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National History and the Novel in 1930s Britain

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NATIONAL HISTORY AND THE NOVEL IN 1930s BRITAIN

by

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I hope our collaborations, personal and professional, continue. Candice Nicolas' wisdom and vitality has infused the last two years with pleasure; for this I thank her.

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Finally, I thank my parents. Their love is my comfort and their respect my prize. Their confidence in me has never faltered and their support is the foundation upon which I stand. I dedicate this to them.

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Introduction

"Twentieth Century Blues"

"In this strange illusion, / Chaos and confusion, / People seem to lose their way. / What is
there to strive for? Say – / Hey, hey, call it a day. / Blues, nothing to win or to lose. / It's
getting me down. / Blues, I got those weary Twentieth Century Blues."
– Noël Coward, *Cavalcade*

The 1930s in Britain are a decade set apart. Although the decade is one half of

the interwar period, its unique designation as being simultaneously postwar and prewar

motivates literary historians to treat the decade as an independent micro-period.

Moreover, although the 1930s are only one decade out of the five that constitute the first

half of the twentieth century, these ten years are treated as historically autonomous by

literary critics and historians. The common wisdom emphasizes the ways in which the

decade is separate from the national-historical narrative that links Britain's industrial

revolution, *Pax Britannica*, and the rise of Empire to military conflicts in the colonies,

the Great War, and World War II, thus crafting a story of national greatness turned

decadent, civilization in crisis, and a return to respectability by way of a righteous war.

Political, economic, and cultural events assist the separation of the 1930s from

longer histories of the first half of the twentieth century. The Great Depression and "the

Slump" in Britain inaugurate the decade ushering in increasing unemployment and

poverty, characterized by breadlines and the phrase "on the dole," culminating in the

Jarrow March of 1936. The middle of the decade is also marked by a crisis of

constitutional politics in the form of Edward VIII's abdication and the consequent

coronation of his brother, George VI. Edward's love affair with and eventual marriage to

the twice-divorced American socialite, Wallis Simpson, was a controversy that cut across

class divisions: Edward's personal battle between duty and love offering the British

population both a distraction from their woes and worries as well as providing a corollary

to their own struggle between dedication to the traditions of England and hope in a new

and modern future.

Symbolically, Edward's abdication closed the door on the postwar euphoria that is

synonymous with the jazz age of the 1920s: youth, frivolity, and carelessness were

replaced by sobriety, austerity, and anxiety, fueled not only by economic instability but

also by political tensions abroad.[1] On the continent, Fascism was quickly becoming a

formative mode of political action, a powerful response to the peace treaty that cultivated

anything but peace for winners and losers alike.[2] Mussolini was waging war in

Abyssinia, Hitler was effectively initiating a political revolution in the form of the

National Socialist Party, and thanks in part to the National Government's policy of non-

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[1] Edward VIII, with his good looks, dashing personality, and celebrity lifestyle, is closely associated with the euphoria and excess that immediately followed World War I. Many memoirs as well as critical studies of the period fold the abdication of Edward VII into the social and cultural fabric of the 1930s, characterizing it as both symptom and sign of political, economic, and generational tensions. *The People's King: The True Story of the Abdication* (2004), by Susan Williams, explores the complicated relationships among Edward VIII, the British government and monarchy, and the British people.

[2] From the 1920s onward there was a growing consensus that the Treaty of Versailles was an ineffective end to World War I. John Maynard Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of Peace* (1919) led the critique against the Treaty of Versailles: a "Carthaginian peace," according to Keynes. As the economic depression and political unrest that characterized the 1930s became undeniable, many scholars, writers, and average citizens alike, came to share a Keynsian opinion of the Treaty. R. G. Collingwood, in his *An Autobiography* (1939), writes explicitly about his contempt for the treaty that, according to many, Collingwood included, planted the seeds for another world war.

intervention, Franco was successfully executing a Fascist takeover in Spain. Although

the plight of the Spanish people captured the imaginations and minds of many left-

leaning British artists and intellectuals toward the end of the decade,[3] the overwhelming

power and presence of Fascism in Europe did not leave England undisturbed. The British

Union of Fascists grew in visibility, exacerbating the political division between left and

right that many literary historians employ as the most important characteristic of the

1930s.

A writer and Great War veteran, Wyndham Lewis situates the particular political

and cultural circumstances of the 1930s in the context of war. Lewis, with a bit of

sarcasm, explains, "This book [*Blasting and Bombardiering*] is about what happened to

me in the Great War, and then afterwards in the equally great Peace. I always think

myself that 'great' as the Great War was, the Peace has been even greater" (*Blasting and

Bombardiering* 1). In *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), Wyndham Lewis presents the

history of the twentieth century within the framework of war; "such a tremendous

landmark," the war "imposes itself upon our computations of time like the birth of

Christ," employing the terms prewar and postwar as one does B.C. or A.D. (*Blasting and

Bombardiering* 1). For Lewis, though, it is not Edward's abdication or the Slump that

inaugurates the period after the war no longer adequately characterized simply by the

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[3] Some of the most notable literary-activists supporting the Spanish Republic in the face of the National Government's policy of non-intervention were Julian Bell, Virginia Woolf's nephew who died in Spain, and John Cornford, who died in Spain on his twenty-first birthday. W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender also went to Spain, as did George Orwell. Other cultural figures associated with the Republican cause are Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Pablo Picasso. See Frederick Benson's *Writers in Arms* (1967), Hugh Ford's *A Poet's War* (1965), Katharine Bail Hoskins' *Today the Struggle* (1969), John Muste's *Say That We Saw Spain Die* (1966), and Stanley Weintraub's *The Last Great Cause* (1968).

phrase postwar: it is the 1926 General Strike.[4] It was after the General Strike, according

to Lewis, that a period "of a new complexion" began. Tyrus Miller, in *Late Modernism*

(1999), follows the chronology suggested by Lewis, advocating, as did Lewis, that "on or

about May 1926," to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, the postwar reality in Britain changed.

For cultural critics like Lewis, and literary critics like Miller, the demonstration of

collective action, the increasing visibility of Britain's working class, and the realization

of the economic consequences of peace changed the tenor of the political and cultural

discourse, initiating, as Lewis explains in 1937, "the period we're living in today"

(*Blasting and Bombardiering* 1).

An oft-cited example of Lewis' "the period we're living in today" is Nancy

Cunard's questionnaire, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (1937), published in the

Left Review. This pamphlet has become representative of the political-cultural split

between left and right that has simplified and compromised the relationship between the

high modernism of the first decades of the century and the more documentary,

sociological, politically-oriented writing of the 1930s. Cunard's question and the three

options for responding – "For," "Against," or "Neutral?" – suggest that the politics of the

decade leave little room for neutrality, contributing to the either/or epistemology that

over-simplifies both the politics and literature of the decade.[5] The question mark that

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[4] Charles Loch Mowat defines the General Strike as follows: the "general strike of 1926,
caused by the bitter coal strikes which long outlasted it, was a great and dramatic event of
the mid-twenties, interrupting the even tenor of Baldwin's government and the course of
economic recovery from the boom and slump which had followed the war…It made a
wound on the body politic and on the economy, but the wound healed, though the scar
remained" (*Britain Between the Wars* 284).

[5] Although the collaboration of Cunard, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and the *Left
Review* speaks to the generational, political, and aesthetic complexities of the decade,

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follows the choice "neutral" implies that neutrality is a questionable position at best; even

the title, *Authors Take Sides*, suggests that there are only two viable responses to the

Spanish Civil War: for or against.

A kind of literary "who's who" of the interwar period, *Authors Take Sides* has

provided literary critics and historians a ready-made template for organizing the cultural

scene of the 1930s: although only five responded in favor of Franco and sixteen were

grouped under the heading "Neutral?," the fervor with which each of the remaining

respondents' "Against" was articulated suggested a division simultaneously political and

aesthetic. Published with the help of Stephen Spender and W. H. Auden, *Authors Take*

Sides has been employed as "evidence" that the younger, politically-invested writers

emerging as a cultural force in the interwar period were rebelling against their modernist

predecessors whose age and upper-class sensibility set them apart from the young

emerging writers and who had, by the 1930s, became synonymous with the British

literary establishment.

However, as many scholarly studies mention but few fully examine, the line

separating modernism, class prejudice, and reactionary politics on one side, and

documentary realism, working-class sympathies, and left-wing commitments on the other

is not only permeable but also far from straight. Virginia Woolf, daughter of the eminent

Victorian Leslie Stephen, published in the *Daily Worker* in 1936 as well as participated in

the Labour Party in the 1930s. Her husband, Leonard Woolf, a former colonial

administrator, was, during the interwar period, an outspoken critic of imperialism, a

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Cunard's pamphlet has been employed by critics to simplify rather than enrich the multi-faceted nature of the literary politics of the 1930s.

leader of the Labour Party, and an advocate of the literary endeavors of those thirties

writers who were supposedly engaged in rebellion against what he represented. The

younger writers, most notably Auden, Spender, and Christopher Isherwood were often

"launched" into the literary world through the support of modernists like the Woolfs and

T. S. Eliot.[6] And although the new style was ostensibly different and their "purpose"

seemingly political, Isherwood, for example, considered Woolf the preeminent British

novelist, while others of his generation such as Spender, John Lehmann, and Cyril

Connolly demonstrated their investment in modernist innovation through their consistent

engagement with and examination of its impact on British literature and culture.

Connolly's 1938 book of autobiography and literary criticism, *Enemies of

Promise*, like George Orwell's well-known "Inside the Whale" (1940), participates in and

elaborates on the left/right division that permeates both political and cultural discourses

in the 1930s. Published the week of the Munich crisis, *Enemies of Promise* is, according

to its author, "a didactic enquiry into the problem of how to write a book which lasts ten

years" (vii). In the first section, "Predicament," Connolly provides a literary anatomy,

detailing the various styles from Mandarin (John Donne, Thomas de Quincey, Walter

Pater, and Henry James) to Modern (E. M. Forster, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence,

Wyndham Lewis) to Vernacular (Ernest Hemmingway, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell,

Christopher Isherwood), establishing the dividing lines that critics, since midcentury,

have maintained. However, a close reading of *Enemies of Promise* complicates the

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[6] The Hogarth Press (owned and operated by Leonard and Virginia Woolf) apprenticed
John Lehmann, who eventually became a partner with Leonard Woolf, and published
Christopher Isherwood, Edward Upward, William Plomer, among others. Eliot supported
and praised the publication of Auden's *The Orators* (1932).

postwar literary scholarship that maps political proclivities onto literary style and assigns cultural value accordingly. Connolly's investigation of literary styles in the search for the key to authorial longevity reveals that the literary politics of the twentieth century are more complex than the scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century would have one believe. *Enemies of Promise* situates writers of the 1930s within the rich context of British literary tradition, highlighting the relationship between literature of the decade and the long history of British literary culture.

Common critical wisdom has for decades simplified and misconstrued the literature of the 1930s. By treating the decade as if it was "lifted" out of the longer literary-historical trajectory of the first half of the twentieth century, the complex relationships that constellate thirties writers, their work, and their politics, with their modernist predecessors, high modernism, and fading Liberalism, are discounted. The most-recognized early scholars of the 1930s – Bernard Bergonzi, Samuel Hynes, and Valentine Cunningham, for example – have characterized the literature of the decade along two divergent, but equally unsatisfacotry, lines of thought, both of which employ exclusion and exclusivity as the framework of analysis.

The first approach I call the micro-period approach. This perspective uses the political and cultural particularities of the decade as boundaries that confine writers of a certain age and class who share a similar postwar experience. These male writers and their literary projects then become the lens through which the decade is read and understood. New modernist studies has identified the inadequacies of this approach: when accessed through the literary projects of a select, male, middle- to upper-middle class few, the complex dynamics of the cultural and political context of the decade are

obscured because the homogeneity of the authors examined.[7] What results is a literary-

historical narrative that presents the 1930s as exclusive and exclusionary. This narrative

is composed primarily of members of the "Younger Generation": a small and strikingly

homogenous group of male writers who were born in the first years of the twentieth

century and came of age shortly after the First World War. These writers have come to

constitute the traditional canon of 1930s literature to the frequent marginalization of

working-class, female, and colonial writers. Consequently, although this approach

recognizes the specific historical context of the decade, it over-emphasizes the autonomy

of the 1930s, paying little to no attention to the way in which the events that make the

1930s so distinct were, in large part, products of historical trajectories that had been

unfolding long before 1930.[8]

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[7] New modernist studies, associated with the Modernist Studies Association and its
journal *Modernism/Modernity*, troubles the middlebrow/highbrow tension that has for
decades dominated modernist studies by critically investigating modernist culture as
opposed to focusing solely on the canonical works that have traditionally oriented the
field. Not only has new modernist studies recontextualized the major writers of high
modernism, but also, by taking into consideration more inclusive frameworks of analysis,
new authors and new works have gained critical traction within the scholarly discourse.
The consequences include studies on modernist celebrity and the modernist marketplace,
for example, as well as the pluralization of modernism to the now common
"modernisms." See Peter Nicholls' *Modernisms* (1995) and Douglas Mao's and Rebecca
Walkowitz' 2008 *PMLA* essay, "The New Modernist Studies."

[8] The acute and ultimately restrictive focus on the events of the decade to the exclusion of
their likely origins in the years before 1930 is illustrated in the first lines of many
scholarly texts that take the 1930s and their representative writers as their subject:
Cunningham's begins, "This book is an account of British literature in the 1930s"; John
Lucas' compilation begins, "This book is about the 1930s." Other texts respond to the
decade focus by first establishing exclusionary frameworks: Bergonzi's begins, "This
book is not about all of the literature written in England between 1930 and 1940"; John
Baxendale's and Christopher Pawling's begins, "Let us begin by saying what this book is
not."

The inadequacies of the micro-period approach are revealed in Noël Coward's

play, *Cavalcade* (1931). Premiering at the Theatre Royal in London in October 1931,

Cavalcade illustrates the far-reaching historical trajectory that "sets the stage" for the

political, economic, and cultural circumstances of the 1930s. *Cavalcade* presents the joys

and sorrows of the Marryot family, emphasizing the intersection of national events and

domestic life. The curtain rises on New Year's Eve 1899 as Jane and Robert Marryot

toast the new century and closes on New Year's Eve 1929. Jane's final speech, typically

read as a rallying cry in the face of flagging national pride and patriotism, leaves the

historically-attentive audience member unable to ignore the ways which decades of

imperial ambition, national hubris, and war have contributed to the tension and insecurity

that characterizes both the penultimate scene, titled "Chaos," and the reality that awaits

the audience after the curtain goes down on Coward's lavish performance.[9] The 1930

night club scene, "Chaos," with its montage qualities, surrealist atmosphere, and

discordant tones, stands in ironic response to Jane's ostensibly hopeful New Year's Eve

toast in the preceding scene. The jarring cacophony of "Chaos," highlighted by the song

"Twentieth Century Blues," suggests that the grim realities of the 1930s are not the

product of that decade alone; rather, as the song title proposes, it is the events of the

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[9] On New Year's Eve 1929, Jane toasts England: "Now, then, let's couple the Future of
England with the past of England. The glories and victories and triumphs that are over,
and the sorrows that are over, too. Let's drink to our sons who made part of the pattern
and to our hearts that die with them. Let's drink to the spirit of gallantry and courage that
made a strange Heaven out of an unbelievable Hell, and let's drink to the hope that one
day this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and greatness and
peace again" (*Cavalcade* 134).

twentieth century that make British citizens in the 1930s so blue.[10] Reading the 1930s as

a micro-period obscures the historical trajectory that *Cavalcade* simultaneously

celebrates and critiques.

The second approach to the literary-historical study of the 1930s is perhaps the

most popular: the Auden Generation approach. The Auden Generation is the name given

to Auden, Isherwood, Spender, Edward Upward, and their literary cadre of like-minded,

middle-class, Oxbridge-educated men who employ poetry, primarily, as the platform

from which they articulate the paradox of privilege and disenfranchisement that

characterizes their position within national and literary discourses.[11] Refusing the role of

soldier and statesman their nation expects them to play, these writers express their

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[10] After the song "Twentieth Century Blues" concludes, Coward describes the night club
scene as follows: "When the song is finished, people rise from table and dance without
apparently any particular enjoyment; it is the dull dancing of habit. The lights fade away
from everything but the dancers, who appear to be rising in the air. They disappear and
down stage left six 'incurables' in blue hospital uniform are sitting making baskets. They
disappear and Fanny is seen singing her song for a moment, then far away up stage a jazz
band is seen playing wildly. Then down stage Jane and Robert standing with glasses of
champagne held aloft, then Ellen sitting in front of a Radio loud speaker; then Margaret
dancing with a young man. The visions are repeated quicker and quicker, while across
the darkness runs a Riley light sign spelling out news. Noise gets louder and louder.
Steam rivets, loud speakers, jazz bands, aeroplane propellers, etc., until the general effect
is complete chaos" (*Cavalcade* 138).

[11] Hynes defines the Auden Generation in his introduction to *The Auden Generation* as
"one generation of writers, the men and women born in England between 1900 and the
First World War, who came of age in the 'twenties and lived through their early maturity
during the Depression" (*The Auden Generation* 9). What is most interesting from the
perspective of the evolution of the critical history contextualizing the Auden Generation,
is the way Hynes carefully limits the frame of his investigation, taking into consideration
the impact of both world wars on the Auden Generation, ending his examination at the
beginning of the Second World War. Additionally, Hynes explains to his reader his
understanding of the relationship between literature and history. The critical aftereffects
of the Auden Generation designation, however, simplify the context established set by
Hynes, culminating in Marsha Bryant's claim that Auden has come to stand in for a
literary movement as well as a historical period (*Auden and Documentary in the 1930s*).

investment in Britain by way of outspoken critique, calling attention to failed Liberal ideologies, decrying economic and political mistakes, and refusing to accept a national historiography that mythologizes imperialism and war, to borrow Woolf's phrase, as "the proper stuff" of national identity.[12] Additionally, these writers seemingly disparage the modernist aesthetic that is their literary inheritance in favor of documentary realism, purpose in art, political engagement, and Marxist-inspired themes.

Although the Auden Generation certainly does offer a rich object of study, within this analytical framework the lives and literature of a very specific group of young men come to stand in for and ultimately overshadow the historical designation – the 1930s – with which their work and lives are most closely associated. Hynes is the patriarch of this line of thinking; his 1976 book, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*, is the thin end of the wedge that culminates in Marsha Bryant's recognition of the scholarly slippage that has employed the figure of Auden "*as a way of thinking*" about the 1930s to the extent that the signifier Auden "exceeds both the person and his texts" (*Auden and Documentary in the 1930s* 4). The result is that the Auden Generation, in contrast to Hynes' subtitle, represents not English literature and politics in the 1930s, but rather the lives and the literary production from adolescence to adulthood of a handful of English men, the most notable of whom leave Britain for America in the 1940s. This not only implies that Auden, for example, is a stable signifier, offering a consistent meaning, but also, that the literature and politics in the 1930s are comprehensively portrayed through the experiences and writings of a privileged group.

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[12] This phrase is from Woolf's 1919 essay, "Modern Fiction," which is commonly read as a manifesto for modernist form in fiction.

This perspective, like the micro-period approach, also tends toward exclusion because of its focus on a critical narrative that follows the Auden Generation from their Great War adolescence through their interwar experiences – travels, love affairs, political commitments, literary production – to their postwar criticism. By the time World War II ends, most members of the Auden Generation are writing literary criticism from abroad and often from a comfortable position inside the literary establishment of which they were once so critical. Also, the strict focus on the Auden Generation of writers overlooks the complex relationships – both personal and literary – between authors like Auden, Isherwood, and Spender and their elder, modernist colleagues, many of whom, as previously mentioned, advised and supported the emerging careers of younger writers despite their aesthetic differences.[13]

Moreover, concentrating on the Auden Generation only amplifies the binary left or right distinctions that over-simplify the dynamic responses to the economic and political events of the decade. Evelyn Waugh, for example, is marginalized within Auden Generation discourses because of his comedic prose – often read as frivolity in the face of sober circumstances – his reactionary politics, his conversion to Roman Catholicism, and his aristocratic ambitions. Most detrimental, I would argue, is the way that reading only the Auden Generation subordinates the historical events that actually connect, rather than separate, all politically-sensitive and nationally-invested writers of the 1930s. Many scholars who take up the Auden Generation as their object of study

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[13] Steve Ellis provides a comprehensive study of the reciprocal relationship between Eliot and Auden in his book, *The English Eliot* (1991); similarly, the mutually supportive relationship between Isherwood and E. M. Forster has been documented by Isherwood scholars as well as by Isherwood himself.

inadvertently suggest that only young writers like Auden, Isherwood, and Spender are affected by and writing about issues such as economic instability, Fascism, and the increasing threat of another world war. Consequently, what gets excluded from the Auden Generation approach is the *longer* narrative of national history as it is replaced by the personal and literary histories of a select few.

The critical aftereffects of these two scholarly approaches are similar. Both reinforce simplistic political and aesthetic divisions, emphasize the ostensibly anti-modernist production of a select group of young, male, middle-class writers, and obscure the relationship between political events of the thirties and the longer historical narrative of nation, either by treating the decade as a historical microcosm or by reading the decade through the lives of the members of the Auden Generation. The overarching result is that the 1930s, as a historical category, becomes synonymous with the personal lives and literary production of privileged literary celebrities or, alternately, is excluded from the national history that links British imperialism and the Great War with World War II and the welfare state in the second half of the century.

Despite the important work of scholars like Janet Montefiore, whose *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s* (1996) seeks to recuperate marginalized authors as well as historicize the literature of the decade, the 1930s, as a literary category, are excerpted from the longer narrative of national literary-history that follows the novel from its "birth" in the eighteenth century through its early twentieth-century evolution to its postmodern manifestations.[14] Consequently, literature of the thirties is confined within a

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[14] Patrick Parrinder's extensive 2006 study, *Nation and Novel*, which charts the evolution of the English novel in relation to the development of nation, spends little time addressing the novel of the 1930s. Although Orwell is the focus of a chapter (along with

critical paradigm that reads it as independent from the modernism that precedes it as well

as unrelated to the postmodernism that emerges postwar. Although critical attention to

the Auden Generation and the 1930s has been instrumental in shifting the emphasis from

high modernism to the construction of new analytical frameworks that intend to account

for interwar writing, even the attempts of new modernist studies to integrate thirties

literature into more comprehensive literary-historical narratives rely upon and often

inadvertently reinforce the very divisions such work intends to complicate.[15]

  "National History and the Novel in 1930s Britain" seeks to complicate the

historically simplistic literary-historical narratives that have come govern the study of the

literature of the 1930s, amplifying its distinctiveness by way of political and aesthetic

divisions while ignoring the historiographic project of some of the decade's most

prominent writers. In other words, my dissertation argues that rather than attempting

separation from longer national and literary histories, writers of the 1930s were

profoundly invested in historicizing the decade and their own position within a national

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Forster, H. G. Wells, D. H. Lawrence, and Woolf), as much time is spent examining *1984* as is spent examining Orwell's 1936 *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Additionally, although Waugh and Anthony Powell are addressed, Parrinder is interested in their postwar novel sequences, *Sword of Honor* (1952-1961) and *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-1975) respectively.

[15] Kristin Bluemel's *Intermodernism* (2009), an important follow-up to her 2004 *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics*, although crucial in its offering of a "new critical category and a new literary history," continues the separation of early-century modernists and the younger writers of the interwar period and World War II (*Intermodernism* 1). The result is that "intermodernism" – Bluemel's term – reveals the rich dynamics of interwar and World War II writing but implicitly portrays aging modernists as members of a stable, consistent literary category with aesthetic views unaltered and literary politics unchanged from the days of their literary prominence in the teens and twenties. In other words, Bluemel's "intermodern sensibility" is defined, in part, by way of a comparison to a stable and critically accessible modern sensibility (*Intermodernism* 1).

historiography with which they grew increasingly frustrated and from which they felt increasingly excluded.

During the "peace" of the interwar years, war was still the dominating influence, coloring the history of Britain both military and masculine. The authors on whom my dissertation focuses were excluded, whether by age or gender, from participating in the wars (the Boer Wars and the Great War) that from the *fin de siècle* are the historical and cultural touchstones for British identity. Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Isherwood, and Virginia Woolf are symbolically disenfranchised from a national identity inextricably linked to war despite their position as "fortunate" inheritors of their nation's privilege. This combination of cultural privilege and historic disenfranchisement prompts these writers and many of their literary peers to respond in their writing to a national story derived from imperial and military mythologies, engaging the intersection of national history and literature in the process that not only imagines and maintains the nation but also imagines and maintains the role of the individuals who constitute it. Confronted by models of national identity that have been rendered impotent and outdated by the horrors of war, a botched peace, economic depression, and the rise of Fascism, these writers critically explore the detrimental effects of imperial and patriarchal national historiography as they search for alternate historical narratives through which to create viable models for national subjects.

Although some of the writers my project examines are part of what scholars identify as the Auden Generation, I employ the term "the Younger Generation," as it does not carry the restrictive political connotation associated with the left-leaning, Auden-centered collective that Hynes championed, nor does it suggest poetry as the privileged

mode of literary expression. Moreover, the Younger Generation was a designation with which many writers commonly associated with thirties literature self-consciously identified. Waugh, a kind of comedic spokesman for his generation, for example, often employs the appellation in his journalistic prose in order to emphasize the difference in perspective and experience between the generation that came of age before the Great War and those who matured in its wake. The designation, not as exclusive and artificial as the Auden Generation, is used to describe the now canonical writers of the thirties who were shaped and scarred by a war in which they were too young to fight. By placing the emphasis on *Younger* as opposed to *Auden*, my project maintains a historical focus, negotiating the way generational categories simultaneously connect and differentiate.

Taking the generational appellation seriously makes visible the specific historical contexts that compose their coming of age while simultaneously recognizing the ties – literary, cultural, national – that bind them to their predecessors. For my purposes, focusing on generational structures highlights familial affiliations and reveals the ways in which the personal becomes a mode of understanding and articulating the public and the political in the 1930s. For example, the pervasiveness of death during their adolescent years left many of the Younger Generation symbolically, and at times, literally, orphaned; the Front, and too often death, took fathers and elder brothers from their positions as visible role models for members of the Younger Generation.[16] Moreover, the

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[16] Isherwood is perhaps the most notable of the Younger Generation to lose a father in the war. His father Frank was first declared missing in action and then dead; this loss haunts Isherwood as he negotiates grief, guilt, and the burden of being worthy of his Hero-Father. The theme of the Sacred Orphan, the name Isherwood gives to himself and others in his position, emerges over and over in Isherwood's writing. See *The Memorial* (1932), *Lions and Shadows* (1938), and *Kathleen and Frank* (1971). Waugh, although he did not

void left by war-dead fathers and brothers was often "filled" by a larger-than-life hero mythology, thus leaving the young sons not only fatherless but also burdened by expectations of masculinity both inflated and artificial. In this manner, absent fathers were a familial corollary to the national hero, the brave soldier who risked his life for his country. Thus, for the Younger Generation, mournful and frustrated, the military masculinities cultivated and reinforced by patriotic national rhetoric were, on one hand, reminders of personal loss and, on the other hand, impotent and unproductive models for their development as contributors to and citizens of Britain after World War I.

In *The Memorial* (1932), Isherwood explores the impact the hero mythology has on a family when its young star, Richard, is killed in the Great War. Present at the dedication of the local Memorial Cross in 1920 are those most influenced by Richard's death: Lily, the widow whose life has gone dark with the loss of her husband; Eric, the fatherless son whose negotiation of grief and frustration characterize his coming of age; and Edward Blake, who, having survived the war that killed his best friend, lives a life marked by social transgression and personal depression. The distinction between Edward, "so tired and ill," and Richard, whose strength, courage, and honor are frozen in time, memorialized by monument and memory, is striking (*The Memorial* 100). That Eric, Richard's son, is torn between emulating his father, exalted but absent, and his father's friend, misguided but alive, is representative of the experience of the Younger Generation, whose search for identity is haunted by memorial mythologies.

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lose either his father or his brother to the war, does experience the potential of war-death when his brother, Alec, was declared missing in action.

Absent fathers and brothers were a constant reminder of the deadly effects of national militarism, and for the aspiring authors of the Younger Generation, the literary market of the late 1920s only reinforced military masculinities. War memoirs and war novels flooded the market in the late 1920s, presenting an intimate look into the life of the soldier-hero.[17] Many of these books were exposés disrupting the patriotic propaganda that, through the war, had created and maintained a hero mythology surrounding the figure of the soldier. *Good-Bye To All That* (1929), by Robert Graves, bids farewell to an old order that had governed politics and culture before the war, now rendered impotent by the failure of patriotism to compensate for millions of lives lost, by the horrors of trench warfare, and by the tragic incompetency of "modern" military strategy. In this respect, *Good-Bye To All That* gives voice to the frustration just beginning to emerge on the pages of the Younger Generation writers, whose grief mixes with skepticism and contempt when the figure of the soldier is employed as the standard by which their peacetime lives are measured.

Although the portrait of war and the character of the soldier differed immensely from book to book, the overwhelming number of war-oriented narratives only emphasized the role and function of the military in imagining what it meant to be a man during the ostensibly peaceful interwar period. As Malcolm Muggeridge explains in *The Thirties* (1940):

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[17] See Cunningham's catalog of war memoirs, fictions, and dramas that flooded the literary market in the late 1920s (*British Writers of the Thirties* 44-45). The success of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) is often cited as the leader of the war-book boom that begins at the ten-year anniversary of the Great War's end.

> At the beginning of the decade, the War book, and the War play were still
> popular, *Journey's End* still running, *All Quiet on the Western Front* still
> selling. The War was far enough away to be romanticized, the prospect of
> another war sufficiently remote for the subject to be considered congenial
> to circulating-library subscribers. Men who had been heroic explained
> that they were sensitive, men who were sensitive explained they had been
> heroic…The fashion was for the solider-poet, agonized at having to shed
> blood, listening to birds singing when the guns paused, with his Keats or
> Shakespeare's Sonnets in the pocket of his tunic; yet not less courageous
> and effective in action for that; if anything, more. (33)

Whether or not the soldier was decrying military action, attempting to justify his participation, or renouncing national pride for Marxist fervor, the writers of the Younger Generation were excluded from this literary trend as they had no trench experience to reflect upon, let alone fictionalize. The result is that although the mythologized soldier-hero had been slowly descending from his national pedestal, he was still the dominant masculine model, both politically and literarily. The trauma of the trenches became the price of admission into an emerging literary pantheon gaining recognition through truth-telling exposés, self-critical autobiographies, and candid confessions about being tempted by patriotism's siren song early in the war. The price was one the Younger Generation could not afford.

However, they did experience the Great War from the relative safety of the home front. In fact, many of the Younger Generation articulate a kind of non-combatant post-traumatic stress: safe within the confines of home and school, the Younger Generation

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nonetheless suffered from acute anxiety derived from the atmosphere of fear, constant

worry, and sadness that permeated their adolescence. Moreover, any complaint of their

home front war experience was reprimanded with reminders of the horrible difficulties

their fathers and brothers were facing in the trenches; the paradoxical consequence is that

these young men grew up feeling guilty that they, by virtue of their age, were excluded

from the horrors of war. Elizabeth Bowen, fifteen years old when the Great War began,

articulates the feeling of guilt, doubled, she implies, by her gender: "We grew up under

the intolerable obligation of being fought for, and could not fall short in character without

recollecting that men were dying for us" ("The Mulberry Tree" 16). "With the lists of the

dead each day in every paper," writes Henry Green, the "atmosphere of death" was

inescapable (*Pack My Bag* 73); although "death became familiar," Bowen adds, "it never

became less awkward" ("The Mulberry Tree" 17). This awkwardness evolved into guilt

and shame, as Isherwood explains in *Lions and Shadows* (1938), "that we hadn't been old

enough to take part in the European war" (74).

Although they had no war experience of their own to write about, the Younger

Generation, following the lead of those soldiers whose memoirs crowded bookstore

shelves, turned their own lives into literature. Excluded from the privileged national

ranks of soldiers, the Younger Generation felt confined by their position as "exceptions"

to war. As exceptions, these sons were often deemed exceptional, burdened by the

expectations of a nation seeking to replace fallen war heroes with civilian heroes: young

citizens whose inability to fight in the Great War facilitated a commitment to nation and

Empire that would help to reinvigorate flagging patriotism, rebuild the nation's economy,

and restructure national politics in such a way so that Britain could reassume and

maintain its central place as a European power. In *Vile Bodies* (1930), Waugh makes

visible the pressure exercised by the national "Establishment" on his peers; Mr. Outrage,

the on-again-off-again Prime Minister, deplores the Younger Generation, exclaiming that

they "had a chance after the war that no generation has ever had. There was a whole

civilization to be saved and remade" (*Vile Bodies* 183). Instead, Mr. Outrage concludes,

they "play the fool" (*Vile Bodies* 183).

Rex Warner, equally aware of the burden felt by the male members of his

generation, illustrates what he perceives as the responses available to his political and

literary colleagues in his allegorical novel *The Wild Goose Chase* (1937). Although an

experimental anomaly amidst the realism common in the decade, *The Wild Goose Chase*

demonstrates its "debt" to the hero mythology, damaged but still powerful. Three

brothers, Rudolph, David, and George, set off to chase the wild goose, and although the

successful brother achieves "victory" through Marxist revolution, the presence and

influence of the soldier archetype is undeniable. George, the most unlikely brother to

lead a revolution, leaves his home for "battle," travels far, and fights on the behalf of

Marxism not nation. George, assumed to be "missing in action," emerges from his

confinement to cheering crowds and the promise of "civilization saved and remade," to

quote Waugh's Mr. Outrage. Burdened with guilt and shame because they were too

young to fight and sensitive to the pressure placed upon them by family and nation, the

Younger Generation fill their fiction with heroes of their own design.

The Younger Generation, resentful of their position as exceptional exceptions,

heavy with non-combatant guilt, and frustrated with a nation that seemed to learn no

lessons from such a terrible war, rebelled against their country's expectations. Refusing

to take their place in what Woolf in *Three Guineas* (1938) calls "the procession of educated men," the Younger Generation still sought a role within the national narrative that acknowledged them only as sons.[18] Consequently, they turn their noncombatant lives into fiction in order to write themselves into a history dominated by military masculinities. Thus, like those war-ravaged soldiers preceding them, the Younger Generation use autobiographically-inflected fiction to reveal the way in which the personal is political, with or without war.

