. In his fragment *A Book of Balaam's Ass*, the Zone represents the place where all things might happen and where '[a]ll the doors are shut'; it is a crossroads where '[a]ll roads intersect' (*Roman Quarry* 208). It is a place for the death of one's old self and rebirth—a place that one enters as one's civilian self and exits as another. In the Zone, one is stripped naked of identity. But as Jones writes in a moment of cynicism echoing propagandistic rhetoric: 'We're the boys of the bulldog breed. This is the price of our freedom. We can take it' (*Roman Quarry* 208). He goes on:

We all know the Zone we all weep in the Zone. It's a great crust runs thereabout, they beat his messengers in the Zone. It never distils a balmy shour in the Zone. He's naked in the Zone. You would perhaps have a good case in the Zone. If you went to the Zone to curse you migh[t] manage it. He's unashamed in the Zone. (*Roman Quarry* 207)

This is the Zone of remaking, where civilian is transformed into regimental soldier, where one is beaten, stripped of self, stripped naked, literally and figuratively, as in male coming-of-age rituals that appear throughout many cultures, such as the Aboriginal Australian walkabout, the North American vision quest, or painful scarification ceremonies. In the Zone anything goes; one may curse with social impunity, or be unashamed of inhuman acts of killing another

human being, having broken the sacrificial 'crust', the host, of war. Here one is 'mercifully conditioned as a limbo child'—one has ceased to exist in the limbo territory after life and before the final judgement brought after death.

And the Zone is the transitional cold place in which the soldier begins the transformation from the singular into the collective. There is no relief offered by the brotherhood of soldiers during this stage; one is utterly alone in the Zone. It is not until the infantry company prepares to go into battle that they march in absolute unison. Then, Jones tells the reader of the march towards the Somme, '[t]he rain came against their faces' (IP 123), baptising the company as a company, a unit, and a whole entity. The individual soldier is comforted by a growing unity with the other soldiers and describes how 'your body conformed to those bodies about, and you slept upright' while the unit marched (123). '[W]here these marched, because of the balmy shower, of the darkness' and the sounds 'of the measure of the beat of feet', there is 'unison' (123)—the brotherhood, baptised into war, has at last become one. Yet in the Zone, before the baptism, the soldier is alone and there is no 'balmy shour' (*Roman Quarry* 207); without the brotherhood, one is left out in the cold, as after war Jones and those who survive are returned to the Zone. *In Parenthesis* is Jones's literary call, his invocation to restore, through the liturgy of words, that which can never be fully restored: his family unit of war, the brotherhood of all soldiers, the ones Jones fights for and remembers.

War, like home, is a primal, intimate, and hyper-sensual experience—filled with big sounds ('the loudest noise' according to Graves) and big landscapes, especially for islanders such as the British—and it contains big concepts such as the expeditionary force, a fighting coalition made of people of many nations and trades, working in concert. Within this huge environment, the daily life of the foot soldier revolves around the 'intimate, domestic life of small contingencies of men' (IP ix), the small, homely duties centred on the comfort and survival of the unit, the infantry family, and himself. '[T]he character of our lives' (ix), as Jones describes the early days of the war, was such that a great deal of time was expended on making oneself comfortable and dry under all circumstances. This remains true for anyone who has been in an army camp in the twenty-first century. As the soldier moves into the new homeland of the battlefield, though, he loses autonomy—perhaps the only remnant left to him lies in the tailoring of

his kit. Jones describes the infantrymen's modifications to their uniforms as they march out of town towards the docks and their departure for France: 'Some like tight belts and some like loose belts—trussed-up pockets—cigarettes in ammunition pouches—rifle-bolts, webbing, buckles and rain' (IP 5). John Ball accidentally divests himself of his distant and immediate past as he searches for a match:

His chill fingers clumsy at full trouser pocket, scattered on the stones: one flattened candle-end, two centime pieces, pallid silver sixpence, a length of pink Orderly Room tape, a latch-key . . . Keys of Stondon Park. His father has its twin in his office in Knightryder Street. Keys of Stondon Park in French farmyard. Stupid Ball, it's no use here, so far from its complying lock. (IP 23)

Thus begins the journey through the looking glass towards total war: the 'twin' keys are split, and the frantic search for them is expressed through a repetition of 'Keys of Stondon Park', and the interior monologue and self-deprecation. Here the son formally separates from the father, as keys (and the son feels like a key) are utterly useless in the battlefields of France, far from their 'complying' counterpart, the safety of 'the lock' (23), the mechanism of house that makes home safe, predictable, and sound. Both soldier and key have 'strayed into the wilderness' with only a 'flattened candle end' utterly incapable of lighting or warming them, and 'Stupid Ball' is so cold, so lost, that he drops not only his key but the definite article preceding 'French farmyard' (23).

Losing the familiar jingling keys of home is devastating, but in this new family and homeland of war, nothing is as devastating as losing one's weapon; the weapon takes the place of best friend, of family, of lover. A large portion of the soldier's time is used to maintain his weapon, and Jones notes in *In Parenthesis* the intimate nature of the relationship. The Regimental Sergeant Major (the most senior non-commissioned officer) tells the men that the weapon is 'the soldier's best friend if you care for the working parts and let us be having those springs released smartly in Company billets on wet forenoons and clickerty-click . . . and you men must really cultivate the habit of treating this weapon with the very greatest care':

Marry it man Marry it!

Cherish her, she's your very own . . .
You've known her hot and cold
You would choose her from among many.
You know her by her bias, and by her exact error at 300, and
by the deep scar at the small, by the fair flaw in the grain
above the lower sling-swivel—
but leave it under the oak. (IP 183–4)

If the pockets and his kit and his bivouac become his home, the weapon, 'the tensioned yew', the First World War's equivalent to the medieval yew longbow, the Lee Enfield rifle, becomes his 'hot and cold' wife. The soldier will spend, must spend, thousands of hours caring for his weapon, taking it apart, oiling its pieces, reassembling it, and keeping it in top condition. This is the soldier's duty, love, and survival, as Jones articulates through his repeated use of the interior second person 'you' and the experiential preposition 'by': 'You would choose her'; 'You know her' experientially as a weapon and sexually as a lover 'by her bias', 'by her exact error at 300 [distance]' whether the trajectory of 'her' bullet will aim left or right; sometimes 'the rifles [are] all out of balance' and 'seem to weigh five times the regulation weight' (156). The intimacy of the weapon is such that the soldier will know her 'by the deep scar' and 'by the fair flaw' (156) in the wood grain, as intimately as a lover knows the marks of the beloved's body—she 'bitches the aim as well' (156).

The weapon is the eternal lover who will keep the soldier alive, the one he has known 'hot and cold' (184) intimately through the heat of combat and coolly in preparation for battle, then after when inspecting and cleaning the weapon. To the soldier she is the 'bright bough' and the instrument of the ritual sacrifice of warfare. Separation from the rifle is as significant to the soldier, if not more so, than from any lover, for this lover will literally keep him alive in the battlefield; separation may be disastrous. But as the following passage describes, the weight of the soldier's weapon has consequences, and Private Ball must face a terrible decision when he is wounded and the weapon has become tangled in the underbrush of the woods. He must decide whether or not to abandon his beloved rifle:

It's difficult with the weight of the rifle.
Leave it—under the oak.
Leave it for a salvage-bloke

Let it lie bruised for a monument
Dispense the authenticated fragments to the faithful
It's the thunder-besom for us
it's the bright bough born
it's the tensioned yew (IP 183)

In this passage, Jones's use of rhyme and repeated imperatives—'Leave it', 'Leave it', 'Let it', 'Dispense'—are followed with the anaphoric 'It's', recreating the driving, frantic interior monologue of the injured soldier. The soldier must confront and argue with himself and must accept the counter-intuitive decision to abandon his weapon, his twentieth-century 'tensioned yew' (183), the wood-and-steel Lee Enfield rifle. In doing so he accepts the fate of the 'thunder-besom', the fire-powered broom, of enemy fire that may sweep him to his death as he crawls through the golden boughs of the woods, golden boughs that will guide him safely through the underworld of the deadly forest. Certainly Jones knows what he is up against. His field notebooks contain technically detailed drawings of British arms and captured German weapons that he has studied closely.⁴⁵ His process of drawing the mechanisms and design of the weaponry would have taught him their firepower and the damage they could inflict on a human body—he has already seen the damage done to the landscape and soldiers about him. To leave his weapon—Ball knows as Jones knew himself at Mametz—is a sacrifice of something 'authentic', 'bruised', and he sees it become a 'monument' to his own dead self, the fallen soldier, Ball (183). But Ball, like Jones, lives to tell the tale.

5.4 Into the Zone

In the Preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones writes of the Royal Welch foot soldiers finding themselves, almost as if through a series of accidents, 'in foot regiments' within the Zone (IP xiii). There, he observes, '[w]e search how we may see formal goodness in a life singularly inimical, hateful to us' (xiii). Yet as a creator, an artist, he sees the Zone as a locale filled with the rich potential of material—manna for the creative artist—especially that of formal and informal goodness between the soldiery. In war, as Jones writes in 'The Book of Balaam's Ass' (1981), 'Art and industry have kissed each other on the heath'

⁴⁵ For numerous examples of Jones's illustrations of weapons, see Dilworth's *David Jones and the Great War* (pages 56, 140, 162, 163).

(*Roman Quarry* 209). Rather, the transformational sector is the great leveller, the locale wherein one becomes, paradoxically, separate and at one with all. As Jones writes, the Zone is the place that makes a 'common denominator for all his devices on the heath' (208)—where the weapons of war, made through the conjoining art of war, show their terrible beauty. And the Zone is hard, relentless, testing, as it is the beginning of separation of self from home, self from self, from whom one used to be, and it is where *hiraeth* may descend most keenly from this sensation of entering the liminal. But it is the place of the soldier's new home. It is the place of becoming part of a whole, a making of something much greater than the individual.

With his infantry family at hand, still in the trajectory sector of battle, with the Forward Zone ahead, a place where 'counterpointing violence . . . breaks all remembered records' (108), Jones reminds us that life still has pleasant moments and continuity. In the busy sector, the forbidden zone behind the lines is where Jones's troops muster and relax 'in the June sun' (110). Here, as in the Stations of the Cross, Jones gives the troops the succour of the pastoral, like Saint Veronica, whose feast day is in July, who offers Christ a cloth to wipe his brow. Here the pastoral landscape of the Western Front is rich and alive, as Jones describes 'the grassy bank with a million daisies spangled, and buttercup sheen made warm upward glint on piled arms' (110). Daisies grow in spite of the war, and 'blue-winged butterflies, dance between, flowery bank and your burnished fore-sight guard star gaily Adam's dun gear' (131). The infantryman lives in the elements, dresses in the 'dun' (131) colours of the elements, and participates in the survival game—that is, a determination of who is luckiest, rather than a Darwinian survival of the fittest. But nature is not at war; it continues to offer young soldiers the solace of daisies and the warm reflection of the buttery light of buttercups. War, then, evidences a continuity of life at the most primal level: survival for some.

In his essay 'Art in Relation to War', Jones writes, 'It is customary to speak of the "Art of War" . . . [A]s man's warfare must at least involve his qualities as artist it would seem that this common and universal description of war as an art, is, to this extent, valid' (*Dying Gaul* 124). Indeed, the many qualities of war and art overlap. Both encompass discipline, stamina, a mastery of technique, obedience to greater principles, the capacity to think and act independently,

acts of improvisation when necessary, the ability to act in the context of the collective—social and historical—and most importantly, the ability to imagine. In Jones's manifesto to the artist as a spiritual maker of acts that witness, 'Art as Sacrament', he states that 'it would be inconclusive and even misleading to consider only arts such as painting and music' (*Dying Gaul* 153). '[W]hen we consider the whole field of making, all that is *per artum*,' he writes, diverse 'things' such as 'the Diesel engine, boot-making, English prose, radar, horticulture, carpentry, and the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries' (153) must be included. For Jones, to appreciate that radar or prose, or the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries, 'adhere to Ars' is demonstrative of the 'desire and pursuit of the whole' that is 'native to us' (153)—we are creative beings. Yet to consider radar, boot making, and the *objet d'art* as one is simply too 'Jekyll and Hydish' for us he adds (*Dying Gaul* 135).