The "rebellious" politics of the thirties were closely associated with its poetry. Most notably Auden, but also Lehmann, Spender, Louis MacNeice, and Cecil Day-Lewis, wrote poetry that mined the archive of personal experience, sought inspiration in industrial landscapes, and revolted against modernist verse through documentary detail and Marxist themes. Despite their defiant poetic stance, these authors, by virtue of their medium, were aligning themselves with a national poetic genealogy reaching back to Shakespeare and through to trench poets such as Wilfred Owen and noncombatants such as T. S. Eliot. However, not all of the Younger Generation sought literary expression in poetry; rather, many desired to distance themselves from a poetic discourse traditionally epic, memorial, and masculine.

Unlike poetry, the novel offered these writers a genre inextricably linked to the modern nation-state. With a history that parallels the rise of the British Empire as well as

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[18] The phrases "the procession of educated men" and "the procession of the sons of educated men" pepper Woolf's *Three Guineas*, her late career statement on patriarchy, gender politics, Fascism, and feminism. These phrases refer to middle- to upper-class men whose class, educational, and cultural privilege grant them easy access to positions of power. Isherwood's concept of the Sacred Orphan interrupts Woolf's male procession of privilege as it recasts the Younger Generation members of the procession as unwitting participants.

the middle class, the novel, as Benedict Anderson has convincingly argued, provided the means by which citizens began to perceive themselves as part of the imagined community of nation. "How can one *see* [the nation]?" asks Franco Moretti in his *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998). His answer: the novel. The novel, as "the only symbolic form that could represent [the nation]," became "an essential component of our modern culture" (*Atlas of the European Novel* 17). Novels not only provided an accessible representation of the nation and its inhabitants, but also, as Krisham Kumar has argued, it offers the means to inquire "into the character of the English people as a nation – as a collectivity, that is, with a distinct sense of its history, its traditions, and its destiny" (qtd. in Parrinder 291). In the twentieth century, this novelistic national inquiry, according to Patrick Parrinder, was "pursued with greater self-consciousness than ever before, but also in an increasingly skeptical and critical spirit" (*Nation and the Novel* 291).

Pericles Lewis, as well, argues for the novel's central role in the construction and understanding of the nation and the individual's participation within it. The link between the novelist's personal experience and nation especially, according to Lewis, influenced the development of the modern novel around the turn of the century (*Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel* 3). In this manner, the novel has participated in the creation and validation of modern British identity, underscoring the intersection of narrative and historiography in regard to presenting the reading public with models of what it means to be an individual within the collectivity of nation. If, by the 1930s, both the form of the modern novel and the form of the modern nation state were firmly established and increasingly critiqued, then it follows that the Younger Generation of writers would seize

upon the novel as a vehicle to revise literary standards as well as the construction of nation and national identities.[19]

Moreover, frustrated by the narrow confines of national identity still saturated with remnants of war, the writers this project examines are able to enact what Rebecca Walkowitz defines as "critical cosmopolitanism": "thinking beyond the nation but also comparing, distinguishing, and judging among different versions of transatlantic thought; testing moral and political norms, including norms of critical thinking; and valuing informal as well as transient models of community" (*Cosmopolitan Style* 2). Although Waugh, Isherwood, and Woolf are all English, and perhaps even "provincial" in comparison to most of Walkowitz's subjects, they each, in their fiction, demonstrate the "useful cosmopolitanism" that disrupts the nation's claim on their identity as well as "'the perfectly phrased'" cosmopolitanism of "dissenting individualism and decadent refusal" (*Cosmopolitan Style* 5).[20]

Like the nation's exceptional sons who never seemed to live up to the heroic standards set by their fallen fathers, the 1930s novel never seemed to measure up to its modernist counterpart. Second in line to modernism and implicitly second rate, literature

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[19] Lewis' *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel* (2000) explains the way in which the formation of the League of Nations postwar both recognized the modern nation-state as the privileged political structure as well as made visible its inadequacies and failures. Similarly, the work of the Leavises at Cambridge, especially Q. R. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), both established the novel's central place in the emerging academic study of English and opened it up for criticism. Additionally, book clubs like the Left Book Club, founded in 1936, positioned the novel (in addition to non-fiction texts from various disciplines) as a means to political awareness.

[20] In *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (2006), Walkowitz examines the cosmopolitanism of Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf alongside Kazuo Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie, and W. G. Sebald.

of the 1930s is typically overlooked in the critical literary history of the twentieth century which has long been dominated by the high modernist innovation that characterizes the 1910s and 1920s and the emergence of postmodernism in the years after World War II. Like the decade that gets "lifted" out of the longer history of nation seamlessly linking industrialism, imperialism, and world wars – thus neglecting the historical and political nuances of the thirties – so, too, does the 1930s novel get "excerpted" from twentieth-century literary history. British literary history customarily disregards 1930s fiction in favor of a genealogy in which postmodernism derives directly from modernism, either as a continuation of it or as a reaction against it. In this manner, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Woolf are simultaneously modernists and proto-postmodernists and writers of the thirties are again excluded, this time from the national literary narrative that connects England's imperial and Great War past (modernism) with World War II and the country's midcentury emergence as a welfare state (postmodernism). The result is that political fiction, documentary realism, and the politicization of autobiography are at best marginalized in the literary history that has come to define the evolution of the British novel.

However, a close look at fiction of the 1930s reveals its contributing role in the emergence of postmodernism postwar. Edward Upward's 1938 novel, *Journey to the Border*, is as overlooked in the context of thirties literature as Upward is. Relatively ignored in the literary scholarship, Upward, according to Spender, was the most respected among Auden's university colleagues.[21] For Auden, who seemed "the highest peak

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[21] See Spender's retrospective interwar autobiography and cultural history, *World Within World* (1951).

within the range of our humble vision from the Oxford valleys," there "was another peak, namely Isherwood, whilst for Isherwood there was still a further peak, Chalmers" (*World Within World* 102). Chalmers was Upward's code name within the imaginative world Auden, Isherwood, and Upward created during their university years; although an important presence in the autobiographical writing that constitutes the Auden Generation mythology, Upward is often reduced to a footnote in scholarship midcentury and after.[22]

His *Journey to the Border*, however, offers a "missing link" in the genealogy that otherwise understands postmodernism as a postwar derivation of early twentieth-century modernism. Originally published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press, *Journey to the Border*, like many of the novels of the 1930s, is derived from the author's personal experience. Upward's novel, however, does not present a reliable narrative voice as is traditionally expected in autobiographical writing; rather, *Journey to the Border* troubles narrative authority, offering a disconcerting reading experience as the question of the protagonist's sanity is never definitively answered. *Journey to the Border* oscillates between, on one hand, straightforward narrative with realistic dialogue and description and, on the other hand, what appears to be the protagonist's hallucinatory revelries. The back and forth between reality and hallucination quickens as the narrative progresses, making the protagonist's journey one which seems to lead to the border of madness. Despite the question of the protagonist's sanity, the narrative is sober and measured, even during moments of the protagonist's paranoia; this tension between absurdity and normalcy might remind a contemporary reader simultaneously of *Alice in Wonderland*, a David

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[22] Upward appears, as Chalmers, in Isherwood's *All the Conspirators* (1928) and *Lions and Shadows* (1938).

Lynch film, and magic realism. What separates *Journey to the Border* from the postmodern novels that follow, however, is its political moral: the protagonist is "saved" from madness by his resolve to contribute to social revolution in the form of Communism. Upward, the only card-carrying Communist among Auden, Isherwood, and company, is, like his colleagues, marginalized within the literary history that he inherits and to which he contributes.

Although postmodernism has "no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political *action*," according to Linda Hutcheon, it does illustrate "that all cultural forms of representation…in high art or mass media are ideologically grounded" and, ultimately, that "they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 3). Consequently, what links *Journey to the Border* with the postmodernism that marks the second half of the twentieth century is its recognition of the inescapability of ideological interpolation. And it is this recognition that *Journey to the Border* takes as its subject and stands as an example: on one hand, through the protagonist's neurotic anxiety that he is, in fact, like the bourgeois family employing him, and, on the other hand, through Upward's recognition that the very politics he critiques provide the market structures which make possible the publication of his polemical, anti-capitalist fiction. It is a strange kind of political critique, admits Hutcheon, that is "bound up, too, with its own *complicity* with power and domination, one that acknowledges that is cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 4). In this way, much of the literary politics of the 1930s can be interpreted as anticipating postmodern after midcentury in that the authors and their fictions grapple with and

illustrate their complicity with the very structures of power and domination that they ostensibly seek to overturn.[23]

Although Upward and his fiction do not figure prominently in the pages that follow, "National History and the Novel in 1930s Britain" stands as a corrective to restrictive critical paradigms that participate in the marginalization of authors like Upward from more inclusive national literary and historical narratives. The work of Waugh, Isherwood, and Woolf each demonstrate what I identify, borrowing from Jed Esty, as the "historiographic turn": an acute historical consciousness illustrated by prose writers of the Younger Generation and their sympathetic colleagues of the Older Generation who merge fiction and autobiography in order to reveal the intersection of literature and historiography in the process of national subject formation. Moreover, the historiographic turn points to the critical investment these authors demonstrate in the relationship among the novel, the nation, and national identity, even as they become more and more disaffected by the current state of British affairs. Far from simply rebellious, or in the case of Woolf, politically disinterested, the authors I examine are *engaged by* and *invested in* their nation's political and literary history and, with their fiction, intend to write themselves into national historiographies either that they are disappointed in or that exclude them.

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[23] Keith Williams provides another example of the overlooked relationship between literature of the 1930s and postmodernism in his chapter "Post/Modern Reportage: Orwell, Agee, and the New Reportage" in *Rewriting the Thirties* (1996). See also Alan Wilde's *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination* (1981) for a scholarly narrative that seeks to establish a link among modernism, thirties writing, and postmodernism.

Many scholars have recently attempted to reorient the critical discourses that have contributed to the exclusion of the 1930s from literary-historical narratives and that have confined thirties writers within restrictive critical contexts. Tyrus Miller, for example, has sought to push the traditional boundaries of modernism historically and aesthetically by examining late modernist writing: literature produced after the modernism of the late teens and early twenties that "appears a distinctly self-conscious manifestation of the aging and decline of modernism, in both its institutional and ideological dimensions" (*Late Modernism* 7). However, Miller complicates the common notion that late modernism signifies the decline of modernism by examining the "apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements" in literature produced after modernism's heyday in the 1920s (*Late Modernism* 7). Although Miller's examination reaches beyond the national context of my project to include America and Europe, his thesis makes visible the unexamined scholarly tendency to align late modernist literature with the decline of modernism, a tendency, I would argue, that can be attributed to a critical confluence of national-historical narratives with literary-historical narratives. In other words, late modernism becomes synonymous with decline not necessarily because modernism is declining but because the British Empire is.

Modernism has long-since been associated with the rise of Empire, often read as a product of imperial expansion and the concentration of power, commerce, and cultural energy at the Empire's capital, London. Novels such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) all illustrate the reciprocity between imperial expansion and literary modernism that many critics take for granted. If, as many suggest, Woolf's infamous "on

or about December, 1910 human character changed" is a response to the Roger Fry's first Post-Impressionist Exhibition at Grafton Galleries in London, then this change in human nature, and consequently, the modern fiction that is the essay's subject, derives in part from the burgeoning awareness and increasing intrusion of images from locales far-flung, their translation into new artistic perspectives, and their impact on cultural epistemologies. Thus, one answer to Raymond Williams' question "When Was Modernism?" (1987) offered and encouraged by literary-historical narratives is that the rise of literary modernism runs parallel to the rise of Empire. Thus, the height of modernism falls in the period shortly after the Great War, just as the first signs of imperial shrinkage begin to manifest.

In *A Shrinking Island* (2004), Jed Esty offers a critical perspective that takes into consideration the collusion of national-historical narratives and their literary-historical counterparts. He begins his project with the question: "[W]hat accounts for the apparent coterminous lifespans of high modernism and high imperialism in the British sphere?" (*A Shrinking Island* 1-2). The implication is that although Esty will be examining the relationship between "a fading imperialism and the putative death of English modernism," he stands on the assumption that modernism and Empire share not only their fall, but also their rise (*A Shrinking Island* 2). Esty proposes that late modernism is dominated by an "anthropological turn" in which the trappings of the British Empire in decline are reclaimed and reoriented in the service of a pastoral, native nationalism in the 1930s. Although Esty's reading of the 1930s does trouble the commonly-accepted scholarly story established by the work of Bergonzi, Hynes, and Cunningham, and attempts to distinguish late writing by modernists like Eliot, Woolf, and Forster from

their writing early in the century, his project perpetuates the division between modernist writing and thirties literature. For Esty, although Woolf is writing alongside Isherwood and Waugh, for example, their political concerns and national critiques are located on opposite sides of what the poet David Jones called "the Break" – the Great War.

Esty's work suggests that aging modernists, whose careers benefit from the rise of Empire, seek, in the 1930s, to offer a new version of nationalism that is oriented not by imperial mythologies but by island ones. The corollary, for Esty, is that the Younger Generation writers, born at the beginning of imperial decline and thus not the beneficiaries of its fruits, are not interested in revising national discourses but rather, respond to the "internationalist tide" that pulls against the Anglocentrism Esty's book explores in detail (*A Shrinking Island* 216). Although Esty does concede that Auden, for example, demonstrates what he calls a "nationalist" phase, he argues that it is replaced by an increasing "cosmopolitan" perspective that forecloses any interest in specifically national concerns. Thus, although Esty is well aware that imperial history participates in the construction of literary history, he positions aging modernists and Younger Generation writers on opposite sides of the imperial climax and orients them in contrary directions: late-career modernists looking backward and inward while the Younger Generation look forward and outward.

Esty's reading contradicts, in part, Miller's insightful characterization of late modernism as having a "double life" – "its linkage forward into postmodernism and backward into modernism" – which, according to Miller and illustrated by Esty, "has not by and large, been accounted for by critics and historians of the period" (Miller 7). I agree with Miller's aesthetic analysis and would extend his proposal with the help of

Esty's attention to the role national history plays in the construction of literary historical narratives. The linkage between modernism and postmodernism that Miller identifies is more than stylistic. It is also political, I would argue, linking the rise and height of the British Empire with its decline postwar. In other words, Miller's characterization of late modernism as an "apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements" can be read politically as well as aesthetically in the context of British national-historical narratives. By reading the literature of the 1930s within the longer, more comprehensive literary *and* national history, modernist and Younger Generation writers alike are revealed as engaged by and invested in the intersection of literature, national history, and national identity, and their fiction reveals a commitment to exploring, and ultimately revising, the role and function of national subjects in a period post-imperial and pre-welfare state. The historiographic turn that characterizes their writing harnesses the particularities of their historical circumstances in the service of critically accessing the way national-historical narratives dictate what it means to be British. Considering the political and economic instability of the 1930s, such models of Britishness are increasingly revealed as outdated, impotent, and exclusive.

Simultaneously influenced and excluded by models of Britishness derived from military masculinities and emphasized by war memoirs, 1930s writers intervene with their own version of national history. In the case of Waugh's 1930 novel, *Vile Bodies*, national history is critiqued by way of a story acclaimed for its gossipy contemporaneity. However, as I argue in my first chapter, "'Some way historical?': Missed Opportunities, Misidentifications, and Evelyn Waugh's Bright Young Things," Waugh's focus on his 1930 present actually exposes the way in which members of the Younger Generation are

"stuck" repeating historical patterns no longer available or viable, thus revealing their engagement in national narratives from which they felt excluded. *Vile Bodies* tells the story of the Bright Young Things, thinly veiled caricatures of Waugh's friends, often read as representative of the artsy-intellectual jazz-age crowd that achieved a sort of celebrity by way of gossip and society columns during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Much more than a trivial tale of social excess and frivolity, *Vile Bodies*, I argue, portrays the historical trauma suffered by male members of the Younger Generation who desire to be "some way historical," like the war-ravaged generation before them (*Vile Bodies* 183). The dark comedy of Waugh's battlefield ending – "the biggest battlefield in the history of the world" (*Vile Bodies* 314) – demonstrates the irony that without a place in national history the Younger Generation becomes the "Lost Generation."

The idea of being "lost" to history is one that Isherwood explores in his *The Berlin Stories* (1939), particularly "The Last of Mr. Norris" (1935). The original concept behind *The Berlin Stories* was a "tightly constructed melodramatic novel" to be titled *The Lost* (*The Berlin Stories* v). Although the novel did not come to fruition, the cast of characters comes to life in the pages of the Isherwood's stories, not only referring tragically, as Isherwood explains, "to the political events in Germany and our epoch" but also "referring satirically to those individuals whom respectable society shuns in horror" (v). In my second chapter, "Decadence and Dandies in the 1930s: Christopher Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories*," I focus on Isherwood's character Mr. Arthur Norris, a 1890s queer dandy lost in the political tensions and economic instability that constitute 1930s Berlin. Through Mr. Norris and tropes of decadence, Isherwood historicizes his

own experience by drawing cultural, political, and sexual parallels between the 1890s and the 1930s.

By establishing the historical corollary between the 1890s and the 1930s Isherwood proposes the presence and importance of alternative historiographies derived from the experience of "outsiders within." For Isherwood, the 1890s are not adequately portrayed by narratives of industrial achievement and social-scientific innovation at home, imperialism and war abroad. Rather, the last decade of the century is equally constituted by London dandies, transgressive sexualities, and decadence, all of which stand in the shadow of, as well as in opposition to, the dominant narrative of triumph: economic, social, scientific, and imperial. Isherwood is attracted to dandies because they represent outsiders within; like the Younger Generation, dandies are marginalized within the realm of cultural privilege of which they are inheritors and from which they feel disenfranchised. As illustrated in the character of Mr. Norris, dandies are participants in the world of cultural privilege as much as they manipulate, critique, and are scapegoated by it. By exposing the presence of alternative national historiographies, Isherwood reveals alternate models of British masculinity, thus complicating the heterosexual, military mythology of national heroes that confines and frustrates those of his generation.

Members of the Younger Generation, however, were not alone in employing the novel as a vehicle to critique national historiography in the 1930s. My third chapter, "To 'make that country our own country': Gender Politics, History, and Virginia Woolf's *The Years*" links modernism with thirties literature by investigating the way in which Woolf was both a witness to and a participant in the historiographic turn indicative of thirties fiction. Woolf's attention to gender gets political in the 1930s as she examines the

impact of national historiographies on women, suggesting a positionality sympathetic to that of the Younger Generation. As a daughter of an educated man and as a middle-class woman with five hundred pounds and a room of her own, Woolf benefits from cultural and class privilege. However, as a woman, Woolf, as she later proclaims in *Three Guineas*, "has no country" (129). A recipient of important social and educational privileges, Woolf nonetheless is marginalized within national historical narratives because of her gender. In this manner, she is an outsider-within like the young male writers she discusses in "The Leaning Tower" (1940), her late-career essay on the difference between 1920s and 1930s writing. Although explicitly a critique of the extreme "consciousness" manifest in the writing of the Younger Generation, this essay, I argue, implicitly establishes the way historical consciousness infuses literature of the 1930s, Woolf's included. Moreover, "The Leaning Tower" ultimately praises such historical sensitivity, recognizing the way literature participates in national historiography, providing the means, in Woolf's words, "to make this country our own country" ("The Leaning Tower" 154).

R. G. Collingwood, the subject of my last chapter, "A Fighting Philosopher: Autobiography and the Politics of R. G. Collingwood," is not a novelist; however, in the 1930s, this preeminent philosopher of history attempts to reclaim his role as a citizen of his country through a merging of personal experience, professional commitment, and public politics. Like the novelists "National History and the Novel in 1930s Britain" examines, Collingwood turns to autobiography in an attempt to investigate, critique, and ultimately reorient the power of national historical narratives – in his case, academic and philosophical – in the formation of national subjects. Positioning himself as both

historian and historical agent, Collingwood, in his 1939 *An Autobiography*, enacts his lifelong intellectual goal: to establish a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history.

The result is a book part autobiography, part history, and part philosophy; a narrative seeking to combine generic intentions, *An Autobiography* engages in the historiographic turn of which the fiction of Waugh, Isherwood, and Woolf is exemplary. All four authors are invested in the intersection of narrative and national history, undertaking a project of novelistic historiography in which the personal experience of the author becomes the "proper stuff" of fiction in order to reveal and evaluate the way the national impacts the personal. Although Collingwood chooses nonfiction, his *An Autobiography* exposes the way in which personal and national narratives are all inherently *stories* that implicate each character, or citizen, in its plot. For Collingwood in 1939, the stakes of the story were too high to leave the authorship to others. *An Autobiography* advocates the necessity of historical thinking: necessary not only to academic historians and philosophers but also, most importantly, to British citizens on the brink of another world war.

Chapter 1

"Some way historical?": Missed Opportunities, Misidentifications,

and Evelyn Waugh's Bright Young Things

"Well in *our* country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to
somewhere else – if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."
"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the
running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you
must run at least twice as fast as that!"

"If I wasn't real," Alice said – half laughing through her tears, it all seemed so
ridiculous – "I shouldn't be able to cry."
"I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?" Tweedledum interrupted in a tone
of great contempt.
         – Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*

  These epigraphs to Evelyn Waugh's first commercially successful novel, *Vile*

Bodies (1930), evoke the topsy-turvy world of the White Rabbit, Mad Hatter, and Queen

of Hearts. The epigraphs also establish the atmosphere of *Vile Bodies*. In the London of

Waugh's Bright Young Things, "*our* country" is as surreal as the country through the

looking glass but unlike Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, *Vile Bodies*

does not present an alternative, fantastic reality. Rather, through dark humor and satire,

Waugh portrays the war-shadowed reality of his generation. Waugh's brightest

characters, as well as his primary audience, are the much talked about Younger

Generation: adolescents during Great War, the members of the Younger Generation were

too young to fight but too old *not* to remember. The Younger Generation, like Alice,

struggle to realize themselves in a world that is no longer governed by the assumption

that running fast for a long time gets one somewhere else.

  Written in 1929 and published in 1930, composed by one of the Younger

Generation's most outspoken voices, *Vile Bodies* initiates my exploration of the

historiographic turn of 1930s literature. Although *Vile Bodies* is best known for its humor, I would like to draw attention to the way in which Waugh's novel is engaged by and invested in the historical nuances impacting his generation. More than just a "scrapbook of popular culture" (Garnett 63), *Vile Bodies* offers a glimpse into the historical context of 1930 and, moreover, the power of national military narratives to scar and shape even those who did not participate in the Great War. Waugh's humorous portrayal of his generation, more than simply an exercise in frivolity, reveals the complexities of a generation burdened by a military history in which they did not participate and anxious about a future that suggests an ironic return to the past.

The unique historical position of the Younger Generation explored in *Vile Bodies* implicates the literary history of his 1930s moment, evoking the relationship between the Great War and the modernist literature that is contextualized by it. Although Jay Winter argues that literary critics have overstated the link between modernism and war, even he concedes that modernism comes of age alongside the Great War: "a phase in the onward ascent of modernism" (*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 3-4). Winter explains that the "'aesthetics of direct experience'" introduced by the soldier-writers – "a way of imagining the war far removed from the 'lies' or 'Big Words' of the older generation that sent them to fight and die" – corresponds to the break with literary tradition espoused by non-combatant modernists like Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot whose most influential works were published in the 1920s (*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 2). Even those who conceive of modernism in more ahistorical, apolitical terms, as an exclusive club of highbrow, out-of-touch intellectuals, are hard pressed to deny the influence that World War I and the immediate postwar context had on modernist

aesthetics. As George Orwell admits in "Inside the Whale" (1940), even if "there is no attention to the urgent problems of the moment" in the literature of high modernism (233), "by simply standing aloof and keeping touch with prewar emotions" modernists were "carrying on human heritage" in a world ravaged by the horrors of war (253).

Unlike the traditional account of modernism that runs parallel to the rise and fall of war, the literature of the 1930s, dominated by Samuel Hynes' account of the Auden Generation, is associated with political engagement, the presentism attendant on documentary realism, and literary purpose as articulated by outspoken leftist writers.[1] Whereas the politics of modernism are implicit, the politics of thirties literature are explicit: "In other words," to return to Orwell, "the younger writers have 'gone into politics'" ("Inside the Whale" 237). Instead of running parallel to national and international conflicts, writing of the 1930s intersects with contemporary history, taking politics as its subject and object. In the 1930s, the consensus was that "society must be changed," although how that would be accomplished was much debated. Moreover, conventional understandings of thirties literature suggest, as Julian Symons explains, that "the artist should play a leading part in changing it" (*The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* 16-7). As demonstrated by the questionnaire *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, the literary "movement" of the 1930s made politics an imperative for authors as well as

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[1] Samuel Hynes' *The Auden Generation*, published in 1976, set the tone for scholarship of the 1930s, so much so that the 1930s has become synonymous with the Auden Generation. As mentioned in the Introduction, Marsha Bryant explains the current state of Auden scholarship: "Auden [has become] *a way of thinking* about the 1930s and socially engaged art. A cultural figure that has become synonymous with this vexing decade, the signifier 'Auden' exceeds both the person and his texts" (*Auden and Documentary in the 1930s* 4).

politicians and statesmen. As the decade progressed, however, Symons' thirties

"dreamers" began to realize the nightmare on their historical horizon: war.

Literary history and literary scholarship since midcentury has encouraged and

maintained the common wisdom that distinguishes modernism from the literature of the

1930s. Thirties literature, with its focus on the politics of the present moment and its

interest in realistically documenting lived experience, has been traditionally understood

as antagonistic to modernism which was born out of the rise of Empire and climaxed

around the horrors of war.   Such simplified literary-historical narratives are complicated

by Waugh's depiction of the Younger Generation in *Vile Bodies*. Arguably the future

veterans of the next war, Waugh's Bright Young Things reveal the inescapable influence

of the Great War while implicitly critiquing the politics of engagement beginning to

emerge as postwar Britain transitions to prewar in the 1930s. Its complex timeliness is

precisely what makes *Vile Bodies* a significant example of thirties literature. If, as

explained by Vincent Sherry, modern "derives from *hodie*, meaning 'these times,'" and

its "ism" suggests a "particular moment of history, a specified Now, which is defined by

a sense of itself as separate" (*The Great War and the Language of Modernism* 17) then

Vile Bodies evolves a very specific version of modernism, albeit "late," to use Tyrus

Miller's term, or "second generation" to use Marina MacKay's phrase. Thirties

literature, too, "involves the consciousness of a *special* present…made more intense by

virtue of some self-conscious *difference* from what went before" (Sherry 17) but, as

revealed by Waugh, the self-conscious difference from what went before is marked by an

understanding of the Great War as a missed opportunity. The *specialness* of Waugh's

1930 resides in the paradoxical position of its Bright Young Things: too young to fight in the First World War, they imagine their future in terms of the next war.

In *Vile Bodies* Waugh responds to Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) by creating his own unreal city, an interwar wasteland that not only confirms but also extends Eliot's poetic confession that "I had not thought death had undone so many" (*The Waste Land* 55). Too young to die in battle during the Great War, Waugh's Bright Young Things are still undone by death. Coming of age under the shadow of war, the Younger Generation is indelibly marked by loss. Fathers and brothers were sent to die in the trenches; faith in abstract ideas such as progress, heroism, and tradition went missing in action, presumed dead when the fog of war cleared. *Vile Bodies* portrays the trauma of war as experienced by the Younger Generation ten years after it was officially concluded by the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the document that in many ways set the stage for a very different kind of conclusion: not the peace to end all peace but rather the botched peace that would facilitate next war.

By 1930, any remnant the of heroic mythology that survived World War I had long since faded in light of the truth-telling books and memoirs written by disillusioned soldiers. The stability and values of the Victorian and Edwardian ages were so far distanced by the atrocities of war that a return to the tranquility of the past was improbable if not impossible. Additionally, misgivings concerning the Treaty of Versailles, the strength of the League of Nations, and Italian and German politics undermined even the most optimistic forecasts for postwar security in 1930. As the historian Modris Eksteins explains, "nineteen twenty-nine was the critical year…the economic situation deteriorated drastically in a year that marked the tenth anniversary of

the Treaty of Versailles" (*Rites of Spring* 294).[2] Or, from another perspective, if

Waugh's friend Nancy Mitford was right to recognize "the follies of the year" 1929 as

"perhaps the most extravagant of all those between the two wars" then she intimates the

turn towards unemployment, political turmoil and general dissatisfaction that dampened

the party, not to mention national, spirit in Britain in the 1930s (qtd. in Garnett 64).

Waugh's own preoccupation with the plight of Younger Generation and his belief in the

impotence of progress suggests that the nature of experience in 1930 was uncertain and

unfamiliar at best. In many ways, for the Younger Generation, what was missing in the

1930s was war.

　　　　Not fighting in the Great War is portrayed implicitly in *Vile Bodies* as a missed

opportunity. Too young to be soldiers, the Bright Young Things unsuccessfully try to be

anything else: writers, gossip-columnists, racecar drivers. However, without the Great

War to make them heroes – and victims – they are unable to make sense of their postwar

existence. Far from trench warfare, life in Britain during the late 1920s and early 1930s

delivers its own kind of trauma. Concluding with the "biggest battlefield in the history of

the world" (314), *Vile Bodies* suggests that the only way to understand the through-the-

looking-glass world inhabited by the Bright Young Things is *not* to read it as postwar at

all. Rather, suffering from impostor syndrome attendant on not having fought in the

Great War, the Younger Generation's pseudo-soldierly trauma can only be alleviated by

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[2] Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published in 1929 as well, an occurrence that Eksteins interprets as more than coincidental.

fighting in their own war, suggesting that the novel's "Happy Ending" is more than ironic

humor – it is an example of acute historical consciousness (*Vile Bodies* 314).[3]

Deviance, Decline, and Fall

According to Noel Annan, Waugh is the "real deviant" of "Our Age": "The writer

who most despised the values of his generation most savagely was the one who at first

sight seemed most to belong to it" (*Our Age* 157).[4] Members of Annan's "Our Age"

reacted against the class structures and institutions from which they inherited their

privileges; school ties mattered more than familial, although they rebelled against both;

they were progressive and humanistic and later in life became part of the Establishment

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[3] *Vile Bodies* will hitherto be abbreviated *VB*.

[4] Most critics of Waugh are more explicit in describing what Annan characterizes
ambivalently as "deviancy." In the late twenties and thirties, Waugh exhibited what most
people recognized as Fascist sympathies, an opinion encouraged by Waugh's 1936
audience with Mussolini and his 1930s nonfiction, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936) and
Robber Under Law (1939). There remains, however, a question as to whether Waugh's
right-wing proclivities ever extended to Fascism. In response to *Authors Take Sides*,
Waugh was one of the few English writers to be classified as "AGAINST": "As an
Englishman I am not in the predicament of choosing between two evils…" According to
Douglas Patey, Waugh's position in regard to Fascism was simple but often
misconstrued; Patey quotes Waugh's response, "'I am not a Fascist nor shall I become
one unless it were the only alternative to Marxism'" (*The Life of Evelyn Waugh* 142).
See Waugh's 1938 letter, "Fascist," in the *New Statesman* in *The Essays, Articles, and
Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (1983). For an extended account of the responses to *Authors
Take Sides*, see Cunningham's "Neutral?: 1930s Writers and Taking Sides" (1980). See
Selina Hastings for the Catholic context that might have influenced Waugh in regard to
Mussolini. John Strachey, in the pro-Communist book *The Coming Struggle* (1935),
after identifying Waugh's fiction as providing the best and most accurate account of
contemporary English society, suggests that there are three alternatives available to
Waugh: "He could either commit suicide, become a communist, or immure himself
within the Catholic Church" (230). See Patey's *The Life of Evelyn Waugh* (1998) for a
broad account of Waugh's politics and the political context. Marina MacKay, in her
chapter on Waugh from *Modernism and World War II* (2007), provides a nuanced
explanation of Waugh's politics in relation to modernism that complicates conventional
perceptions of Waugh's conservatism.

in order to change it.[5] Waugh, with his reactionary views, infatuation with English

aristocracy, and snobbery, was deplored by members of "Our Age" (Annan 157-8).[6]

Similarly, in his book *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (1960), Symons describes Waugh

as a political reactionary, an anomaly among the thirties "dreamers" who based their art

on the idea that the "rebirth of Britain must come through chaos and catastrophe" (8). In

Waugh's fiction, from *Decline and Fall* (1928) to the *Sword of Honor* trilogy (1952-61),

chaos and catastrophe seem inescapable but the promise of rebirth, the dreamers' dream

according to Symons, is noticeably absent. Unlike his left-leaning contemporaries whose

political voices are privileged in traditional literary-historical accounts of the decade,

Waugh did not believe in progress, especially the Marxist conception of progress that

captivated so many of his generation. For Waugh, the promise of progress in postwar

Britain was, in the language of *Vile Bodies*, too-too bogus.

    Progress is just another casualty of the Great War according to Waugh and any

promise of its resurrection in postwar Britain is naïve as well as nostalgic, implicitly, if

unconsciously, recalling a prewar golden age populated by Cambridge Apostles and

young members of the Bloomsbury Group. John Maynard Keynes' "My Early Beliefs"

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[5] David Cannadine explains that the "best way to approach Noel Annan's *Our Age* is to think of the author as the class president, not just of a year, but of an entire British generation, which has recently celebrated its fiftieth reunion, has taken its final curtain call, and is now in the process of quitting the public stage" (*History in Our Time* 165). Clarifying the designation "Our Age," Cannadine suggests that "Lord Annan takes it to encompass those who grew up between the end of the First World War and the late 1940s, many of whom became part of the British Establishment between the late 1950s and the early 1980s" (*History in Our Age* 165).

[6] Yet, despite this characterization, Annan proposes that Waugh is "perhaps the greatest novelist of his time" (*Our Age* 157-8).

(1938) details a belief in progress that reveals a surprising affinity with its postwar, left-wing reclamation as characterized by Symons:

> We were amongst the last of the Utopians…who believe in a continuing moral progress by virtue of which the human race already consists of reliable, rational, decent people, influenced by truth and objective standards, who can be safely released from the outward restraints of convention and traditional standards and inflexible rules of conduct, and left, from now onwards, to their own sensible devices, pure motives and reliable intuitions of the good. (95)[7]

According to Keynes' 1938 retrospective, in which prewar idealism is both romanticized and renounced, the secular religion of G. E. Moore was "a purer, sweeter air by far than Freud cum Marx" ("My Early Beliefs" 91); sweet to some, Freud cum Marx offered Keynes' Younger Generation counterparts their own, very similar, postwar version of progress. According to Sherry, an "idealistic philosophy like liberalism collides with history as a matter of usual course" (*The Great War and the Language of Modernism* 16); and the millions of dead bodies that mark the divide between the prewar Keynes and the Younger Generation invalidate progress as defined by Liberal beliefs in truth, the rule of reason, and the good intentions of the governing class. Progress, as the rallying cry for 1930s left-wing politics, locates its epicenter not in Keynesian "institutions of the good" but rather in institutions of change: Freud and Marx, Communism and Socialism.

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[7] "My Early Beliefs" was composed for Bloomsbury's Memoir Club in 1938. Quentin Bell, present at Keynes' reading, recalls that "'A certain part of the paper was addressed to, or at, us – the younger generation'" (*The Bloomsbury Group* 83).

Contrarily, for Waugh, progress is a word "that must be dismissed from our conversation before anything of real interest can be said" (qtd. in Patey 104). Speaking in the role of "Young Man" for a 1932 BBC series entitled "To an Unnamed Listener" Waugh explains that the Older Generation "enjoyed the luxury of growing up with a 'belief in Progress'": "You were told that a man was a perfectible being…that he would yearly become healthier, wealthier and wiser" (qtd. in Patey 104).[8] Destroyed by "total war," progress became another hollow principle like glory, honor, and duty, once capitalized, now incapacitated. For those who experienced the trenches firsthand, the old customs and attitudes were no longer valid or available. The Great War was, in the words of David Jones, "the Break": "The whole of the past, as far as I can make out, is down the drain" (qtd. in Eksteins 211). Although Waugh's leftist contemporaries had their own version of interwar progress – not the technological, industrial, imperial progress of Victorian England but the activist, revolutionary, socialist progress of Marx – for Waugh, any conception of progress was anachronistic, inadequate, and impotent. After 1914 progress could not be evoked without irony; anticipating Fussellian "modern memory," Waugh intimates that the Great War "reversed the idea of progress" (Fussell 8).

Even if one believes, as his friend and fellow Catholic Graham Greene did, that Waugh was "a romantic in the sense of having a dream which failed him," the disillusionment was, for Waugh, his generation's as well as his own (qtd. in Annan 158). Waugh understands the Younger Generation as inextricably tied to the Great War; for Waugh and his generation, the war was "simply the atmosphere of their adolescence"

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[8] Waugh's father responded in the role of the "Old Man."

("The War and the Younger Generation" 62). During these years, "the real and lasting

injury was caused, not by danger, but by the pervading sense of inadequacy" ("The War

and the Younger Generation" 62). "Everything was a substitute for something else, and

there was barely enough even of that," explains Waugh in his 1929 essay, "The War and

the Younger Generation" (62). When inadequacy becomes normalcy, the "consequence

is a generation of whom 950 in every thousand are totally lacking in any sense of

qualitative value" ("The War and the Younger Generation" 62). For the older generation,

the war was "either a shocking negation of all they had represented, or a reckless, rather

thrilling, plunge into abnormality" ("The War and the Younger Generation" 62). For the

Younger Generation, the war was neither abnormality nor negation; it was reality.

Henry Green, Waugh's friend and fellow-writer,[9] remembers his adolescence

through the lens of wartime on the home front in his autobiography, *Pack My Bag*

(1940).[10] Food, rationed, was always on Green's mind at school and reprimands from the

masters, frequent, were reminders that "they [the soldiers] were out there fighting for us"

(*Pack My Bag* 35-7). Many of Green's fellow students lost fathers and brothers during

the war, intensifying the feeling of "death all about us" (*Pack My Bag* 74). The

pervasiveness of death was matched only by the fervor of hero-worship; Green admits

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[9] Waugh and Green were friends and Waugh greatly admired Green's novels. See
Waugh's 1964 autobiography, *A Little Learning* (213) and his 1930 review of Green's
Living, which, according to Waugh, "is a work of genius" (*The Essays, Articles, and
Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* 80-2).

[10] Sebastian Yorke, Henry's son, quotes Waugh in his introduction to *Pack My Bag*: "'I
read it [with] increasing delight…I wish there has been twice as much about Oxford, four
times as much about Hunt Balls…But it was a book no-one else could have written and it
makes me feel I know [you] far less well than I did before which, in a way, I take to be its
purpose'" (*Pack My Bag* ix).

that even though neither of his older brothers fought "I hero-worshipped both [of them]" (*Pack My Bag* 74). Heroes were a bulwark against death and the power dynamics at school became imaginative corollaries to military hierarchies offering to adolescent schoolboys a home front version of military leaders in their prefects, class presidents, and team captains. Waugh shared with Green similar adolescent experiences, although Waugh's older brother Alec was sent to the Front and was later a prisoner of war. With the war directly impacting his family and many of his schoolmasters away in the trenches, the influence of war was inescapable.[11]

School days emerge as an imaginative substitute for the battle experience the Younger Generation was too young to have. Green explains that "anyone who was young at that time, too young to fight that is, would naturally if he has imagination make much out of what he remembers as he goes over and over it afterwards as we all do" (*Pack My Bag* 74). For young boys, the war provided a new narrative in which to fold their adolescent trials and tribulations, typically understood in the language of sport, hunting, and school hierarchies. Fighting family members, food rations, and mobilized schoolmasters were links to the world of war geographically distant; once the air raids started, however, even the boundaries of geography were rendered permeable (Green 39). In *Pack My Bag*, being a student is the closest the Younger Generation can come to being a soldier and public school the closest thing to the trenches: in many ways, suggests Green, "we were the world in miniature" (*Pack My Bag* 17). In the Great War for

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[11] Waugh's older brother Alec was in a machine-gun unit stationed at the Front; in 1917, Alec fought at Passchendaele and survived only to be reported missing and then captured in 1918. Alec returned home for Christmas in 1918 (see Christopher Sykes' *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*).

civilization, public schools were revered symbols of British civil institutions, preparing students to inherit the civilization millions were dying to save. Public schools were far from the Front but in many ways they were on the forefront of a postwar future.

Under such pressure it is not hard to believe that men of the Younger Generation who were public school boys during the war suffered from what Cyril Connolly calls *The Theory of Permanent Adolescence*: "It is the theory that the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives, and, to arrest their development" (*Enemies of Promise* 324-5). Thus, in early mid-life Green turns to his school days (*Pack My Bag*), in later life Waugh emphasizes his adolescent education (*A Little Learning*), and in a treatise about great literature, Connolly narrates his Eton experiences as though they were his credentials (*Enemies of Promise*). For these "permanent adolescents" national politics are public school politics on a larger stage. Although "[f]utility was the rage" during their school days and postwar disillusionment was pervasive after 1918, Connolly admits that "through the medium of college politics, we had become politically-minded ourselves" (*Enemies of Promise* 265, 296). School politics took on a new resonance during and immediately following the war. With their own versions of duty, honor, and glory to guide them, fought for and defended in the classroom, on the playing field, and in the dormitories, the Younger Generation both aligned themselves with and were distinguished from the soldiers of the Great War, men for whom the innocence of adolescence was quickly erased by the experience of the trenches.

Waugh, similarly, understands his adolescent miseries in a wartime context. In *A Little Learning*, published in 1964, Waugh retrospectively situates himself in relation to men like his brother, soldiers of the Lost, not the Greatest, generation:

> I do not seek to harrow with these mild austerities the reader who has vicariously supped full with the horrors of the concentration camp. I merely assert that *I* was harrowed…My brother and thousands like him, not five years my senior, were wintering in the trenches in conditions immeasurably more severe. These were dismal years for half the world. I believe it was the most dismal period in history for an English schoolboy. (115)

Even though Waugh participated in World War II, it is the Great War that shapes his recollections of the past and, by aligning his adolescent wartime experience with those in the trenches, Waugh suggests that, at least imaginatively, the Younger Generation had been preparing for war since as early as 1914.

Waugh's personal public school experience finds public expression in "The Youngest Generation" (1921), his last editorial for the *Lancing College Magazine* before going up to Oxford. In this early article, Waugh begins to articulate the questions and concerns that would influence his writing through the 1930s and after: "During the last few years, a new generation has grown up; between them and the young men of 1912 lies the great gulf of war. What will they stand for and what are they going to do?" ("The Youngest Generation" 11). Although the short essay does not answer this initial question, it does expose a young Waugh beginning to script his own persona alongside the character of his generation: clear-sighted, reticent, and humorous ("The Youngest

Generation" 11). Unlike the "men of Rupert Brooke's generation" who "are broken" by

the war "which old men made," Waugh's generation will be "very hard and analytical

and unsympathetic" ("The Youngest Generation" 11). The Younger Generation will

"aim at things as they are and they will not call their aim 'Truth'" ("The Youngest

Generation" 11). To others, the Younger Generation will seem soulless but their

justification will be their humor. Yet, despite their humor, Waugh concludes that the

Youngest Generation "will not be a happy generation" ("The Youngest Generation" 11).

Happiness is impossible, Waugh implies, in the "queer world which the old men

have left them" and in which even the old men are unhappy ("The Youngest Generation"

11). Eliot's "Gerontion" (1920) portrays these old men as fathers of decaying houses –

"My house is a decayed house" – whose knowledge begs but does not guarantee

forgiveness – "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" – and who confess the high

price of heroism – "Unnatural vices / Are fathered by our heroism" ("Gerontion" 29-30).

In *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), the story of one such decaying house, Waugh depicts the

tension between the old men and the Younger Generation, a tension mediated by the

ghosts of hero-victims, soldiers broken and often buried by the Great War. Lady

Marchmain lost three brothers to the war and commemorates Ned, "the best of them," in

a memorial book (*Brideshead Revisited* 137).[12] For Lady Marchmain, her brothers are

heroes whose lives demonstrate, in the words of Winston Churchill on the announcement

of Rupert Brooke's death, "the sure consolations of a sincere and valiant spirit…[the]

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[12] Many commemorative projects, both personal and public, were not completed or even undertaken until well into the 1920s (see Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* for examples). The distance in time between the war and the gestures of commemoration drew attention to the evolution of and attitudes toward the mythology of heroism born of the Great War.

absolute conviction of the rightness of his country's cause and a heart devoid of hate for

fellow-men" (qtd. in Turner 161). For Charles Ryder, a member of the Younger

Generation, the heroism of Lady Marchmain's brothers is simply a standard by which he

will be measured and will inevitably fall short. Far from meeting the standard and

suspicious of its value, Charles fails Lady Marchmain in her attempts to make a hero out

of her son and his friend, Sebastian Flyte. "'That was it,'" explains Sebastian to Charles,

"'If you were going to be any help to her, you would have said a lot. Uncle Ned is the

test, you know'" (*Brideshead Revisited* 141). Great War heroism becomes the test that

the Younger Generation can never pass. Not only are these standards of heroism

anachronistic but more importantly the very war that created such heroes invalidated their

heroism, making them victims and eventually ghosts haunting both the Younger and the

Older Generation alike.

The figure of the heroic soldier-poet did not survive the early days of war; like

Rupert Brooke who died in 1915 (not in trench warfare but of dysentery and blood

poisoning) this version of heroism was one of the initial casualties of war. With trench

warfare dictating the terms of battle, according to Eksteins, "the hero became the victim

and the victim the hero" (*Rites of Spring* 146). The erosion and eventual death of

conventional ideas of heroism was evidenced by the flood of war memoirs,

autobiographies, novels, and dramas that "suddenly, toward the end of the 20s" "started

to pour torrentially forth" (Cunningham 44).[13] Instead of Brookean heroes as acclaimed

by Churchill, these truth-telling veterans exposed the destruction and futility of war, the

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[13] In *A War Imagined*, Hynes situates the "great period of English prose-writing about the war" (424) alongside the General Strike (1926), which he proposes was "rhetorically…a reversion to the days of the war" (408).

experience of the trenches, and the impossibility of heroism.[14] Siegfried Sassoon,

Wilfred Owen, Erich Maria Remarque, and Robert Graves all "protested at civilian lies

and self-deceptions" by setting before the public eye "the faces, woes, and gestures of

once-living men" as well as their own traumas and tragedies (Winter 204). As Winter

explains, soldier-poets like Owen "understood what soldiering meant" and it was not

heroism; soldiers of the Great War were "killers as well as victims" (*Sites of Memory,*

Sites of Mourning 212).

The irony, however, is that although heroism had been emptied of meaning for

those who experienced the trenches, the figure of the soldier-poet and the truth-telling

veteran loomed large for members of the Younger Generation. Although ostensibly

indifferent to all things war-related, the Younger Generation conceive of themselves

through a paradigm dominated by military models of masculinity and, consequently,

without a war to fight, they experience a crisis of identity. Waugh is attentive to this

irony. In *Vile Bodies*, the Bright Young Things, under the guise of frivolity, reveal the

impact military heroism has on their postwar lives, illustrating that, regardless of

heroism's impossibility after 1918, they, like their country, were haunted by soldiers.

"Some way historical"

"We had seen far too much of Great Men" writes Annan (*Our Age* 13). Waugh

would agree and add that for the Younger Generation greatness would not be their goal as

the titles of his first two novels imply. *Decline and Fall* introduces a theme that *Vile*

Bodies continues: culture in decline. For Waugh, the decline is historical. The title

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[14] See Modris Eksteins' *Rites of Spring* for an account of World War I that concentrates
on battle experience.

Decline and Fall takes its cue from Gibbon's history of Rome. By alluding to the fall of

the Roman Empire, Waugh "suggests to the reader that his book, too, will trace the

crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind" (Crabble 25). The tile *Vile Bodies* continues

the lapsarian theme with origins both ancient and modern. The phrase "vile bodies" is

from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (3:21), which in turn is found in the Burial

Service in the Book of Common Prayer.[15] A novel about London's postwar modern

wasteland, *Vile Bodies* is also influenced by Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as is Waugh's later

A Handful of Dust (1934). The first section of *The Waste Land* is entitled "The Burial of

the Dead": a reference that evokes St. Paul's letter, the Burial Service and, in its historical

context, the pervasiveness of death during and immediately after the Great War.

As a "second-generation modernist" (MacKay 118), Waugh was certainly

influenced by Eliot. "I, Tiresias, have foresuffered all" is chanted through a megaphone

by Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited* suggesting the presence, if not importance,

of *The Waste Land* to undergraduates during Waugh's university years (33).[16] The

"historic monument of literary modernism," *The Waste Land* is also, according to

Christine Froula, "an elegiac monument of a traumatized European sensibility in the

aftermath of the First World War with its staggering toll of thirty-seven million people

dead or wounded" ("Corpse, Monument, Hypocrite Lecteur" 304). In this manner, *The

Waste Land* is not only a (literary) monument but also a (historic) memorial "of war

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[15] See Emily Dalgarno's short piece in the *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter* for a reading of the title that attributes to it more significance than the conventional opinion of it as an afterthought.

[16] The influence of Eliot on Waugh's fiction is a common theme within Waugh scholarship.

death and murder, physical and spiritual maiming, loss and bereavement at once immitigably personal and vastly collective" (Froula 305). Setting the standard for modernist form with fragments, allusions, citation, notation, *The Waste Land* offers Waugh more than an aesthetic benchmark; as a memorial to the Great War, *The Waste Land* also reinforces the inescapability of war in a postwar world. If monuments memorialize then the consequence is the chance to forget as much as the burden of remembrance. Froula explains: "By marking the site of loss and death, we are released from memory to a degree, placed at a remove from loss" ("Corpse, Monument, Hypocrite Lecteur" 313). However, the influence and evocation of *The Waste Land* in Waugh's fiction suggests that forgetting is an opportunity, like the war, that the Younger Generation does not have.

Eliot's London landscape in *The Waste Land* not only provides inspiration for Waugh's urban wasteland in *Vile Bodies* but also the hauntedness of Eliot's verse, with corpses, ghosts, and disembodied voices, offers Waugh a model for grappling with tradition after the cultural rupture that was the Great War. Demonstrating what Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) calls the "historical sense," *The Waste Land* conveys the perception "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (100). The anticipated blooms of Eliot's planted corpses are one surreal example of the past, fallen soldiers buried in no-man's land, embedded in the understanding of the present: "'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?'" (*The Waste Land* 55). The historical sense, according to Eliot, "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature…has a simultaneous existence and composes a

simultaneous order" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 100). *The Waste Land* with

its modernist form appears to break fast from the trappings of tradition; however, when

read through the lens of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" it suggests a more

complicated relationship to tradition, both literary and historical. If, as Froula argues,

The Waste Land is both modernist monument and historical memorial, then it straddles

the cultural rupture of the Great War by "mixing / Memory with desire" (53). In *The

Waste Land*, the desire for new form does not deny the memory of history.

It is the mixture of memory and desire in *Vile Bodies* that makes it, in the words

of Father Rothschild, "some way historical" (*VB* 183). Although *Vile Bodies* appears

topical and ephemeral, a snapshot of a cultural moment already fading, it exhibits its own

version of an Eliotic historical sense. It, too, is a memorial. Bound up in the rhetoric and

consequences of the Great War, 1930s fiction confronts military memory and the national

desire for heroism. The cultural rupture of 1914-1918 cannot be forgotten or erased and

its consequences shape postwar experience. *Vile Bodies*, through the Bright Young

Things, represents the Younger Generation as haunted by the history of the Great War,

unable to find consolation in the present, and incapable of imagining a future different

from their adolescent past. Ultimately, what *Vile Bodies* memorializes is the present.

For Hynes, the gap between the past and the present created by World War I

offered two alternatives for British postwar imaginations: one could look back to the

Great War and its aftermath with a "mythologizing eye" (*A War Imagined* 421) or one

could look forward into the future through the lens of politics and purpose to what would

emerge in the thirties as the myth of the *next* war (*Auden Generation* 42). According to

Hynes, interwar fiction can be understood as responding to one of these two imaginative

impulses: Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924) enacting a backward glance and the plays by Auden and Isherwood, such as *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935) and *The Ascent of F6* (1937), looking forward. Historical memory on one hand, literary purpose on the other: either way, thirties fiction is inextricably linked to the rhetoric and consequences of the Great War.

Writing of the 1930s demonstrates a Janus-faced perspective, which, according to Patricia Rae, articulates the discourse of consolation that survived the Great War while simultaneously examining its merits and registering its insufficiencies ("Double Sorrow" 248). "Proleptic elegy" is consolatory writing "produced in the anticipation of sorrow, where the expected loss is of a familiar kind," responding to the need for "'psychological rearmament' in the face of a threat" ("Double Sorrow" 247). If, according to Winter, "language itself was mobilized in 1914" to prepare "the public for war," then in the 1930s writers found themselves faced with a familiar, although unwanted, task: how to respond to a historical moment subsequent to, yet saturated by, war (*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 187). Rae's analysis borrows from what Jonathan Bate describes as "the distinctively English experience of the Western Front": the violent contrasts of Arcadia and Armageddon ("Arcadia and Armageddon" 150). Arcadia represented the Edenic world of the prewar pastoral while Armageddon, invoking the horrors and traumas of the trenches, represented the destructive consequences and awaited resurrection that world war entailed.[17]

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[17] Bate's Armageddon is Winter's apocalypse. Winter's investigation of the apocalyptic imagination illustrates the way in which modernists reconfigured classical, biblical, romantic, and traditional images and narratives to convey "beliefs about revelation, divine justice, and the nature of catastrophe" (*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 178).

However, as Rae goes on to argue, what emerged in the 1930s was the realization that familiar compensatory symbols and narratives were insufficient, especially since earlier discourses of consolation depended upon the stability and tranquility of a prewar golden age. In the 1930s, the concept of "the world before the war" was an inadequate form of consolation; the world before the *next* war was still very much a postwar world and as such, was characterized by continued psychological trauma, social upheaval, and economic insecurity, a far cry from the consolations offered by an Edwardian golden age – as fictitious a construction as it may be. For many, the inadequacy of familiar forms of consolation initiated a turn from Arcadianism to Utopianism, a turn from the past to the future: "an orientation towards the future rather than the past, and a conviction that the solution to society's ills lies not in restoring a Golden Age but in creating a brand new kind of social organization" born of cultural and political Armageddon (Rae 264). In this manner, Rae's reading of 1930s writing suggests a decade and a discourse preoccupied with its past and its future as a means to understand its present.[18]

"The sins of the fathers": Anchorage House and Shepheard's Hotel

The generational focus of *Vile Bodies* emphasizes the historical tension that contextualizes the Younger Generation in the 1930s. Stephen Spender also writes of generational difference, describing both the Older and Younger Generation with an image that, despite Spender's political difference from his contemporary Waugh, could have been lifted from *Vile Bodies*. Spender explains that the "war has knocked the ball-room floor from under middle-class English life. People resembled dancers in mid-air yet

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[18] The phrase "anticipatory grief" that Rae employs reveals the paradox in which the present moment foresees a future already marked by loss ("Double Sorrow" 247).

miraculously able to pretend that they were still dancing" (*World Within World* 2-3). The Younger Generation are witness to this historical suspension, "aware of a gulf but not of any new values to replace old supports" (*World Within World* 3). The result, according to Spender, was "what was new seemed negative": "the immortality of the 'young people,' the drinking, the short skirts, the pillion-riding, all of which my father deplored" (*World Within World* 3). Meanwhile, for the Younger Generation, what was old seemed at best, needlessly naïve, and at worst, willfully ignorant, like the suspended dancers, oblivious to the drastic difference in postwar reality. In *Vile Bodies*, Kitty Blackwater and Fanny Throbbing, representing Spender's suspended dancers, exhibit the fascination and bewilderment surrounding the Younger Generation in *Vile Bodies*; "'The sins of the fathers, Fanny,'" laments Kitty as if that answers all the questions raised by the inexplicable but alluring escapades of the Bright Young Things (*VB* 26).

"'The sins of the fathers,'" could be the subtitle to *Vile Bodies*, a novel as much about the impotence of the old as it is about the decadence of the young. Both the older aristocrats and the younger set are portrayed farcically in Waugh's novel. Fredrick Beaty suggests, Waugh being an equal opportunity ironist, that the entire society of *Vile Bodies* is "oblivious to the gravity of their true situation":

> Not only does he poke fun at the Bright Young People for their
> obliviously unrealistic approach to life; he also ridicules their supposedly
> more sensible elders – such as the wealthy and powerful traditionalists of
> Anchorage House and, with gentler irony, the anachronistic Lottie Crump
> – for blithely living in the illusions of the past while disaster looms in the
> near future. (*The Ironic World of Evelyn Waugh* 51-2)

Beaty recognizes Waugh's ironic sleight of hand. The frivolity of the Younger

Generation is comedic *not* because of its contrast to their traditionalist elders; rather, the

comedy emerges in the similarity between the two generations. Both share an

"obliviously unrealistic approach to life."

In *Vile Bodies*, Waugh does not use a declining aristocracy to stand for a lost

golden age, mourned and lamented; nor does he, like Eliot, portray the aging Liberal

aristocracy as dry-mouthed old men waiting interminably for rain. Rather, in *Vile Bodies*

Eliot's Gerontion is represented by a humorous cast of characters: the decaying house is

Anchorage House but instead of bathos Waugh employs farce in representing what the

Cambridge Magazine aptly identified as a "garrulous gerontocracy" (qtd. in Sherry

208).[19] On the other side of the generational divide, Agatha Runcible and Adam

Fenwick-Symes encounter the absence of progress and stability bequeathed to them by

the authors of the Great War. Representing what Eksteins describes as "hedonism and

narcissism of remarkable proportions," the Bright Young Things stand in for the "sense

of transitoriness" and "craving for newness" that emerged in the postwar 1920s before

the depression of the 1930s (*Rites of Spring* 256-59). Despite the madcap escapades, the

Bright Young Things, like their Anchorage House elders, cannot escape the trauma of the

Great War. Ironically, it is the Great War – in which neither the Bright Young Things

nor the Gerontions of Anchorage House fought – that bridges the generational divide in

Vile Bodies.

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[19] A phrase coined by C. K. Ogden, editor of the *Cambridge Magazine*. Ogden and I. A.
Richards are the "central figures in the Cambridge literary scene during and just after the
war" (Sherry 65). The phrase "garrulous gerontocracy" comes from "The One Thing
Needful: A Suggestion to Members of Parliament," a *Cambridge Magazine* article
written by Ogden under his sometime-pseudonym Adelyne More.

Chapter VIII of *Vile Bodies* contrasts the Younger and the Older Generation while also establishing the common trauma underlying the experience of each: war. The chapter begins with the Bright Young Things traipsing through a "degraded suburb" to attend a party on a captive dirigible (*VB* 168). That "[i]t was not really a good evening" is admitted immediately, though perhaps a symptom of the "unnatural" setting: the Bright Young Things belong on the city streets as much as the dirigible belongs in the air. It seems appropriate that Waugh would have his Bright Young Things "stationed" in the country, making an attempt at gaiety on an airship that ten years ago had shone searchlights on another country's degraded suburb. Without a war to fight, both the Bright Young Things and the dirigible are left without purpose.

But this outrageous event is just one of many such revelries occasioned by the Bright Young Things' seeming purposelessness. Exemplifying the hedonism and narcissism Ekstein identifies as the defining characteristic of a particular postwar milieu, the Bright Young Things unsuccessfully attempt to locate the meaning of life in the simple act of living:

> As people became less able to answer the fundamental question of the meaning of life – and the war posed that question brutally in nine million cases – they [the Younger Generation] insisted all the more stridently that the meaning lay in life itself, in the act of living, in the vitality of the moment. (*Rites of Spring* 256)

But the "captive dirigible" party is rather a flop and Adam and Nina find themselves restless and disaffected; the "vitality of the moment" fades and this party becomes just another party in a long list of now anonymous and meaningless nights. Adam's

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bewildered and bored exclamation – "'Oh Nina, *what a lot of parties*'" – initiates a

narrative interruption listing the numerous outrageous events: "(…Masked parties,

Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, Russian parties,

Circus parties… – all that succession and repetition of massed humanity….Those vile

bodies…)" (*VB* 170).[20] The list, culminating with the novel's title, recalls *The Waste*

Land and consequently a world tragically disoriented by the casualties of World War I:

an era when the passing of time was marked not by parties but by battles, and, as the last

words of the parenthetical interruption suggest, mass burials. Unfortunately, as the

narrative aside implies, neither parties nor bodies offer an adequate answer to the

question of life's meaning in a postwar world.[21]

As the Bright Young Things come to the conclusion that "'[t]here's nowhere like

London really you know'" (*VB* 174), the aging aristocrats stream through the streets

toward Anchorage House, the "last survivor of the noble town houses of London" and as

such, a "'picturesque bit'" (*VB* 174).[22] A relic among the "concrete skyscrapers," it has

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[20] The excerpted portion of the parenthetical aside continues the outrageous list:
"…parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St. John's
Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in
windmills and swimming baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins and
meringues and tinned crab, parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked
Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting
dances in Paris – all that succession and repetition of massed humanity….Those vile
bodies…)" (*VB* 170).

[21] Waugh himself marked time and tried to find meaning in the "huge casualty lists [that]
appeared daily" while his brother Alec was posted to the Front during the battle of
Passchendaele (*A Little Learning* 114).

[22] Patey suggests that historic buildings map "the most recent stages in the degradation of
the already degraded antecedents for which, in Waugh's view of history, those periods
stand" (*The Life of Evelyn Waugh* 60).

"grace and dignity and other-worldliness enough to cause a flutter or two in Mrs. Hoop's heart" (*VB* 174). "'Can't you just see the *ghosts*?" Mrs. Hoop asks Lady Circumference, imagining the historical personages who centuries ago socialized under the roof of Anchorage House. Lady Circumference does not answer Mrs. Hoop's question directly; rather, a third-person description of the visitors performs the role of a reply:

> …people who had represented their country in foreign places and sent their sons to die for her in battle, people of decent and temperate life, uncultured, unaffected, unembarrassed, unassuming, unambitious people, of independent judgment and marked eccentricities, kind people who cared for animals and the deserving poor, brave and rather unreasonable people, that fine phalanx of the passing order, approaching, as one day at the Last Trump they hoped to meet their Maker, with decorous and frank cordiality to shake Lady Anchorage by the hand at the top of the staircase. (*VB* 175-6)[23]

"[P]eople who had represented their country in foreign places and sent their sons to die for her in battle": this characterization, penned in 1929, is an ironic understatement. A naïve defense of the "garrulous gerontocracy," Annan's "Great Men," Lady Circumference's perception is remarkable not for what it reveals as much as for what it

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[23] This passage ironically echoes the parenthetical aside that follows Simon Balcairn's suicide after the publication of his fictitious column: "So the last Earl of Balcairn went, as they say, to his fathers (who had fallen in many lands and for many causes, as the eccentricities of British Foreign Policy and their own wandering natures had directed them; at Acre and Agincourt and Killirecrankie, in Egypt and America. One had been picked white by fishes as the tides rolled him among the tree-tops of a submarine forest; some had grown black and unfit for consideration under tropical suns; while many of them lay in marble tombs of extravagant design)" (*VB* 146).

conceals: total war authored by their bravery and unreasonableness, exactly those "vanities" by which History, according to Eliot's Gerontion, has been guided. Filling the space between Mrs. Hoop's question – "'Can't you just see the *ghosts*?'" – and her answer – "But she saw no ghosts" – this description acts as an ironic reply suggesting that these people, this way of life, their values and beliefs, have approached the "Last Trump" and metaphorically met their maker, ghosts of a culture long gone, themselves "picturesque bits." Like Eliot's Gerontion, Anchorage House society has no ghosts; like Gerontion, they are themselves specters haunting a nightmarish history.

Unable to admit to the war-torn past they authored and unable to imagine a future beyond their impotent order, the Older Generation turn their attention to the present: "the Younger Generation spread through the company like a yawn. Royalty remarked on their absence and those happy mothers who had even one docile daughter in tow swelled with pride and commiseration" (*VB* 180). But the "fathers," whose sins are implicated in this generational divide, are dissatisfied. Mr. Outrage laments that "'[e]veryone seems to have been talking about the younger generation tonight[, t]he most boring subject I know'" (*VB* 182). Father Rothschild, the mysterious Jesuit, implies there is more at stake than gossipy conversation. "'Well, after all,'" he inquires, "'what does all this stand for if there's going to be no one to carry it on?'" (*VB* 182). In other words, who is going to save the Older Generation from becoming cultural ghosts in the modern wasteland outside the safety of Anchorage House?

Mr. Outrage, the on-again-off-again Prime Minister, sees no hope in the Younger Generation. Validating his "return" to power after the fall of Mr. Brown's government, a consequence of "revelations of the life that was lead at No.10 Downing Street" (*VB* 100),

Mr. Outrage reinforces the claim in the *Evening Standard*'s leading article which "drew a fine analogy between Public and Domestic Purity, between sobriety in the family and in the State" (*VB* 100). The irony is thick: Mr. Brown is an unwitting participant in the escapades of the Bright Young Things and Mr. Outrage's sordid sex life positions him on the wrong side of Public and Domestic Purity. It gets thicker: in his most self-assured speech of the novel, Mr. Outrage blames the Younger Generation for the unfortunate state of civilization ignoring the fact that he and his contemporaries are exactly the "old men" that "made" the war:

> They had a chance after the war that no generation has ever had. There was a whole civilization to be saved and remade – and all they seem to do is play the fool. Mind you, I'm all in favour of them having a fling. I dare say that Victorian ideas *were* a bit strait-laced…But there is something wanton about these young people today. (*VB* 183)

One can imagine Mr. Outrage as Waugh's respondent in "To an Unnamed Listener." Employing the rhetoric of heroism so familiar during World War I, "a chance…no generation has ever had…civilization to be saved and remade," Mr. Outrage overlooks the fact that it was his generation that placed civilization in such a precarious position in the first place.

It is in response to Mr. Outrage's tirade that Father Rothschild poses the question that guides my reading of this novel: "'Don't you think…that perhaps it is all in some way historical?'" (*VB* 183). Father Rothschild reasons that "people [don't] ever *want* to lose their faith either in religion or anything else" (*VB* 183). It seems to him that

…they are all possessed with an almost fatal hunger for permanence. I

think all these divorces show that…And this word "bogus" they all

use…They won't make the best of a bad job nowadays…They say, "if a

thing's not worth doing well, it's not worth doing at all." It makes

everything very difficult for them. (*VB* 183-4)

Father Rothschild reads between the lines of the madcap existence of the Bright Young

Things and suggests that their frenetic partying, their inability to commit, and even their

infamous motto – too, too, bogus – are responses to the cultural rupture between past and

present in a postwar world. Instead of following the guidance of school and church, "'If

a thing's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well'" (*VB* 183), they "'have got hold of

another end of the stick'" and refuse to do anything that isn't worth doing well (*VB* 184).

The implication being that saving and remaking civilization, "a chance after the war that

no other generation has ever had" is, perhaps, not worth it.

"'Well, it's like this war that's coming…'" offers Father Rothschild by way of

clarification (*VB* 184).[24] "'What *war?*'" exclaims Prime Minister Outrage, "'No one has

told me anything about a war'" (*VB* 184). But Father Rothschild sees it as another

inevitability born of the same "some way historical" state of affairs: "'Wars don't start

nowadays because people want them. We long for peace, and fill our newspapers with

conferences about disarmament and arbitration, but there is a radical instability in our

whole world-order, and soon we shall all be walking into the jaws of destruction again'"

(*VB* 185). First and foremost, Father Rothschild's explanation is a foreshadowing of the

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[24] It is worth noting that *Decline and Fall* also "predicts" the next war in a conversation
between Paul Pennyfeather and Lord Circumference.

novel's conclusion – "the biggest battlefield in the history of the world" (*VB* 314) – but also it is an articulation of the undercurrent of disbelief, disillusionment, and distrust – radical instability – that began to emerge in the late twenties and that dominated the 1930s.[25]

Lottie Crump's Shepheard's Hotel seems to offer an antidote to the radical instability of postwar London although it is more accurately a symptom of Father Rothschild's diagnosis. Shepheard's Hotel offers comfort and consolation – it is a brothel – even if fleeting and illusory. Lottie's offers to anyone "parched with modernity" – political exiles, deposed royalty, aging war captains – the opportunity to "draw up, cool and uncontaminated, great, healing draughts from the well of Edwardian certainty" (*VB* 41). But Lottie's version of "the splendours of the Edwardian age" are

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[25] The reliability of Father Rothschild's revelation may be undercut by the manner of his exit: "mounting his motor cycle, [he] disappeared into the night, for he had many people to see and much business to transact" (*VB* 186). A mysterious Jesuit, Father Rothschild is described as carrying a "borrowed" suitcase, books in six languages, a false beard and an annotated gazetteer (*VB* 1). On numerous occasions he has appeared more informed of political happenings than either of the Prime Ministers. Just as critics differ about the merit of Waugh's early fiction and his religious agenda, so, too, do scholars diverge concerning Father Rothschild. Patey reads Father Rothschild as Waugh's spokesman in the novel, citing Waugh's complaint to Alec that "'[t]he trouble about the world today is that there's not enough religion in it'" (*The Life of Evelyn Waugh* 76). Patey's is a plausible conclusion, especially considering Waugh's divorce during the writing of *Vile Bodies* and Waugh's public explanation for his conversion to Catholicism that followed: "It seems to me that in the present phase of European history the essential issue is...between Christianity and Chaos" ("Converted to Rome" 103). Another view of Father Rothschild is offered by Christopher Sykes. Acknowledging that Father Rothschild's "apologia for modern youth has sometimes been read with awe as showing Evelyn's essential and underlying seriousness," Sykes perceives it as sentimentalism and artistic flaw (*Evelyn Waugh* 99). Sykes suggests that Waugh agrees with him, as evidenced by a conversation they had years after the publication of *Vile Bodies* in which Waugh confessed that he regretted the passage (*Evelyn Waugh* 99). Robert Garnett who, while reading *Vile Bodies* as "a metaphor of contemporary life," aligns himself with Sykes in claiming that the novel does not offer a "coherent cultural or religious argument" (*From Grimes to Brideshead: The Early Novels of Evelyn Waugh* 71).

rendered unconvincing and her "well of Edwardian certainty" dry to the discerning reader.