Jones states that 'there is . . . enormous influence, direct and oblique, of war upon the other arts' (135) — and why not? For beyond the scope of bardic tales, in war there is the terrible beauty and the sublime of the best of human actions and design. Though the reality is that many wars are fought by poorly equipped soldiers, the things of war must by necessity, if they are to be successful, be well made: weapons, equipment, medals, armaments, flares, massive detonations, bullet traces, the battle plan, the soldier's discipline—even when the scene is a night lit up 'like summer lightnings dance' with the destructive firepower of weaponry (IP 120). The battle zone can become a kind of wonderland, where even natural sunrise appears as an 'irradiance' (59), like the chemicals intended for war, and is barely discernable from the glow of night bombardment on the horizon. This sight proves an irresistible detail for the visual artist and poet Jones, as is a minor detail such as the 'glass-wiping' (105) of the barmaid Alice [in Wonderland], for whom 'war was lucrative' (106). For the poet and painter Jones, war is a sensually lucrative subject that he returns to again and again throughout his oeuvre in an attempt to reconcile his final exile from combat and the fellowship of the ranks after the war (Dilworth, *David Jones in the Great War* 206).

The *modus operandi* for the artist is a curious paradox of separating oneself from self and binding oneself to all that surrounds. The soldier artist identifies not only with the rifle company, but also with the physical and psychic

environment. In *In Parenthesis*, Private Saunders separates himself from his unit when assigned to rubbish detail. He has habituated so rapidly in the company's first three weeks in France that he is able to look at the camp's dump 'with a certain wistfulness, as he poked jagged twisted tins, and litter of all kinds into the smouldering heap' (IP 15). He begins to see the camp in shapes, and the dump itself as a 'freely drawn rectangle of sodden green with its willow boundaries [that] called familiarly to him' (15)—even the dump becomes homely. Saunders, like Jones, is making order out of something—using the 'data' of recognisable human waste, the 'tin cans', intermingled with the natural world of willows, the wet, and possibly weeping, landscape. In a place that is unfamiliar, Saunders is at ease with the 'familiarly' recognisable and concludes, 'After all, the last three weeks haven't been too bad' (15). He lives in the present, absorbs what is at hand. He doesn't ponder where the soldiers who left the garbage and tins have gone. He has adopted what Jones refers to in a letter to Harman Grisewood as 'Zone mind': 'It is the Zone mind that will save us when the time comes, you mark my words . . . there is no shadow no shade, no shade to caress, no walls on the heath, no recession, it's all on one plane in the Zone . . . on the heath you can see a free democracy preparing to defend itself . . . it's a sod in the Zone' (*Roman Quarry* 84).

Adaptability in the Zone through 'Zone mind'—a detachment from all that was and an attachment to all that is—is a primary source of survival, and solace, for the soldier heading into battle. As he experiences a separation from home with all its connotations, he also experiences separation on a larger scale, a separation from the earth in a landscape utterly transformed by ordnance. Jones describes looking out and seeing 'in the morning, mountains removed' (116).

But traversing the Zone is not easeful, as some combatants attempt to cling to the womblike protection of their trenches or bivouacs, 'the place of their waiting a long burrow, in the chalk cutting, and steep cliff' (155). Here they are like Viking marauders huddled in the 'too shallow' trenches . . . Like in long-ship', their faces 'flattened', pressed to the 'kelson', the keel of the earth boat that carries them into battle across a muddy, stygian Western Front. Here, Private 25201 Ball finds a type of foetal comfort in the trench, with his new 'white chalk womb to mother him' (154). Then the communication trenches

transform into weird death canals rather than birth canals, in their 'chalky deep protected way' (155). They deliver the soldiers, 'five brethren from the same womb as himself' (145), either to 'the place of a skull' (154), the suffering of the Golgotha of the Somme, or into the arms of the eternal mother figure, the Queen of the Woods, with her offering of a redemptive deliverance. And the time 'is zero minus seven minutes,' Jones tells us (155). 'Seven minutes to go . . . and seventy times seven times the minute' (156), with reference to the punishment of Cain in Genesis 4:24 and to Christ's answer when asked how many times we should forgive those who harm us (Matthew 18:22). Here one observes another echo of Jones's preoccupation with the seven stages of his soldier's pilgrimage to the cross of the Somme, the septych, and his sense of duty to bear witness.

So begins the assault on Mametz Wood. Some readers interpret Ball's sudden vision of a Queen of the Woods, in the penultimate pages, as a fantasy produced by a seriously wounded soldier pushed beyond fatigue, delirious and fearful; Fussell writes that this 'final ritual' at the hand of any other writer 'might be ironic, but here it's not, for Jones wants it to be true' (*Great War* 153). This, for Fussell, is not a compliment; he views Jones's *In Parenthesis* as 'excessively formal' and as having a 'doctrinal way of fleeing from the literal' (Fussell *TGW* 153), and the Queen of the Woods scene is, to him, a regrettable instance of Jones's characteristic flight from the real into the fantastic. According to Thomas Dilworth, however, the scene is 'a lyrical high point in modern literature' (*The Shape of Meaning* 139), and while it is stylistically modernist, Jones's formal witness is decidedly ancient in its ritualism. The soldiers' accession into heaven draws together the narrative of the soldiers' Stations of the Cross and delivers a redemptive act clothed in the primal, woodland resurrection. In this, Jones the Catholic offers a type of eternal life, through the mechanism of literature, to those he could neither defend nor save at Mametz Wood in July 1916 and elsewhere during his war. These are the soldiers to whom he dedicates *In Parenthesis*, such as 'PRIVATE R.A. LEWIS-GUNNER FROM NEWPORT MONMOUTHSHIRE KILLED IN ACTION IN THE BOESINGHE SECTOR N.W. OF YPRES SOME TIME IN THE WINTER OF 1916-17' (IP, Dedicatory Page n.p.). The evidence of this is his references to the ancient sacrificial rites in the woodlands.

For soldiers, the woods were places of both exceptional danger and exceptional safety, since they offered cover and places in which to hide. For soldiers, the woods were a space separate from the battlefield, and alive. Remarque describes passing through a wood he personifies as 'indigent', a place that 'receives us' (56). Woods were hiding places, refuges, or the locale of covert relationships, and they were ancient. Jones refers to woodlands throughout *In Parenthesis* as 'Odin's wood' (67), that is, sites for ritual that are 'bright the wood / and a Golden Bough' sacrificed as 'blasted oaks for Jerry' (177–8). The dangerous woods are cathedral-like 'cool interior aisles' (171), the place of 'anchoring roots' (174). But at other times they are personified, as when Jones describes marching with his unit beneath 'the lopped colonnade' of trees; through the 'all depriving darkness split now by crazy flashing' of bombardment he sees 'the spilled bowels of trees' that sprawl like dead soldiers (31). This is 'the tufted avenue denuded, lopped, deprived of height; stripped stumps for flowering limbs' (30), in the hyper-sensual zone where the 'Jaguar-gun, wind carried, barks' (30) at the unit as it marches to the forward reaches of the war.

Later, Jones describes trees within the woods like the men that fight within them, each 'beware each other' (183), and who 'beat against each other' (186). The woods provide home, opportunity, prison, or sepulchre for the soldier. Jones grounds his narrative with references to ancient earthworks combined with mechanised warfare, in a setting of landscapes and forests as sites utterly altered by war, yet rendered utterly static by ritual. In 'The Worship of Trees', a chapter in *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer refers to Druidic and Germanic tribal tree-worship. He identifies forests as 'sacred groves' in which any man who defaces a tree will subsequently be subjected to a 'life for a life' code of punishment (355). Jones alludes to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a copy of which he annotated, particularly the section, 'The Scapegoat'. Jones's personal copy is held in the National Library of Wales.

The following passage describes a moment from the unit's first full day in the trenches. They are looking out across no-man's-land, at the woods, and sense destiny:

He found the wood, visually so near, yet for the feet forbidden by a great fixed gulf, a sight somehow to powerfully hold his mind. To the woods of all the world is this potency—to move the bowels of us. To groves always men come both to their joys and their undoing. (IP 66)

Jones uses the imagery of the potent, living woods, and the feelings of terror at the locale as the site of the golden bough of the sacrificed Christ-figure and the scapegoat, as unifying images throughout *In Parenthesis*. Wood and tree imagery provide the material of the wooden cross of the Christ-soldier, the rood, but also the trunk of the ancient folkloric tree, upon which Jones hangs the story of the infantry company. His foreboding at seeing the woods where his unit will fight is expressed when he warns of the dangers of 'perilous bough-plucking' (66), offending against the tree spirits. He notes that the 'Draughtsman at Army [headquarters] made note on a blue-print at the significance of the grove' and that within the woods there is 'a door at whose splintered posts [destroyed trees], Janus-wise emplacements shield and automatic fire' (66). Here 'great strippings-off hanged from tenuous fibres swaying, whitened to decay', providing the locale for 'immolations for the northern [mother Goddess] Cybele' and the soldier, '[t]he hanged, the offerant: himself to himself on the tree' (67). This latter reference, with its off-kilter syntax, is, Jones writes, a direct reference to 'Odin and the Usala sacrifices' (IP 204n15).

As Jones illustrates the progress towards the Front, the unfamiliar becomes the familiar and the familiar becomes strange. The soldiers move closer towards 'the damascened' (98) tree-curtained landscape of the Somme. Here then is the soldiers' moral and sensual conversion to war, their road to Damascus. They are blinded by war; all that was previously strange and harsh about army life—camps, bivouacs, transport vehicles, orders—has become normalised. It has become normal to walk towards destruction rather than away. Here is the strange new home and hearth of war, as blood kin recede once the company parts the staging sector and enters the wonderland of battle with their blood-brothers in arms. Their progress has taken them from the bricks and mortar of British landscape and homes to the 'long hutment lines' (4) of camp, the canvas tents, and finally to the Front, where they are 'wombed of earth' (75) in 'little cubby-holes' (76). They have come from one womb of life, motherland

England, to be born again as they enter the womb of death—or, as Jones will later perceive the experience, through the resurrection of the dead by the Queen of the Woods, a Mary figure, a Catholic resurrection. Nationhood is, by the time they reach the Somme, moot.

From the soldier's point of view, war is a separation from one's nation as one knows it, and often, from one's continent. All the familiar landscapes, cultural touchstones, and identification are dislodged in the theatre of war, and the need for normalisation becomes a priority. Jones reminds us that no sooner has his unit of soldiers 'sought out nails and hooks on which to hang their gear for the night' and sorted out 'their allotted flooring' than fearful 'truth stole upon them'— they had orders to move out (22). However, '[t]hey would make order, for however brief a time, and in whatever wilderness' (22). Wherever the unit goes, it creates, it modifies, it learns to adapt and read the landscape, but at this stage of the war, it is already at home in the rifle company, a mobile and adaptable unit. As Jones writes in a letter to René Hague on 15 April 1973, the unit provides comfort and stability for the infantryman wherever they locate, and any change is felt keenly. Of being transferred to another rifle company during the war, he notes: 'Up to the Somme I had been in "B" and still don't know why I was transferred, and men hate being transferred from one company to another. . . . For a certain domesticity is very strong and changes of any sort are resented' (*Dai Greatcoat* 243).

As Jones's unit arrives at the battlegrounds, in Part 4 of *In Parenthesis*, he writes of troops' adaptability: 'so quickly had they learned the mode of this locality, what habit best suited this way of life, what most functioned, was to the purpose, and easily obtained' (70). The men humanise the trench from an uninhabitable, 'untidied squalor', a 'loveless scene spread horizontally', one that is as 'sordid and deprived as ill-kept hen-runs' (74). They normalise the abnormal, and in this 'loveless scene', a type of love for one another arises. This is in spite of the fact that at the Front, the flame of all '[s]ubstantial matter guttered and dissolved' (76), the familiar landscape and the life flame of all that came before war was snuffed out. But troops normalise quickly and become almost fond of their new existence and environment. They quickly name it and project a type of ownership upon the landscape, as have others who have gone before them. Here there will be soldiers' markings and signage and graffiti, as

that seen earlier in a village, where the company 'bunch together before a tarred door. Chalk scrawls on its planking—initials, numbers, monograms, signs, hasty, half-erased, of many regiments' (22). In each sector, troops will make their marks.

The adaptability of the soldier—that is, making one's bivouac and circumstances—is of primary importance for morale. And often home is co-constructed, as soldiers club together kit, as Private Saunders does with his litter-mate soldiers in *In Parenthesis*. When Saunders is given orders to report to headquarters a day before going to battle, 'His two mates said he was lucky' and that 'anything [was] better than the Company' (IP 137). But they were in fact 'wretched when he would extricate his ground-sheet from its place in the construction of the bivvy, which threw their little shelter miserable out of gear' (137–8). Jones's unusual syntax is as 'out of gear' as the shelter they 'set about without any cheer, to reconstruct' (IP 137). The separation of companions meant, literally, a threat to the soldiers' temporary home, but also a threat to the intactness and ideal of the soldierly family: 'For such breakings away and dissolving of comradeship and token of division are cause of great anguish when men sense how they stand so perilous and transitory in the world' (IP 137).

Jones remembers sitting with his comrade Leslie Poulter, reminiscing about their trench days and the feeling of ownership the troops had over their new land:

we went into glowing details [of the trenches] & wondered if the unexploded projectile lying near us would go up under a bright holiday maker & how girls in muslin frocks would stand & be photographed in our parapets. I recall feeling very angry about this, like you do if you think of strangers ever occupying a house or garden you live in & love. There was a great sense of possessiveness among us. It was always 'our trenches' 'our dugouts'—we knew exactly the kind of shell *he* was likely to put on . . . we knew the best way across the open to where the big crater was, where the good water was. Some twist of traverse in a disused trench-system had for us something of the quality of the secret places lovers know. (qtd. in O'Brien, S. 8)

Jones's recall encompasses the feelings of intimacy and fondness of the brotherhood situated within the war zone. He describes the dugouts and

trenches in terms of ownership and as lovers' places of assignation. Jones, the artist and soldier, sees himself permanently in 'The Zone', the transit sector between literature and visual art, war and peace, the animate and inanimate, and the secular and sacred—these, he perceives as an artist, and as one who has entered 'The Zone', are utterly indivisible. It is fundamental to his work, and to the Catholicism Jones practised, to see the indivisibility of human life—Thanatos and Eros, death in the field of love, love in the field of death. For the post-war Jones, to be an artist requires the life-and-death commitment of the infantryman. He describes the emotionally and physically charged tasking of the artist in terms analogous to a soldier's: 'for the practitioner, the splendour of form even in so innocent an art as painting, is only achieved by something analogous to, though vastly different in kind and degree from, the stress that accompanies war' (*Dying Gaul* 131). Jones, the poet-painter, saw more time fighting at the Front than any other poets of the canon, survived wounding, a posting to Ireland after the war, and a lifetime of shell-shock—he knew 'the stress that accompanies war' intimately. One would imagine that Jones would have been loath to revisit his war, yet he clearly sees his role as that of artist witness. 'It is the business of a poet in . . . any century, to express the dilemma, not to comment upon it, or pretend to a solution,' he writes in 'Art and War' (*Dying Gaul* 130), and he continues the theme in 'The Book of Balaam's Ass', through the tenor of the liturgy: 'But it is inevitable and meet: / while there is breath it's only right to bear immemorial witness' (*Roman Quarry* 192).

Expressing the 'dilemma' of war emphatically means to Jones that it is not his 'to comment upon it, or pretend solution' (*Dying Gaul* 130). His ethics are of one of revealing rather than dictating, and for this he turns to form—the septych—in which one may find the landscape, the home, the individual house of a stanza or passage, and the individuals and collective of the Corps, in which he witnesses the Somme. But to sing, to bear witness, and remove the seven seals of witness takes courage, and for this he calls out to his fellow soldiers who have died:

You, Bertie, Leslie, 'Waladr, Joe, Griffin, Lamkin, Hob,
Malkin, Warwick, Talbot—you Hector, whose arse they couldn't see
for dust at the circuit of the wall—the bastards got you in the end.
You will be my witness who knew how the leaden clay

Could flame, you who saw the second hundred thousand shop-keepers in glistening scape-goat hauberks. (*Roman Quarry* 192)

Through his roll call, including the allusion to the great horse-whisperer Hector, who has been dragged mercilessly behind Achilles's chariot at Troy, Jones invokes the 'scape-goat' nature of the dead. Once again he links his witness of dying soldiers to the Christ figure as scapegoat, drawn, in part, from his study of Fraser's *The Golden Bough*. Through this recitation Jones asks his fellow soldiers to 'be my witness' (*Roman Quarry* 192) and to bear witness to the one who has returned from the weird landscape of the Western Front, the furnace of clay and fire that has made him a latter-day Prometheus, though he is one who bears the fire of witness. But Jones is mindful enough to put his own witness on trial and judges himself harshly. 'Gee!' he writes, 'I do like a bloody lie turned gallantly romantic, fantastical, glossed by the old gang from the foundations of the world' (193). Here Jones mocks himself as one extracting from the 'foundations of the world' a 'gallantly romantic' tale from the great 'dilemma'. This gives us a clue to how Jones perceives his duty to the narrative after the war, and his guilt, as an artist, at potentially exploiting the deaths of his fellow soldiers through 'the bloody lie'. Yet it is unfair for Jones to admonish himself, because of all the canonical war poets, he served and survived the longest, spending 117 weeks in the parenthetical world of the trenches, even longer than Edmund Blunden and Henry Williamson. Still, this is nothing less than self-flagellation, a self-loathing for his own survival and the fact that he can, potentially, exploit the narrative of all those who did not come home with him.

Jones believes that he has been called to do this work of witness, as he writes on the title page of Part 7 (IP 151):

Goddodin I demand thy support.
It is our duty to sing: a meeting
place has been found.

This demand is more a plea, a call out into the darkness, than a command. Jones is, after all, 'essentially a private soldier,' as he writes to Harman Grisewood (NLW CD 1/2); he is never an officer. As Jones lays out the final stage of the soldier's journey, the opening line reveals where the space shall be

for his ultimate act of witness: ‘Invenimus eum in campis silvae [we found it in the fields of the wood]’ (IP 153), from Psalm 131 of the ancient Latin Vulgate (220n2). This, as much as any other line in the book, proclaims Jones’s perception of a potential site for redemption through one of the most harrowing experiences of his life—the battle in Mametz Wood—as a sacred place. Jones asks us to gaze directly on that small rectangle of forested land wherein 676 of his Welsh soldiers entered on 12 July 1916, and 400 were killed. Jones’s wounding begins a series of major separations: between the man at home with himself in his body as his wounded body becomes something foreign; from his unit fighting and dying around him; from those of his companions who lie dead around him, who now belong to the ‘proper massacre of the innocents’ (IP 6), as Corporal Quilter observes; it is also the beginning of a survival guilt for Jones, a separation from wholeness to the feeling of living only to be damned.

In a letter to Harman Grisewood dated 20 July 1935, during the period in which Jones was writing *In Parenthesis*, Jones emphasises his calling to the solitude and the exile of the witness:

I’ve always known that I must be and am essentially a private soldier, in and out of the war, who with fear and trembling just might manage to slope arms and sometimes remember to turn left on the command “Left”, and just have the physical strength to not: fall out of the line of route perhaps: but that my own real life was that of judgment of the work to be made—line by line—to be unfettered when about that work, and that was the only sphere I knew about, that my own contribution, but that anyway it might be—or anyway that I was a fool indeed at all else. (NLW CD 1/2)

This is Jones’s meta-*apologia* for the body of his work and, possibly, for his manner of living—alone and ‘oddly at home [in small rooms] as an Ishmael in diaspora’ (James 49) after the war. Kathleen Raine recalls a mutual friend commenting on Jones’s ‘poky room at Harrow. . . looking onto a car park . . . that David still found it natural to live in a dug-out, as he had lived in the trenches’ (James 63). But she adds that the room he occupied after the Second World War was ‘made beautiful by small treasures charged with meaning for him—his mother’s silver spoon, a glass chalice in which he arranged the flowers he would paint, a small knife, a slender pair of scissors a photograph of the little dog Leica, sent up by the Russians to space’ (James 63). It is tantalising to

speculate that Jones's empathy for the little dog, held captive in a tin-can spaceship orbiting the earth, may have been owing to the fact that she was as unwilling a participant in history as Jones's infantry unit members. Certainly, how Jones lived in that room mirrored soldiers' habits of adaptation and maximising comfort in the most unlikely places in the Zone.

But where the Zone is a locale of little makings, it is also the place of unravelling as the unit heads into exile. Still, Jones is canny enough to see that the place of violent destruction is also a place of *construction*. This aligns with Lefebvre's observation that '[w]ar has unfairly been classed . . . as a destructive and evil force as opposed to a good and creative one' (276–7). While Jones's view of armies as a force for productivity might differ widely from Lefebvre's, he might concur that it is from the breaking, or near-breaking, that something new, and possibly marvellous, is made. A year after publishing *In Parenthesis*, Jones wrote to H. J. Harman: 'The only times a drawing is good is when you nearly break yourself turning the corner from a muddle to a clarity' (NLW CD 2/1 67). He tells Harman that 'it takes every ounce of nervous effort to be any good' (NLW CD 2/1 67). Revealingly he states: 'it is very difficult to proceed gingerly and soberly and stop when you know it will be probably fatal (because of bringing on some bloody recurrence of nerves) to go on and hope to recapture something next time, because for one thing you get so bored with working like that' (NLW CD 2/1 67).

Even seventeen years after demobilisation he was still at an operational level of enervation and looking for clarity through the 'muddle' of experience. Jones continues in his letter to Harman: 'What a real sod and bugger this neurosis is for this generation . . . it is our Black Death' (NLW CD 2/1 67); linking his war with all war, or all devastation, and by 1938 anticipating the next, he adds, 'I wonder if everyone had neurasthenia about the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire. I suppose so' (NLW CD 2/1 67). Clearly, in 1938, the cycle of fear, sleeplessness and adrenaline induced and sustained by soldiering in theatre continues to shadow him, drifting into his work as an artist.

5.5 The House of Form

Jones states, unambiguously, that '[m]an as a moral being hungers and thirsts after justice and man as artist hungers and thirsts after form' (*Dying Gaul* 134). Jones's artistic parallelism with the beatitude from Christ's Sermon on the

Mount (Mathew 5:6) expresses his belief in a satisfaction, a quenching of thirst, brought primarily through mastery of form. This quest goes far beyond what he believes is 'a palliative, a "cloak" against our cultural December' (134)—the Second World War, during which he wrote 'Art and War'. Jones believes that the artist's search for form, 'and the delight it occasions', is 'good', theologically speaking, unto itself (134). But this artistic manifestation of 'good', he believes, displays 'the "sanctity" of accurate theology, actual and native' (134), that is, the wholesomeness of one. Jones speaks of the time of war, and the search for a clarity during these times: 'Certainly men never more needed to contemplate form, they need all there is to remind them that all evidence to the contrary, the end of man is happiness' (134). This section looks at the idea of form as a literary house, presents why the sonnet remains a formal response to the war narrative, and proposes why Jones chose a radically different form in comparison with so many of his peers.