"Oblivious of those changes in the social order which agitate the more observant *grandes dames* of her period," Lottie is described as "singularly unscathed by any sort of misfortune" which, in early twentieth-century Britain, there were many (*VB* 40). Her hotel, however, *is* marked by the social changes and various misfortunes that leave Lottie unscathed. Shepheard's Hotel may be appointed like a country house but this likeness is a result of the "great houses of her day being sold up" and Lottie's love of a good bargain (*VB* 41). Symbols of the aristocracy and memorials to feudal family power, Britain's great houses represent the Edwardian splendor that Lottie's London hotel attempts to convey. However, that English estates are being leased and sold is a tell-tale sign of the national and political changes unfolding in Britain; resulting from the confluence of democracy, capitalism, and an unfavorable post-boom, postwar economy, the liquidation of "great houses" allows everyone the chance to purchase their own piece of aristocratic life.[26] Consequently, Shepheard's Hotel is like a museum of Victorian and Edwardian domesticity; cluttered with too much furniture, ranging from rare to hideous, Lottie is not above furnishing her hotel with cast off wedding gifts, distinguished by their various monograms, suggesting a kind of familial schizophrenia.

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[26] The Crouchback family leases their country house to an order of nuns in Waugh's *Sword of Honor Trilogy* (1952-1961); in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Remains of the Day* (1989), a rich American purchases the country house at the center of the story; in the last book (*The Last Post*) of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-1928), an American takes residence at Groby, the Tietjens family estate. See John J. Su's "Refiguring National Character" (2002) for an extended discussion of the relationship between English country houses and the nation in modernism.

Appointed with reminders of Britain's apocryphal aristocracy, Shepheard's parlor is home to a "comprehensive collection of signed photographs" presenting to the perceptive visitor – and reader – a catalogue of the kind of Edwardian certainty that can only be found in photograph and memory, both of which, at Lottie's, are fading. Adorning the walls are photographs of "[m]ost of the male members of the royal families of Europe," "young men on horses riding steeple-chases," "men leading in the winners of 'classic' races," "elderly men in yachting caps," and "terribly funny pictures of the earliest kind of motor car" (*VB* 43). The most telling photographs, however, are those that bear witness to the inaccessibility of the world presented on Lottie's parlor walls: "photographs cut from illustrated papers, many of them with brief obituary notices, 'killed in action'" (*VB* 43). The obituary photographs, and the removal of the signed photograph of the Kaiser to the men-servants' lavatory, are strong reminders that the "Edwardian splendours" of security, prosperity, and progress are merely memories of an inaccessible but inescapable past.

In addition to its décor, what distinguishes Shepheard's Hotel is Lottie's inability to remember anyone's name and her continual failure to recognize her guests. Despite the narrator's assurance that Lottie is "singularly unscathed" she acts like a shell-shocked soldier, a humorous Chris Baldry who, in Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier* (1918), returns from the trenches unable to remember anything after his own Edwardian summer. "You'll have a lot of friends here," Lottie assures Adam when he arrives at Shepheard's. Presented incorrectly as "Lord Thingummy," Adam is introduced to Mr. What's-his-name, the Major, Mr. What-d'you-call-him, an American, and the King of Ruritania (*VB* 43-4). A reminder of Lottie's historical amnesia, the King of Ruritania sadly corrects

her; he explains that he is deposed and that his wife has gone mad, arguably casualties of the unspoken but ever-present Great War. But Ruritania is not the only country in chaos, if Shepheard's Hotel is any indication. Lottie and her guests argue over England's current Prime Minister: is it Mr. Outrage (upstairs unsuccessfully seducing a Japanese Baroness) or Sir James Brown (whose daughter has lately been spotted with the Bright Young Things)? At Shepheard's Hotel, however, there is no question who reigns. Lottie Crump is the benevolent dictator generous in deciding reparations: "in making up the bills" Lottie makes certain the "richest people pay for everything" (*VB* 46).

Writers, Racecars, and Other Misidentifications

"What we are seeing is this," Wyndham Lewis declares in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, "The world was getting, frankly, extremely silly. It will always be silly. But it was getting into a really suffocating jam – no movement in any direction. A masquerade, a marking-time. Nothing real anywhere" (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 15). The editor of *Blast*, a member of the London Vorticist movement spearheaded by Pound, and a soldier in World War I, Lewis is an important, if idiosyncratic, representative of interwar London. Movement, in the traditional sense of getting from one place to another, does seem impossible in a world reoriented by trench warfare. "Masquerade," "marking-time," and "nothing real": Lewis' descriptors of 1930s London could just as easily be applied to the Western Front where men were made alien by gas masks, bored by the monotony of routine, and confronted by the surrealism of a corpse-laden landscape. And although "silly" may seem an incongruent characterization of London from a postwar vantage point, Lewis is drawing on a tradition of black humor that emerged from the Front. "Black and bitter" humor found its expression in papers such as

the *Somme Times* and "*Better Times*" printed sporadically at the Front (Eksteins 220-1),

ironic but appropriate successors to the final edition of *Blast*, the "War Number"

(1914).[27]

According to Lewis' characterization of England in the 1930s, *Vile Bodies* is an

allegory of its contemporary moment. Throughout the novel, characters, like Alice on the

other side of the looking glass – like soldiers at the Front – are always moving without

ever seeming to get anywhere; they continually return to familiar places made unfamiliar,

circling back with intentions that are always thwarted or forgotten. The traditional

narrative markers of development, climax, and dénouement are absent in the novel; the

narrative structure substitutes circularity for climax and return for resolution. Like the

soldiers of the Great War, Waugh's Bright Young Things fight their own battle against

attrition. Decisive actions and turning points are no longer valid narrative strategies after

what Eksteins calls the "trinity of horror": the battles of Ypres, Verdun, and the Somme

(144).[28] The novel, like the years 1914-18, creates order out of what otherwise seems

like chaos, but instead of movement in the traditional sense – as Alice explains – *Vile*

Bodies represents the "suffocating jam" that bears witness to the cultural, political, and

historical reality of its postwar moment.

The beginning of the novel is a return to England and allegorically a return to the

end of the Great War. Readers are introduced to Adam, too young to fight in the First

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[27] For more on black humor and its relation to war, see Paul Fussell and Lisa Colletta.

[28] Trench warfare slowly altered martial strategies and perceptions of modern war
experience: "'The first principle of position warfare…must be to yield not one foot of
ground'" and "'Whole regiments gambled away eternity for ten yards of wasteland'"
(qtd. in Eksteins 144).

World War, returning to England from France like war-weary soldiers a decade ago. "There was nothing particularly remarkable about [Adam's] appearance…He looked exactly as young men like him do look" and like young soldiers before him he was returning home in anticipation of marriage and stability (*VB* 7). A "sort of everyman" according to Lisa Colletta (*Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel* 89), not a "Tommy" but an "Adam," Adam's universality and ordinariness is given historical resonance as he boards the ship "[t]wo minute before the advertised time of departure" evoking the Two Minutes Silence of Armistice Day remembrances, a tradition Adam witnesses later in the novel (*VB* 7). Furthering the association with soldiers of World War I, like Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, Adam has written his autobiography. Unlike writing a novel, writing an autobiography is "a somewhat audacious project for someone still in his twenties and who hasn't really done anything" (Colletta 89). But if one believes the author, "only when one has lost all curiosity about the future has one reached the age to write and autobiography" (*A Little Learning* 1), then Adam's autobiographical writing suggests that, like soldiers ten years before, the future can in no way compensate for or accommodate the past, a past that in Adam's case is distinguished by being too young for the war. Reading Adam's return to England as a contemporary reimagining of a soldier's return from the Great War suggests that Adam has a story to tell.

But 1929 is not 1919. Adam is not returning from the Front and he has no war stories to tell. As such, rather than revealing the horrors of war, Adam's autobiography can only reveal the emptiness that men of the Younger Generation often articulated: too young to fight, too disillusioned for heroism, too disappointed in progress, left to make

their way in a world very different from the one for which their fathers and older brothers fought. Although the interwar autobiographies of the Younger Generation recall prefects and playing fields instead of commanding officers and battlefields the war is an important character in these narratives. Moreover, as writers the Younger Generation encounter a remnant of government policy instituted during the Great War. In 1929 it is the Obscene Publications Act that prohibits Adam's manuscript from entering the country, the postwar evolution of the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA) instituted during World War I and responsible widespread censorship.[29] From letters sent home from the Front during the war to literature penned in Paris in the twenties, all fell under the watchful eye of government censors. But Adam is neither a war-weary soldier nor a modernist celebrity; however, like both the soldier and the modernist, Adam is denied an audience for the communication of his experience of a world changed by war.

The misidentification of Adam with battle-worn soldiers from a decade earlier, although not explicitly stated, is encouraged by the publication context surrounding *Vile Bodies*. On one hand, war memoirs, soldier autobiographies, and novels that fictionalize such experiences, not to mention memorial books like Lady Marchmain's, are being published in the late twenties, the most notable perhaps being Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, published in 1929 to widespread acclaim and controversy. On the other hand, the Younger Generation is beginning to mine its adolescence for material, as in Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows* (1938),

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[29] It is worth noting that the burning of Adam's manuscript also aligns him with modernist writers like Radclyffe Hall and D. H. Lawrence whose novels were censored by the Obscene Publications Act. In writing his autobiography in France, Adam is also like James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* (1922) was published in France and smuggled over to Britain in order to bypass censors.

making fiction out of adolescent woes, public school experiences, and the disappointments of early adulthood. According to Isherwood and George Orwell, the Younger Generation's exposure to and obsession with Great War soldiers, both during their adolescence and later during the "war book boom" in the late twenties, exposes their sense of missed opportunity. There is a shared feeling that the war "meant The Test. The test of your courage, your maturity, of your sexual prowess"; or, as Orwell put it, "You felt yourself a little less than a man, because you had missed it" (qtd. in Patey 85). Emasculated by their youth, the Younger Generation is, as Woolf explains in "The Leaning Tower" (1940), extremely self-conscious. Unlike those writing before the war who inherited the values and conditions of the nineteenth century, the Younger Generation inherited the acute knowledge of what they *did not* have: security, memories of a peaceful boyhood, and the experience a settled civilization ("The Leaning Tower" 139). And if to make matters worse, they were unable to participate in the very "break" that rendered their inheritance obsolete. Too young to have participated in the most important event in their lives, the Great War, yet nonetheless indelibly marked by it, the members of the Younger Generation suffer from a historically induced identity crisis.

The Younger Generation's identity crisis is portrayed in *Vile Bodies* through a series of misidentifications and incidents of imposture on the part of the Bright Young Things. One of the most humorous occurs at Doubting Hall, the family home of Nina Blount, Adam's on-again-off-again fiancée. Traveling to Aylesbury alone with a hangover, Adam is informed by his taxi driver that a vacuum cleaner salesman was just turned away from "Doubting 'All" by Colonel Blount (*VB* 86). This sets the scene for Adam's arrival:

"Have you come about the vacuum cleaner?"

"No."

"Funny, I've been expecting a man all the morning to show me a vacuum cleaner. Come in, do. Won't you stay to luncheon?"

"I should love to." (*VB* 89)

But Colonel Blount's invitation is quickly rescinded: "'…it is, after all, impossible for me to ask you to luncheon. I have a guest coming on very intimate family business….its some young rascal who wants to marry my daughter. I must see him alone to discuss settlements'" (*VB* 90). To which Adam responds, "'Well, I want to marry your daughter, too'" (*VB* 90). "'What an extraordinary coincidence,'" Colonel Blount exclaims as he reads a telegram from Nina explaining that Adam will be coming to Doubting Hall for luncheon (*VB* 90-1). "'Are you Adam Symes?'" inquires Colonel Blount, "'why didn't you say so before, instead of going on about a vacuum cleaner?'" (*VB* 91).

This misidentification is as historical as it is humorous. Adam, like countless demobilized soldiers after 1918, is "welcomed" home by high unemployment and a precarious economy. Suggesting the association of Adam with such demobbed soldiers is Colonel Blount's misidentification of him as a traveling salesman: a common occupation for returning soldiers looking for work. Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1938) depicts the life of one such World War I veteran, George Bowling, living in the suburbs – "Just like a prison with the cells all in a row" (12) – selling insurance – "I ought to tell you that I'm in the insurance business. The Flying Salamander. Life, fire, burglary, twins, shipwreck – everything" (5) – trying to make sense of a life continually punctuated

by the phrase "before the war" (39). Being misidentified for a vacuum cleaner salesman puts Adam in "good" company.

Although Adam is not a salesman, he is seeking to "sell" something to Colonel Blount: his marriage to Nina. As a father, a country house gentleman, and a veteran of the war years, Adam and Nina assume that Colonel Blount is not only wealthy but also invested in the values and traditions of Edwardian England. In this, they misidentify Colonel Blount. If Lottie's Shepheard's Hotel is a "well of Edwardian certainty" within a modern wasteland, then Doubting Hall is a mirage. Although Doubting Hall has the accoutrement of country house stability, from a gatehouse and stables to marble pedestals and fine furniture, there are suggestions that all is not as it seems. Colonel Blount undercuts the atmosphere of prewar tranquility and prosperity by asking Adam if he saw the new houses being put up outside Aylesbury: "'Nice little red houses. Bathroom and everything. Quite cheap, too, and near the cinematographs'" (*VB* 91). Instead of clinging tightly to the remnants of aristocratic privilege, Colonel Blount would rather have a small, new home with all the modern amenities in close proximity to the most modern of entertainments, the cinema.[30]

Adam is not a salesman and Colonel Blount is not a conventional country house gentleman: imposture seems to be a common feature among the Bright Young Things and their elders. Father Rothschild carries a false beard in his suitcase; Mrs. Melrose Ape is anything but Christian and her angels are anything but holy; Lady Metroland is not only a renowned hostess but also an international procuress; and Simon Balcairn plays at

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[30] Furthering the association of Colonel Blount with all things modern is his own "impersonation": much to Adam and Nina's chagrin, Colonel Blount signs the thousand pound check he gives to Adam "Charlie Chaplain" (*VB* 108-11).

being a gossip columnist, a profession dependant upon, as Simon puts it, lies and libel (*VB* 120). But for the Bright Young Things, being an impostor does not necessitate a misidentification of reality; unlike Lady Metroland and Mrs. Ape whose performances are in conflict with the underlying reality of their situations, Adam and Agatha take on roles and *make them their reality*. According to Connolly, "[r]eality is a shifting thing…the nature of things as they are and *as they will be*" (*Enemies of Promise* 176, emphasis mine). Dispossessed of the sense of security, certainty, and progress attributed to a prewar era, reality, for the Bright Young Things, is what ones makes it. When Adam acquires Simon Balcairn's job as Mr. Chatterbox and when Agatha takes seriously the title on her armband, Spare Driver, the modern world of *Vile Bodies* becomes even more topsy-turvy: Eliot's Unreal City meets Alice's through-the-looking-glass world.

Impostures and misidentifications in *Vile Bodies* generate humor but also, as Adam's short career as a gossip columnist and Agatha's even shorter career as a racecar driver propose, they expose the consequences of recent historical events. Lisa Colletta, in *Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modernist British Novel* (2003), characterizes the "real" climate of postwar Britain as

> shockingly unkind. Violence on a grand scale, the loss of identity, and the increasing mechanization of society left the modern individual in a dilemma. Traumatized by recent historical events, there was the fear that some incalculable and horrible catastrophe awaited, yet, deprived of a sense of forward movement, there was the equally terrible prospect that nothing at all would happen. (9)

Colletta's description reveals the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of postwar Britain and, in the context of *Vile Bodies*, sets the scene for Waugh's humor, which is also shockingly unkind. The novel derives its humor from the very things that make interwar Britain so miserable: violence, trauma, loss of identity, anxiety about the future, and confusion about the present. The "real" climate of postwar Britain is represented as quite similar to the climate of Britain in wartime, suggesting that part of the humor, black and bitter, is exactly that nothing at all had happened, nothing at all had changed.

In fact, the terrible prospect that "nothing at all would happen" is the motivating factor behind Adam's short career as Mr. Chatterbox for the *Daily Excess*, a position made available by the suicide of Simon Balcairn. In an era that realized the "new imperialistic power of the media" even society gossip made headlines (Cunningham 279).[31] Emerging at the "boundary of politics and popular culture," news dailies saw increased circulation in the 1930s, and according to some scholars, acted as a "magic mirror" held up to society by journalists "with the effect of keeping the popular classes, in particular, in a state of ecstasy and to deny them knowledge about the world" and their position in it (Bingham 7, 9). In many ways, it is the magic mirror theory of the press that Waugh portrays in *Vile Bodies*. Simon's last column initiates a string of libel suits against the *Daily Excess*, "an orgy of litigation such as they had not seen since the war" (*VB* 150), and thus, the black list for Mr. Chatterbox's column is long. With no one to write the column and essentially no one to write about, the social editress is in a bind. When Adam takes the job, he has his work cut out for him.

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[31] See Adrian Bingham's *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (2004) and Keith Williams' *British Writers and the Media, 1930-45* (1996) for accounts of the press and the media during this time period.

After quite a few attempts at sensationalizing the "murky underworld of nonentities" and risky columns titled "Notable Invalids" and "Titled Eccentrics," Adam realizes that "people did not really mind *whom* they read about provided that a kind of vicarious inquisitiveness into the lives of others was satisfied" (*VB* 154-5). With the "truth" of journalism finally understood, as explored in Waugh's "Careers For Our Sons: The Complete Journalist," Adam "began to invent people" (*VB* 155). Adam's first invention is the sculptor Provna, a Polish émigré negotiating a deal with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Soon, Mrs. Hoop announces that Provna is working on a bust of her son, while early Provnas begin to travel from London to California: "Such is the power of the Press" (*VB* 155). Seizing the power of the "magic mirror" and encouraged by success, Adam begins to create a colorful cast of characters, as divine and as bogus as the Bright Young Things themselves. Adam's characters, like their "real" counterparts, become the talk of the town – the potential crisis that "nothing at all would happen" inventively diverted.

Adam's greatest success by far is Mrs. Andrew Quest. Imogen Quest, "the most lovely and popular of the young married set," emerges quietly from Mr. Chatterbox's pages – and imagination – to social glory (*VB* 158). With Imogen, Adam hits upon the holy grail of newspaper reporting. The "magic mirror" of journalism contains the key to its own success: the public wants to see themselves, only better, brighter, younger, and more sensational than they really are. As explained by Waugh in "The Complete Journalist," the adept society columnist will soon have his readers doing the work for him (*Essays* 48-9). This happens to Adam: having resourcefully eschewed Imogen's genealogy, Adam's readers "nodded to each other and speedily supplied her with an

exalted if irregular origin" (*VB* 158). Ironically, "Imogen Quest became a byword for

social inaccessibility – the final goal for all climbers" (*VB* 158). For some, like the

fictitious Provna, Imogen is seen as "justifying the century" (*VB* 158). An exaggerated

farce, Waugh's commentary on popular journalism appears merely to poke fun at society

tabloids and fly-by-night journalists. However, as I have been suggesting, Waugh's

humor locates its inspiration in historical circumstances: the popular press' reciprocal

relationship with the Great War.

The desire for news during the war encouraged the growth of the press and, in

turn, the press became an advocate for nation, empire, government, and military. As

Adrian Bingham explains, "[p]ress coverage of the military campaigns emphasized the

heroism and courage of the British soldiers, and critical or pessimistic reporting, if not

censored, was usually felt to be inappropriate" (*Gender, Modernity, and the Popular*

Press in Inter-War Britain 183). Eksteins goes as far as to argue that during the war,

"[d]feats were presented as victories…truth became falsehood, falsehood

truth…euphemism became the official order of the day" (*Rites of Spring* 233). With

propaganda "blurring…the reality of the war," truth and fiction were rendered

interchangeable and, at times, indistinguishable (Eksteins 233). The establishing analogy

to the phenomenon in *Vile Bodies* and its effect on the reading public – "[p]eople started

to imitate the mannerisms and habits of the book's characters" (Humphrey 209) – the

British press presented the public with a particular version of events that, under the

pressure of government censors and civilian desires, became the reality of Great War.[32]

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[32] An exchange between Henry James and Edith Wharton cited by Eksteins represents the
quagmire created by such propagandist efforts (*Rites of Spring* 234-5).

That journalists write the first draft of history is perhaps more than a cultural cliché (Bingham 1).

Disillusioned by their forays into the popular press, the Bright Young Things seek their entertainment in the country at the motor races. The motor races represented a new wave of entertainment in the late 1920s; in the quest for new heroes during the postwar period, film stars and sportsmen were emerging as replacements for professional and military heroes. "In a period when imperial adventurers and military leaders were losing some of their appeal," and offered increasingly flawed models of masculinity, "sportsmen embodied similar manly qualities in less threatening and controversial environments" (Bingham 217). Sports figures offered a new version of heroism that was attractive, dangerous, and more sensational than the beleaguered military model. Iris Downing reported for the *Daily News* on the newest modern knights, Speed Kings: "I came away full of admiration for the skill and the nerve displayed by these modern knights of the Speedway Track" (qtd. in Bingham 222). However, if *Vile Bodies* is any indication, instead of offering an escape from the frenetic world of the Bright Young Things, the motor races provide an allegory of their dizzying, directionless, but entertaining existence.[33]

Critics generally locate the much sought-after meaning of *Vile Bodies* in the image of the racetrack. "Speeding round and round a racetrack, like rushing from party to party, is a futile activity, all-consuming but, finally, going nowhere" Colletta suggests,

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[33] Like Adam, Agatha, and company, Waugh, too, escaped from London and his troubles to the dizzying thrill of the motor races; in 1929, after his wife's desertion, Waugh wrote to Harold Acton that he was "escaping to Ireland for a week of motor racing" (qtd. in Garnett 67).

echoing Waugh's *Alice Through the Looking Glass* epigraph (*Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel* 98). However, when situated in its historical context, the motor race in *Vile Bodies* portrays the ambivalent desire of the Younger Generation for heroes and heroic experience: fueled by the fact that they were too young in 1914 to be war heroes and tempered by the knowledge that such heroism is impotent.[34]

At the Imperial for breakfast, Adam finds the dining room is full; spectators, journalists, and race officials are elbow to elbow with the Speed Kings themselves. Excitement and anticipation fueled by the danger of the sport pervades the atmosphere; in a leisured imitation of war, the Speed Kings muse that this may be their last meal, anticipating that they might "go over the top" on the speedway (*VB* 223). Leaving the hotel for the garage in search of their Speed King, No. 13, Agatha, Adam, and Miles Malpractice soon find themselves putting brassards on their arms, badges that bestow new identities for the day. As the "Spare Driver" it seems appropriate that Agatha is the one who, between rounds of drinks, cheers for car No. 13 as it vies for the lead with car No. 28, driven by the notoriously underhanded Italian, Marino.

Back in the pits, the Bright Young Things watch sadly as No. 13 returns with an injured driver, a victim of Marino's sabotage. The official inquires whether No. 13 will scratch or continue the race with its spare driver. As if on cue, Agatha reports "'I'm

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[34] It is worth noting that "hero" in both the prewar and postwar era is a gendered term; paths to "heroism" are male-dominated. Part of the irony, and the gravity, of the motor race for Waugh's Younger Generation is Agatha's misguided eagerness and naïve determination to take on the role of Spare Driver. As a woman, Agatha, like the majority of young women in the twenties and the thirties, was faced with new, different, and often unconventional opportunities. Women pilots provide an interesting example of women crossing social and cultural boundaries of propriety as well as illustrating many of the issues that characterize the interwar period such as the quest for heroes, adaptation to new technologies, rise of the celebrity, and evolution of gender norms.

spare driver…It's on my arm'" (*VB* 246). Seemingly unconcerned with the discrepancy

between the title on her arm and the actual circumstances – she is as much the spare

driver as the dandy Miles is the spare mechanic – Agatha repeats "'I'm the spare driver.

It's on my arm'" (*VB* 246). Soon the space between appearance – being the spare driver

– and reality – being Agatha Runcible – collapses: "'Agatha,' repeated Miss Runcible

firmly as she climbed into the car. 'It's on my arm'" (*VB* 246).

Drunk, determined, and deathly serious, Agatha becomes a tragic allegory for all

Bright Young Things and a parodic inversion of Waugh's early characterization of the

Younger Generation as clear-sighted, reticent, and funny. Disillusioned by heroics,

substituting military experience with celebrity sporting achievements, Agatha is the

epitome of the Younger Generation's identity crisis. Whether a Jewelry Smuggler, a

Hottentot, a Spare Driver, or simply one of the misunderstood and misidentified Younger

Generation, Agatha seems to embody the tension between appearance and reality that

characterizes the vile bodies of the novel and which, for many critics, is the centerpiece

of Waugh's humor. Employing different terms, Fredrick Beaty and Kathryn Crabble

both understand Waugh's humor in terms of the disparity between appearance and reality

"expressed through both the confusion of identities of the characters and the setting aside

of the laws of cause and effect" (Crabble 40). The irony in *Vile Bodies*, however, has

another level. Waugh's humor, as Colletta suggests, has a dark side, and that dark side

comes from the "truth" behind the madcap confusions and impossible outcomes.

For Agatha, the Spare Driver, appearance and reality are a single state, cause and

effect practically irrelevant, and identity a shifting and uncertain signifier. She *is* the

Spare Driver. Initially leading Marino in the race and the survivor of a crash with the

Italian car, Agatha and No.13 disappear from the course, taking a wrong turn and speeding out of control. The next day, Adam, Miles, and Archie discover that Agatha had "been found early that morning staring fixedly at a model engine in the central hall of Euston Station" (*VB* 258). When asked about herself, "she replied that to the best of her knowledge she had no name, pointing to the brassard on her arm, as if in confirmation of this fact. She had come in a motor car, she explained, which would not stop…" (*VB* 258).

Settled in a nursing home to recover her senses, Agatha's dreams replay her experience as the Spare Driver. Like many shell-shocked soldiers a decade earlier, Agatha's "heroics" land her in the hospital where she continues to relive her traumatic experience. Not hallucinations in the conventional sense, Agatha's nightmares are more accurately re-imaginings of her reality. Seemingly innocent of this ironic twist, Agatha explains to Adam:

> …all that time when I was dotty I had the most awful dreams. I thought we were all driving round and round in a motor race and none of us could stop, and there was an enormous audience composed entirely of gossip writers and gate crashers and Archie Schwert and people like that, all shouting at us at once to go faster, and car after car kept crashing until I was left all alone driving and driving – and then I used to crash and wake up. (*VB* 266)

Interrupted by the entry of a crowd of friends, the discussion of Agatha's dreams is replaced an impromptu party; but more than her dreams, what is displaced is the reality of Agatha's situation. Her dreams are not hallucinations but rather traumatic revisionings of

her racetrack experience. She is not crazy as much as she is traumatized by what Waugh might call the experience of the Younger Generation. Agatha's dreams recount her actual experiences: the confusion of appearance and reality and the disruption of the laws of cause and effect that underlie the circumstances of postwar Britain and its Younger Generation. Ironically, then, it is not madness or insanity per se that forces Agatha into the nursing home; rather, what the matron calls a "severe shock" (*VB* 262). In many ways, Agatha is a civilian version of the shell-shocked soldier except this time it is postwar life, not the trenches that causes the trauma.[35]

"*Faster. Faster*": confined to her hospital bed, forced to lie quietly, Agatha's mind still races. In her dreams, Agatha continues to drive No.13, speeding quickly along the curves of the racetrack towards the end of her life (*VB* 285). Traumatized by her experience, Agatha – like Alice on the other side of the looking glass – is going nowhere fast. Agatha's "*Faster. Faster*" could be the novel's mantra, the mantra of the Bright Young Things circling through London from party to party. But in the case of Agatha, irrevocably shell-shocked by postwar modernity, "*Faster. Faster*" is met by the stab of a hypodermic needle and the words of the nurse: "'There is nothing to worry about, dear…*nothing at all…nothing*'" (*VB* 285).[36]

"There is nothing to worry about" anticipates Adam's final return to Doubting Hall for Christmas. Impersonating Nina's husband, Ginger Littlejohn, Adam reenacts his two previous visits to Colonel Blount, both remarkable for the moments of

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[35] The "mad" pilot in the next room encourages the association of Agatha with traumatized war veterans.

[36] Adam goes to Agatha's funeral with Van; like Simon's funeral, it is sparsely attended.

misidentification that occur. This time, instead of the usual confusion and chaos that characterizes Doubting Hall, Adam and Nina are met with the order, stability, and the aura of tradition. A "WELCOME HOME" banner hanging in the hall recalls Colonel Blount's youth and his homecomings, first from school and then from the war (*VB* 287). After Christmas luncheon, Nina, Adam, and Colonel Blount participate in the tradition – "a yearly custom of some antiquity" – of viewing the decorations in the servants' hall; presents are exchanged, toasts made, and the carolers, who come every year, enhance the atmosphere of ritual that permeates the holiday at Doubting Hall. Even the film screening that punctuates Adam and Nina's visit seems to participate in the return of tradition that orders the holiday experience; although the most modern form of entertainment, the film is about eighteenth-century England.

But the film is a failure, cinematically and historically, and the tranquility that reigns over Doubting Hall at Christmas ephemeral. Like the Christmas truce of 1914, a "celebration of history and tradition" amidst the horrors of modern warfare (Eksteins 133), Adam and Nina's visit to Doubting Hall is an anomaly. Doubting Hall's version of the Christmas truce is, like it its historical counterpart, merely a prelude to disaster. For Woolf, the nineteenth century ended in 1900 although "the conditions went on" until August 1914 ("The Leaning Tower" 135), but an argument could be made that "the conditions" actually "went on" through the Christmas truce of 1914. After 1914, the "nature of war changed," the enemy and the gentleman became abstractions, and, as Eksteins poignantly explains, "the hero lost his name" (*Rites of Spring* 135). Disaster, too, follows the Christmas truce of *Vile Bodies*. The Rector announces the "most terrible and unexpected thing": "'*War has been declared*'" (*VB* 313). The irony of this

announcement is located in the Rector's preface; it may be terrible but it is not unexpected. The *next war* has already been "predicted" by Father Rothschild and, in many ways, the Bright Young Things have be impersonating soldiers throughout the novel.

"The most terrible and unexpected thing": "Happy Ending"

The last chapter, "Happy Ending," finds Adam "in the biggest battlefield in the history of the world" reading a letter from Nina (*VB* 314). Structurally, the novel returns to its beginning. This time however, circumstances are reversed: Adam *is* a soldier, not an implicit allusion, not returning to England but *fighting* in France. Historically, too, the novel has come full circle. It is a return to origins: the event that makes and marks the Younger Generation. It is the Great War all over again, but in the spirit of the Bright Young Things, bigger, bolder, and more outrageous. "The novel's final battlefield," according to Douglas Patey, "is simply a magnified rendering of all that has come before" (*The Life of Evelyn Waugh* 75).

But also, as if in response to Father Rothschild's "some way historical" prophecy, the final chapter also foreshadows what, in 1930, was only prescience: World War II. Reading the end of the novel as a forecast more than a return, Hynes proposes that the Bright Young Things of *Vile Bodies* are "proleptically veterans of the Second World War" (*Auden Generation* 61). Indelibly marked by World War I, the Younger Generation develops with and into World War II. Waugh himself conforms to Hynes' historical forecast; an adolescent while his brother was at war, writing about the Younger

Generation as the Great War is mythologized and World War II is prophesized, Waugh would eventually enter military service in 1939.[37]

Although characters like Guy Crouchback and Basil Seal in Waugh's World War II fiction initially believe that the next war *will* offer an opportunity or second chance for those whose lives were shaped and scarred by a war in which they did not participate, *Vile Bodies* does not even temporarily entertain this illusion. The members of the Younger Generation, differing from their elders in many ways, are distinguished perhaps most importantly in that "for them the myth of the Great War had already taken form when they reached maturity"; according to Hynes, "it was part of their world, it was the truth about war" (*War Imagined* 467). For Adam, Armistice Day is just another day, more important because it marks his trip to Doubting Hall than because of the remembrance it enacts (*VB* 84). The two minutes silence in *Vile Bodies* is followed immediately by Adam reading the gossip page in which he is identified as "'the brilliant young novelist,'" suggesting that Armistice Day, marked by the sale of artificial poppies, shares with the gossip pages a certain amount of insincerity. Waugh himself harbored contempt for the two minutes silence when it was instituted in 1919, recognizing even then the discrepancy between experience and sentiment, describing it as "a disgusting idea of artificial reverence and sentimentality" (Sykes 27).[38]

For Waugh who, according to Patey, "characteristically understood historical change as a process running not from good to bad, but from already bad to worse" the choice to

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[37] Waugh joined the Royal Marines in December of 1939 and continued military service until he was demobilized in 1945.

[38] For an account of the evolving significance of Armistice Day see Adrian Gregory's *The Silence of Memory* (1994).

conclude *Vile Bodies* with war is not arbitrary as Garnett proposes (*The Life of Evelyn Waugh* 74) nor is it as Christopher Sykes suggests a "skillfully contrived finale" (*Evelyn Waugh* 100). For Hynes, who calls the novel a "parable of bogusness," the lesson is located in the novel's conclusion: "the war that is inexorably approaching" (*Auden Generation* 63). Although Hynes, like many others, comes dangerously close to historical backshadowing – "a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events…is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*" (Bernstein 16) – one should not read the final chapter of *Vile Bodies* as solely a prediction of the next war. Coming of age under the shadow of war, all too familiar with the mythologies of Arcadia and Armageddon, and disillusioned by heroism, the Younger Generation experiences the failure of progress through a return to war, Waugh's ironic happy ending.