In 1919, the Imagist F.S. Flint pronounced that 'rhyme and metre are dead and dying . . . their use brings poetry into contempt' (Flint viii). He added, 'poetry in verse that is . . . in spite of the number of books of verse by soldiers that appear, it is not the poetry in them that moves us' (viii). And while this appears to be a reactionary response, akin to Cru's truth project, Flint, himself a veteran, knew that the battlefields of Jones's war still smouldered. What possible 'happiness' could, or should, come of a poem? Flynn advocated free verse and nothing else. And yet, a century after the war, the non-scholarly readership consistently returns to the canon of Sassoon, Owen, Graves, and occasionally, Rosenberg. The canon, as Tim Kendall states, is essentially built on a Georgian aesthetic:

They wanted intelligibility in art, they wrote with deceptive simplicity in celebration of the rural landscape, and their assumptions about poetic form tended to be traditional, even conservative. (Kendall *Poetry of the First World War* xvi)

The cadre of Georgian poets that orbited around Edward Marsh and who were published in his anthologies, *Georgian Poetry* (1912-22), has significantly informed an emotional response to the Great War. To a large extent, the poets have been sought out, at times obsessively, by a nation in search of a grand

narrative. Jay Winter remarks of a compulsion towards ‘the work of remembrance’ in the war years and immediately beyond:

during and after war, individuals and groups, mostly obscure, come together to do the work of remembrance. This entails their creating a space in which the story of their war, in its local, particular, parochial, familial forms, can be told and retold. The construction of the narrative—in stone, in ceremony, in other works and symbols—is itself the process of remembrance. (‘Kinship and Remembrance’ 40)

Winter observes that the construction of a physical, literary, or vocative space for the war narrative was a unifying reaction. This was not, however, always a smooth or conciliatory practice. In the physical realm, this meant a reformation of home; yet with munitions factories and jobs for women shutting down, the return of the battle-weary or the war-invigorated, and the hard work of physical reconstruction, home could never be the same. Nor could spaces that, before the war, had been relatively empty. Salisbury Plain, for example—where thousands of allied soldiers trained for battle at all times throughout the war, becoming what Lefebvre defines as a ‘lived space’ (190)—reverted, eventually, to primarily agricultural land, although part of it is still an army training camp. Yet, as the archaeologist Nicholas Saunders tells us, ‘the trench systems on Salisbury Plain, representing practice trenches . . . are the most complete and extensive to survive in the UK’ (*Matters of Conflict* 198). Though the land seemingly retains its pre-war shape, the landscape is a living memorial. But what of less temporary spaces? Where does one find evidence of them?

In the opening scene of Ford Madox Ford’s autobiographical novel, *No More Parades* (1925), Captain Christopher Tietjens sits in his command post at Number XVI Casual Battalion, amidst the mental disintegration of his second-in-command, the classics scholar Captain McKechnie, a protracted war with his provocative Catholic wife, Sylvia, and the bullying of his superior officer, his godfather, General Campion. Pulled back from the Front as punishment for a perceived misdemeanour—transport and administration companies being traditional demotions for ‘bad’ or ‘crazy’ soldiers—Tietjens has been tasked with both army companies and thus experiences war from a haphazard army hut that is ‘desultory, rectangular . . . transfused [with] brown-orange dust that was light’ (*No More Parades* 291), warmed only with a brazier. As David Jones

writes in *In Parenthesis*, ‘the homing perfume of wood burned’ (IP 49) is sometimes the only reminder of the soldiers’ real home. In his temporary home in camp, Ford’s hapless protagonist is at ease, ironically, within earshot of the machine-gun fire that Ford has normalised as ‘pleasurable pop-op-ops’ (*No More Parades* 291).

In war—and in the context of this thesis, the Great War narrative—when the soldier is in kinetic combat, or under bombardment with its attendant destruction, the last place that may be considered ‘home’ has become the soldier’s only home—that is, the soldier’s sound mind. In the Introduction to *No More Parades*, Ford writes of his war-time service as an officer, and of the mind being sorely tested, less by combat than by those who ran the war:

We were oppressed, ordered, counter-ordered, commanded, countermanded, harassed, strafed, denounced—and, above all, dreadfully worried. The never-ending sense of worry, in fact, far surpassed any of the “exigencies of troops actually in contact with the enemy forces,” and that applied not merely to the bases, but to the whole field of military operations. Unceasing worry! (*No More Parades* xiii)

It was the ‘unceasing worry’ that wore the men to the point of no resilience. When Ford was contemplating writing his narrative, biographer Max Saunders writes, ‘It wasn’t just that he panicked about his memory [of actual events]. For *what* he remembered was, itself, chiefly—panic and anxiety’ (Saunders *Ford Madox Ford* 126).

In a scene from *No More Parades*, Ford describes the supply officer Captain Tietjens under German bombardment. Tietjens feels his grasp on sanity separating as the architecture of his temporary home near the front begins to separate: ‘The hut was moving slowly before the eyes of Tietjens. He might have just been kicked in the stomach. That was how shocks took him. He said to himself that by God he must take himself in hand’ (*No More Parades* 314). To ‘take himself in hand’, Tietjens grabs a square piece of army-issue ‘buff’ and ‘[writes] on it with a column of fat, wet letters’—letters as wet as O Nine Morgan’s sticky blood that remains on his hands—and throws the paper at Captain McKechnie, his subordinate officer, who cowers in the corner. He shouts at his ‘adenoidy, Cockney subaltern’, ‘Give me the fourteen end-rhymes

of a sonnet and I'll write the lines. In under two minutes and a half' (314). In his moment of psychic crisis, Tietjens, a statistician and pedant who annotates errors in the encyclopaedia at the breakfast table, grasps at the 'desultory rectangle' (291) of literature, the sonnet form, to save himself. It is the tidy architecture of cultural emotion, love, and memory, and the discipline of the sonnet form, the artefact of Tietjen's school lessons, that provide him with a last refuge, a safe house, in his private and very public war. Tietjens grasps at the cultural artefact of the sonnet, an architectural rectangle of words with firm borders, a form that represents something refined, disciplined, predictable, highly cultured, and finally, soothing and ancient.

As Andrew Frayne suggests, 'The lyric form is [best] appropriate for intense moments of pleasure or horror' (Frayne 7). In response to Tietjen's command, McKechnie comes out of terror and draws literary battle lines, shouting that he will write 'Latin hexameters in three. In *under* three minutes' (*No More Parades* 214). The absurd duel of paper, ink, and intellect, in the midst of threatened loss of life and sanity, captures, compartmentalises, and postpones the moment of reckoning for these men. Tietjens and McKechnie seek the architectural rules and regulations of poetic form when all else is gone. 'They were men uttering deadly insults the one to the other', throwing verbal bombs as a way to anchor them in a 'hut [that] was moving slowly up and down before [his] eyes', a 'rudimentary hut' the author describes as 'shaped like the house a child draws' (291).

A dozen years after Ford constructed Groby and Tietjen's Great War sonnet, a cadre of writers conducted a flurry of literary house-building during the Second World War. As the homes of Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Elizabeth Bowen, Daphne du Maurier, and Virginia Woolf were under physical threat, or requisitioned by the army, the authors offered literary walls, doors, windows, roofs, and floors to their readers in their respective literary works. From 1939 to 1945, Waugh built a fictional Brideshead, Bowen began a biography of her family's stately home, Bowen Court, and Virginia Woolf began constructing what Alexandra Harris identifies as being Woolf's 'meticulous . . . memorial house' during a period when houses next to hers at Tavistock Square were being pulled down after being bombed (Harris 261). Woolf states that she initially began building a psychological inventory of her childhood home, an act that

Harris describes as being Woolf's 'soothing, systematic mental exercise, the rebuilding of a remembered home' in a time of war (Harris 261). As Tietjens uses his war sonnet in *No More Parades* to 'take himself in hand', Woolf states that 'I write this partly in order to recover my sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface' (Woolf *Moments of Being* 98). With literature, these writers reconstructed, or constructed, grand, or substantial, *family* homes—representing a metaphoric desire to return to the solidity of home and family in the time of war. For as Jay Winter remarks of the interwar period, '[t]here is overwhelming evidence that the First World War *increased* the strength of family life' ('Kinship and Remembrance' 42); then, with the return of destruction of another war, literature may have seemed to offer an anchor, a lifeline, or another way home.

When the non-specialist reader is asked to cite the great writers of the Great War, inevitably, even a century after the war, the names of the triumvirate of poets—Brooke, Owen, and Sassoon—often come to the fore. Despite the fact that all three were at some level engaged in the Georgian and/or Modernist project, writing poems using a variety of forms, somehow they are often best remembered for their sonnets: Brooke for his 1914 sonnets, especially 'The Soldier', Owen for his valorised 'Anthem For A Doomed Youth', and Sassoon for his bitter 'Glory of Women'. Meanwhile, poets such as John Allen Wyeth—with his remarkable collection *This Man's Army: A Man's War in 50 Sonnets* (1928)—remain virtually unknown, although Wyeth's collection was popular enough to go into a second print within ten months of publication, as Dana Gioia writes in the introduction to a new edition (Wyeth xvii). Whether the present lack of interest in, or communal memory of, Wyeth's collection reflects what might be perceived as a daunting prospect (a collection of fifty-one consecutive war sonnets), or that he was American, one can see in the example from 'La Voie Sacrée' [The Sacred Way] that perhaps of all the sonnet writers of the Great War, his voice is amongst the least forced, the most subtle. His record of war, though disciplined through the tidy rectangular shell of the sonnet form, releases an evocation of the feeling of war by a soldier who never published poetry again:

La Voie Sacrée: Blercourt

These houses died too long ago to care
who comes and echoes in their empty shells.
Our broken rooms stay blank and vacant still
although we laughed and talked an hour or two.
Rats squeak and scabble brusquely everywhere.
The night is almost blind ... Something dispels
my stupor, wakes me with a squeamish thrill
to find my raincoat pocket eaten through ...
How can I sleep with Verdun over there!
Once out of doors, what is it breaks and wells
to tears,—just to be marching along the grey
of the road, with Verdun back of any hill,
Verdun, in touch and sentient—there to view
my lonely crisis on her sacred way. (Wyeth 46)

In the first line, Wyeth resurrects the houses of war from his memory; they have been emptied of the life force from within, abandoned and are blank and vacant—they have nothing left to say. And they are spent as shells, indifferent beyond care. This is a poem of abandonment, the temporary shelter of the exile soldier, and the abandonment or escape from Verdun. It is about homelessness made through war, when even one's pockets—and the contents of a soldier's pockets are perhaps the last bastions of home—are 'eaten through' by the rats who now claim these houses, 'squeaking' in 'brusque' housewife-like tones, 'scrabbling everywhere'. What is remarkable is how Wyeth captures the mood of a soldier incapable of rest, after battle perhaps, or maybe not, utterly conscious that the massacre of Verdun 'is over there!'

The weariness of living in the battle zone has made the soldier feel as blank and empty as the rooms he and his unit occupy for a few hours, and though his comrades fill the rooms with laughter and talk, the rooms remain empty. The transitional, subsequent mood of relief of the poem comes in the volta, when upon leaving the ruins he bursts into tears at something he can't identify, something that 'breaks and wells / to tears' (l. 10–11) as he marches away. The last two lines present the third transition of the poem, to the personification of the ruined city, 'sentient' and watching the poet when in the final line the poet marches out of the poem, the city perceiving the soldier's personal sacred way, his 'lonely crisis' on 'her sacred way' (l. 14). What is worth considering here is Wyeth's use of architecture, the house, and the architecture

of the sonnet to encapsulate and contain the feelings wrought by his war experience.