With the return of war the Younger Generation reach the epitome of Connolly's *Theory of Permanent Adolescence*. War thrusts them back into the atmosphere of their youth in which "darkened streets, food rations [and] the impending dread of the War Office telegram" were "observed as universal and presumed normal" ("The War and the Younger Generation" 62). Ironically, then, it is through "the war that is inexorably approaching" that the Bright Young Things find what otherwise seems to be absent in the novel: stability and tradition. In 1914, war was the antithesis of stability and tradition. In 1929, war is the perverse apotheosis of stability and tradition for those existing uncomfortably in a state of permanent, wartime adolescence. For the Bright Young Things, war offers a return to the "universal" and "normal," circumstances hitherto absent in their postwar through-the-looking-glass world.

Whereas Waugh's "Happy Ending" may, in many ways, provides a return to the "universal" and the "normal" it also maintains the tell-tale signs of interwar modernity. Instead of imaginary social celebrities in the gossip columns, it is the war news that is "made up." Nina, in her letter to Adam explains that "Van has got a divine job making up all the war news" and in a twist fitting for the creator of Imogen Quest, Adam reads that Van "invented a lovely story about [him] the other day, how [he'd] saved hundreds of people's lives" creating a "popular agitation" concerning Adam being awarded the V. C. (*VB* 314). Nina's letter also announces her pregnancy and implies that her husband, Ginger, is not the father: "But Ginger has quite made up his mind it's his, and is as pleased as anything, so that's all right" (*VB* 315). Having "quite forgiven [Adam] about last Christmas" and ignoring the potential consequences of Adam's and Nina's holiday tryst, Ginger, too, becomes an impostor, misidentifying himself as the father of Nina's baby.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the last chapter is Adam's encounter with the Drunk Major. A reappearing character in the novel, Adam initially meets the Drunk Major at Lottie's where Adam, under the influence of alcohol, entrusts the Major with his recently acquired one thousand pounds. The Major convinces Adam to bet his spoils on a "likely outsider for the November Handicap," "a horse named Indian Runner" (*VB* 53). From this moment on, the Drunk Major becomes an elusive phantom throughout the novel, appearing and disappearing, unable to be traced. Indian Runner wins the November Handicap and at the motor races the Drunk Major explains to Adam that he is now thirty-five thousand pounds richer (*VB* 242). But Adam loses track of the Drunk Major and, as the novel continues, Adam's hope of ever receiving his money decreases.

However, on the deserted battlefield – "The scene all around him was one of unrelieved desolation…every visible object was burnt or broken" – Adam finally comes face to face with the Drunk Major (*VB* 316). Although the Major does have Adam's money still, they both acknowledge that during war-time it will not be worth much: "'The pound's not worth much nowadays, is it?' 'About nothing'" (*VB* 317).

"About nothing" echoes Agatha's last moments and suggests that although some version of "normal" might have returned with war, "about nothing" has changed. The Bright Young Things are still up to their old tricks: Van invents the soon-to-be-history of the "next war" like it is gossip; Ginger masquerades as the father of Nina's baby and misidentifies Archie as a spy, continuing the identity-crises that punctuate the novel; Adam is still broke and drinking is still his preferred coping strategy. In the end, with Adam, the Drunk Major, and Mrs. Ape's fallen-angel-prostitute Chastity in an abandoned Daimler limousine trying to make the best of an uncertain situation with champagne, the "biggest battlefield in the history of the world" becomes an ironic version of one of the Bright Young Things' many fancy dress parties. A kind of War party with the attendees attired in military dress, the "Happy Ending" of the novel concludes with the Drunk Major and Chastity getting cozy in the backseat while Adam drifts off to sleep, as he did at Archie Schwert's Savage party. Perhaps there is no difference between the wasteland of interwar modernity and the wasteland of war in which Adam finds himself. Reality, for the Bright Young Things is what they make it to be. Connolly was right to call reality "a shifting thing," both "the nature of things as they are and as they will be" (*Enemies of Promise* 176-7). For himself and his generation "what people want to happen is real if it

can be willed to happen" (*Enemies of Promise* 176-7). And, as a historical reading of

Vile Bodies suggests, the haunting reality for the Bright Young Things is war.

Chapter 2

Decadence and Dandyism in the 1930s:

Christopher Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories*

"My generation was brought up to regard luxury from an aesthetic standpoint. Since the War, people don't seem to feel that any more…At times, one feels guilty, oneself, with so much unemployment and distress everywhere…Things are so very complex, nowadays."
                                  – Christopher Isherwood, "The Last of Mr. Norris"

"Hating his father's business and his brother's science, he made music and literature into a religious cult…To his pleasure and surprise, people appeared to be listening to what he said. It wasn't until he had done this often that he began to notice their air of slight embarrassment. 'Somehow or other,' said Peter, 'I always struck the wrong note.'"
                                  – Christopher Isherwood, "On Ruegen Island"

Invited to have lunch with the Landauers, whose daughter, Natalia, the narrator, Christopher Isherwood, tutors in English, Isherwood is confronted with questions both provocative and political:

> "This is a very interesting problem," interrupted Herr Landauer, looking
>
> benevolently round upon us all and masticating with the greatest
>
> satisfaction: "Shall we allow that the man of genius is an exceptional
>
> person who may do exceptional things? Or shall we say: No – you may
>
> write a beautiful poem or paint a beautiful picture, but in your daily life
>
> you must behave like an ordinary person? We will not allow you to be
>
> *extra*-ordinary…Your dramatist Oscar Wilde…this is another case. I put
>
> the case to you, Mr. Isherwood. I should like very much to hear your
>
> opinion. Was your English Law justified in punishing Oscar Wilde, or
>
> was it not justified? Please tell me what you think?" ("The Landauers"
>
> 150)

Herr Landauer's meditation on genius and degeneracy represents more than a desire to "shock" and appear "modern" while in the company of the "vairy intelligent young man" who tutors his daughter in English ("The Landauers"153). As a successful Jewish businessman in Berlin in 1930, Herr Landauer's "modern" subject matter uncannily anticipates Fascist ideology – as exemplified in the Nazi's 1937 Degenerate Art Exhibition – which, by the narrative's 1933, will have Herr Landauer exiled in Paris and his nephew Bernhard Landauer killed.

As the Nazis rise to power in the 1930s, modern art is not the only recipient of the damning label, degenerate. From the avant-garde to the social delinquent to the homosexual to the Jew, anyone who stands as an exception to the Ayran rule, anyone who is, in the words of Herr Landauer, "*extra*-ordinary," is in danger. Herr Landauer's question to "Mr. Isherwood" – "Was your English Law justified in punishing Oscar Wilde, or was it not justified?" – suggests that how "exceptions" are handled is not only an issue within the political and cultural discourse of 1930s Germany. Rather, Herr Landauer's question gives voice to a concern held by Christopher Isherwood, the author of *The Berlin Stories* (1939), and shared by many of the Younger Generation: is national history justified in who it deems exceptional and who it renders merely an exception? Who is written into history and who is excluded is a preoccupation for the Younger Generation, a generation simultaneously outside and within a national story that since the Great War has been dominated by military masculinities.

English history, too, has punished the "exceptional" and the "*extra*-ordinary," as the Wilde example suggests, and as a member of what one may call a generation of exceptions – too young to fight in the war that killed so many – Isherwood is ambivalent

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as to whether his symbolic disenfranchisement from modern British masculinity is justified. Men of privilege and culture spared the horrors of battle yet unwilling heirs to its consequences, members of the self-identified Younger Generation are exceptions and thus burdened with the responsibility of being somehow exceptional.[1] Often literally as well as metaphorically orphaned, members of, yet marginalized within, a world of cultural, educational, and social privilege, Isherwood and others of his generation become exceptions to a national masculinity validated by Great War history-cum-mythology. With no war to write about, disillusioned by national heroics, and critical of the Establishment, the constituent institutions of the British Empire and its national economy, members of the Younger Generation seek to historicize themselves in a national narrative dominated by power, imperialism, and militarism by identifying fellow "outsiders within": men of privilege and position whose social performance, cultural politics, and deviant sexuality make them celebrities in and scapegoats for a national order both arrogant and anxious.

Disillusioned, directionless, and increasingly dissatisfied, the Younger Generation finds alternate father figures in the dandies of the British 1890s.[2] Antagonists to the twin

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[1] For Isherwood, this position is best exemplified in the figure of the Sacred Orphan. Isherwood writes in the "Afterward" of *Kathleen and Frank* (1972) that being a Sacred Orphan "had its disadvantages": "indeed it was a kind of curse which was going to be upon him, seemingly, for the rest of his life" (*Kathleen and Frank* 502). Understood as an obligation to be worthy "at all times and in all ways" of his father, Frank, who was killed in battle and thus a "Hero-Father," the role of Sacred Orphan was attended by guilt, and for Isherwood, this guilt became a force he reacted against with rejection and rage (*Kathleen and Frank* 502).

[2] Perhaps the most comprehensive history of dandyism in Britain is Ellen Moers' *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (1960). Many other studies address the dandy figure in the 1890s often with a specific focus, be it Oscar Wilde, aestheticism, queer sexuality, the continental context, etc. See Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913), Alan

nineteenth-century ideologies of progress and imperialism, deviants according to the

conventions of Victorian morality, and complex parodies of British gentlemanliness, the

1890s dandy provides the Younger Generation with a historical corollary. An "outsider

within," the 1890s dandy, like the Younger Generation, is an inheritor of cultural

privilege as much as he critiques it, exploits it, and is victimized by it. In *Vile Bodies*,

Waugh humorously represents the Younger Generation's preoccupation with the

"vanished world of Wilde and the Decadents" and "the earlier blue-china atmosphere of

Wilde and Pater's Oxford" (Page 7) by way of Adam Fenwick-Symes' morning-after

reverie. Adam, hungover and exhausted after yet another party, conjures the *fin de siècle*

philosophies that are put into service of what Modris Eksteins calls the "hedonism and

narcissism of remarkable proportions" (*Rites of Spring* 256) that has come to characterize

the twenties:

> Adam ate some breakfast. No kipper, he reflected, is ever as good as it
>
> smells…he lay back for a little in his bed thinking about the smells of
>
> food, of the greasy horror of fried fish and the deeply moving smell that
>
> came from it; of the intoxicating breath of bakeries and the dullness of
>
> buns…he planned dinners of enchanting aromatic foods that should be
>
> carried under the nose, snuffed and thrown to the dogs…endless dinners,
>
> in which one could alternate flavour with flavour from sunset to dawn

Sinfield's *The Wilde Century* (1994), Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (1990), Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990), Jessica Feldman's *Gender on the Divide: The Dandy in Modernist Literature* (1993), Charles Bernheimer's *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe* (2002), Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (1986).

without satiety…Oh for the wings of a dove, thought Adam, wondering a

little from the point as he fell asleep again (everyone is liable to this

ninetyish feeling in the early morning after a party). (*Vile Bodies* 80-1)

Those familiar with the bible of decadence will recognize Adam's evocation of J. K.

Huysman's *Against Nature* (1884). Characterized by Wilde's Dorian Gray as either the

"spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confession of a modern sinner"

(*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 92), *Against Nature* depicts the closeted and neurotic yet

sensual and exotic life of Des Esseintes, a wealthy, intelligent, and eccentric dandy-

aesthete whose reclusive existence consists of vicarious sensation and archived

knowledge.[3] For Dorian Gray, under the influence of Des Esseintes and Lord Henry,

Against Nature portrays "a new Hedonism that was to recreate life…it was to have its

service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that

would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to

be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be"

(*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 95).

Infused with Paterian tones – echoing throughout Wilde's novel is Pater's

infamous charge, "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this

ecstasy, is success in life" (*The Renaissance* 152) – Dorian Gray offers an approach to

life that does not differ greatly from the *carpe diem* lifestyle depicted by Waugh's Bright

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[3] Jean Des Esseintes, the narrator and main character of *Against Nature*, is the last
member of his once powerful family. A recluse and aesthete, Des Esseintes disdains
nineteenth-century bourgeois mores and thus retreats into a world of his own creation
based on his aesthetic philosophies. *Against Nature* (*À rebours*) quickly became the
ultimate example of decadence.

Young Things.[4] In their own madcap manner, these caricatures of the Younger

Generation live not for the fruits of experience but for experience itself. Considering the

description of the Great War presented by soldiers and veterans, as well as Eksteins, Paul

Fussell, and other scholars, it is not surprising that the Younger Generation was averse to

sacrifice and disillusioned by the "fruits of experience": with millions of soldiers dead

and those returning to England welcomed by unemployment and burdened by shell-shock

the "fruits of experience" suggest a meager harvest. But the lives of the Younger

Generation are not confined to the roaring twenties. They do grow up, and, as implied by

the ending of *Vile Bodies* – "the biggest battlefield in the history of the world" (*Vile

Bodies* 314) – growing up means an increasing awareness of their place in national

history. Without a war to fight, Waugh's Bright Young Things are their own "Lost

Generation." Unlike their privileged and talented predecessors who in losing their lives

gained a place in history, the Bright Young Things are lost to a national history oriented

by the cultural rupture of 1914.[5] Failing as writers, gossip columnists, and racecar

drivers, the Bright Young Things emerge as exceptions within a national story dominated

by soldiers and war.

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[4] Wilde was a student of Pater's at Oxford and as the "Professor of Aesthetics," a popularizer of Pater's philosophies. Murray Pittock explains that "during his last years at Oxford and his American tour at the beginnings of the 1880s, [Wilde] transmuted the hunt for beauty and ecstasy which Pater valorized into the more easily accessible metaphors of display and indulgence" (*Spectrum of Decadence* 36). Wilde was, according to Pittock, a "Paterian clothes-horse" advocating the "pursuit of individual fulfillment through beauty" (*Spectrum of Decadence* 36, 31).

[5] As previously mentioned, the poet David Jones refers to the Great War as "the Break" (qtd. in Eksteins 211). Virginia Woolf, in "The Leaning Tower," makes a similar claim, suggesting that the nineteenth century continued until 1914.

In 1930, the year *Vile Bodies* was published, having recently graduated from

university, Eksteins' narcissistic hedonists perceived Wildean decadence as but another

costume in the closet of fancy dress: perfect for parties and their attendant hangovers.

However, as the decade progresses and postwar euphoria is replaced by political tensions

and economic instability at home and abroad, the 1890s dandy acquires a more historical

and symbolic significance. If *Vile Bodies* portrays decadent frivolity by caricaturing the

Younger Generation in the twenties, then Waugh's World War II novel, *Put Out More*

Flags (1942), conjures a "ninetyish feeling" on the other side of the interwar divide. In

this novel, Waugh's caricature becomes more overtly and complexly political. No longer

oblivious pleasure-seekers, Waugh's characters face what Lady Seal, without irony,

perceives as her son's inheritance: war (*Put Out More Flags* 18).

A survivor of a decade-old world where Waugh's "imagination still fondly

lingers" (*Put Out More Flags*, "Dedicatory Letter"),[6] Ambrose Silk is a contemporary of

Lady Seal's son, Basil Seal, with whom he "maintained a shadowy, mutually derisive

acquaintance since they were undergraduates" (*Put Out More Flags* 36). Ambrose is a

dandy-aesthete whose work for the Ministry of Information during World War II takes

the form of a publication called the *Ivory Tower*, considered "something like the old

Yellow Book" (*Put Out More Flags* 237).[7] "'Well, that was a failure…in the end,'"

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[6] Waugh dedicates *Put Out More Flags* to Randolph Churchill and evokes in the
"Dedicatory Letter" "the survivors of the world we both knew ten years ago, which you
have outflown in the empyrean of strenuous politics."

[7] Self-described as belonging "hopelessly" to the "age of the ivory tower," Ambrose was
"respected as a writer by almost everyone except those with whom he most consorted.
Poppet and her friends looked on him as a survivor from the *Yellow Book*…His very
appearance, with the swagger and flash of the young Disraeli, made him a conspicuous
figure among them" (*Put Out More Flags* 38).

Ambrose's publisher-turned-government-official replies to this description, simultaneously acknowledging the legacy of the 1890s and foreshadowing the results of the *Ivory Tower* (*Put Out More Flags* 237). And considering the historical circumstances – World War II – Ambrose, like the *Yellow Book*, seems doomed to "failure." A homosexual, Jewish intellectual with an art-for-art's-sake temperament and connections with left-wing artists, Ambrose is a likely target for Fascist sentiment. Yet unlike many European Jews who flee Europe for safety in England, Ambrose is forced to *flee from* England for safety.

But Ambrose is not so easily written off as a failure, as Marina MacKay's reading of the novel suggests. Rather, Ambrose represents the failure of an interwar historiography – or, perhaps more accurately, mythology – that positions politics and aesthetics as enemies battling over the fate of British culture. MacKay explains, "the novel makes the war a forceful reality check to the 'taking sides' of the 1930s. For all the political grandstanding of the period, Ambrose finds himself alone and trapped between two terrifying totalitarianisms, subject of persecution by either or both of them" (*Modernism and World War II* 122). A composite character derived from real-life thirties notables, the left-leaning Brian Howard and the culturally conservative Harold Acton, Ambrose evokes and troubles the exclusivity of conventional accounts of the 1930s – like Humphrey Carpenter's and Samuel Hynes' – that portray the decade as a choice between, on one (left) hand, the engaged and political Auden Generation and, on the other (right) hand, the Brideshead Generation of Eton-and-Oxford aesthetes.[8]

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[8] Most notable in the propagation of this division are Humphrey Carpenter, whose *The Brideshead Generation* (1990) positions Waugh at the center of the witty and reactionary group known for developing conservative cultural values and a love for the landed

By linking Ambrose's short-lived little magazine the *Ivory Tower* to the *Yellow Book* of the 1890s, Waugh draws a connection between his historical experience as a member of the Younger Generation and the dandy of the 1890s, thus aligning the 1930s within a national narrative that reaches beyond the "once upon a time" of Edwardian England, its attendant Great War climax, and postwar dénouement. The *Yellow Book*, "associated with all that was bizarre and queer in art and life, with all that was outrageously modern" was, according to Holbrook Jackson, "newness in *excelsis*: novelty new and unashamed" (*The Eighteen-Nineties* 54). In *Put Out More Flags*, Ambrose's *Ivory Tower* is nothing new – but perhaps this is exactly Waugh's point. It is not newness or novelty that the Younger Generation is after; rather, by locating a historical corollary in the 1890s dandy, the Younger Generation seeks to revise the national story that since World War I has rendered them in many ways, like the *Yellow Book* and its dandies, a "failure."

Far from labeling the decadent 1890s a failure, Jackson, in his book *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913), characterizes the decade as

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aristocracy, and Hynes, whose *The Auden Generation* has encouraged the critical collusion of the Auden Generation with the historical designation of the decade, as examined by Marsha Bryant (*Auden and Documentary in the 1930s* 4-5). Valentine Cunningham is another outspoken voice in the literary-historical discourse contextualizing the 1930s; although he does not stress a separation within and among thirties writers, he has contributed to the sense of exclusivity that surrounds these, primarily male, writers. Consequently, female authors like Stevie Smith, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Rosamond Lehmann are rendered marginal figures in the literary histories of the 1930s as well as women authors – like Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Djuna Barnes – who wrote through the thirties despite conventionally being associated with an earlier, high modernist aesthetic. In the case of Barnes this is especially problematic since her most famous novel, *Nightwood*, is published in 1936.

an epoch of experiment, with some achievement and some remorse. The

former is to be seen in certain lasting works of art and in the acceptance of

new, and sometimes revolutionary, social ideas; the latter in the repentant

attitude of so many poets and other artists of the time who, after tasting

more life than was good for them, reluctantly sought peace in an escape

from material concerns. (13)

As a decade that "began with a dash of life and ended with a retreat – but not defeat" the

1890s, in Jackson's characterization, has much in common with the 1930s (*The Eighteen-

Nineties* 13). And it is this commonality that the Younger Generation evokes as many of

their ranks retreat from view as the 1930s end and war begins. As representatives of the

now thirty-something Younger Generation in *Put Out More Flags*, Basil "retreats" into

the Establishment, "He has joined a special *corps d'élite* that is being organized" (*Put

Out More Flags* 285), and Ambrose "retreats" from England, because, he thinks

mistakenly but ominously, of the "dark, nomadic strain in his blood" (*Put Out More

Flags* 282). Unlike the left-leaning poets Parsnip and Pimpernell who "escape" from

England for America – caricatures of Auden and Isherwood – Ambrose is "exiled" to

Ireland disguised as a priest thanks to the political deceptions and double-crossings of

Basil. In this manner, even within Waugh's humor and farce, Ambrose emerges as kind

of tragic hero, like Pound's decadent doppelganger from *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920),

E. P., "out of key with his time": a Nero figure, strumming the strings of a decadent

modernism as its Rome is slowly engulfed in flames. Evoking the end of an era and a

figurative changing of the guard, *Put Out More Flags* brings the curtain down on the

1930s as well as historicizes the decade: Basil does come into his "inheritance" and

Ambrose, like Jackson's *fin de siècle* dandies before him, disappears from the scene, vilified and victimized.

"A race of ghosts" is how Waugh describes his characters in the "Dedicatory Letter" that prefaces *Put Out More Flags*: "survivors of the world" now ten years old and as such "no longer contemporary in sympathy," satisfied to live "on delightfully in holes and corners" and that lately, Waugh is writing after the start of World War II, "have been disturbed in their habits by the rough intrusion of current history."[9] It is history's rough intrusion in which I am interested and why this history, specifically as viewed from the perspective of writers in the 1930s, disturbed the ghosts of the dandies on the far side of the millennial divide. By evoking tropes of decadence and embodying the 1890s dandy in 1930s fiction, the Younger Generation, I argue, aligns themselves with a certain kind of history. If decadence is the "dark side" of nineteenth-century progress – industrial, scientific, economic, and imperial – then the *fin de siècle* dandy is its specter, an "outsider within" whose social politics, cultural performance, and deviant sexuality offer

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[9] With the exception of Wilde, whose escape was not so happy, and Audrey Beardsley, whose Keatsian death added a note of romantic tragedy to the movement, many of the decadent dandies of the *Yellow Book* also have "lived on delightfully in holes and corners" as Establishment figures: like the outspoken editor and critic Arthur Waugh who contributed to the first number of *The Yellow Book* (Jackson 265) or literary antiquities like Max Beerbohm and Reggie Turner. As one of the few surviving members of Wilde's circle and obsessed with his memories of Wilde, Turner is like a living memorial to the 1890s (see Acton's 1948 *Memoirs of an Aesthete*). Isherwood describes meeting Beerbohm at the Colefax dinner party where he also met Virginia Woolf and Somerset Maugham: "He was only ten years older than Virginia but seemed helplessly becalmed in the past" (*Christopher and His Kind* 326). But, by the late 1930s, so, too, do the moderns live on "delightfully in holes and corners." In their case, the "holes and corners" are that of the British literary establishment: Eliot and Woolf especially, have the privilege to publish in the *Daily Worker* without being "accused" of Communist leanings and facilitate the careers of choice left-wing writers, while exploring in their own writing the more traditional mythology of the British tradition of agrarian pastoral (see Jed Esty's *A Shrinking Island*).

an alternative, decadent history to a period otherwise mythologized as the pinnacle of progress and imperialism.

One of the thirties most comprehensive compendiums of such "ghosts" is Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories*. A contemporary of Waugh, although situated across from him along the divide separating the "sides" of interwar politics and culture, Isherwood is equally interested in the "race of ghosts" Waugh conjures in *Put Out More Flags*. However, if Waugh's ghosts "live on delightfully in holes and corners…disturbed in their habits by the rough intrusion of current history" then Isherwood's ghosts are "The Lost": a "wonderfully ominous" title that signifies for Isherwood not only "The Astray" and "The Doomed," "referring tragically to the political events in Germany and our epoch," but also "The Lost" in "quotation marks," "referring satirically to those individuals who respectable society shuns in horror" (*The Berlin Stories* v). Mr. Norris, Sally Bowles, Bernhard Landauer, and even Baron von Pregnitz are Isherwood's lost souls, outmoded yet ahead of their time, disreputable perhaps but admirably human, seemingly passive yet inherently political. In conjuring his own race of ghosts and documenting the "rough intrusion of current history," Isherwood looks forward to the future, Europe's, England's, and his own, in order to tell not only the story of Berlin in the 1930s but also the story of the thirties author negotiating the contested frontiers of interwar politics, aesthetics after modernism, and national history postwar.

Constellating the 1930s with the 1890s may seem odd: politics on one hand, aestheticism on the other.[10] In literary history and criticism the 1930s are known simply

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[10] Cassandra Laity recently edited a special edition of *Modernism/Modernity* (2008) that explores the relationship between 1890s decadence and the "long" modernism ushered in by new modernist studies. The edition, according to Laity, intends to complicate the

and almost exclusively as the political decade. During the thirties, so the story goes, art

took up the banner of politics, specifically left-wing politics, in service of economic and

social revolution. Marxism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the evils of capitalism,

according to critics, color the decade red, and, as the conventional accounts suggest, the

subject of both poetry and prose, rebelling against the reign of modernism, is group

action, anti-Fascism, and the plight of the working class. The 1890s, conversely, are

characterized infamously by an art-for-art's-sake sentiment that privileges artifice and

urbanity, performance and parody, excess and indulgence. In the 1890s, such decadence

was indicted as degenerate. As the nineteenth century neared its millennial closure,

1890s decadence disturbed the reign of progress, industrialization, and science that fueled

imperial and national hubris as well as initiated the social and moral anxiety that has

come to characterize the *fin de siècle* in Britain.[11] However, a closer look at the 1930s

suggests that 1890s decadence – especially its dandies and their attendant transgressive

sexuality – exerted its influence and offered inspiration to thirties writers struggling to

negotiate the political mandate of the interwar period with their modernist literary

inheritance. By evoking the 1890s, writers of the 1930s rehabilitate a decade condemned

as degenerate by revealing its nuanced and complicated progressive politics and, in the

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"primacy on Benjamin's formulaic Baudelaire" that seems to govern scholarly
investigations of the *fin de siècle* as well as modernism's relationship to the 1890s
("Beyond Baudelaire, Decadent Aestheticism and Modernity" 427).

[11] Much literary and cultural history investigates the 1890s in Britain and the decade's
relationship to the reigning Victorian ideologies of progress and imperialism as well as
the discourse of degeneration that pervades the British *fin de siècle*: see Edward
Chamberlin and Sander Gilman's *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (1985),
William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel: 1880-1940* (1994), Murray
Pittock's *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (1993), among others.

process, historicize their own political moment through an exploration of the position of the author after modernism and after the Great War.

"A Ninetyish Feeling"

Isherwood's Mr. Norris is one member of the "race of ghosts" disturbed by "the rough intrusion of current history;" one of "The Lost" that wanders in and out of Isherwood's Berlin narratives. The centerpiece of Isherwood's first Berlin story, "The Last of Mr. Norris," Mr. Norris is remembered for his eyes. An "unusually light blue," his eyes seem to the narrator, the Isherwood character William Bradshaw,[12] to signify the power of memory, the weight of history, and the fear that attends life in the 1930s present:

> My first impression was that the stranger's eyes were of an unusually light blue. They met mine for several blank seconds, vacant, unmistakably scared. Startled and innocently naughty, they half reminded me of an incident I couldn't quite place; something which had happened a long time ago, to do with the upper fourth form classroom. They were the eyes of a schoolboy surprised in the act of breaking one of the rules. ("The Last of Mr. Norris" 1)[13]

The vacancy and fear that Bradshaw recognizes in Mr. Norris' gaze are the symptoms of the time: economic uncertainty and political instability pervade the continent as the

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[12] The first of Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories* (1939), "The Last of Mr. Norris" ("Mr. Norris Changes Trains" in Britain), initially published in 1935, features William Bradshaw as the narrator instead of the Christopher Isherwood character that narrates the other Berlin stories. This is not an anomaly to the Isherwoodian tradition of namesake narrators, however, as William and Bradshaw are Isherwood's two middle names.

[13] "The Last of Mr. Norris" will hitherto be abbreviated as "LMN."

implications of the Peace Treaty breed discontent and distrust among winners and losers alike. Crossing the frontier by train – "all these frontiers…such a horrible nuisance" ("LMN" 3) – has Mr. Norris anxious and watchful. Fearing the inevitable inspection of his passport, Mr. Norris' behavior, nervous, distracted, apprehensive, casts a shadow of suspicion on his introduction: "Arthur Norris, Gent. Or shall we say: Of independent means?" ("LMN" 4).[14] "Quite a young man" in 1898, Mr. Norris aligns himself with a class of British gentlemen who were "brought up to regard luxury from an aesthetic standpoint" ("LMN" 11) but "since the War," Mr. Norris admits, he has rather "lost touch with my English friends" ("LMN" 5), implying that his lifestyle is no longer welcome in Britain's far from luxurious 1930s atmosphere. In this manner, Mr. Norris is himself "something which has happened a long time ago," out of place in interwar society, a startling memory of something innocent and naughty that resonates with the repressed desires and perverse violence of the British public schools. As one of Isherwood's "The Lost," Mr. Norris simultaneously embodies the avant-garde and the old guard, the young rebel and the historical icon, like Pound's E. P., "out of key with his time" (*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*).

But in some ways, Mr. Norris is the antidote for his time. Crossing historical as much as political and national frontiers, he represents a time before the war, significantly, a time preceding even the "once upon a time" of Georgian England: the last decade of

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[14] In "The Poet and the City," Auden comments on the status of the gentleman: "Until quite recently a man was proud of not having to earn his own living and ashamed of being obliged to earn it, but today, would any man dare describe himself when applying as *Gentleman*, even if, as a matter of fact, he has independent means and no job?" (*The Dyer's Hand* 74). Auden goes on to discuss the social implications of being a writer and a poet.

Victoria's reign, the 1890s. In a modern world that marks its violent birth with the outbreak of war in the twentieth century, Mr. Norris offers, by way of his dandy performance and *fin de siècle* aura, an alternative to national narratives dictated by imperialist progress and war. And unlike many of his peers – the Fathers who became instrumental in the Great War and who have since become the Old Men synonymous with the Establishment – Mr. Norris is an antique, a well-preserved heirloom incongruous among the shabby furnishings of postwar modernity.[15]

However, after a "most excellent lunch" in the dining car, Mr. Norris offers to Bradshaw a surprisingly insightful analysis of the interwar period. For a brief moment, it is Mr. Norris, not Bradshaw, who best articulates the plight of writers like Isherwood who are searching, as he details in his autobiographical novel *Lions and Shadows*, for "Isherwood the Artist." Caught between modernism's setting sun and the lengthening shadow of 1930s politics, the commitment to aesthetic innovation championed by modernism is a luxury and, according to Mr. Norris' commentary, luxury has become harder and harder to justify:

> "My generation was brought up to regard luxury from an aesthetic
>
> standpoint. Since the War, people don't seem to feel that any more. Too
>
> often they are merely gross. They take their pleasures too coarsely, don't

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[15] Such visual and historical incongruity is captured in a passage from the first "A Berlin Diary." Here, Isherwood-the-narrator describes the Bernstein's house: "The hall of the Bernstein's house has metal-studded doors and a steamer clock fastened to the wall with bolt-heads. There are modernist lamps, designed to look like pressure-gauges, thermometers and switchboard dials. But the furniture doesn't match the house and it fittings. The place is like a power-station which the engineers have tried to make comfortable with chairs and tabled from an old-fashioned, highly respectable house. On the austere walls, hang highly varnished nineteenth-century landscapes in massive gold frames" (14-5).

you find? At times, one feels guilty, oneself, with so much unemployment

and distress everywhere. The conditions in Berlin are very bad…In my

small way, I do what I can to help, but it is such a drop in the ocean." Mr.

Norris sighed and touched his napkin with his lips.

"And here we are, riding in the lap of luxury. The social reformers

would condemn us, no doubt. All the same, I suppose if somebody didn't

use this dining-car, we should have all these employees on the dole as

well…Dear me, dear me. Things are so very complex, nowadays."

("LMN" 11)

Things are so very complex nowadays, especially for the authors-cum-Marxists who, like

Isherwood, feel compelled to examine and evaluate their allegiances: to the "luxury" of

an aesthetic perspective, on one hand, and the necessity of social and political

commitment, on the other. The guilt Mr. Norris experiences as he partakes of "truly

delicious" kidneys and very good hock is akin to the guilt and division experienced by

the thirties writer seemingly forced to choose between his cultural privilege, its attendant

modernist inheritance, and the political mandate of his generation.

Thus, when the 1890s dandy Mr. Norris laments knowingly in the 1930s that

"things are so very complex nowadays" the implication is that things are not necessarily

new. Mr. Norris is quick to assess the current situation because as "quite a young man"

in "ninety-eight" he represents British decadence in the *fin de siècle*: a nineties version of

the Younger Generation, the British dandy was an "outsider-within" whose luxury was

both burden and blessing. Rising literary and artistic stars that incited both admiration

and passionate critique in a period of intense cultural anxiety and apprehension facilitated

by rapid industrialization, intense urbanization, increasing crime, and fears of a shrinking empire, the 1890s dandy, too, was caught: caught between privilege and tradition, on one hand, and cultural rebellion and artistic innovation, on the other. A member of the very bourgeois establishment he rebelled against, the 1890s dandy benefited from the privileges and traditions that his art and performance sought to undercut, challenge, and overthrow. It is the luxury of class privileges like wealth, education, and connections that furnish the dandy with the means to rebel so successfully. However, "successful" rebellion comes at a price: marginalized within social circles of wealth and privilege, the dandy is an "outsider-within" whose threat to the establishment that supports him places him in danger of vilification and victimization.[16]

In the case of Wilde, for example, artistic innovation went hand-in-hand with an agenda of social progress and cutting cultural critique. Be it socialism, penal reform, or a veiled critique of heterosexuality, Wilde attempted to marry avant-garde aesthetics with progressive and often paradoxical cultural politics.[17] As public figures that pushed the envelope of propriety and acceptability in the last decade of an age famous for its decorum, modesty, and morality, the dandies were labeled degenerates, a diagnosis that condemned anything new and unfamiliar as dangerous, insane, and criminal. The last

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[16] Moers' example of the dandy Benjamin Disraeli reveals the fine line between being "in" and "out" that characterized the exclusive social circles that the dandies both cultivated and governed and how, as a class-climber, Disraeli had a nuanced understanding of how quickly and easily the dividing line could shift and of the severity of the consequences of being left "out."