As the war stretched from months into years, poets and writers tested the boundaries of form and engaged at some level with the modernist technique and the new vocabulary of war, one far removed from comforting the rhyme schemes and unquestionable patriotism of poems such as Julian Grenfell's 'Into Battle'. Isaac Rosenberg, in a letter of 1916, writes that the war warranted 'a colder way, more abstract, with less of the million feelings everybody feels' (qtd. in Kendall 1). His response was to deliver the imagery in a limping metre, to describe the wagon loaded with corpses, and a fraying, ragged form, as in 'Dead Man's Dump'. Still, the popular cultural memory, even a century after the war, seems inclined to cling to the conservative ideals of classical imagery and form, adhering to predictable set of tropes and poetic form, the sonnet, to dust off yearly, then put away after following prescribed cues of maudlin mourning, regret, and, ultimately, pacifism. Jason Harding writes, 'When one considers, however, the deaths of the First World War poet-combatants—Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen—it is not difficult to find reasons why British cultural memory yearned for a world in which modernism had not taken the high ground' (178). For the contemporary reader, perhaps, clinging to the sonnet, like Ford's protagonist Tietjens, represents a romantic form from the past. Through the rhythms and rhyme schemes of the form, the poet is able to provide an enduring comfort, a metaphoric return to a literary safe house.

Arguably this public engagement with the aesthetic form and the Great War myth seeks a morbid comfort based on the false idea that the war poem tradition is static. This, perhaps, contributes to an irresolution of grief on a national scale. During the 2014 public engagement project at the University of Exeter, *The Long Goodbye: a conversation across a century*, participants repeatedly stated the following words: 'My Grandfather returned and never spoke of the war.' The implication of this is that the grandfather suppressed his trauma, and yet it is possible that there was no trauma to repress. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, with ninety per cent of the combatants returning from the war, a large percentage may never even have seen the Front and would not have engaged in combat. Would one's great-grandfather, for

example, have come home and boasted about his time baking bread as a 'kitchen corporal' (Hemingway, *In Our Time* 13), or repairing boots, or sorting mail? A woman I met over the course of a Great War project told me of her grandfather, who was an army cow herder and butcher. If the baker had written a sonnet on his war work, would it be remembered?

Clearly the sonnet form continues to serve war into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Brian Turner's 'Body Bags', his devastating poem about the Iraq war, employs the formal conventions that parody the chaos and distil the pathos. Here the sonnet form is a vessel, a container, like a body bag, for the uncontainable, either of sublime love or painful detail. Turner writes:

as we stand over the bodies—
who look as if they might roll over,
wake from a dream and question us
about the blood drying on their scalps,
the bullets lodged in the back of their skulls,
to ask where their wives and children are
this morning, and why this hovering
of flies, the taste of flatbread and chai
gone from their mouths as they stretch
and rise, wondering who these strangers are ... (l. 3–12)

Here the poet is following in the tradition of Sassoon through the use of pathos, as seen in the latter's sonnet 'Glory of Women'. Sassoon writes: 'While you are knitting socks to send your son / His face is trodden deeper in the mud' (l. 13–14). Where Turner contrasts the homeliness of 'wives and children', and 'flatbread and chai', Sassoon chooses to excoriate women who knit in total ignorance that their sons' faces are at this moment being trod underfoot in the mud. I suggest that for both poets the war sonnet provides a vital cultural anchor to the past and function through its tidiness. It is a capable form that is a method of containing the unresolved war grief—imaginary or otherwise—one that seems to be central to the nation state's communal narrative. Overtly, this stance may appear to object to the First World War sonnet as a *memento mori*, a fetishistic object, but in fact it is praiseworthy in its efficiency, its ability to express trauma and contain it. What I contend as objectionable, is the reductive reading of the Great War facilitated by this containment, and so I argue that an

empathic reading of Great War literature needs to take a more comprehensive look at form.

In his seminal work *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934), Henri Focillon writes: '[Form] prolongs and diffuses itself throughout our dreams . . . it is a kind of fissure through which crowds of images aspiring to birth may be introduced into some indefinite realm—a realm which is neither that of physical nor that of pure thought' (qtd. in Warner 11). Later, the surrealist Roger Caillois developed a theory based on Mallarmé's idea 'that the imagination possesses its own logic' and proposed that 'a language of forms' is operational in the universe (12). He called this a 'universal syntax' and argued that '[p]hilosophers have not hesitated to identify the real and the rational. I am persuaded that a different bold step . . . would lead to discover the grid of basic analogies and hidden connections which constitute the logic of the imagination' (qtd. in Warner 12). Form, then, may be 'the logic of the imagination', a logic ineffable in peace, but even more so perhaps in times of war, a hyper-sensual environment packed with contradictory logic, illogic, and imagination on a larger scale, potentially, than in peace. The next section looks at Jones and form.

5.6 David Jones and Form

'I did not begin [*In Parenthesis*] with any idea of what shape it might take,' Jones writes to Bernard Bergonzi; he continues:

in all arts the crucial problem was wedding 'form' and 'content' so that work, no matter whether it was a modest, small affair, or a great complex one was to be judged by what extent 'form' and 'content' were resolved so that the two were no longer seen as separated, but as a 'thing' existed, an 'object'. (qtd. in Goldpaugh 31)

In Parenthesis demonstrates Jones's object, his shape, his dwelling, his number of 'modest, small affair[s]', linked into 'a great complex one'. He rather wistfully writes to Herman Grisewood after the completion of *In Parenthesis*:

I see now why chaps write about 'separate things' in short poems—to wit, odes to nightingales and what not—but it seems to me that if you just talk about a lot of things as one thing follows another in the end you may have made a shape out of all of it. That is to say, that shape that all that mess makes in your mind. (*Dai Greatcoat* 72)

Within the septychal outer form, Jones orders or disorders his narrative through the methodology he describes above—in the end, he has made ‘a shape out of all of it’.

In Parenthesis is a record of the infantry unit that orders and disorders accordion-like as in kinetic battle at the front and behind the lines. With the interior complexity, he makes not just one single ‘shape that all that mess makes in your mind’ (72) but many shapes. He frequently approaches language in a similar manner to Ford. As Ford writes in the essay ‘An Answer to “Three Questions”’: ‘Creative prose *is* poetry; the novel is narrative poetry and displaces nothing’ (Ford *Critical Essays* 206). Jones makes poetry that is workmanlike and prose-like, capturing the sounds and sights of the collective into and at the battlefield. He writes creative prose that is close to poetry, tweaking form in order to accommodate his narrative. As he states in his Preface to *In Parenthesis*, ‘There are passages that I would exclude, as not having the form I desire—but they seem necessary to the whole’ (x). Form, writes Angela Leighton, ‘is not a fixed shape to be seen, but the shape of a choice to be made’ (16). She suggests too that what is left out is as integral to what is included in the aesthetic choice and design of form. What Jones has left out of *In Parenthesis* tells us as much as what he has included. Jones continually deflects the spotlight away from his personal narrative, to that of the infantry company’s, using only Dai’s boast with the rare personal pronoun ‘I’ to make his claim: ‘I was with Abel’, ‘I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes’, ‘I was the spear in Balin’s hand’, and so on (IP 79). It is Jones’s strategic usage of the first-person singular, centrally placed in the arc of the narrative, that reinforces the assertion he makes in the preface that ‘I have tried, to so make this writing for anyone who would care to play the Welsh Queen’ (xiii). He is, he is telling us, the one who looks upon, who records, who survives, and who tells the tale of the Battle of the Somme; he is the bard singing for ‘the Welsh Queen’.

Merlin James writes that Jones the painter is considered to adhere to a distinct European modernism of detachedness wrought through artificiality, ‘a degree of abstraction’ (James 11), and yet Jones insists on ‘*necessary* representationalism . . . in its themes of human spirituality, physicality, signification and artefacture’ (11). Jones produced a literary artefact, as Read

recognises in his review of *In Parenthesis*, and it is one that is 'woven into a pattern which, while retaining all the authentic realism of the event', does so 'without affectation, without parody or pedantry' (Read 457). Jones's lack of affectation in *In Parenthesis* contrasts with Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, in which Graves shows off his military knowledge. So too does his lack of pedantry contrast with Mary Borden's 'Unidentified', her demanding stance that cajoles the reader into gazing directly upon the ugliness of war and at the same time upon the magnificence of Borden's VAD. In the Preface to *The Anathemata*, Jones writes:

It is of no consequence to the shape of the work how the workman came by the bits of material he used in making that shape. When the workman is dead the only thing that will matter is the work objectively considered. Moreover, the workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work, otherwise we have that sort of 'self-expression' which is undesirable in the painter or the writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back or the cook. (*Anathemata* 12)

Jones is the infantryman artist here, and all that counts is that his objective is met. If one looks at the numerous drafts of *In Parenthesis* and correspondence in the Jones archives at Aberystwyth, one is struck by the obsessive attempts to hone his ideas. His personal letters display a form unto themselves—one can spot a David Jones letter immediately—most often with near-right justification, and with the left, top, right, and bottom margins filled with annotations. These annotations are frequently final conversational comments, corrections, or apologies for his lack of formal education, and are often written in contrasting green or red ink. Sometimes they look like battle plans, though filled with cursive writing rather than mathematical coordinates. Here one observes Jones layering information or allusions on images and ideas in a way that is almost reverse-archaeological in his methodology of composition.

5.7 The Spiritual Home

[T]he 'parts that are united in one' in an art-work may be, for some, the most convincing analogy which they can get in this world of the 'proportioned parts' of the heavenly city, to delight in which, religion says, is part of our redeemed destiny.

David Jones, from 'Art in Relation to War' (*Dying Gaul* 135)

In 'Art in Relation to War', Jones writes, 'Because the Land is Waste (or so says the writer), it seeks to do what the hero in the myth was rebuked for not doing, i.e. it seeks "to ask the Question"' (*Dying Gaul* 123). To answer 'the Question', Jones proposes addressing 'the myth' that suggests that 'the land can be restored' (123), that trees may grow again, villages, homes, societies, and people may become whole again, that is, one with God. The seemingly irredeemable situation of not one but two world wars, as Jones's essay dates from the early years of the Second World War, may only be mitigated, he believes, by overtly asking 'the Question'—how does one achieve wholeness in a world so utterly separated from itself?

Jones defines his role as an artist as being one of witness rather than that of the fixer or the healer. Through Dai's boast, Jones argues that the Bard is the artist, the one who must at least make 'a tentative attempt to give expression to some of the questions rather than . . . offering answers or solutions' (*Dying Gaul* 123). This is the artist's ethical imperative, a 'tentative attempt' at least. For Jones is communitarian in outlook, and his Catholicism is a natural outcome, with its emphasis on the communal, the social gospel, and its undeniable hierarchical structure (with its inbuilt avenues for subtle dissent), its rituals, uniforms, and historical provenance—all of which must have made the church a safe spiritual bivouac for the war-weary artist. Jones, when he converted, was joining another army, the army of God.

Merlin James reminds us that at the time of writing *In Parenthesis*, Jones was fully engaged in the 'Catholic cultural revival [that] had been underway since before the First World War' (James 11). Beyond the overt offering of mystical staging, ritual, spectacle, and a sense of order to which a newly demobilised soldier such as Jones might have strongly responded, Catholicism represented a powerful influence that 'represented a radical (even chic) cultural and intellection ambience, which was as powerful and influential as . . . Bloomsbury liberalism' (11). The 'chicness' and 'radicalism' of Catholicism in this period cannot be underestimated, as witnessed in the significant influence on Jones's work of his integration into the bizarre, all-encompassing world of sculptor Eric Gill and his Ditchling community. The sect's two bases, first in Ditchling, then later in Capel-y-Ffin, provided Jones with his first home as an

adult. Gill's brand of hyper-sensual Catholicism began to influence Jones's drafts of *In Parenthesis*, and both his drafts and his vast correspondence are filled with the presence of a hyper-sensual woman-figure, the goddess, Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, the Queen of the Woods, and, in a penultimate draft of *In Parenthesis*, as Mark Rutter points out, the figure of Melpomené, 'the muse of tragedy', who Rutter believes underlines the essential pathos of Jones's narrative (Rutter 7). The female figures appear throughout Jones's oeuvre, but their appearances accelerate in number in later drafts. The models for the two goddess figures were Gill's daughter Petra and Prudence Pellham, and a third, that of Melpomené, Rutter speculates, was based on a nurse with whom Jones fell in love at a convalescent hospital in 1916 (7). As Rutter reports, 'Jones's manuscript illustrations focus overwhelmingly on these "feminine presences", and significantly shift the weight of emphasis toward the importance of the creaturely order, the "genius of the place" associated with Diana' (4). But this is a Christian Diana, or rather, a Gillian idea of all sacred women rolled into one, inclusive of Jones's two significant and unconsummated relationships with Gill's daughter Petra, and Prudence Pellham. Jones's work was heavily influenced by Gill, whose central ethos was Thomasine and is best summed by Aquinas: 'The createdness of creatures is simply their relatedness to their Creator as source of their being: and the active creating of them is God's action' (Aquinas 86). Jones's task, then, is to reflect upon rather than to mirror, and to bear witness through the act of creation. Jones attempts, in *In Parenthesis*, to give form to the redemptive narrative of a unit that tracks through the mud, doing their work as soldiers, knowing the likelihood that it shall lead directly to the wooden cross, the trees, the underbrush, the danger and death of Mametz Wood. But for Jones the Catholic, this death march brings one closer to home.

In Parenthesis presents a spiritual home for Jones's narrative. This, one might analogise, is akin to the shelters found in his soldiers' front, 'corrugated tin shelters and hastily contrived arbours and a place of tabernacles' (IP 144), or the seven panels of his septychal altarpiece, as suggested in the introduction. But as Jones offers a liturgical safe house to his soldier reader, though these dwellings are 'of no long continuing nor abidingness, yet not by no means [are they] haphazard nor prejudicial to good-order' (144). *In Parenthesis* is a

construction of a spiritual home rather than a statement of beliefs. As Richard Marsh remarks in his study of Jones's *The Anathemata*, 'within its pages there is no specific spirituality. He does not, for instance, describe the experience of God found in the practice of affective or contemplative prayer. When prayer is his subject, he is rather more likely to describe God's experience of Man's intercessory prayer' (Marsh 2). What Jones does is:

explore two of the important themes of Christian spirituality: that of the journey and the sacredness of place. To these we may add his insights into the joyful and fruitful aspects of the human soul bent on the discernment of the divine within the world. The result is certainly what we might call 'spiritual writing'. (Marsh 2–3)

Jones's *In Parenthesis* is a soldier liturgy embedded throughout with the language of soldiery, the Christianity hours and liturgy, and mythology. It is through the performance of *In Parenthesis* that the war is 'endow[ed] with meaning', to borrow a phrase from Thomas Dilworth ('liturgy endows life with meaning') (*Liturgical Parenthesis* 4).

Liturgy, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is 'a form or formulary . . . (in Ancient Greece) . . . a duty performed', with its origin in the Greek λειτουργικός, translated variously as 'serving' or 'giving to serving' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, online n.pag.). Through *In Parenthesis*, Jones attempts to create a soldier liturgy, an engagement, as Thomas Dilworth cites, between the 'significant drama' of 'belief and desire' and the 'ordinary events of modern war' ('Liturgical Parenthesis' 4). But where Dilworth argues that liturgy endows experience with a sense of meaning, through the progression of liturgy's 'patterns of inception and completions, promise and fulfilment', this chapter argues that liturgy responds to a longing for, and provides, a spiritual home. For Jones's Great War narrative, the soldier liturgy is manifested through his painterly concern with the spatial arrangement of his text rather than that of the oratorio.

Merlin James makes the following comments about Jones's sea paintings at the monastery on Caldy Island and Portslade: '[They] develop most clearly [his] exploration of pictorial space' (James 14). Jones, James tells us, 'played teasingly with what is near and far, flat and recessive, deploying the device of a

distant horizon viewed through the frameworks of open door and balcony, closely echoing that of the picture frame' (14). As Jones negotiates the unfamiliar seascape through the 'frameworks of open door and balcony', so he negotiates the unfamiliarity of the road to war through the frameworks of seven roughly symmetrical sections, or panels, with Dai's boast as the central trunk. The Bard of the Somme's testimony, his 'geste' (IP 187), is a testimony of a survivor guilt that cannot be contained within one text but is spread throughout Jones's opus. But where Dilworth argues that liturgy endows experience with a sense of meaning, through the progression of liturgy's 'patterns of inception and completions, promise and fulfilment', this chapter argues that liturgy responds to a longing for, and provides, a literary manifestation of Jones's Great War. Formally, *In Parenthesis* is the witness, the spiritual home for Jones's Great War narrative. As Aquinas writes: 'since works of craft derive their form from their craftsman's conception; and as related to others each creature is a trace of the Holy Spirit, God's Love' then, fundamentally, all 'derives from [the] creator's will' (Aquinas 87). Jones fundamentally believes that his investigation into producing a liturgical and literary *act* of the war narrative, while derived from the 'craftsman's conception', empowers the reader, especially the soldier-reader, to regain a wholeness through an act of literary redemption. This act, especially when read aloud, offers a literary benediction of the work of soldiery. Jones believes that 'a purpose is served in deliberately reminding ourselves . . . that man is unavoidably a sacramentalist and that his works are sacramental in character' (*Dying Gaul* 155).

In 'Art and Sacrament', Jones develops his idea that man has been a sacramentalist from Palaeolithic times to the present (*Dying Gaul* 155). He cites the example of the horse paintings at Lascaux as being sublime, then argues that even the most 'rough, bungled incision or the daubed on red ochre, the most elementary "cup-markings" on the stone at the burial-site' provide evidence, act as 'the domain of sign (sacrament), of anamnesis, of anathemata' (156)—remembrance of things past and a conceptualisation of eternity, 'a without-endness', and of the offering. For Jones, there is no hierarchy of sacrament in art. He argues that 'the multiplicity of artistic perfections does not make such works either less or more anthropic signs than . . . the scratchings on the earliest paleolith' (156). In the next section of his essay, Jones presents

his most intriguing evidence that supports his thesis from 'Art and War', on the inseparability of war and art:

Let us return for a moment to the effects of war experience, as we know it, upon some kind of artist. A trench lived in in 1915 might easily 'get into' a picture of a back garden in 1925 and by one of those hidden processes, transmogrify it—impart, somehow or other, a vitality which otherwise it might not possess. (*Dying Gaul* 140)

Jones, it appears, cannot get out of the trenches, nor does he wish to, seeing instead the 'vitality', the magical transformation, and the act of offering up the war experience as evidence of something higher. 'Great painting', he writes, 'triumphs over mediocre painting because it has every sort of undertone and overtone, both of form and content'; 'it is both peace *and* war . . . it must hint at December snow, when summer's heat is the text' (140). The same holds true of his war narrative:

If we smell a rat because of the marks on the eolith or on the elkbone we smell only that same rat whenever we approach these subsequent *signa* of man. We know that that rat's hole is well earthed, pungent with corporeality, warm with 'this flesh', brightened with built fires, chill also '*et opertam mortis caligine*' ['and covered with the mist of death'], located in a tangled no-man's-land where antropos and anthropoid, because of the mortal smog and our own caliginousness [darkness], appear sometimes hard to distinguish. But we suspect also, from that rat-smell, that that rat's hole in the forward area must have some liaison with a trench system organized in very great, or rather in infinite, depth. That is to say our rat-odor is not altogether a finite odor. It has, if one may employ a cornered and somewhat patented term, the 'odor of sanctity'. It smells of the 'sacred'. This word no less than the word 'sacrament' needs . . . to be rescued from both certain antipathetic biases and from a certain kind of appropriateness. (*Dying Gaul* 156–7)

Here, the rat is the infantryman, or, the infantryman has transformed so closely to a rat-like creature that the two are indiscernible—such is the trench embedded into the soldier and the soldier into the trench. If the rat-odour 'smells of the 'sacred', then the progress of the infantry company to the Somme is sacred. And it is its vividness, its vitality, of the scents of that progress that lend the 'odor of sanctity', like soldier incense, that is central to Jones's project.

Evidence of the infinite, that which is greater, that which is whole, lives for Jones in the ‘tangled no-man’s land’ (156), as Aquinas’s ‘smoke signifies fire’ (Aquinas 87). For Jones it is fundamentally in the making, as in ‘a *signum* of roses . . . altar of roses’ that one ‘can garland them ‘and make anathemata of them’ (*Dying Gaul* 166)—that the human being engages in ‘sacrament at every turn and all levels of the “profane” and sacred,’ in the trivial and in the profound’ (166). This making, garlanding, or offering is, for Jones, fundamental to the empathic telling of his war narrative. Where there are rats, as he tells us, there is ‘corporeality . . . brightened with built fires’, there is compassion, little gestures of humanity, such as the soldier who turns to the relief unit and says to them, ‘Good night china—there’s some dryish wood under fire-step—in cubby-hole—good night’ (IP 49). To which one of the replacements calls out, ‘Good night kind comrade,’ and ‘the narrow space’ has new occupancy, with the chance for warmth and fire (49). Here is the gift of home, the gift of hearth, from one soldier to another—a typical act in the theatre of war. Jones writes in ‘Art in Relation to War’ that ‘[i]n the domain of “doing”, in the moral order, the end of War is Peace’ (*Dying Gaul* 146), that is, a return to the state of grace.

5.8 Bard of The Somme

The central themes of soldier liturgy and soldier transubstantiation through battle are spread throughout Jones’s work. I argue that it is the formal arrangement of *In Parenthesis* in seven sections, or seven literary seals of witness and with Dai’s boast at its centre, that demonstrate Jones’s sense of being called to witness the passion of the Christ-soldier at the Somme. He sees this bardic role as continuous, just as he understands the role of soldiering throughout the ages. I sense that Dai’s boast also bears his guilt and his claim to his role in the Battle of the Somme as a soldier, and as the Bard of the Somme. Throughout his narrative Jones seeks to provoke questions rather than to provide answers—and as this chapter argues, Dai’s boast bears witness through the bardic tradition. To do so, Jones places the boast at the centre of seven stations of the soldier’s cross. This is his conscious proclamation that he has been called to be the Bard of the Somme: ‘My fathers were with the Black Prince of Wales,’ he states. And he has been with kings, Mallory, Caesar, Ninnius, the Archangel Michael, and he has been the ‘fox-run fire consuming in the wheat lands’ (IP 80) of the Philistines (KJV Judges 15:4), just as the fire of

that day in July 1916 in that small thicket of woods in Northern France, sacrificed. And this is the true pathos of *In Parenthesis*. Jones would never recover, suffering breakdown after breakdown, notably in 1947 after hearing an adaptation of *In Parenthesis* broadcast on the BBC. In a letter of 21 January 1947, to Jackson Knight, Jones writes: ‘the dialogue [is] far better than the narrative. More “realistic” than book & far more emotional,’ then he adds, ‘Strange this change of medium. But chaps like it, it seems. Made me pretty shy I might say’ (EUL MS 75).

Near the end of Dai’s boast, Jones lays the question out for his readers:

You ought to ask: Why?
what is this.
what’s the meaning of this. (IP 84)

This is the question he and so many others would seemingly spend a lifetime trying to answer: Why me? Why did I survive and not they? And what was it all about? While Jones’s guilt is palpable throughout his published work, and even in his unpublished annotations and letter, his work is an offering, a soldier’s liturgy. An annotation in Part 1 of René Hague’s personal copy in the National Library of Wales reads, ‘and they all dead did lie’, from line 237 of Coleridge’s ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’. But to read the conclusive statement to Jones’s narrative as being solely of survivor guilt—the Ancient Mariner—is an incomplete reading. As Coleridge’s next lines proclaim, ‘And a thousand thousand slimy things / Lived on; and so did I’, so too did Jones live on, spending the rest of his life, like the Ancient Mariner, who travelled from land to land, repeating his story endlessly, bearing moral witness to ‘[t]he many men so beautiful’ (l. 238–9) who never came out of the war alive. Finally, borrowing from the *Chanson de Roland*, Jones states outright that he is the Bard of the Somme. He offers his credentials in the last lines of the text: ‘The geste says this and the man who was on the field . . . and who wrote the book . . . the man who does not know this has not understood anything’ (IP 187)—Jones had been on the field, wrote the book, and came home alive to bear witness.