[17] Wilde wrote *Soul of a Man Under Socialism* (1891), was an advocate for penal reform, and his *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889) alludes to homosexuality (or, more specifically, romantic love between men and boys) by evoking the muse of Shakespeare's sonnets, "Willie Hughes."

decade in a century characterized by the ideology of progress – imperial but also

scientific, technological, and industrial – the 1890s were in some ways the apotheosis of

Victoria's reign. However, as many scholars note, accompanying this progress was the

parallel but inverse evolution of the concept of decline – imperial, cultural, and moral.[18]

Fear of decline became "institutionalized" as degeneration: a potent admixture of fiction

and fact, derived from popularized Darwinian and Lamarkian biology and propagated by

new disciplines such as criminology, psychology, and sociology (Chamberlain and

Gilman vix).

Degeneration, as an "organizational scheme or discursive mode," explained the

unfamiliar and the undesirable "according to quite tidy contraries" like "rising and

falling, going forward and going backward, regenerating and degenerating" (Chamberlain

and Gilman x) and "encouraged the appraisal of social problems from the point of view

of national interest" (Nye 60). And within the pervasive discourse of degeneration, the

artist became a social problem of national interest. According to Max Nordau's

extremely popular book, *Degeneration* (1895), "degenerates are not always criminals,

prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists" (vii).[19]

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[18] Robert Nye explains that "the concept of decline was conceptually inseparable from
that of progress" and thus decadence became an inevitable consequence of progress
("Sociology and Degeneration" 49). For Vincent Sherry, "Victoria's reign, even as it
marked a high point in global domain, located the moment of imminent downturn. This
perception was not reserved for later ages. This condition was a matter of ready (if
suppressed) recognition, and it afforded the circumstance of a decadence that was
specifically English and at the same time highly conscious of its historical [Roman]
precedents" ("T.S. Eliot, Late Empire and Decadence" 123).

[19] The popular conflation of the decadent artist and the degenerate was largely the work
of Max Nordau and his book, *Degeneration*. William Greenslade explains that the
"decadent artist was stigmatized as the unhealthy 'other,' the carrier of a prevailing
cultural sickness" (*Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel* 21). Many critics however,

In this manner, all things new, unfamiliar, and modern in the realm of art and culture were in danger of being linked to criminality, mental illness, and delinquency. Wilde makes the consequences of this association abundantly clear. Imprisoned for disrupting artistic and cultural codes of acceptability as much as for violating the conventions of sexual morality, Wilde illustrates the tug-of-war between art and cultural politics that characterize the experience of the 1890s dandy.

A similar tug-of-war marks the experience of the 1930s writer as Herr Landauer's question to Isherwood suggests. On one hand, as the first postwar generation – the citizens of the future that their fathers and elder brothers fought and, in large numbers, died for in World War I – Isherwood and his contemporaries are unwilling inheritors of their nation's aspirations and expectations. Like Isherwood's figure of the Sacred Orphan, the Younger Generation is expected to live up to the standard of patriotism and heroism set by their fathers, biological and symbolic. However, critical of what they perceive as the blind patriotism and inflated heroism generated and maintained by governmental rhetoric and idealistic national historiographies, the members of the Younger Generation are frustrated by and rebel against the national assumption of their exceptionalness.

Rather than exceptional, the Younger Generation feels more like an exception. Educated at public school, followed by Oxford or Cambridge, these writers were

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most immediately George Bernard Shaw and William James, were quick to identify the manifestation of "degenerate" tendencies as Nordau details them in Nordau himself: according to Shaw, Nordau was "falling prey to the very condition he was condemning in others" (qtd. in Greenslade 125). Regardless of the numerous contemporary critiques of Nordau, his work was very influential and helped give voice and shape to the pervasive and ambiguous millennial anxiety.

expected to enter the national Establishment. However, in many cases literally as well as

metaphorically orphaned by the war and consequently very critical of the Establishment,

members of the Younger Generation consider themselves without viable models and

mentors in a time marked by peace but saturated with war. As writers they were acutely

aware of the effects of militarism on the national imagination, and the war memoirs that

flooded the literary market in the late twenties only reinforced the war's position at the

center of British masculine identity. With no war experience to write about, but

determined to have a voice and a role in the construction of a national identity that

threatened to be dominated by Great War history-cum-mythology, the Younger

Generation turned their own lives into fiction in order to present themselves as

participants in a national narrative that acknowledged them only as sons.

In many ways, members of the Younger Generation are not only sons, but also

"second sons." After the war, Woolf's procession of educated men is disrupted: the path

from university to profession to peerage seemed as arduous as it did undesirable to the

Younger Generation. Armed with the mores and money of their class but critical of and

uninterested in the roles bequeathed to them by national tradition and cultural

patrilineage, the Younger Generation is disillusioned and symbolically disenfranchised.

As the Isherwood character in *Lions and Shadows* asks: "What – after twelve years at

school and university, with well over a thousand pounds spent on my education – was I

really qualified to do?" (199).[20] Even in their literary aspirations the Younger Generation

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[20] Waugh's characters demonstrate this phenomenon: in *Decline and Fall*, *Vile Bodies*,
and even *Put Out More Flags*, many of the main as well as supporting characters do not
hold permanent jobs and often plotlines revolve around their inability to acquire and keep
employment. Many of the Younger Generation found themselves in similar situations:
Isherwood purposely failed his university exams, enrolled and dropped out of medical

never seemed to measure up: second in line to modernism, and implicitly second rate, thirties writing is customarily overlooked in the longer literary history of the twentieth century, which remains dominated by the high modernism that preceded it in the 1910s and 1920s and the development of postmodernism in the years after World War II. Even during the decade so closely associated with their work, presumably after the reign of high modernism, the Younger Generation was surrounded by a literary market managed largely by the purveyors of modernism. The one-time-modernist-revolutionaries had become, by the 1930s, the very British literary establishment they staked their reputations upon challenging. Not only were they editors, publishers, and impresarios, but as the thirties progressed, many modernists – following the lead, perhaps, of their Younger Generation counterparts – entered into the politically-inflected discourse of the day either by promoting left-leaning writers or writing pieces for political papers.[21]

Surrounded by the legacy and influence of their fathers – biological, national, and literary – and burdened by the expectations of a nation that saw them only as sons, the Younger Generation, as Martin Green suggests, sought to realize themselves as such: "the war had the effect that the sons of England no longer wanted to grow up to become fathers themselves. Instinctively but also consciously, they wanted to achieve themselves as sons…and that marked a profound change from prewar England" (*Children of the Sun*

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school, and tutored Germans in English; another good example is Waugh, who after university, takes up journalism, apprentices a carpenter, and teaches at a boys' school.

[21] Eliot is editor of the *Criterion* during which time he publishes and endorses Auden. Woolf's Hogarth Press publishes Isherwood and apprentices John Lehmann (who would go on to publish and edit *New Writing*) and she writes for *The Daily Worker* in 1936.

39).[22] As sons, Green's book *Children of the Sun* (1980) argues, the Younger Generation

derives inspiration from the decadence of the 1890s and the figure of the dandy. Green's

account – an eclectic mosaic of literary history, biography, and pop-psychology –

provides a lens through which to view British writers of the 1930s that complicates

conventional accounts of the decade by suggesting a productive historical and cultural

association between the 1890s and the 1930s.

   If the 1890s dandy is the prodigal son of the nineteenth-century patriarchies of

progress and imperialism, then the Younger Generation is composed of metaphoric

"second sons": symbolically disenfranchised by the historical circumstances of their birth

yet participants nonetheless in a cultural patrilineage that since the Great War bequeaths

masculine Britishness through narratives of nationalism, military service, and heroism.

Thus, like the 1890s dandy, the Children of the Sun are, "outsiders-within" working *with*

and *against* national masculinities in order to create a "new identity for 'England.'" As

Green explains:

> I am concerned primarily with the *high culture* of the country, and within
>
> that primarily with the *intellectual and imaginative literature*, though I
>
> want to use that as a focus, a lens, and to look through it at the *imaginative*
>
> *life of the whole society*. If I am granted that point of view, I think I can
>
> show that a certain type of experience, appropriate to a certain mode of
>
> being, was *cultivated* by the young men who felt that they were *the*

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[22] Green continues: "But after 1918…the ideals of patriarchal virtue no longer
commanded the general imagination. Young men no longer wanted to grow up to be men
– that is, they did not want to be fathers-husbands-masters. For what the Great War had
meant to England, from our point of view, was *public* disillusionment with the ideals of
maturity cherished before" (*Children of the Sun* 42).

generation of English writers growing up after the War; who convinced

most of their contemporaries who cared about books that they were right;

and who, therefore, established *a new identity for "England," a new*

meaning to "being English," in the world at large and in the privacy of

individual minds… (*Children of the Sun* 3-4, emphasis mine)[23]

Green's description of the Children of the Sun resonates with Jackson's

characterization of the 1890s.[24] Green's characters, born on a shrinking island after the

millennium (between 1901-1911), share many qualities with their *fin de siècle*

forefathers: they are a small, homogenous group; they inhabit the world of privilege

while simultaneously rebelling against its conventions and expectations; they situate

themselves against tradition while continuing to reap the benefits such tradition has

bequeathed unto them; they stress the imaginative and private while maintaining

allegiances to the material and political world around them; they offer a seemingly

paradoxical representation of politics and nationalism; they provoke critique and

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[23] Green goes on to explain that "the imaginative history of any period can be, should be, described in terms of the clashes between a dominant temperament, the culture's 'thesis,' and its opponents, the 'antithesis'… Thus we shall expect to find men of other intellectual temperaments who claimed to be "England" in this period" (*Children of the Sun* 3-4). As this quotation suggests, Green is attentive to the "factions" within thirties writing and politics and, although he is drawing the two sides – right and left – together in his analysis, he is also interested in the intragenerational divisions.

[24] Jackson's book, *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, like Green's *Children of the Sun*, reveals a personal investment in its subject matter. Both authors are members of the generation immediately following the one that they write about and assume a position of privileged knowledge as well as of admiration. Both authors employ a selective roster and archive in constructing their narratives and both participate in the formation and perpetuation of conventional literary and cultural myths that surround each generational category even while they provide new perspectives.

contempt; and most importantly perhaps, they evolve aesthetically, intellectually, and politically in response to the historical and national "decline" in which they interpret England and the world to be participating. A synthesis of Green's and Jackson's projects suggests that the postwar is as millennial in sensibility as it is modern.

Two aspects of Green's introductory description deserve emphasis in attempting to create a conversation between 1890 and 1930: 1) the self-conscious historical position of the Children of the Sun as English writers "growing up after the War" and thus arguably after modernism and 2) the imaginative, cultural, and intellectual connection between this generation of writers and the idea of (masculine, heterosexual) Britishness untethered from its Victorian moorings through a contracting Empire, the Great War, and its consequent debts. For Green, the 1930s is not simply a decade dominated by national, international, and economic concerns; rather it is a decade whose most notable figures negotiate the tensions incumbent upon authors writing after modernism and after World War I. The politics of the interwar period, Green's project suggests, are aesthetic and historical as well as right and left, and the stakes intellectual and cultural as well as national and ideological.

For the Younger Generation, sons of cultural and educational privilege, modernism is both their aesthetic and political inheritance. Whether understood as the literary corollary to the cultural rupture of World War I or as the revolutionary aesthetic of coterie and Ivory Tower, modernism is inextricable from narratives of endings and beginnings. Either an obituary for a national epistemology that locates its pinnacle in the golden light of an illusory Georgian summer or a manifesto of revolution that declares the first day of a new order, modernism straddles a historical and cultural great divide. At

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once revolutionary and memorial, modernism is, by the 1930s, the very tradition

bequeathed to the Younger Generation, and as such, modernism belongs to the world of

war, a sign and symptom of the historical and cultural upheaval that characterizes, as

Waugh explains, the "normal" and "universal" atmosphere of the Younger Generation's

adolescence.

Without their own "Great War" to fight, the members of the Younger Generation

feel frustrated by, antagonistic to, and ultimately excluded from historical plotlines

constructed by imperial anxiety, national hubris, and military masculinities.

Consequently, many of the Younger Generation, like Isherwood, Auden, and Spender,

become, as Woolf explains in "The Leaning Tower" (1940), conscious. Conscious of

their privileged positions as well as the inequities of their postwar reality, these inheritors

of the ivory tower tradition lean their tower left.[25] "Struggling with ideas and leaving

words to look after themselves," according to Harold Acton (*Memoirs of an Aesthete*

231), the left-leaning Younger Generation, seeking to realize themselves as "sons," were

looking for "a young man's politics" and Communism – much like Fascism – was perfect

in that it made their "fathers" very uncomfortable (Green 252). Dressed in corduroy and

sporting beards, certain members of the Younger Generation attempted to present

themselves as "workers" in rebellion against their position as exceptional exceptions, and

their writing, in seeming opposition to their modernist inheritance, favored documentary

realism, political purpose, and anti-Fascism to stream-of-consciousness, fragmentation,

and Liberalism.

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[25] Woolf read "The Leaning Tower" to the Workers' Educational Association in Brighton
in 1940.

However, following from Mr. Norris' lament – "things are so complex nowadays" – it would be naïve to take the Younger Generation writer's political performance at face value. Green, who reads his Children of the Sun through the lens of 1890s decadence, suggests that more than comrade or fellow-traveler, the left-leaning members of the Younger Generation are old dandies who found themselves a new style, "superficially the opposite" of their 1890s predecessors but nonetheless "mark[ing] them off from their would-be…[proletariat] brothers" (*Children of the Sun* 259). Green's observation, however, is not necessarily the result of historical hindsight; even in the thirties, in uncensored and unaccounted for moments of introspection, Younger Generation writers acknowledge the role performance plays in their presentation and literary production.

Isherwood-the-narrator in *Goodbye to Berlin*'s "Sally Bowles" perhaps says it best: "I only knew that I'd been somehow made to feel a sham" (65). In what I would argue is a moment of authorial confession, Isherwood's namesake narrator poses the question Isherwood himself would not publicly articulate until the decade neared its close: "Wasn't I a bit of a sham anyway…with my arty talk to lady pupils and my newly-acquired parlour-socialism?" ("Sally Bowles" 65). Caught between the privileged position afforded him by his social class and his modernist inheritance, on one side, and his symbolic disenfranchisement and the political imperatives of postwar Britain, on the other, Isherwood-the-narrator answers his own question: "Yes, I was" ("Sally Bowles" 65).

"Bit of a Sham"

A sham, perhaps, but much like Mr. Norris, Isherwood's narrators are not deceitful as much as they are self-interested. Attempting to write themselves into a

national narrative that since the Great War has been oriented by military and modernist masculinities, the Younger Generation perceives the "luxury" of their situation – saved by virtue of their age from the Front and granted, by virtue of their class, cultural, educational, and professional opportunities – as a burden. Burdened with the expectations of a nation eager to honor the sacrifice of the fathers, the sons are thrust into the role of the would-be and should-be exceptional. But unlike their 1890s predecessors, symbolic prodigal sons of imperial Britain whose art and behavior rendered them exceptional exceptions to Victorian mores, who "were brought up to regard luxury from an aesthetic standpoint," the Younger Generation perceives their luxurious position from a political standpoint. Symbolically disenfranchised by a national historiography represented by men like their fathers and elder brothers and both intentionally and unintentionally memorialized by modernism, the members of the Younger Generation are nonetheless inheritors of a tradition to which they are antagonistic and often in opposition. By evoking the 1890s dandy the members of the Younger Generation are able to historicize themselves and their position: sons, yes, and as such inheritors of literary modernism and postwar Britain, but also "outsiders-within" a historical and cultural narrative that simultaneously confines and excludes them because of their metaphoric secondness.

As "second-generation modernists," the Younger Generation may consider themselves modern, but as Spender explains, being modern in the 1930s was very different from being modernist.[26] Leaning their ivory tower to the left, as Woolf

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[26] "Second-generation modernists" is a phrase borrowed from MacKay's *Modernism and World War II*.

proposes, the "modernity" of the Younger Generation's writing is characterized by attention to contemporary politics, sympathy with the plight of the working class, and a commitment to documentary realism. In this manner, the Younger Generation *seem* to oppose their modernist literary inheritance. As Spender explains, "In relation to the modernist movement in the arts…[thirties writing] was regressive" (*The Thirties and After* 14). Spender, nevertheless, is not interested in denying the tradition bequeathed to thirties writers by modernism:

> From the Thirties' point of view, what the modernists had done was to present us with a medium in which it was possible for us to write about modern life, say whatever we chose, without taking thought as to whether language and form were 'poetic'…We were putting the subject back into poetry. We were taking the medium of poetry, which to them was an end in itself, and using it as an instrument for realizing our felt ideas about the time in which we were living. (*The Thirties and After* 14)

However, a close look at Isherwood's "A Berlin Diary" suggests that the transition from modernist-inheritors to political-poets is not so straightforward. The first story from *Goodbye to Berlin*, "A Berlin Diary," begins with perhaps one of the most famous passages written by Isherwood: "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking…Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed" (1).[27] As a camera, Isherwood does not represent the thirties writer as the political

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[27] The first story in *Goodbye to Berlin* – the name for the second half of *The Berlin Stories* – and the first of two stories entitled "A Berlin Diary," this initial vignette sets the scene for Isherwood's Berlin life, introducing Frl. Schroeder and the others that interact with Isherwood-the-narrator. The first "A Berlin Diary" is dated Autumn 1930 and the

animal he has come to be known as. Although in Spender's characterization the thirties

writer may very well be "putting the subject back into poetry," as a passive, recording,

unthinking camera, the thirties writer does not seem to be very particular about what

subject it is that his poetry communicates. An allusion to documentary realism, perhaps,

but far from "realizing our felt ideas about the time in which we were living," the thirties

writer, as a camera, seems more interested in capturing images, in form and frame,

leaving the subject to be developed, printed, and fixed at some later time. As a camera,

Isherwood-the-narrator is much like Auden's early conception of the poet who "viewed

life with utter detachment, as material for his poetry" (Spender 6).

But "utter detachment," it seems, is as difficult to achieve as "putting the subject

back into poetry" is to achieve. Most critical commentary regarding Isherwood's *The*

Berlin Stories focuses on the narrator's role as a passive observer and unthinking

recorder, going as far as to "treat the camera passage as a declaration of authorial

method" (Thomas 45).[28] By employing namesake narrators and turning diaries into

novels, Isherwood does facilitate the conflation of author and narrator; however, as David

Thomas argues, Isherwood's camera metaphor is "entirely misleading as a description of

[his] narrative method" ("Refocusing Isherwood's Camera" 47). In all the narratives that

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last, which concludes the *Goodbye to Berlin* portion of *The Berlin Stories*, is dated
Winter 1932-3.

[28] David Thomas, in his 1972 article "*Goodbye to Berlin*: Refocusing Isherwood's
Camera," cites a critical perspective that still seems to represent the consensus. Richard
Mayne's description of the narrator as a "self-effacing onlooker, making no judgments,
forming no attachments, withholding imaginative sympathy, ultimately not involved"
aligns with G. H. Bantock's complaint that Isherwood's narrator does not portray any
"personal reaction, except insofar as the mere angle at which the camera is held can
imply comment" (qtd. in Thomas 44).

constitute *The Berlin Stories*, Isherwood's camera-pose "gives way to confession" (Thomas 48). Isherwood's photographic panorama of Berlin on an autumn evening in 1930 in "A Berlin Diary" illustrates the complexity of the camera perspective as the narrator's photographic eye reveals the desire for agency, interaction, and analysis:

> Because of the whistling, I do not care to stay here in the evenings. It reminds me that I am in a foreign city, alone, far from home. Sometimes I determine not to listen to it, pick up a book, try to read. But soon a call is sure to sound, so piercing, so insistent, so despairingly human, that at last I have to get up and peep through the slats of the Venetian blind to make quite sure that it is not – as I know very well it could not possibly be – for me. ("A Berlin Diary" 1-2)

Isherwood-the-narrator cannot record without thought or feeling. The "despairingly human" sounds of whistling young lovers that rise from the streets invite more than the shutter's quick open and close. Instead of simply recording, the narrator is summoned to join, to participate. The role of documentarian is rendered a pose when, even as a young man in "a foreign city, alone, far from home," Isherwood cannot remain utterly detached, passive, and unthinking. Ironically, in the negotiations between the form and content the subject that seems to get put back into literature in the 1930s is that of the author.

The characterization of Isherwood's narrators and Isherwood-the-author as documentarian, according to Carolyn Heilbrun, "is unsatisfactory but probably irreplaceable" (*Christopher Isherwood* 4). Having famously stated that his work is "all part of an autobiography" (qtd. in Heilbrun 6) Isherwood's namesake narrators have come to be understood as "ventriloquist dummies": narrative puppets distinct yet

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inextricable from their author. By "throwing his voice" Isherwood-the-author creates a

sense of distance – from the narrator, from the other characters, and from the events of

the story which are, more often than not, autobiographical more than fictional. For

Heilbrun, who makes a distinction between Isherwood's novels and documentaries,

documentaries feature the ventriloquist dummy Christopher Isherwood (or the William

Bradshaw of "The Last of Mr. Norris") as their narrator and it is in these texts that

"Isherwood's success as a political novelist lies" (*Christopher Isherwood* 15). Through

the namesake narrator, emotion is "transposed or dissolved" and "the distance which

political novels require has been achieved" (Heilbrun 15). Distance, be it from authorial

personality or from the object of the photographic eye, emerges as the key critics believe

unlocks the politics of Isherwood's fiction, facilitating the transformation from the

personal autobiography of the author to the impersonal "biography of his time" (Heilbrun

6). However, a close reading of *The Berlin Stories* suggests that the creation of authorial

distance cuts both ways: on one hand, assisting the author's disappearing act; on the other

hand, facilitating authorial embodiment. Just when the reader is convinced of the

documentary efficacy of the narrator, confession replaces observation as the camera turns

inward and the personal trumps the political.

Isherwood, in the first pages of his "A Berlin Diary," establishes his position as an

"outsider-within": narratively, inside his apartment looking out; nationally, an

Englishman in Germany; historically, one of the Younger Generation. The indirect

subject of his supposedly detached observation, Isherwood's positionality reveals the

luxury that for his generation is inherently political: on the winning side of a war that

made losers of so many, Isherwood-the-narrator can travel unmolested, gaze undisturbed,

and, although what he encounters may pull the strings of sympathy and desire, he has the

luxury, as he says, "not to listen." But for Isherwood-the-narrator peaking out of the slats

of the Venetian blind, "not to listen" is not a viable option. Confronting "street leading

into street of houses like shabby monumental safes crammed with the tarnished valuables

and second-hand furniture of a bankrupt middle class," Isherwood-the-narrator indirectly

confronts his fears and apprehensions for himself and his nation ("A Berlin Diary" 1).

Although far from London, the narrator's description of Berlin could easily describe his

own capital city, suggesting that the line dividing winner and loser in the postwar world

is arbitrary at best. In this manner, Isherwood's Berlin diaries are also his own.

In the early thirties, Berlin is a crucible of German politics and in "The Last of

Mr. Norris" Bradshaw has a front row seat. However, politics is not the main subject of

The Berlin Stories and, in "The Last of Mr. Norris," Bradshaw – and by extension

Isherwood – more so than Mr. Norris, emerges as the indirect subject of the story,

replacing politics with the personal, or more accurately, demonstrating their

inextricability in the eyes of the Younger Generation. Although the beginning of the

story suggests that Bradshaw – like the Isherwood narrator in "A Berlin Diary" – is an

observer, on the outside looking in, as the story progresses, Bradshaw's role as

documentarian is rendered suspect. Beginning with Bradshaw's "first impression" of Mr.

Norris on the train and evidenced by his eye for detail – the descriptions of Mr. Norris,

the quick detection of Mr. Norris' wig, the attention to the moods that pass over Mr.

Norris during their passage to Berlin – Bradshaw seems initially to anticipate

Isherwood's "I am a camera" characterization in "A Berlin Diary." However, as the

narrative continues, Bradshaw falls short of the standards set by the documentary

metaphor.[29]

Accompanying Mr. Norris to a Party meeting in Berlin in 1931, and even having

"moved up several rows in order to hear better," Bradshaw eventually replaces

observation with self-reflection ("LMN" 48). Interrupting his description of the hall

packed full with curious and attentive members of Berlin's working class is a sincere,

albeit ambivalent, self-evaluation:

> Their passion, their strength of purpose elated me. I stood outside it. One
>
> day, perhaps, I should be with it, but never of it. At present I just sat there,
>
> a half-hearted renegade from my own class, my feelings muddled by
>
> anarchism talked at Cambridge, by slogans from the confirmation service,
>
> by the tunes the band played when my father's regiment marched to the
>
> railway station, seventeen years ago. And the little man finished his
>
> speech and went back to his place at the table amidst thunders of clapping.
>
> ("LMN" 49)

Although his camera eye captures the atmosphere of the meeting – "the faces of the

Berlin working class…They had not come here to see each other or to be seen…They

were not spectators. They participated, with a curious, restrained passion…They were

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[29] Bradshaw remains naïve concerning Mr. Norris' double-crossings and deceptions.
Bayer, the communist leader, has to explain to Bradshaw first, that Mr. Norris has been
spying on the Party, and second, that the rendezvous between the Baron and van Hoorn
had nothing to do with a glass factory but rather with state secrets. Even after this
revelation, Bradshaw does not see Mr. Norris' role in the meeting between the Baron and
van Hoorn; Bayer gently reveals the truth: "You have misunderstood me, Mr. Bradshaw.
I have not said that van Hoorn deceived him. That was not necessary…Norris was quite
aware, you see, of what van Hoorn wanted. They understood each other quite well"
("LMN" 156).

listening to their own collective voice" ("LMN" 48) – it does not make even a mention of the politics or policies that have garnered the undivided attention of these tired, hard-working people. Instead of summarizing the speech that has the audience in thrall, instead of conveying the audience's "collective voice" as articulated by the smiling, red-haired man, Bradshaw's redirects his attention from the scene before him to himself. The camera lens turns inward as the picture of Berlin's burgeoning Communist community becomes a self-portrait: a young British man, orphaned and traumatized by World War I, suffering from acute class consciousness, motivated by a desire for rebellion and revolution but without the purpose and passion visible on the "faces of the Berlin working class, pale and prematurely lined" ("LMN" 48).

A "half-hearted renegade from my own class," Bradshaw considers himself "with it" but never "of it": a reference to the unattainable but pervasive passion and purpose of the working-class crowd. However, as one of Isherwood's ventriloquist dummies, Bradshaw's meditation is as much about him as it is about the scene before him. "With" but never "of" the working-class movement, Bradshaw also alludes to the position of the Younger Generation in relation to the tradition of British masculinity they unwilling inherited: no war stories to tell, the Younger Generation may be "with" but are not "of" a national construction of masculinity indelibly marked by World War I. Consequently, instead of privileging the personal over the political, Isherwood, by turning his "camera eye" onto his Younger Generation narrator, demonstrates the way national history makes the political a very personal matter, betraying, perhaps, the true subject of thirties writing: not aesthetics, not politics, but the position of the author. In this manner, rather than a momentary lapse of political consciousness or narrative purpose, Bradshaw's brief

introspection alludes to the relationship between the seemingly disparate working-class

revolution on one hand, and the position of the Younger Generation on the other – both

are trying to make history.

According to Norman Page, however, that "Isherwood plays down the drama of

contemporary happenings" in "The Last of Mr. Norris" and *The Berlin Stories* simply

represents his debt to modernist literary techniques (*Auden and Isherwood* 185). The

influence of E. M. Forster is detected by Page – "what specifically Isherwood admiringly

referred to as Forster's 'tea-tabling'" – in the way that "the landmarks of history are

scaled down so that, subjectively perceived, they take their place with the banalities of

everyday life" (*Auden and Isherwood* 185). Page, however, undercuts his own analysis,

suggesting that any trace of the influence of Forster or Woolf is anomalous as Isherwood,

by this time, had "left Modernism behind" (*Auden and Isherwood* 185). Similarly,

Heilbrun believes that although "essentially Forsterian," Isherwood is a representative

member of the generation which passed, in his own words, "'into a socially-conscious

political phase' at the beginning of the thirties" (*Christopher Isherwood* 9).

Far from having left modernism behind, Isherwood seems to be torn between the

legacy of modernism and the potential of a new literary perspective that claims as its

muse contemporary history, lived experience, and material conditions, particularly those

of the working class, similar to the tension between Isherwood-the-narrator's "arty talk"

and his "newly-acquired parlour-socialism" that makes him feel neither modernist nor

Communist but rather a "sham." Consequently, by "tea-tabling" the "landmarks of

history" Isherwood is not just evoking modernist techniques or revealing the influence of

a mentor; rather, Isherwood is critiquing twentieth-century national historiographies that

make myths out of "landmark events" and Great Men. Although Isherwood, by his own admittance, may have passed "'into a socially-conscious political phase,'" this phase is not divorced from or outside of the literary tradition he inherits. Instead, Isherwood attempts to position himself and his moment *within* literary history by evoking a modernist technique in the service a thirties conundrum: the struggle of the thirties writer post-modernism and postwar.

Unable to fully politicize his art in the terms established by taking-sides mentality of the decade – Spender attributes the laurel wreath of left-wing political poetry to John Cornford and Julian Bell – and unwilling to be simply modernism's dutiful son, Isherwood creates a character through which to act out the tension between the public and the private that confronts forward-looking writers indelibly marked by a Great War past. Rather than simply looking to modernism for models, Isherwood evokes another decade made significant by its conclusion, the 1890s, and instead of a "proper" artist – "proper" by modernist standards – Isherwood summons the dandy. An anachronism of sorts, Mr. Norris, with his upper-class pose, effeminate performance, perverse sexuality, distaste for bourgeois prejudices, and naïve politicking, offers Bradshaw not only a Wildean foil for his own conventionality and seriousness but also a historical corollary for the role of the author in the thirties. Like Ambrose Silk, "trapped between two terrifying totalitarianisms" (MacKay 122), Mr. Norris finds himself ensnared among various lines of political intrigue: Bayer and the Party, Baron Pregnitz and the German Government, and Mr. van Hoorn and the French Secret Service. Rumored to have spent time in prison, a faux fellow-traveler with convincing oratory energies, and an unsuccessful double-

crosser, Mr. Norris confirms Green's claim that "the 1930s was not a decade favorable to dandyism" (*The Children of the Sun* 259).

However, unlike the real-life interwar dandies Harold Acton, John Betjeman, and Evelyn Waugh, whose performances and publications align them with prewar values and conservative and reactionary cultural politics,[30] Isherwood's dandy finds himself embroiled in a quintessentially thirties quagmire. Acton, Betjeman, and Waugh escape to country estates and eastern countries, dedicating their energy to preservation and antiquities; cultivating a kind of Des Esseintes detachment from contemporary concerns, these would-be aesthetes separate themselves from interwar politics by turning their intellectual and cultural gaze toward the past. Isherwood, like Auden and the other forward-looking members of the Younger Generation, find themselves caught between modernist aesthetics (a luxury that postwar Britain can no longer afford) and the current political and economic climate (marked by working-class movements, a sense of urgency, and competing prophesies for the future). Unable and unwilling to be totally detached – Isherwood's camera metaphor is more a "defensive mask" than a "theoretical manifesto" (Thomas 48, 44) – Isherwood, Auden, and company find themselves forced to negotiate their dreams for the future with the consequences of past, modernist aesthetics with political imperatives, and the exceptional with the exception.[31]

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[30] Much ink has been spilled regarding Waugh's politics. A convert to Roman Catholicism and an admirer of Mussolini – he had an audience with him in the thirties – Waugh is most often considered conservative with Fascist sympathies. However, many scholars are reluctant label his politics; a friend and biographer of Waugh, Christopher Sykes, explains that Waugh was not as conservative as he was characterized (*Evelyn Waugh* 22) while Noel Annan simply identifies Waugh as "deviant" (*Our Age* 158).

[31] Julian Symons characterizes the left-leaning members of the Younger Generation as "dreamers" in his book, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (1960). For Symons, the

Mr. Norris, embodying the paradox of the exceptional exception, offers to

Bradshaw a warning. Having put his "genius into his life, not into art" – a Wildean

aphorism emphasizing his dandy status – it is Mr. Norris' life rather than his art that is

condemned and in danger at the story's conclusion ("LMN" 173). In putting his genius

into his life, Mr. Norris makes "connections between worlds where artifice is prominent:

the worlds of the aesthete, of criminal intrigue, and of politics" (Shuttleworth 152). As

the figure through which aesthetics, criminality, and politics intersect, Mr. Norris, a

modern manifestation of *fin de siècle* degeneration, demonstrates what can happen when

party politics and political performance become indistinguishable. Never a true comrade,

not a true fellow-traveler even, Mr. Norris is essentially fascinated by but ambivalent

about Marxism and Communism. Rather, it is self-interest and self-preservation that

motivate the many roles he assumes. From the frivolous (his wig, silk underwear, and

elaborate toilet), to the perverse (his gleeful masochism), to the underhanded (deceiving

Bradshaw about the Baron and van Hoorn), Mr. Norris is most interested in himself: his

comforts, pleasures, survival, and successes in a city increasingly afflicted by "an

epidemic of discreet, infectious fear" ("LMN" 181). As Anthony Shuttleworth suggests,

it is "hard to believe that Arthur has not been rehearsing his lines as 'revolutionary' and

'friend' since the start of the novel, just as he might have practiced his role as aesthete"

("In A Populous City" 154).

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decade's most visible political extremes – Communism and Fascism – were potential
ideologies for a group of idealistic dreamers born in the first years of the twentieth
century. One of Symons' examples is John Strachey who begins his political career
connected with Oswald Mosley, the creator of the British Union of Fascists, but
eventually becomes a spokesman for Communism in Britain (see his 1935 book, *The
Coming Struggle for Power*). Incidentally, Oswald Mosley followed a similar path as a
member of the Fabian Society before turning to Fascism.