5.9 Conclusion

Often deemed difficult by the readership of the Great War narrative, *In Parenthesis* is deeply rich and filled with the pathos and the sublimity of the war

as experienced by a foot soldier in an infantry rifle company. The irony associated with close readings of *In Parenthesis* is that the more one studies it, the more complex, the more bewildering or wondrous it becomes, rather than clearer, perhaps like war itself. Elizabeth Judge writes: 'The requisite preface to writing on David Jones is to lament that he is "known but not assimilated" before invoking a parade of canonicals to testify on his behalf' (179). Judge believes that as late as 2001, Jones was still considered non-canonical and that Jonesites would use this technique 'to proclaim his right to canonization and to rant about his academic neglect' (179). Of his supporters there are those 'who judged him to be an artist equal to Eliot, Joyce, and Pound' (179). Indeed, as Judge points out, Jones's 'epic length poems in scope and ambition rival the *Cantos*, *The Waste Land*, and *Finnegans Wake*' (179). Jonesites, such as Luke Thurston, head of the David Jones Centre at Aberystwyth states in an email that he believes:

[The reasons for] Jones's non-inclusion in that canon are many and various: he misses the initial moment of modernism (he doesn't start writing until 1928); he lacks the intellectual profile of the modernist hero (think Stephen Daedalus: has a degree, poses as Hamlet etc.); he suffers from the habitual disregard of Welsh culture in the Anglophone world; he is a Roman Catholic in a WASP-dominated environment; he says the wrong kind of thing about World War One. (Thurston)

This perception is now under revision, however, with the centenary of the Great War, which has already seen the English National Ballet's adaptation of *In Parenthesis* in May 2014, a new edition of *In Parenthesis* produced by the Folio Society with calligraphic illustrations by Ewan Clayton, and other adaptations in negotiations with the David Jones estate, including an opera that premiere in 2016. In 1937, Herbert Read characterised Jones as a 'singularly independent' artist ('War and the Spirit' 457), a descriptor that seemingly holds to this day in the context of Jones's visual and literary record. Now, it appears, Jones the writer is beginning to enjoy appropriate appreciation for his work.

This chapter has looked at the artist's struggle to house the war narrative through a reading of David Jones's *In Parenthesis*, his essays, letters, and other works. The chapter looked at separation and exile, the sense of *hiraeth* in the

war zone caused from dislocation, the infantryman's skill of adaptation in war, the assimilation of the individual into the unit through the Zone and 'Zone mind' (*Roman Quarry* 84), and Jones's struggle for formal aesthetic choices. In 1938 Jones wrote the following to Harman Grisewood:

I absolutely and definitely know there is nothing else I care about except this drawing business—writing, ah yes—as much—but after all my equipment as a writer is very severely limited by not being a scholar, and for the kind of writing I want to do you really have to have so much information and know such a lot about words that I cant [sic] really believe I can do it except in a limited way—what I did in I.P. was really a special thing and very strictly within my limits, and by a series of accidents I think I just turned the corner—but O Mary! What a conjuring trick it was. (*Dai Greatcoat* 83)

This letter presents Jones's insight into his hard-wrought battle for form, battles that took him to the breaking point, as they did sometimes in his painting and in the construction of *In Parenthesis*—inseparable vocations for the author. The effort the artist exerts is to the point he describes as being 'fatal'. In Jones's *In Parenthesis*, his painterly aesthetic combines with the soldier's natural inclination towards adaptation in the war zone, resulting in a masterpiece of form—the narrative of an army corps, a singular unit, and their road to war. As his letter reveals, this was the result of 'a series of [literary] accidents'; with reference to Mary, his goddess figure, and to his modesty, he believes that it was a great 'conjuring trick' (83). But these accidents were only the result of many trials and many errors, as seen in the multiple drafts he produced.

In his review of *In Parenthesis*, Herbert Read states that Jones has achieved this great literary feat 'without affectation, without parody or pedantry' ('War and the Spirit' 57). These attributes differentiate *In Parenthesis* from a text such as Robert Graves's frequently parodic autobiography, *Good-bye to All That*, or Mary Borden's frequently pedantic collection of fragments and poems, *The Forbidden Zone*. In this, Jones shows a fundamental respect for his readership, and more importantly, for his fellow combatants and the war experience. Spread over a septychal form of many 'tiny rooms' of prose, poetry, and prose poetry, filled with 'the paraphernalia' (IP x) of the young infantryman, *In Parenthesis* demonstrates a soldier narrative through a form that may lead the reader, step-by-step, through the stages of separation, to transition, and

finally to a ritualistic resolution, through what Jones describes as being ‘all the unknownness of something of immense realness, but of which you lack all true perceptual knowledge’ (15). *In Parenthesis* demonstrates the nature of the unity of the army corps as a type of home, and the duality of the communal and singular experience of war. In this, Jones has produced a fundamentally ethical text of the Great War; he has co-constructed the text with the infantry unit as much as he has authored his own experience.

Through painterly form—positioning Jones’s ‘boast’ of pride and shame at the centre of his septychal arrangement—Dai’s boast is the figure that transverses the what was, the what is, and the whatever shall be, the central eternal witness to the brotherhood of war at the altar of war. The Queen of the Woods is the one who ‘DIGNIFIES THE SPACES OF THE AIR AND MAKES AN AMPLE SCHEME ACROSS THE TRIVIAL SHAPES’, as Jones writes in ‘The Book of Balaam’s Ass’ (*Roman Quarry* 187). This message is laid out for all readers to see in the physical position of the boast at the heart of *In Parenthesis* and the Queen’s appearance near the end. Jones has masterfully handled and housed his complex narrative in which locales, such as the forest in the war zone, are both refuge and death trap, womb and tomb, and the infantry family is singular yet comprised of many—but, as Jones reminds us, is always eternal. *In Parenthesis* is more than a vessel for one man’s narrative, or the ethnography of a military unit: it may also be perceived as a tabernacle, a sacred place, that continues, a century after the beginning of the war, to offer up witness to great acts of suffering, and great acts of mercy, and thus, to provide a redemption for those who have gone to war. But above all, for Jones, the war zone represented a tabernacle of suffering and the sublime, a compressed and holy experience that would require nineteen years of artistic struggle to do it ‘right’ (IP ix), and, through his ‘shape in words’ (x), to fully bring the seven seals of his witness to fruition.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

'On August 1, 1914, we were wakened out of an opiate dream of prosperity and peace,' Edmund Gosse writes in his preface to *Inter Arma: Being Essays in a Time of War* (1916) (ix). For the cranky 65-year-old Gosse, the 'opiate peace' of the pre-war period, was one of 'miserable poltroonery of the sheltered life . . . in which the images of life recurred as on a kind of zoetrope, with a lulling uniformity of repetition' (3). The 'we' whom Gosse mentions clearly excludes the ordinary working person, who at the time had utterly unsheltered and 'miserable' lives in rural or urban poverty, condemned to keeping the zoetrope of the privileged ones' daily life spinning. Theirs was a relentlessly difficult, and often hopeless, generational repetition of indentured servitude of the kind that shocked Robert Frost while on a visit to Gloucestershire from the United States in 1914. Frost recalls witnessing women walking before ploughs in the pouring rain, clearing fields of stones 'for a shilling a day . . . carrying flints the size of their fists in aprons' (Hollis 128).

Hard physical labour, poor living standards, chronic and deadly illness, and a lack of social mobility made for a dulling rather than 'lulling' ethos of life in pre-war Britain for the majority of its disenfranchised citizens. The era was more of rust than gold for many, and yet the myth of the golden summer of 1914 remains in gauzy period films and novels. What came, then, with the shooting of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in late July, and the ensuing war, was a cultural revolution that saw men transcend the strictures of class, sometimes as 'temporary gentlemen' officers, and women break the bounds of home by becoming tram conductors, nurses, chemists, bank managers, or perhaps munitions workers, whose first purchase was often a motorcycle, the ultimate symbol of freedom. Even children picking blackberries for soldier jam or gathering eggs for soldier hospitals participated in what historian Richard Batten describes as the 'participatory citizenship' of First World War volunteerism (Batten).

In these centenary years, through the power of digital technology, thousands of voices from the participatory citizens of the Great War are resurfacing as collections of personal diaries, first-hand accounts, letters, family stories, photographs, and even national narratives such as Russia's. Internationally, public and private interest groups, religious and secular

organisations, and individuals are collecting, collating, and publishing personal or corporate narratives that broaden and deepen our perceptions of the Great War. This gold rush of narrative recalls Gosse's questioning of the role of literature in a world caught up 'in this sphere of tempest' and his anticipation that 'the arts and sciences . . . would withdraw from view, and reappear only on the wings of peace' (Gosse 3). And yet the arts and sciences did everything but withdraw. War is a time of enormous destruction and dislocation and, paradoxically, enormous creativity, an unpalatable paradox. This creativity is born of the intense intersection of sciences, the arts of war, religion, ideology, and the resilient human spirit. As Douglas Jerrold writes in his pamphlet *The Lie About the War*, 'War accelerates the pulse of life. It produces changes . . . within periods impossibly short; changes which it would take generations of peace to produce' (37). To paraphrase Lefebvre, to deny the creativity of war and the destruction of peacetime activities is to dismiss overarching themes of human existence. As John Horne writes:

The shock came not only from the transformation of war, with which the industrial age seemed at last to have caught up, and of the place of warfare in European culture, it also arose from the rupture between intention and outcome. . . . In a previous climacteric of the European state system from 1789–1815, revolution was the explosive charge that altered war along with so much else. In 1914–18, by contrast, war was the great transformer that reshaped everything in its image, including revolution. In many respects war was the revolution, and this helps to explain the gulf between intention and outcome. (xvi)

The war was an entity that spread across the continent, confounding military strategists and drawing in combatants and non-combatants, including artists, to its fronts and to its forbidden zones. Among them, as Gosse notes: 'We have discovered in this present crisis . . . [that although] the first thing people want to do is fight, and prepare for fighting, . . . the next thing they want is to write and to arrange for writing to be printed' (ix). Gosse was himself blatantly envious of the young and their 'envied consecration, of actual fighting' (4), adhering to the trope of sacred warrior Gnosticism, the voice of the trenches perceived as being the singular true story. But this war was different in scale, and to read it as an ethical project, one needs to read widely and critically, and to read, with

empathy, between the lines of the major and minor texts, probing each for residual truths and identifying conventions of *apologia*, signing up, the wait, initiation, loss of innocence, first contact, endurance, return (or death), epilogue. One must look at formal convention, voice, and evidence of the moral and sensual conversion of the artist, and the ethical *raison d'être* of their script, if one is interested in understanding the depth of the experience and how it affects those who endure it.

Robert Graves famously wrote *Good-bye to All That* for money, but an empathic reading reveals that he was confronting a shifting understanding of post-war truth as he was rewriting himself over and over again. After the stock market crash of 1929, Mary Borden, also in need of money, sought her place alongside the Modernists, producing perhaps her only robust, lasting piece of writing, *The Forbidden Zone*. Through an empathic reading of her war narrative one may understand that perhaps the Great War years were the only time in her life when Borden felt complete agency; it was her time of personal life and death power. While Jones initially began his personal war narrative as an experiment in form and expression and sought to apply painting techniques to the writing, as one reads beyond the conventions of the war story, in doing so, he produced one of the greatest pieces of war literature in the English language, *In Parenthesis*. This text, often perceived as difficult, continues to yield profound insight into the Great War—not the least through its structure and form, and Jones's embedded claim within as Bard of the Somme. Such are the vagaries of war. Such are, potentially, the empathic readings of war narratives.