However, it is when Mr. Norris is caught in the act of deception, when the curtain comes crashing down on his many performances, that his true colors are revealed. Exactly when Mr. Norris "seems most obviously a plain deceiver…we come to realize that he is, in a particular and crucial sense, exactly what he has been claiming to be all along: an aesthete with a loyal sensitive nature and a tender heart, a conscience, and good intentions" (Shuttleworth 154). "'I shall miss you terribly, you know,'" Mr. Norris explains to Bradshaw before escaping from Berlin to safety, leaving Bradshaw to feel, like Isherwood in "Sally Bowles," a bit of a sham. "Hadn't I, after all, misunderstood him? Hadn't I misjudged him?" Bradshaw asks himself, emphasizing at the moment of their separation their likeness ("LMN" 177): Mr. Norris, like Bradshaw and the Younger Generation, is misunderstood and misjudged.

"Instead of an aesthete unmasked as a crook," Mr. Norris emerges as "a criminal unmasked as an aesthete" (Shuttleworth 154). An aesthete with a very thirtyish temperament, Mr. Norris' confession to Bradshaw at the Communist victory in 1933 ventriloquises sentiments more likely attributable to his author:

> "I was merely indulging in my favorite vice of philosophizing. When you get to my age you'll see more and more clearly how very strange and complex life is. Take this morning, for instance. The simple enthusiasm of all those young people; it touched me very deeply. On such occasions, one feels oneself so unworthy. I suppose there are individuals who do not suffer from a conscience. But I am not one of them."
>
> The strangest thing about this odd outburst was that Arthur obviously meant what he said. ("LMN" 115)

Believing Mr. Norris to be the comrade his performance suggests he is, Bradshaw considers Mr. Norris' confession an "odd outburst": "It was a genuine fragment of a confession, but I could make nothing of it" ("LMN" 115). Despite his uncertainty, Bradshaw responds encouragingly that he, too, "sometimes feel like that myself" implying that the narrator, and perhaps the author, participate in similar performances and suffer similar crises of conscience ("LMN" 115). More than any other ambiguous and performative exchange across that "almost invisible line which divided" their two worlds, this scrap of conversation gives voice to Isherwood's own dilemma ("LMN" 165). Like Mr. Norris, Isherwood and his colleagues are touched by what they interpret as the "simple enthusiasm" of the working class and like Mr. Norris, they, too, struggle with feelings of unworthiness in the face of a political and cultural movement oriented around the working class and against their own leisured, privileged class.

This brief exchange between Mr. Norris and Bradshaw, hardly remarkable among the narrative suggestions of Mr. Norris' conspiracy, offers an alternate perspective on the thirties writer, a perspective discouraged by their self-constructed and self-critiqued hyper-political mythology. Peter McDonald is one critic who investigates the project of self-historicizing undertaken by the thirties writers both during the decade and afterward.[32] In "Believing in the Thirties" (1997), McDonald argues that the political

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[32] Colin Wilson cites Stephen Spender's autobiography *World Within World* (1951) as an example of the kind of exclusive mythology that surrounds discussions of what came to be known as the Auden Generation, what Spender calls "the Gang": "Auden had spoken of Isherwood in a way which made me think of him as The Novelist...Isherwood, according to Auden, held no opinions whatever about anything. He was wholly and simply interested in people…He simply regarded them as material for his work…At the same time he was the Critic in whom Auden had absolute trust…just as Auden seemed to us the highest peak within the range of our humble vision from the Oxford valleys, for Auden there was another peak, namely Isherwood, whilst for Isherwood there was a still

commitment synonymous with thirties writing is part and parcel of a literary myth

created, exploited, and later problematized by a group of writers and poets of the

Younger Generation seeking to set themselves apart from, on one hand, their generational

counterparts and, on the other, their modernist predecessors while simultaneously writing

themselves into national and literary history. "In terms of the 'Myth' and its cannon,"

suggests McDonald, "questions of evaluation are connected to measurements of

'political' commitment and detachment which describe degrees of involvement during

the decade, then allow for honourable distancing in the interests of artistic integrity later"

("Believing in the Thirties" 77).

For McDonald, the "political" is, at best, an ambiguous term when employed by

thirties writers and their critics succeeding them. Associated with left-wing activism,

Marxism, and Communism but divorced from the specificities of policy – politics in the

discourse of the thirties myth has little relation to praxis – the notion of the political

functioned as an evaluative category in the process of canon-formation.[33] Consequently,

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further peak, Chalmers" (*World Within World* 101-2). According Hynes, the most
"irritating aspect" of the whole generation was the manner in which its artistic
productions conveyed that sense of "private communications among friends" – what
Louise MacNiece called "'the myth of themselves'" (*The Auden Generation* 43). This
"myth of themselves" was cultivated by their practice of dedicating their works to one
another. "The Last of Mr. Norris," for example, is dedicated to Auden, Auden's *The
Orators* to Spender, and so on.

[33] McDonald focuses on the term "political" examining its historical and literary
specificity in the thirties: "first, the function of the term 'political' needs to be considered
as of a particular kind in relation to the writers (and it is, effectively, a small group of
writers) who belonged to the canonical 'club' of the thirties literary 'Myth' – it does not
serve the same function in this context which it does for a political historian of the period;
second, the 'political' may be playing a part in the evaluative strategies of canon-
formation during and after the thirties – it is a term called upon to do critical service"
("Believing in the Thirties" 76).

the thirties writers, McDonald proposes, were able to distance themselves from the *realities* of political action, both in the decade and later in the century, when they turned their critical and creative energies away from their post-World War II, midcentury present to the to the narrative of their literary legacy. McDonald explains:

> It is vital to understand, however, that the construction of the "Myth" of the thirties as a literary period made the best of a series of confusions, compromises, and inconsistencies from which the writers put together narratives of coherence for each other. Thus, "commitment," of some kind or other, became a justified artistic impulse to be balanced, *in retrospect*, by an equally justified disengagement from commitment; to put the matter crudely, individualism was salvaged from politics, keeping the liberal conscience intact. ("Believing in the Thirties" 86, emphasis mine)

In McDonald's formulation, political commitment is a sliding signifier for thirties writers, symbolizing variously and ambiguously Communism, Socialism, and Marxism during the decade and afterward revised to suggest a nuanced historical consciousness in which the interaction between the public and private becomes the epicenter for literary and poetic inspiration.

However, Mr. Norris' confession to Bradshaw counters McDonald's interpretation by articulating *in the thirties* the very sentiments that McDonald argues only surface in *retrospective revision*. But it is not Bradshaw, the namesake narrator, who confesses his misgivings and his "unworthiness." The "distancing" that McDonald reads as a retrospective rhetorical strategy, Isherwood employs in the moment. A

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ventriloquist extraordinaire, Isherwood-the-author speaks both through his namesake

narrator *as well as* his dandical counterpart, Mr. Norris. Thus, not only are *The Berlin*

Stories diary-cum-historical-fiction,[34] but also, in "The Last of Mr. Norris," by having

Mr. Norris, the 1890s dandy, seek absolution for the "sins" of his 1930s corollaries,

Isherwood's thirties "philosophizing" is historically and generationally displaced: it is the

older Mr. Norris who suffers from a crisis of conscience and it is the representative of the

1890s, not of the 1930s, that feels "unworthiness" in the presence of such "simple

enthusiasm." Distance, consequently, may very well be the key to unlocking the complex

politics of Isherwood's fiction but it is more than simply narrative distance – the textual

space created between author and narrator, narrator and characters – it is historical

distance as well – the generational space between the thirties writer and the nineties

dandy.

"When you get to my age," laments Mr. Norris, calling attention not only to the

age difference between him and Bradshaw but also alluding to his coming of age in the

1890s. Significantly, Mr. Norris is the only male representative of the Older Generation

in the story. Fifty, or even sixty, when Bradshaw meets him, Mr. Norris is "considerably

senior to his prototype Gerald Hamilton, born in 1889, and much closer to Isherwood's

father generation" (Page 187).[35] Although British-born, Mr. Norris has not been to

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[34] Page goes as far as to suggest that "what had started out as a diary" had become, by the
end of the decade and by the beginning of the war, "a historical study" (*Auden and
Isherwood* 60).

[35] Gerald Hamilton, like Mr. Norris' other model, Wilde, was Anglo-Irish; when accused
of being anti-British and pro-German during World War I, Hamilton clung tightly to his
Irish heritage suggesting he was most accurately an Irish rebel (*Christopher and His Kind*
74). From Isherwood's point of view, Hamilton was "enchantingly 'period'" and Auden,
Spender, and others treated Hamilton like "an absurd but nostalgic artwork which has

England since before the war, and unlike Isherwood's father who fought and died in World War I, Mr. Norris did not don a uniform or experience the trenches. "In the postwar world," offers Page, Mr. Norris "remains a Nineties Decadent" who early in life "learnt the meaning of the word luxury" and who, by not participating in the Great War, manages not to have forgotten (*Auden and Isherwood* 187). In this manner, Page suggests, Mr. Norris can be interpreted as an alternative father figure, "as disreputable and unreliable as 'real' English fathers of the Edwardian middle class (like Isherwood's own) were conventional and dependable" (*Auden and Isherwood* 190).

Conventional, yes, but dependable? The "real" English fathers to which Page refers were, in the eyes of their younger sons, anything but dependable.[36] Not only did many such fathers never return from the war, lost and anonymously buried in a French field like Isherwood's own, but also many were the strength and conviction behind the Great War. Glory, honor, duty, and heroism were their rallying cries and British Liberalism the standard they followed into battle. In 1914 this might not have seemed so misguided but by 1916 words like glory, honor, and duty as well as concepts such as heroism were as empty as most civilian pantries and the flag of British Liberalism was tattered and at half-mast.[37] For those younger sons who experienced World War I by way

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been rediscovered by a later generation" (*Christopher and His Kind* 75). In *Christopher and His Kind* (1976), Isherwood admits that "The Last of Mr. Norris" "fails to reveal what was the most enduring bond between Gerald and Christopher, their homosexuality" (78).

[36] According to Heilbrun, male members of Isherwood's generation "saw the family as the villains" (*Christopher Isherwood* 4).

[37] George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) traces the "death" of Liberalism in England in the four years leading up to the war. According to

of its effects and consequences from the relative safety of their public schools, the "real"

English fathers – both their biological fathers and those national and political father

figures – were perhaps more "disreputable and unreliable" than any nineties dandy.[38]

With an "interest in the Wilde circle and pass[ing] off a Wilde epigram as his

own," Mr. Norris' dandy heritage is evidenced by "his library of erotica and his

Swinburnian collection of whips," his admiration of the work of William Watson – "still

alive in the early 1930s, but, like Norris, a relic of the 1890s" – and his "espousing of

1890s aestheticism" (Page 187). As a nineties dandy, Page assumes Mr. Norris is

"conveniently above or beyond morality," and as thus, "his criteria for commercial or

political action are less a matter of truth and justice than of self-gratification and self-

serving" (*Auden and Isherwood* 187). In other words, according to Page, as a

representative of the 1890s, Mr. Norris offers to Bradshaw, as well as Isherwood-the-

author, an anti-hero to fill the void left by all the fallen soldiers and absent fathers, an

anti-hero whose morals and politics are far from patriotic in their self-interest. This

assumption, however, is too simple. First, it reduces the 1890s dandy to a caricature of

egotistical self-promotion. Second, by positioning the 1890s dandy "above or beyond

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Dangerfield, "the War hastened everything – in politics, in economics, in behavior – but
it started nothing" (viii).

[38] In many ways, World War I is represented as the "proper" conclusion to the decadence
that "began" in the 1890s and the *fin de siècle*. Speaking of Liberal politics, Dangerfield
suggests that English democracy had for a long time been "swiftly declining" but that in
1914 it was "generally considered that this decline had turned into a galloping
consumption" (*The Strange Death of Liberal England* 365-6). In Dangerfield's analysis,
the events of 1913 and 1914, followed to their logical conclusion, illustrate "weariness"
and the "decadence of a great democracy" (*The Strange Death of Liberal England* 367).
The alignment of imperial decline and decadence is a theme crucial to Sherry's reading of
the literary *fin de siècle* and its relation to twentieth-century modernism.

morality," Page ironically implies the "correctness" of traditional Victorian morality, thus

aligning his interpretation of the dandy with Max Nordau's diagnosis of the dandy as

degenerate.

The dandy is more complicated than Page's analysis suggests. Wilde, the most

infamous 1890s dandy, and another model for Mr. Norris, paints a "strange and complex"

picture, to use Mr. Norris' words, of 1890s politics, aesthetics, and performance. An

exemplar of self-promotion, yes, but also a risk-taker in the realm of cultural politics, an

artistic innovator, and a living challenge to the restrictive moral code of Victorian

England seized with *fin de siècle* anxiety, Wilde and other 1890s dandies offer a kind of

anti-hero to the thirties writers who found the actions of their fathers – both those absent

and those aging – if not "above or beyond morality" dubious and misguided at best.[39]

For the literary-minded Younger Generation immediately after the war, the soldier-poet

Wilfred Owen provided a poignant example of the results of the unethical behavior

sanctioned by World War I. His death in November 1918 represented the numerous

unjustified casualties because it was apparent, according to many, that by the preceding

October, Germany could no longer mount a successful campaign.[40] Emerging as writers

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[39] Characterized by Churchillian doublespeak concerning rearmament before the war,
stubborn adherence to outdated military strategies during wartime, severe censorship,
deceitful propaganda on the home front, and impractical politics regarding postwar peace
treaties – not to mentioned the uncritical patriotism portrayed by those fathers who went,
unquestioningly, into battle – the legacy of the fathers is understood by their "sons" as a
series of missteps, miscalculations, and misunderstandings as well as downright mistakes.

[40] The soldier and poet who was a member of Isherwood's and Chalmers' "extremely
select pantheon" of poets in *Lions and Shadows* (45), Owen died in France on November
4th, 1918 and, in a Fussellian irony, news of Owen's death was not delivered to his
parents until Armistice Day, November 11th. Killed in battle one day after the Armistice
with Austria was signed and four days before Germany was declared a republic, Owen, to

and poets in the aftermath of the Great War, considering themselves foot soldiers in the

literary battle over the politics of British culture, and beginning, as the thirties progressed,

to proleptically imagine themselves as veterans of the undesirable war to come, the

Younger Generation writers were, to say the least, disillusioned by their literal and

metaphorical fathers. Positioning themselves as cultural, national, and political orphans,

the Younger Generation sought alternate father figures which to emulate.[41]

"Genius Into His Life, Not Into Art"

Isherwood was very frustrated with his role as "Orphan of a Dead Hero": a role

into which he was unwittingly cast and that "carried the full endorsement of the Crown,

Church, and Press" (*Kathleen and Frank* 501).[42] Cursed with an exclusive membership

into the club of "Sacred Orphans," Isherwood felt constrained by, and eventually rebelled

against, the sense of obligation that was more a burden than an honor. Heavy with guilt,

Isherwood reacted against "the authority of the Flag, the Old School Tie, the Unknown

the Younger Generation, was "a sort of martyred saint" who managed to be both a poet and a man of action (Hynes 23).

[41] Isherwood writes in the "Afterward" to *Kathleen and Frank* that there were two versions of his father, Frank: the Hero-Father who belonged to "The Others" and the "anti-heroic hero" who Isherwood conjured and was constituted of select characteristics of Frank's drawn from Isherwood's childhood memory (503). Although Isherwood's "anti-heroic hero" always "appears in uniform" this was merely a disguise because the Frank of Isherwood's imagination was primarily an "artist who had renounced his painting, music and writing in order to dedicate his life to an antimilitary masquerade" (*Kathleen and Frank* 503).

[42] Isherwood's *The Memorial* (1932), published by the Hogarth Press, is a response to the feelings of grief, helplessness, frustration, and guilt that attended many of the Younger Generation who were too young to fight in the war but old enough to remember it. Isherwood writes in *Lions and Shadows* about *The Memorial*: "It was to be about war: not the War itself, but the effect of the idea of 'War' on my generation. It was to give expression, at last, to my own 'War' complex" (296).

Soldier, the Land That Bore You, and the God of Battles" (*Kathleen and Frank* 502). His

familial and cultural rebellion, however, challenged more than abstract concepts, empty

but still powerful in a postwar England untethered from its national, political, and moral

moorings. Isherwood's sexuality stood in direct opposition to appropriate manifestations

of British masculinity.[43] Although not publicly identifying as homosexual – male

homosexuality was still punishable by British law – Isherwood was quite comfortable

claiming his sexuality among his friends, many of whom were also homosexual.[44]

Moreover, with Germany positioned as "the Enemy" in postwar discourse facilitated by

the Treaty of Versailles, Isherwood's life in Berlin as well as his obsession with the

"German Boy" symbolized "his refusal to accept, however metaphorically, the mantle of

the avenging son" (Page 40).[45] Living in a country that many British citizens still

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[43] In the "Afterward" to *Kathleen and Frank*, Isherwood explains his early interpretations
of Frank's letters from the Front concerning the development of his eldest son. Frank
writes: "I don't think it matters very much what Christopher learns as long as he remains
himself and keeps his individuality and develops on his own lines" (505). Isherwood
recalls that he "interpreted this freely as 'Don't follow in my footsteps! Be all the things
I never was…I want an Anti-Son. I want him to horrify The Others and disgrace my
name in their eyes. I shall look on and applaud!'" (*Kathleen and Frank* 505). Reflecting
on these adolescent thoughts in the early 1970s, Isherwood admits that had Frank lived it
"was more likely that Frank would have forgotten he had ever wanted Christopher to
'develop on his own lines'; that he would have ended by disowning this Anti-Son"
(*Kathleen and Frank* 506).

[44] Isherwood and Auden were sexually intimate at times throughout their long friendship;
during the thirties, Isherwood, with Heinz, would often spend time with Spender or
Forster and their lovers. Isherwood's mother Kathleen had to know about Isherwood's
sexuality although much was left unspoken: Heinz visited Kathleen in England with
Isherwood, Kathleen visited the pair in Portugal, and Kathleen financially aided
Isherwood in his campaign to keep Heinz from conscription into the Nazi army.

[45] Isherwood analyzes his focused obsession of working-class foreigners in *Christopher
and his Kind*: because he "couldn't relax sexually with a member of his own class or
nation" he needed a "working-class foreigner" (3). The German Boy held a particular
fascination to Isherwood as "the representative of his race" (*Christopher and His Kind* 5).

referred to as a nation of murderers, Isherwood denies the "martial and dynastic

ambitions demanded of a member of the English landed gentry" (Page 40).[46]

Isherwood's life in Berlin was a far cry from the life of proper British masculinity

scripted for him by family and state and emphasized in a postwar world that perceived

the Sacred Orphans as substitutes for the Lost Generation. Frequenting boy bars

(*Jugendsbars*) like the Cosy Corner, with a reputation like that of the Café Royal in

London in the 1890s, and the Dorian Gray (Page 16-18), Isherwood found a thriving gay

male social scene. Additionally, living for a time at Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's *Institut fuer*

SexualWissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science), Isherwood was introduced to the

scientific study of sexuality.[47] Dr. Hirschfeld's Institute, however, did not stop at the

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"By embracing Bubi," Isherwood's first young German lover, "he could hold in his arms
the whole mystery-magic of foreignness, Germanness" (*Christopher and His Kind* 5).
For a young man disillusioned, alienated, and angry with his own fatherland, foreignness
offered not only consolation but also the means for rebellion.

[46] Cunningham reads the desire for Germanic lovers on the part of the left-leaning
Younger Generation as "a way of being, so to say, in the First World War by proxy, a
participation in a murky underground substitute for the uniformed world of the military
father and elder brother, a wasteland place that was legally and physically dangerous,
where one's pacifist conscience could be appeased in a parody of the Christmas Day
1914 fraternization with the enemy" (*British Writers of the Thirties* 55).

[47] In *Christopher and His Kind* Isherwood remembers the gallery of photographs
"ranging in subject matter from the sexual organs of quasi-hermaphrodites to famous
homosexual couples" – such notable pairs as Wilde and Alfred Douglas, Whitman and
Peter Doyle, and Edward Carpenter and George Merrill (16). One of the Institutes main
objectives was to have Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, which punished
homosexual acts between men, overturned. On May 6, 1933, the Institute was raided by
a party of students who damaged furniture and manuscripts and looted books and art;
later that afternoon Nazi troops entered the Institute searching for particular files. Since
then it has been revealed that well-known officials in the Nazi Party had previously been
patients at the Institute and were fearful their homosexuality would be used against them.
Luckily, Hirschfeld, who had been on an international lecture tour, was safely in France
with his partner Karl Giese. The government formally deprived Hirschfeld of citizenship
(see *Christopher and His Kind* 15-29 and 124-9).

scientific study of sexuality; additionally, the Institute advocated for the recognition and

legality of male homosexuality. Through Dr. Hirschfeld and his lover Karl Giese,

Isherwood not only met other "sexual deviants" but also became acquainted with a

culture of "middle-class queens" whose tea-tables and club rules offered a bourgeois

version of male homosexuality in contrast to the vibrant, if exploitative, underground

working-class culture of the boy bars. The longer Isherwood spent in Germany and

Europe, and the more experience he had with varying degrees of sexual liberty, the more

committed he became to homosexual rights. By 1939, he made "the treatment of the

homosexual a test by which every political party and government must be judged"

(*Christopher and His Kind* 334).

Despite the sexual freedom he experienced in Berlin in the early thirties,

Isherwood was very aware that such freedom was ultimately false: underground and

under the cover of night. Not only was homosexuality illegal but it was becoming

increasingly psychologized, pathologized, and medicalized with consequences quite

contrary to those toward which Dr. Hirschfeld was working. By the beginning of World

War II, the danger to homosexuals was apparent: *Put Out More Flag*'s Ambrose knows

first-hand the costs of Nazi policy toward homosexuals because Hans, Ambrose's own

"German Boy," lay in the "unknown horrors of a Nazi concentration camp" (Waugh 47).

But even in the early thirties the resurgence and rehabilitation of discourses of

degeneration suggest the growing threat Fascism posed to all those somehow, as Herr

Landuer describes, "*extra*-ordinary." One of Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* stories, "On

Ruegen Island," explores the way the *fin de siècle* discourse of degeneration – Victorian

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millennial anxiety replaced by German postwar insecurity – is put in service of a growing

Fascist ideology in the 1930s.

Vacationing on Ruegen Island, Isherwood-the-narrator meets Peter Wilkinson, an

Englishman about the same age as the narrator, and his companion Otto Nowak, a

German working-class boy sixteen or seventeen years of age ("On Ruegen Island" 77).

Peter, literally a second son who "hating his father's business and his brother's science…

made music and literature into a religious cult" ("On Ruegen Island" 80), presents a sad

caricature of the Younger Generation: beside himself with privilege and knowledge,

Peter, spiraling into a vortex of guilt, self-righteousness, and depression, finds himself

paralyzed with anxiety and bound to his analyst's couch.[48] Otto, however, seems an

antidote to Peter's hopeless state. According to Isherwood-the-narrator, Otto, who "like

many animal people…has considerable instinctive powers of healing," effects Peter

powerfully: "He relaxes, begins to hold himself naturally…his eyes lose their haunted

look…he is just like an ordinary person" ("On Ruegen Island" 83). Peter, neurotic and

over-intellectualized, Otto, primitive and exoticized – "Otto is his whole body; Peter is

only his head," explains the narrator ("On Ruegen Island 78) – and the narrator, a

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[48] Peter, in many ways, is an exaggerated representative of the Younger Generation. As Isherwood-the-narrator explains in *Lions and Shadows*, even after twelve years of school and thousands of pounds invested in his education, he still feels unqualified. Peter's situation is similar: with a university education and the luxury of social status behind him, Peter could be anything he wants; however, after many failed attempts at fashioning a life for himself, Peter eventually is overcome by an attack of "homicidal mania" that leaves him dependent on his various psychoanalysts ("On Ruegen Island" 80-1). There is also a bit of the Des Esseintes character in Peter: an anxious recluse who fears "normal" life will "contaminate" him. In "On Ruegen Island," Isherwood-the-narrator explains that Peter, before he met Otto, "was so terrified of infection that he would wash his hands with carbolic after picking up a cat" (83).

Communist sympathizer, prove perfect specimens for the observant eye of the Berlin doctor who interrupts their quiet seaside isolation.

Declaring "communism a mere hallucination" and "speaking enthusiastically about Hitler," the "little fair-haired man with ferrety blue eyes" is in the majority as the seashore becomes increasingly dotted by Nazi flags and swastikas ("On Ruegen Island" 86-7). Despite the narrator's leftist politics and Peter's obvious effemininity and neuroses, it is Otto who garners the doctor's attention. According to the doctor, Otto has "a criminal head" and should be admitted into a labor camp, where, the doctor implies, discipline would contain but not correct the "disease": "It is a bad degenerate type. You cannot make anything out of these boys" ("On Ruegen Island" 90). Even in 1931, the year "On Ruegen Island" story is dated, talk of degenerates and labor camps suggests the approaching horrors of the Nazi regime, anticipating the categorization of Germans along the line dividing "exceptional" and "exceptions."

Explicitly silent on the topic of homosexuality but alluding to it quite loudly, "On Ruegen Island" may be Isherwood-the-author's most elaborate ventriloquist's trick. Just as Isherwood-the-author displaces his authorship onto Isherwood-the-narrator – "I am very taken up with my new novel" – so too do the Isherwoods displace their implicit homosexuality onto Peter. An exaggerated representative of the Younger Generation, Peter's homosexuality is coded: mother-identified and mother-hating, Peter was romantically involved with his tutor, turned aesthete at Oxford, and, thanks to a small inheritance from his uncle, is able to live independently, spending most of his money on psychoanalysis. With a biography not unlike Isherwood's, Peter becomes yet another ventriloquist dummy for the author, a puppet of sorts performing the part with Isherwood

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pulling the strings.[49] But the narrator's attention to detail concerning Otto – "Otto

certainly has a superb pair of shoulders and chest…the beautiful ripe lines of his torso"

("On Ruegen Island" 79) – and the hints of camaraderie between the narrator and Otto –

"he makes up to me assiduously, flattering me, laughing at my jokes, never missing an

opportunity of giving me a crafty, understanding wink" ("On Ruegen Island" 78) –

suggest that Isherwood-the-narrator is more a sympathetic observer than a disinterested

documentarian.

Keeping in mind Isherwood-the-author's authorial displacements, the

conversation between Isherwood-the-narrator and the Berlin doctor takes on a new

significance:

> "And you think that people with criminal heads should be left to
>
> become criminals?"
>
> "Certainly not. I believe in discipline. These boys ought to be put
>
> into labor camps."

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[49] Isherwood, too, had a love-hate relationship with his mother, Kathleen, a relationship often articulated in psychoanalytic-inflected language. At Cambridge, Isherwood – with the help of Upward – lived a kind of Des Esseintes existence by creating alternate, narrative worlds and cultivating a specialized discourse both aesthetic and imaginative. Although there are no accounts of "homicidal mania" in Isherwood's biography, he did often suffer from what he suggests are psychosomatic illnesses and, like Peter, experienced a kind of "identity crisis" as he entered adulthood: Isherwood purposely failed his Cambridge exams, was a private tutor for a time, worked as a personal secretary, entered and dropped out of medical school. Additionally, Isherwood, like Peter, benefits from financial support from an uncle; Isherwood's uncle, however, was alive for a good portion of Isherwood's life and singled out Isherwood in part because of their shared homosexuality. But the most obvious similarity between Isherwood and Peter is that both "escaped" their family dramas and personal crises by traveling to Germany where homosexuality and young working-class German boys played a large part in their increasing self-esteem and self-assurance.

"And what are you going to do with them when you've got them there? You say that they can't be altered, anyhow, so I suppose you'd keep them locked up for the rest of their lives?"

The doctor laughed delightedly as though this were a joke against himself which he could, nevertheless, appreciate. He laid a caressing hand on my arm:

"You are an idealist! Do not imagine that I don't understand your point of view…You and your friend do not understand such boys as Otto…So, you see, I know them through and through!" ("On Ruegen Island" 89)

Between the lines of this conversation labor camps become concentration camps and social "exceptions" become victims sacrificed to science, a science of eugenics tracing its lineage back through the *fin de siècle* work of Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau. Furthermore, the irony of the doctor's erroneous assumption – "You and your friend do not understand such boys as Otto" – suggests that Isherwood-the-author actually understands all too well the potential fate of "such boys as Otto." With their British accents and privileged education, the narrator and Peter are superficially exempt from the doctor's menacing diagnosis. However, this exemption is just another exclusion encountered by the Younger Generation. Their national affiliation and social position provides them with the "luxury" of remaining safe from the threatening ideology of Fascism while their sexuality and political sympathies align them with those soon to be vilified and victimized by the Nazis.

"With it" but "never of it": Bradshaw's confession during the Party meeting he

attends with Mr. Norris echoes throughout *The Berlin Stories* and, in "On Ruegen

Island," the stakes of this "outsider-within" position become clear. If the 1890s dandy

viewed "luxury from an aesthetic standpoint" then the Younger Generation views it from

a political standpoint. And it is the very luxury of their position as exceptional

exceptions that compels them to conjure the 1890 dandy. With a growing conviction

concerning the rights of homosexuals and an increasingly nuanced understanding of the

relationship between sexual rights and state power, it is no wonder that Isherwood

chooses the nineties dandy Mr. Norris as an alternate father figure and a mouthpiece for

his own political ambivalence and uncertainty.

Seemingly heterosexual, albeit masochistic, Mr. Norris's dandyism offers more

than a suggestion of Wildean homosexuality.[50] With his wigs ("I'm obliged to get one

every eighteen months or so, and they are exceedingly expensive"), elaborate toilet

("Seated before the dressing-table in a delicate mauve wrap, Arthur would impart to me

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[50] Jonathan Fryer asserts that Mr. Norris "is proudly heterosexual" ("Sexuality in Isherwood" 346), a statement that derives its evidence from Mr. Norris' relationship with the prostitute Anni and his flirtation with Frl. Schroeder. This reading simplifies Mr. Norris' nuanced sexual proclivities – and politics. A fetishist and masochist as well as an author and connoisseur of erotica, Mr. Norris' sexuality can not be defined by the gender of the prostitute who services him, especially considering gender and intercourse may be irrelevant to a fetishist or masochist. What is most important, I would argue, is that Mr. Norris is represented as sexually marginal, deviant, and perverse. Considering his ambiguous acquaintance with Baron von Pregnitz and his knowledge of the Baron's sexual tastes, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Mr. Norris has a homosexual history. The Wildean context in which Mr. Norris is presented does suggest that he, too, may exist outside the bounds of heteronormativity despite a seemingly heterosexual performance – recall that Wilde was married. John Lehmann, in the memoir of his friendship with Isherwood, states emphatically that Mr. Norris (like Proust's Baron de Charlus) is homosexual "though Christopher concealed Mr. Norris' homosexuality" (*Christopher Isherwood* 21).

the various secrets of his toilet"), and lady-like silk underwear (Frl. Schroeder exclaims, "you should let *me* wear those; they're too fine for a man"), Mr. Norris already presents a very effeminate version of masculinity. However, it is not just Mr. Norris' dandy performance that evokes the specter of Wilde. Rather, the narrative endows Mr. Norris with a very Wildean history. After meeting and talking with Bradshaw's friend Fritz Wendel – about the "unpublished works of the Wilde group" nonetheless – Mr. Norris is deemed "queer" by Fritz who heard rumors suggesting Mr. Norris had been imprisoned ("LMN" 35-6). "'What's he supposed to have been in prison for?'" Bradshaw inquires; "'I didn't hear,' Fritz drawled, 'But maybe I can guess'" ("LMN" 36).

An acquaintance with Wilde's friend and biographer Frank Harris, the prosecuting party in a libel suit, and an unlikely advocate for penal reform, Mr. Norris is a kind of interwar Wilde. An exile-of-sorts from England, threatened by poverty, yet an ardent devotee of the leisured life, all that is missing in Mr. Norris is Wilde's late-in-life Rome-ward turn.[51] In many ways, Mr. Norris's ambiguous criminality is aligned with the "ninetyish feeling" he brings to the narrative. As Mr. Norris explains to Bradshaw, it was in the last ten years of the nineteenth century, after the death of his mother and his acquisition of an inheritance, that he "first learnt the meaning of the word luxury" ("LMN" 40). The lesson, however, was cut short. Within two years Mr. Norris had spent his entire inheritance: "Since then, I am sorry to say, I have been forced to add others [words] to my vocabulary; horrid ugly ones, some of them" ("LMN" 40).

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[51] Peter Thomas, in "Camp and Politics in Isherwood's Berlin Fiction" (1976), suggests a productive link between Roman Catholicism in the 1890s and Communism in the 1930s: "The Party, indeed, functions as the Church does for the *fin de siècle* sinner. It purges and purifies and yet, like Catholicism in the 90s, it is itself *outré*" (124).

Considering the similarity to a Wildean timeline of rise and fall, Mr. Norris's decadent reminiscence suggests that the "horrid ugly" words added to his vocabulary could very well have been sodomite and homosexual.[52] No longer an acceptable if unspoken upper-class luxury, homosexual interactions are deemed criminal once the boundaries of class are trespassed, as in Wilde's performance of aristocratic gentlemanliness, or, as in Mr. Norris' case, once one falls from a position of class privilege.[53]

Queer sexuality and its attendant evasions along with class privilege and its attendant guilt are as much constituent parts of Mr. Norris' character as they are aspects of Isherwood and his fellow thirties writers. As a nineties dandy, Mr. Norris conjures up all the *fin de siècle* clichés: paradoxical politics and the political performativity it necessitates, class passing, and deviant sexuality. However for Isherwood, the master ventriloquist, the evocation of such millennial clichés is neither accidental nor incidental. Rather, Mr. Norris emerges in the narrative as yet another ventriloquist dummy, articulating the nuanced and ambivalent politics, sexual and otherwise, that Bradshaw, as Isherwood's namesake narrator – and Isherwood-the-author – dare not speak.

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[52] Alan Sinfield explains in his book *The Wilde Century* (1994) that press reports of Wilde's trials "avoided specifying Wilde's alleged crimes" because they were "regarded as too horrible to be named" (3). He cites the *Evening Standard* reporting that Queensberry had written "'Oscar Wilde posing as _____': the last word, 'somdomite' (Queensberry's mistake for 'sodomite'), was replaced by a blank" (*The Wilde Century* 3). Consequently, "'Oscar Wilde posing' stood for the whole idea" (*The Wilde Century* 3).

[53] In his review of the *Letters of Oscar Wilde* in the *New Yorker* in 1963 (collected in Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays*), Auden describes the class betrayal at the heart of the Wilde trials: "Had Wilde been an aristocrat, his class brothers would have seen to it that there was no public scandal; since he was a person of middle-class origin who had pushed himself into high society, they left him to his fate with, perhaps, a certain feeling of satisfaction at the downfall of someone who had risen above his proper station" ("An Improbable Life" 137).