It is the heteroglossia that proves most truthful in the diversity of voices that recur and enliven the war narrative within the canon of war literature, crossing genres from the poetry of Kipling, Sassoon, Owen, and Hardy to Blunden's and Graves's memoirs, to the novelisations of Ford Madox Ford, Siegfried Sassoon, Rebecca West, and Remarque, or hybrid forms such as *The Forbidden Zone* or *In Parenthesis*. Edward Thomas's Arras diary, for example, records snippets of comrades' speech and song between bombardment and boredom and introduces the voices of 'characters' he is at war with, as well as his own observations at the Front, often more razor-sharp than his poetry. Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* is redolent with thinly fictionalised war archetypes, all of whom speak in their own voices: the young schoolboy

soldier Müller; Lance-Corporal Kropp, the thinker; Leer, the leech; Tjaden, a locksmith with an endless appetite; Dettering, the farmer homesick for his wife; Stanislaus Katczinsky, the leader; and the narrator, 'Paul Bäumer'. Remarque's personal war narrative was a vocal performance with a message. As Modris Eksteins writes:

Very few contemporary reviewers noted, and even later critics have generally ignored, that *All Quiet* was not a book about the events of the war—it was not a memoir—but an angry postwar statement about the effects of the war on the young generation that lived through it. Scenes, incidents, and images were chosen with a purpose to illustrate how the war had destroyed the ties, psychological, moral, and real, between the front generation and society at home. (Eksteins 351)

Eksteins states that '*All Quiet* is more a comment on the postwar mind, on the postwar view of the war, than an attempt to reconstruct the reality of the trench experience' (351). In this, *All Quiet on the Western Front* has more in common with Graves's 'The Shout' than with *Good-bye to All That*. By 1928, Remarque believed that 'normal existence' would be impossible after the war, even ten years later (Eksteins 351). Eksteins perceives the book as 'a symptom, rather than an explanation, of the confusion and disorientation of the postwar world' and believes that Remarque's surrealistic distortions of events, such as his description of a man who continues to run despite his legs having been blown off, is a manifestation of that quality (351).

With several layers of irony, *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* was published in 1930 and was intended to be a commercial volley into the war-publishing skirmishes of the period. The English writer Evadne Price was asked by the publisher A.E. Mariot to write a spoof of *All Quiet on the Western Front* following the huge success of Remarque's novel. Price, a successful journalist and romance writer under the pseudonym Helen Zenna Smith, chose instead to write a realistic account of the Front from the point of view of an English ambulance driver named Winifred Young. *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* is a ghosted novelisation of the lives of six young women driving field ambulances at the Front. Jane Marcus, in her afterword to the 1989 edition of the book, states that the book is a 'multi-authored text . . . "heteroglossia" in

Bakhtin's terms, . . . [that] comes from Evadne Price's extraordinary ability to hear and read the popular experience of the horror of this particular war' (Price 267).

The reasons for writing the war narrative were many. Herbert Read states that he attempted to set down his account, *In Retreat* (1925), while the 'memory of the events associated with these relics was yet vivid enough to give them a real connection' (7) and after 'find[ing] myself receding from the stern oath of realism I took when in the midst of war' (7). For some writers, the narrative acts as a public confession, a process of self-improvement through 'self-transformation and self-mastery' in pursuit of 'the good life' (Taylor 14). For others, it is the relief of one's burden through 'self-discovery and interpretation' (13), as in the later confessional of the modern era. For the military mind, it may incorporate the techniques of the ancient and modern confession; the primary impulse of truth-telling in antiquity, as Taylor suggests, was 'more self-conscious . . . than in modernity', reflecting the ancients' model of autonomy and self-mastery, whereas the modern is one of metamorphosis and/or cleansing.

Narrative is an act, whether it is public (published), or private. Confessing, telling the 'truth' or one's self-truth, is a performative act, 'a ritual where truth is authenticated by the obstacles and resistances that it has had to lift in order to be formulated' (Taylor 7). For the author of the war narrative, the ethics of the act sometimes have far-reaching consequences, and accordingly, for the reader of the war narrative the empathic, compassionate reading may reap insight into the interiority of the act of living war, remembering war and recording war. To do otherwise is, as Leonard K. Smith reminds us, 'comes at the cost of closing off our understanding of the creativity with which soldiers [and others] grappled with their predicament' (Smith *Embattled Self* 1). A contemporary case of ethics and writing may be seen in the work of the Canadian civilian internist and former soldier Kevin Patterson. Patterson is also an author of a travelogue, *The Water in Between* (1999), and a novel, *Consumption* (2006), and has co-edited a collection of essays from the Afghan war, *Outside the Wire: The War in Afghanistan in the Words of its Participants* (2008). In the July/August 2007 issue of *Mother Jones*, Patterson published 'Talk to Me Like My Father: Frontline Medicine in Afghanistan', in which he writes in detail of the final dying

moments of his patient, the young Canadian soldier Kevin Megeney, in the operating theatre in the Role 3 hospital in Kandahar Air Field. Patterson was disciplined by the medical community and faced charges by the Department of National Defence (DND) for contravention of classified information in the months following publication. He was cleared by the DND after Megeney's family confirmed that they had given permission for their kin's name to be used. Still, he issued apologies and paid a fine after being censured by the British Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in 2009. In an email to *The National Review of Medicine*, Patterson writes:

The essay describes the horror of war in strong language, but to understand the extent of the ongoing sacrifice of the troops, I believe that strong language is necessary. If the public is to get a sense of the price being paid on our behalf by these young men and women, it is necessary to face with open eyes the grotesque nature of war trauma. The recent disengagement and fatigue of the public with these matters is itself grotesque. Reasonable people may disagree on the prospects for a durable solution in Afghanistan, but no one could dispute that these young men and women are there for us, and that it is our duty to understand what it is they endure in order to truly honour them for their courage—and in order to make appropriate decisions about what is to be done in the future. . . . Kevin Megeney's immediate family was approached by Mother Jones magazine prior to the publication of this piece, and his mother's response was strikingly gracious. Nevertheless, it must have been painful for anyone who loved him to have read this. My intention was to honour their son and brother. (qtd. in Solomon n.pag.)

What one observes here is Patterson's *apologia*, his credentials, through his use of the code for 'mud and blood', the 'horror of war', and his display of combat Gnosticism of the battlefield surgical unit. What one might also read if one applies the protocol that I suggest in this thesis, perhaps, that there is a sense of survivor guilt in the writer's letter—Patterson had been a soldier in peacetime and had never been deployed as a combatant. Perhaps Patterson's eagerness to prove he has finally been to war—like La Motte's—is his way to make amends for having previously failed at soldiering.

For the subjects of this study, Robert Graves, Mary Borden, and David Jones, a residual form of survivor's guilt, or worse, the guilt of killing or making the life-and-death decisions of triage, may be observable embedded in their

narratives. So too, at some level, the artist's sense of guilt at exploitation of subject and self may possibly be discerned. Perhaps this provides some of the impetus for Jones's offering of the redemptive, ritualistic soldiers' liturgy *In Parenthesis*. Ritual, writes Taylor in her introduction, requires not only a 'lifting' of guilt and its sister, shame, but also 'difficulty' (Taylor 7)—certainly *In Parenthesis* was born of struggle. Through confession may come redemption, purification, and potentially, 'salvation' (8). Inevitably, purification, a cleansing of the *grandes blessés* of the Great War, appears to have been a driving impulse for the artists, as discussed in this thesis. Some, like Herbert Read, felt that they could only contribute a 'transcript of experience' of the Great War (*In Retreat* 8). By 1925, he was cognisant that '*in full* [emphasis original] that history will never be written' and he 'wished to avoid . . . any personal interpretation of the events' of the Fifth Army's retreat from St. Quentin in March 2018 (7). Read states: 'I wanted the events to speak for themselves unaided by any art' (7).

What is imperative to this project is that readers consider and develop their own compassionate framework as a process of engaging with the corpus of Great War literature and war literature from the point of view of empathy. Integral to this is recognition of the public face of the metanarrative versus the private face of the individual war story—with attendant foibles and whimsies—and the *rationale* behind the narrative. For some writers, the narrative is: a form of credibility, showing that the author has played a role (Ellen La Motte); gnostic, or an establishment of rank (Sassoon, Owen, possibly Blunden); an artistic experiment and a redemptive act (David Jones); therapeutic or remunerative (Graves); or a claim of agency through performance (Borden). Whatever the motivation, each writer confronts at some point the dualism of the Great War narrative, the problem of personal versus public performance, as they put their work into the public arena. While throughout the thesis I look back a century, the ethical implications of this study for consumers of contemporary war narratives remain crucial.

This reading of Graves, Borden, and Jones has asserted that war literature may be approached as an ethical project through an engagement with empathy and compassion in its interrogation of the artist in war, and that its producers and consumers may choose to have a moral contract with the genre, to read for deeper content than the tropes of mud and blood, and the

predictable conventions of the war story genre. With this in mind, Graves's narrative proves substantially unreliable yet conveys the sound of the truth. Borden's is somewhat reliable, although uneven and rather incomplete, but through her use of the uncanny, and her overt egotism, one may perceive a line of truth embedded within it. Jones's narrative, ostensibly the most overtly fictitious of the accounts—at least according to Jones in his preface—proves to be one of the most authentic, and possibly the most empathic, or, compassionate account of the individual and the army unit within the Great War canon.

But in the end, perhaps, a story is just a story, and a war story is just a war story. In 2010, at the Olympic Winter Games in Whistler, British Columbia, I shared an after-dinner coffee with the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Colonel Shane Schreiber, a veteran of the Afghan and Bosnian wars, some of his men and the Colonel of the Regiment were hosting me for two days while I looked at the domestic operations of the battalion after war. The senior officer leaned towards me and smiled as he asked whether me knew the difference between a fairy tale and a war story. I shook my head, and he said in a low voice: 'Well a fairy tale begins with "Once upon a time..."', whereas a war story begins, "So there we were in the shit...". The circle of young snipers surrounding us, all of them young Afghan war veterans now reluctantly serving as security detail at the 2010 Olympics (boring compared to war), nodded and burst out laughing. Only the tattoos on their arms, watery blue and faded red—the names or images of their dead comrades etched into their young skin—only these letters and dates seemed to be able to tell the real story for which the snipers simply had no words.

Appendix: Tables of Conventions of Selected Texts

The conventions that I consider it possible to identify across the personal war story genre are as follows: the *apologia*; the establishment of credibility or credentials; anticipation or signing on; reality; loss of innocence; damage or disillusionment; return and readjustment; silence, or, the shout; and epilogue.

The *apologia* is often found in the preface, introduction, or dedication of the war book. It functions as the author's notice to the readers, especially those who served alongside the author, that truth is subjective and frequently incomplete or contradictory.

'Credentials' are frequently presented in the introduction or preface, or sometimes in the title of the work, and present evidence of or justification for writing about war.

The 'anticipation or signing on' convention, though self-explanatory, may be expressed by the author as the process of enlistment or the internal struggle of whether or not to join the war effort.

'Reality' may be represented by leave-taking, the acquisition of the uniform, or the discomfort of communal life. The importance of dressing up for role-play in war is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

'Loss of innocence' comes in the first exposure to the *matériel* of war for some, or full exposure to death and damage.

'Damage or disillusionment' frequently accompanies 'loss of innocence' or comes after years of exhaustion and exposure to war.

For those who return alive, the convention of 'return' frequently coincides with 'readjustment'.

'Silence, or, the shout' occurs as the author struggles with repression, depression, and the accompanying silence, heightened anger, or anguish.

Finally, the 'epilogue' provides the retrospective voice, the lesson learned, the hopes held, the remembrance, the elegiac, or the bewilderment of feeling lost in the transition to a post-war peace.

The following tables illustrate the conventions applied to the three main Great War texts of Graves, Borden, and Jones.