Already canonized by the mythology generated by he and his generational

companions, Isherwood is compelled to distance himself from Mr. Norris' "favorite vice

of philosophizing" for fear that he would reveal his Liberal inheritance, encourage his

pacifist inclinations, and turn the practice of critical questioning that he and his friends

fostered among themselves onto the politics that they often unquestioningly advocated.

Moreover, although increasingly comfortable with his sexuality among his close friends,

Isherwood also feared giving voice to what many would label deviant sexuality. As

illustrated by Baron von Pregnitz from "The Last of Mr. Norris" – "You knew Pregnitz

was a fairy, of course" Helen Pratt asks Bradshaw when she shares the news of his

suicide ("LMN" 188) – and young, homoerotic Rudi from "A Berlin Diary" – "Rudi's

make-believe, story-book game has become earnest; the Nazis will play it with

him…Perhaps at this very moment Rudi is being tortured to death" ("A Berlin Diary"

207) – Isherwood knew well the risks of mixing sexuality with politics. By counting Mr.

Norris among his ventriloquist dummies, Isherwood "throws his voice" far enough,

narratively and historically, so that his own queer sexuality and class privilege are

displaced onto a historical and cultural figure already marginalized by the *fin de siècle*

discourse of degeneration leveraged by millennial anxiety and late-Empire insecurities.

However, *The Berlin Stories* are more than an exercise in displacement. An acute

if subtle documentation of Berlin's political climate in the 1930s, *The Berlin Stories* is a

prose portrait of a moment. Far from displacement, on the surface, *The Berlin Stories*

derives its inspiration from contemporary events and the accounting of contemporary

attitudes: as many scholars have demonstrated, "novelists and poets started to see

themselves as reporters" with reportage becoming a "highly favored literary mode"

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(Cunningham 281). But *The Berlin Stories*, according to Shuttleworth, is of especial importance because "rather than voicing uncomprehending liberal alarm at the horrors of the time," Isherwood's stories "delve into the possible causes of totalitarian politics, while also seeking to take account of their dangerous allure" ("In A Populous City" 151). Isherwood is able to "take account of their dangerous allure" because, as a member of the Younger Generation, Isherwood and his namesake narrators are as alarmed at the mistakes and failures of Liberal politics as they are with the increasing presence and power of Fascist movements.

Inheritors of a British masculinity and literary tradition contextualized in part by Liberal intellectualism, but also witnesses to and heirs of the consequences of its "strange death," the Younger Generation is searching for an ideology, a belief system, a politics that will provide direction and give meaning to a world marked by "the inevitable increase in the chances of death" and "makeshift consolations" (Auden, "Spain 1937"). Isherwood locates one consolation, makeshift perhaps but affirming nonetheless, in the dandy of the 1890s and in doing so breaks the confines of postwar *exception*ality that burden the Younger Generation. Illustrated by the manner of their meeting – in a train crossing through the liminal space of the German frontier – the connection between Bradshaw and Mr. Norris is as political as it is historical: both figures, the thirties writer and the nineties dandy, are metaphorical casualties to national narratives dominated, on one hand, by Victorian imperialism and progress, and, on the other, by military masculinities and war. By aligning them in the no-man's land of interwar politics, Isherwood is able to offer an alternate national story composed by "outsiders-within."

It is not until Isherwood is sailing to America in 1939 that he can directly

articulate his individual politics. Literally displacing himself from his "fatherland,"

Isherwood begins the process of separating himself from not only his national identity but

also the mythic identity he and his contemporaries crafted in opposition to the Great War

mythology that still pervaded national and literary discourse.[54] Perhaps initiated by

Stalin's 1934 reversal of the Soviet Union's 1917 recognition of the private sexual rights

of its citizens – in 1934 homosexuality again becomes a criminal offence – Isherwood's

advocacy of Communism began to wane. In a period when, and among friends for

whom, group action was ostensibly privileged over the rights of individuals, Isherwood

wavered between "embarrassment and defiance" in regard to the confluence of national

politics and sexual rights (*Christopher and His Kind* 334).

By the end of the thirties, the treatment of homosexuals became "the test by

which every political party and government must be judged": "All right, we've heard

your liberty speech. Does that include us or doesn't it?" (*Christopher and His Kind* 334).

Arguably the most important realization during this period for Isherwood was that by

criminalizing homosexuality Stalin's government was in agreement with Nazi policies.

The only difference between the two parties on the issue of homosexuality, as far as

Isherwood could detect, was in name: the Fascists called it "sexual Bolshevism" and the

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[54] It is arguable that Isherwood never fully abandons his ventriloquist dummies. Even in his 1976 novel-memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, there is a distinction between Isherwood-the-author and Isherwood-the-character exemplified by Isherwood-the-author's use of the third person in reference to the book's subject and protagonist. In some ways a continuation of the "I am a camera" metaphor from *The Berlin Stories* and in other ways an awareness of the evolution of identity throughout a person's lifetime, I like to imagine Isherwood's third person characterization of himself as demonstration of his acute sensitivity to the power of historiography – auto or otherwise – to make myths out of reality and in so doing blur the lines of memory and experience.

Communists called it "Fascist perversion" (*Christopher and His Kind* 334). In a very "ninetyish" irony, the alignment of Fascism and Communism over homosexuality that frustrates Isherwood late in the thirties (although he does not publicly articulate this until 1976 in *Christopher and His Kind*) is anticipated in "The Last of Mr. Norris": it is Mr. Norris, with his ambiguous and deviant sexuality, who finds himself simultaneously associated with both the right and the left. Accepted by neither, Mr. Norris works to exploit both sides for his own gain.

Like Mr. Norris who flees Berlin after his double-crossings are revealed, Isherwood, too, departs first Germany, then the continent, and finally England for America. Beginning the process of nationally and geographically distancing himself from his homeland – England – and his adopted homeland – Germany – by immigrating to America with Auden in 1939,[55] what many left-wing commentators declared a betrayal and desertion, Isherwood comes closer and closer to the politics he would continue to develop for the rest of his life. He explains to Forster in a letter from New York City three months after arriving in America that he "want[s] to talk about pacifism, for I know

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[55] Green explains in *Children of the Sun* that Germany, for the left-leaning Younger Generation, was the "Holy Land" and its sacred position was passed down from Auden to Isherwood, from Isherwood to Spender, from Spender to Lehmann" (292). Isherwood had visited Germany twice before he returned for his longest "visit." On his third visit to Germany Isherwood was not "putting any limits on his stay" thinking that this visit "might become an immigration": "When the German passport official asked him the purpose of his journey, he could have truthfully replied, 'I'm looking for my homeland and I've come to find out if this is it'" (*Christopher and His Kind* 12). For Isherwood, Germany was his adopted Fatherland – representing freedom from and revolt against his role as Sacred Orphan – and England was the smothering Motherland – closely linked to his own mother, Kathleen, with whom he had a complicated and, at times, oddly intimate relationship.   However, emigrating from England in 1939 was "his final act of breaking free from her": by becoming a citizen of the United States, Isherwood separated himself "from Mother and Motherland at one stroke" (*Kathleen and Frank* 508).

now (it's about the only thing I do know) that I'm a pacifist" (Zeikowitz 78).

Reductively defined by Auden as merely not wanting to kill people one does not know

personally (Zeikowitz 78), Isherwood's pacifism is constituted by more than a distaste for

gratuitous violence. Indelibly marked by his years traversing the European continent

with his German lover, Heinz, in an attempt to keep him from military service in

Germany, Isherwood – who eventually loses his battle against the Nazis over Heinz – is

able to see through the enemy in Nazi uniform to the loved one that is disguised in the

trappings of totalitarian ambition. As Isherwood writes in *Christopher and His Kind*,

"but now Heinz was about to become an unwilling part of the Nazi military machine.

Soon he would be wearing Hitler's uniform" (335). And from his personal experience

Isherwood's political conclusion issues forth: "every man in that Army could be

somebody's Heinz" (*Christopher and His Kind* 336).

In this instance, it is Isherwood's identification with his homosexuality and the

opportunity to participate in national militarism that provides his "camera eye" with a

new subject. With World War II emerging on the horizon, Isherwood is given the

opportunity to think about war and his role in it as a reality instead of a haunting national

mythology. For Isherwood, that man in uniform on the other side of the line dividing

right and left, right and wrong, Fascist and anti-Fascist, is not simply the enemy but

potentially someone's lover. Although this perspective is arguably not unfamiliar to

women – one only has to read war novels written by women to witness this logic at work

– it is not women who don military uniforms, salute to authority, and pull the trigger on

command. As a man who inherited all the privileges of class, education, and culture,

Isherwood, for all intents and purposes, should be, like his father before him, obediently

and patriotically uniformed, taking aim in the name of God and country.[56] Writing in

1976 of the thought process that brought him to pacifism in 1939, Isherwood implicitly

recognizes the role homosexuality plays in his reaction to a construction of masculinity

inextricable from militarism:

> Suppose, Christopher now said to himself, I have a Nazi Army at my
>
> mercy. I can blow it up by pressing a button. The men in that Army are
>
> notorious for torturing and murdering civilians – all except one of them,
>
> Heinz. Will I press the button? No – wait: Suppose I know that Heinz
>
> himself, out of cowardice or moral infection, has become as bad as they
>
> are and takes part in all their crimes? Will I press that button, even
>
> so?...Of course not.
>
> Suppose that Army goes into action and has just one casualty,
>
> Heinz himself. Will I press the button now and destroy his fellow
>
> criminals?...Once I have refused to press that button because of Heinz, I
>
> can never press it. (*Christopher and His Kind* 335-6)

I quote at length from *Christopher and His Kind* because it poignantly illustrates how

Isherwood's love for a man changed his perspective on war, the province and validation

for national masculinities in the war-torn first half of the twentieth century. Instead of

national mythologies built upon patrilineal generational conflict – the mistakes of the

Fathers, the rebellion of the Sons – that breed pride, ambition, and discontent, Isherwood

offers through his camera eye a new perspective, a new state of mind based not on hate,

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[56] Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Three Guineas* (1938) paint poignant and pointed
pictures of the violence inherent in the script of imperial British masculinity.

but love. Anticipating a line from Auden's "September 1939" – "We must love one another or die" – Isherwood, in an April 1939 letter to Forster, declares his commitment to pacifism: "You have to get into a state of mind. You have to stop hating. I mean, *I* have to stop hating" (Zeikowitz 78).

In fact, it is love – in a very perverse and camp manifestation – that ends "The Last of Mr. Norris." The nineties dandy again anticipates the results of Isherwood's as-yet-forbidden "favorite vice of philosophizing." Having escaped Berlin in the nick of time after his multifaceted deceptions are revealed, Mr. Norris travels the world in search of a safe haven from the parties he deliberately and accidentally injured – parties both personal and political. Bradshaw, still hurt by even if resigned to Mr. Norris' behavior, receives postcards from Mr. Norris along his journey. The destinations accumulate as Mr. Norris is pursued closely by Schmidt, his double-crossing secretary who succeeds with "positively superhuman" ingenuity to continue not only to locate Mr. Norris but also to interfere and implicate himself in Mr. Norris' business prospects ("LMN" 190). After a failed attempt to "*exterminate* the reptile" that "succeeded only in arousing its venom," Mr. Norris undertakes another approach in dealing with his enemy ("LMN" 190). The last postcard Bradshaw receives from Mr. Norris reveals "a new state of affairs": "We leave this afternoon, *together*, for Buenos Aires. I am too depressed to write more now" ("LMN" 191).

This new partnership, presented with all the exaggeration, camp humor, and perversity that has accompanied Mr. Norris throughout the novel, can be read as yet another ventriloquist's trick. Instead of a simple story of good versus evil – Communism versus Fascism – in which those on the side of good – Communists, Marxists, Socialists –

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live happily ever after, through Mr. Norris, Isherwood is able to present a more complex narrative. By joining Mr. Norris and Schmidt in an ironic marriage of mutual exploitation, Isherwood prophesizes his own exile. Like his dandical counterpart Mr. Norris, Isherwood, too, takes flight from politics, politics that, as in the case of Mr. Norris, were more often than not mere performance. And as Mr. Norris the English gentleman finds himself forever paired with his German secretary, so too does Isherwood "betray" both his country and his comrades in his declaration of pacifism at the outset of World War II.

Emigrating from England not coincidentally at a moment when national military masculinities are once again called into service, Isherwood's departure responds unequivocally to the Younger Generation's frustration with and investment in historical plotlines dominated by the rise and fall of war. Given the opportunity to "be worthy of" his father in the most appropriate and symbolic way – by participating in World War II – Isherwood chose to emigrate (*Kathleen and Frank* 502). Weary with his role as Sacred Orphan – an inheritance he did not desire – and that of "outsider-within" – a role he and others of the Younger Generation fiercely cultivated in response to their postwar positionality – Isherwood divorced himself from nation and family in order to become simply an outsider. However, as the dandy Mr. Norris laments, "things are so very complex nowadays," and as such Isherwood's long-sought-after and finally-achieved outsider position is not to be taken at face value. Perhaps just another Isherwoodian "sham," Isherwood-as-outsider does not reject historical narratives as much as he revises and reorients them, writing himself into them. At the end of *Kathleen and Frank*, an epistolary biography of Isherwood's parents with the son in the role of detached historian,

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Isherwood alludes to the relationship between his writing, his life, and the life of family and nation he was so eager to rebel against:

> About 1960 Christopher began to consider a project which he called *The Autobiography of My Books*; it was to be a discussion, as objective as possible, of the relation between his own life and the subject-matter of his books. The questions asked would be: To what extent do these books describe their writer's life? In what ways and for what reasons to they distort or hide facts about it? How far do the writer's father- and mother-characters resemble his own parents? What are the main themes of these books and how do they relate to the writer's personal problems? (509)

What Isherwood discovers as he reads through the letters and diaries of his mother and father is that "heredity and kinship create a woven fabric": if these histories are part of his project then he is a part of theirs. And as such, there is no outside or inside, no exceptional exceptions, just perspective and position. By way of concluding *Kathleen and Frank*, Isherwood, in 1890s dandy fashion, positions himself within both familial and national historical narratives: "this book too may prove to be chiefly about Christopher" he proposes, but only after he has confessed that "Christopher's project has become theirs" (510).

Chapter 3

"To make that country our own country":

Gender Politics, National History, and Virginia Woolf's *The Years*

"She [Ethel Smyth] is of the race of pioneers, of pathmakers. She has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who come after her. Thus we honor her not only as a musician and as a writer…but also as a blaster of rocks and the maker of bridges."
- Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women"

"That is your problem now, if I may hazard a guess – to find the right relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world outside. It is a difficult problem. No living poet has, I think, altogether solved it."
- Virginia Woolf, "A Letter to a Young Poet"

"But The Pargiters [*The Years*]. I think this will be a terrific affair. I must be bold & adventurous. I want to give the whole of present society – nothing less: facts, as well as vision. And to combine them both."
- Virginia Woolf, *Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV*

"But quite suddenly, in the years 1930-35, something happens," George Orwell declares in his 1940 essay "Inside the Whale" (236). The something that happens is politics and it happens, according to Orwell, to the Younger Generation of writers whose poetry and prose is seemingly dismissive of the modernist movement:

> The literary climate changes. A new group of writers, Auden and Spender and the rest of them, has made its appearance, and although technically these writers owe something to their predecessors, their "tendency" is entirely different…In other words, "purpose" has come back, the writers have "gone into politics." (236-7)

In this chapter I question Orwell's assertion that the "tendency" of the Younger Generation is entirely different from those modernist writers whose technical innovation and aesthetic concerns they simultaneously inherited and disowned. Rather than isolate

"Auden and Spender and the rest of them" from their literary predecessors, this chapter attempts to integrate the Younger Generation of writers into the national literary-historical trajectory from which their "purpose" and "politics" so often separates them by paying attention to the way in which Younger Generation writers *and* modernist writers engage with issues of national identity and political history in the 1930s.

As Bernard Bergonzi explains, it is a commonplace in literary studies to understand "the thirties" as referring "generically to a group of writers and the work they produced mostly in that decade, occasionally later" (*Reading the Thirties* 1). In this popular understanding of the thirties, the cultural meaning eclipses the bounds of the historical designation: in other words, the literary-historical construction of the thirties is less about a decade of history and more about a small group of young writers whose work has come to signify the economic instability and political tensions of the decade and to symbolize the slow but definitive break between Britain's imperial past and welfare state future. However, by taking the decade designation seriously as a *shared* context for modernist *and* Younger Generation writers, I intend to illustrate the relevance of national history and politics for all those interested in what it means to be English and what it means to write literature in the thirties. Although the writing of the Younger Generation most directly highlighted the "necessary connection between politics and literature" suggesting (*World Within World* 249), as David Margolies explains, that "traditional notions of literature and criticism [were] irrelevant" ("*Left Review* and Left Literary Theory" 67), a close look at the thirties writing of Virginia Woolf reveals her investment in contemporary politics, the politics of literature, and narratives of national history that were both threatened and called into service during the decade.

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In order to understand Woolf as writing *with, not against,* the Younger Generation of writers in the thirties – to challenge Jed Esty's convincing interpretation of her in *A Shrinking Island* (2004) as an aging modernist turned Little Englander – I read Woolf's thirties writing in the same way I have read the writing of the Younger Generation. If the members of the Younger Generation are productively understood by way of a war they did not fight, then Woolf, too, can be understood by way of a political movement about which she felt ambivalent at best. Just as the Younger Generation's experience of the thirties is shaped and scarred by the Great War, so, too, is Woolf's experience of the decade influenced by the suffrage movement, specifically the militant suffrage movement she opposed.

Although always concerned with histories of the obscure as well as the situation of women within the patriarchal structure of family and nation, Woolf reexamines and reorients her feminism in the thirties, a productive consequence of her growing friendship with Dame Ethel Smyth, a militant suffragist, composer, and lesbian then in her seventies whose personal and political history offers a prewar feminist corollary to the Younger Generation. Like the Younger Generation, Smyth is a prominent figure in Woolf's letters and diaries throughout the thirties. When Woolf is not responding to one of Smyth's lengthy epistles, she is either caricaturing Smyth to her friends or using Smyth as a catalyst for her own ruminations on egotism and art, thus revealing not only her engagement with the current literary-political discussions associated with the Younger Generation but also her increased interest in the political history of British feminism.

By constellating Woolf's writing in the 1930s with Smyth and early twentieth century feminism, on one hand, and with the politicized self-consciousness of the

Younger Generation writers, on the other hand, I hope to illuminate the intensity and urgency of Woolf's own political and historical concerns as well as complicate conventional literary-historical narratives of the 1930s. These two constituencies, Smyth and the Younger Generation, not only are 1930s representatives of Britain's pre-World War I political past (Smyth) and its pre-World War II political present (Younger Generation) but also they provide Woolf with the opportunity to critically analyze the role and function of gender within the patriarchal, heteronormative narratives of nation that perpetuate hubristic and tragic mythologies of imperialism and its decline, war and its necessity.

Just as the conventional representations of Woolf's gender politics portray her as ambivalent if not contemptuous of the feminist movement, the majority of accounts position Woolf at best as wary of, and at worst, as antagonistic to the Younger Generation. Similarly, scholars interested in the Younger Generation typically evoke the commonplace thirties story that depict writers such as Auden, Isherwood, and Spender as literary malcontents critical of modernism's bourgeois Liberal foundation and its elitist aesthetic; many feminist critics also abide by the conventional wisdom, deriding Woolf for her hands-off approach to feminism and her class prejudice. The reality, however, is much more nuanced – on both accounts. Over the course of the last two decades, Woolf has emerged as a feminist icon in new modernist studies: evidence of her work for the Labour Party and feminist organizations in conjunction with the slow erosion of the Bloomsbury mythology has encouraged a more politically-attentive reading of Woolf's

life and work.[1] Likewise, Woolf's relationship with the Younger Generations is more

complicated than it is typically represented. For example, the Hogarth Press was very

supportive of the Younger Generation writers and, despite all their talk of documentary

realism, the working class, and Marxism, the Younger Generation was deeply influenced

by and interested in the older generation of modernists, often confessing their debt to and

respect for – even if grudgingly – their literary predecessors.[2]

My interest is motivated by, but reaches beyond, the generational, political, and

aesthetic distinctions that structure the common narrative of the decade and its literature.

What connects Woolf and writers of the Younger Generation more profoundly than

anything that divides them is their position within – or more accurately, outside –

national historical narratives that privilege military masculinities, honor imperial

ambitions, and perpetuate power structures based upon class and gender divisions. As

inheritors of national ideologies they simultaneously absorbed and opposed –

Victorianism and the Great War, respectively – Woolf and the Younger Generation

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[1] The pendulum of critical opinion has swung from conservative readings of Woolf's life
and work to radical readings. An illustrative example is Jane Marcus' recent
"Introduction" to *Three Guineas* which offers Woolf's pacifism and feminism as
inextricable from her "own brand of communism" (li). The benefit of more politically-
attentive readings of Woolf are invaluable, however, many feminist critics undermine
their authority by reading Woolf as an social activist and political radical. The reality, I
would argue, is much more nuanced than either extreme – left or right – suggests.

[2] As previously mentioned, the Hograth Press published Isherwood's *The Memorial*
(1932), employed and apprenticed John Lehmann, and supported Lehmann's publication
of *New Writing*. Also Eliot was an early advocate of Auden, supporting the publication
The Orators (1932) and reviewing it favorably. Spender's *The Destructive Element*
(1953) discusses the work of Eliot and other modernists, implicitly acknowledging their
influence on writers of his own generation. Spender also defends Woolf against
Wyndham Lewis' attack in *Men Without Art* (see *Letters IV* 530) and, in his
autobiography, describes Bloomsbury as "the most constructive and creative influence on
English taste between the two wars" (*World Within World* 140).

writers positioned themselves as "outsiders-within": recipients of certain cultural privileges but also critics of what they perceived as the detrimental consequences of nationalistic historiography-cum-mythology dominated by imperial progress, war, and the lives of Great Men.

Opposing the gendered roles national history had scripted for them – a wife, mother, and patriot on one hand; son, soldier, and statesman on the other – Woolf and the Younger Generation writers examine and challenge national historical narratives in their writing, implying that rather than being separated by aesthetic and political principles, they are connected by their shared investment in public and private history. In other words, frustrated by the exclusivity of a national historiography dominated by the discourse of war, both Woolf and the Younger Generation explore intergenerational tension, class conflict, and gender politics in service of a more inclusive national narrative that not only will "survive this [coming] war," but also will see beyond historical plotlines constructed by imperial anxiety, national hubris, and military masculinities ("The Leaning Tower" 154).[3] Presenting history, like literature, as "common ground," as Woolf suggests in her 1940 essay "The Leaning Tower," Woolf and the Younger Generation offer literary historiography as a way for "commoners and outsiders like ourselves" to "make that country our own country" ("TLT" 154). Through the Pargiter family in *The Years* (1937), Woolf depicts the intersection of family and nation, illustrating the way public narratives of gender inequality, imperialism, and war are privatized, domesticated, and realized over the course of three generations,

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[3] Woolf's 1940 essay "The Leaning Tower" will hitherto be cited with the abbreviation "TLT."

advocating, as she does in "The Leaning Tower," that we can "add our own experience"

and "make our own contribution" (153).[4]

A family saga of sorts, *The Years* follows the Pargiter family from 1880 until the

"Present Day" (1936 or 1937), each section of the novel titled with the year it represents.

Informed by the popularity of the family saga and the pageant history genre, two

typically middlebrow forms that found eager audiences in both the masses and the

bourgeois bohemians in the interwar years, Woolf finds herself among an assorted group

of writers, such as John Galsworthy, Ford Madox Ford, and Noël Coward, all of whom

explore and exploit the teleology of historical narrative for purposes as diverse as realism,

critique, and camp.[5] Unlike Woolf's precisely divided novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927),

The Years, despite its chronological divisions, appears random, with some sections longer

than others and a large narrative gap between 1918 and the final "Present Day" section.[6]

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[4] Here, I follow a line of argument articulated by many Woolf scholars linking tyrannical governments with dictatorial domestic structures. As Herbert Marder explains, "Dictatorship, which as Woolf saw it was rooted in domestic tyranny, formed an implicit background to 'The Pargiters,' an invisible ambience that subtly colored her novel" (*The Measure of Life* 126). Woolf's *Three Guineas* takes up this issue directly.

[5] Galsworthy, Ford, and Coward are just a few of the writers to utilize the family saga form. Galsworthy, although writing and publishing *The Forsyte Saga* (1906-1921) in the twentieth century, demonstrates a Victorian-influenced realism; see "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923) for Woolf's criticisms of Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells. In the cases of Ford and Coward, the use of the family saga is more complicated. Although the patriotism of Coward's 1931 play *Cavalcade* is influenced by his conservative politics, the play's over-the-top theatricality and ironic plotline imbues it with a camp aesthetic. Ford's four volume family saga, *Parade's End* (1924-28) is both an elegy for and indictment of nation, class, and family.

[6] Although the narrative jump from the "1918" section to the interwar "Present Day" section encourages some scholars to read the structure of *The Years* as a commentary on the seeming repetition of history – 1918 being simultaneously postwar and prewar – the manuscript history of the novel suggests otherwise. As Grace Radin and others have made clear, Woolf cut "two enormous chunks" – the "1917" section and the "1921"

It is the ensemble cast of Pargiters more than its structure, that gives the novel its

cohesion (which many scholars argue is tenuous at best, considering it her most formless

novel, lacking both a compelling structure and plot). Like *To the Lighthouse*, however,

The Years foregrounds the interpersonal relations and daily details of family life,

relegating national and historical events like the death of King George and the end of the

Great War to the periphery of the narrative. Woolf's domestic focus, her evocation of the

family saga and pageant history, and her characteristic lyricism – perhaps at its finest – is

often read as a conservative turn, literarily and politically. Her own intense struggle with

the novel, spending nearly six years composing and revising, encourages its detractors

who employ Woolf's own distress, she fears it is a failure, as evidence for their

judgment.[7]

  However, as this chapter will demonstrate, *The Years* is as far from conservative

as it is from failure. Its politics are as progressive as those clearly articulated in *Three*

Guineas (1938), a project that shares its genesis with *The Years*.[8] Whereas *Three*

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section – during the revision and editing process (see chapter 5, "Two Enormous
Chunks," as well as the appendix in Radin's *Virginia Woolf's The Years*).

[7] The manuscript history of *The Years* is long and rich; Radin and Mitchell Leaska, in
conjunction with the winter 1977 *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* provide an
extensive history of and commentary on the process of writing and revision that not only
spanned nearly six years but also caused Woolf terrible psychological anguish during the
latter stages. It is not my intention to investigate this history as it has been so
competently done. See *Virginia Woolf's The Years* (1981) by Radin, *The Pargiters*
(1978) by Leaska, and the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* from the winter of
1977.

[8] As Woolf's diaries and letters make clear, and as many scholars have explored, *The
Years* and *Three Guineas* were both "born" out of Woolf's speech to the LNSWS. *Three
Guineas* was the "phantom book" to *The Years*, existing, as Marder explains, mainly in
Woolf' imagination as she struggled with the form of her novel, an arena for the overt
political and cultural commentary increasingly sublimated in the story of the Pargiters

Guineas capitalizes on the direct address of the epistolary form, *The Years*, with its focus

on the private and the domestic, sublimates its argument, seeking to demonstrate rather

than preach, an intention confirmed by Woolf's decision to eliminate the essay portions

of what was originally, as *The Pargiters*, called a "novel-essay."[9] Consequently, *The*

Years offers a subtle rejection of critical interpretations that seek to read the late work of

canonized modernists as participating in what Esty has identified as an "anthropological

turn." For Esty, as I will discuss in more detail below, modernists associated with the

1910s and 1920s "translated the end of empire" so apparent in the 1930s "into a resurgent

concept of national culture" (*A Shrinking Island* 2). In contrast to Esty, I read Woolf's

late work, particularly *The Years*, as harnessing the context of imperial decline as an

opportunity to examine, critique, and reorient national narratives – narratives dominated

by gender inequality and oppressive patriarchal ideologies.

　　Moreover, the literary-historiographic project Woolf undertakes in the late 1930s

does not distinguish her from her modernist peers any more than it separates her from the

politicized Younger Generation. Rather, indebted to Steve Ellis' reading of Eliot's

thirties writing, I seek to explore the way in which Woolf and the Younger Generation

"exercised a mutual influence" upon each other (*The English Eliot* 142). I agree with

Ellis that modernists like Eliot share with the Younger Generation "a common

fascination": the threat of war, the escalation of military nationalism, and the increasing

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(*The Measure of Life* 190). However, looking back, Woolf perceived *The Years* and
Three Guineas as "one book" (*Diary V* 148). I choose to focus on *The Years* because,
more so than *Three Guineas*, it highlights Woolf's negotiation between form and content
and her reexamination of the relationship between literature and politics during a time
when the meaning and function of both were evolving.

[9] See Leaska.

encroachment of town on country motivates the modernists and Younger Generation

alike to search for the meaning of "England" and "Englishness" (Ellis 88-9). However,

my chapter's emphasis on nation does not endorse a strictly English reading of Woolf and

the Younger Generation, a perspective that ultimately privileges Woolf's Englishness

over (many of) the Younger Generation's eventual emigration from the "shrinking

island" in the late thirties and forties. Although my chapter highlights the Britishness of

Woolf and the Younger Generation of writers by examining their respective responses to

outdated and impotent *national* and historical narratives, I align myself with scholars

whose work on Woolf's cosmopolitanism represents Woolf as much more than the little

Englander Esty argues she becomes in the last decade of her life.[10] Woolf's national

consciousness is inextricable from her investment in the international – "civilization," in

Bloomsbury terms – and is shaped by her acute attention to the gender inequality inherent

in all patriarchal political structures, national or international.[11] A closer look at Woolf's

relationship with Smyth, her attentiveness to the privatization of national politics, and

Woolf's later fiction, specifically *The Years*, provides a way in which to discuss literature

[10] Rebecca Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (2006)
positions Woolf among other modernist and postmodernist authors in the context of
international cosmopolitanism: "thinking beyond the nation but also comparing,
distinguishing, and judging among different versions of transnational thought" (2).

[11] According to Christine Froula, "Bloomsbury artists and intellectuals entered a struggle
not to 'save' their civilization [Britain] but to help advance Europe toward its own
unrealized ideal…carrying the Enlightenment struggle for civilization dialectically into
the twentieth century in its pacifism and internationalism, its sense of history not as
inevitable progress but as an unending fight for a future that is always open and free, and
– most tellingly – its address to barbarity *within* Europe and the West" (*Virginia Woolf
and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* xii). Specifically, Froula positions Woolf "in alliance
with Bloomsbury and in some measure against it," contextualizing the fight against
patriarchy "as an avant-garde in the struggle for freedom, peace, and the rights of all
within modernity's unfinished project" (xii).

of the 1930s that cuts across generational and aesthetic categories revealing in Woolf a

gendered positionality, derived from her historical, feminist consciousness, sympathetic

to the Younger Generation.[12]

Egotists, Outsiders, and the Problem of Politics

The "Present Day" section of *The Years* culminates with a speech given by

Nicholas, the foreigner called Brown, as the party Delia (née Pargiter) throws comes to a

close in the wee hours of the morning. But the speech, much like the novel, is rendered

nearly incoherent by numerous interruptions, multiple voices, and allusions to memories,

familial and textual. Unable to hold everyone's attention, Nicholas is accosted by Rose

Pargiter, marching across the room: "'Going to make a speech are you?'" she demands of

Nicholas, "her hand hollowed round her ear like a military man" (*The Years* 415).[13] She

raps the table with a knife, crying "Silence" to the inattentive crowd. "She is the very

spit and image…of old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter's horse," observes Martin, Rose's

brother, repeating the refrain that so often accompanies his sister in the novel (*TY* 416).

And so it is with Rose, the youngest of the Pargiter siblings, always likened to a

military man; even as a child in 1880, Rose is presented in a military context. Breaking

the rules in order to prove her independence – and to purchase a toy at Lamley's on the

corner – young Rose leaves the Pargiter house, Abercorn Terrace, unaccompanied one

evening:

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[12] Marina MacKay offers a similar analysis of Woolf's 1930s writing, arguing that Woolf
was "engaged in a project to illuminate the connections between feminist consciousness
and the causes and conduct of international conflict" ("The Lunacy of Men, The Idiocy of
Women: Woolf, West and War" 126).

[13] *The Years* will hitherto be cited with the abbreviation *TY*.

Now the adventure has begun, Rose said to herself…Now she must

provide herself with ammunition and provisions…Now she had her pistol

and her shot, she thought, taking her own purse from her own drawer, and

enough provisions, she thought, as she hung her hat and coat over her

arm…She was riding on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison…she

had a secret message…to deliver to the General…All their lives depended

on it. The British flag was still flying… (*TY* 27)

This passage represents not only the imaginings of a young child liberated from the

supervision of her nurse but also an ironic commentary on female disenfranchisement

from national military traditions. Woolf's seemingly innocent description of Rose

actually prefigures her declaration in *Three Guineas* that "as a woman I have no country"

(129): Rose's adventure is a figment of both her imagination and the national

imagination. Although innumerable lives do depend on women and women's work, they

cannot, in 1880, own property, enter the professions, or vote – let alone participate in

their country's political decision-making process. By 1910, however, the British fight for

female suffrage had escalated to the point at which scores of women were beginning to

realize Rose's childhood adventure, turning the streets into battlefields through militant

tactics – breaking windows, sabotaging pillar boxes, committing arson – and becoming

soldiers of sorts, not for their nation but against it.

Both the character of Rose and the novel in which she figures are the results, in

part, of Woolf's friendship with Smyth which began in 1931 when they both took the

stage at a London and National Society for Women's Service (LNSWS) meeting at the

invitation of Pippa Strachey. The combination of Woolf's speech for LNSWS and her

new connection to Smyth, a great admirer of *A Room of One's Own* (1929), was proving

fruitful as this oft-quoted 1931 diary entry makes clear: "I have this moment, while

having my bath, conceived an entire new book – a sequel to a Room of One's Own –

about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps – Lord how

exciting! This sprang out of my paper to be read on Wednesday to Pippa's society"

(*Diary IV* 6).[14] Two days after the meeting, Woolf notes that she is "[t]oo much excited,

alas, to get on with The Waves" which she was in the process of revising; instead her

mind is occupied with "making up The Open Door, or whatever it is to be called" (*Diary

IV* 6). "The Open Door" would soon become more than an exciting distraction: over the

next six years "The Open Door" would evolve in title and in structure as Woolf struggled

to negotiate what in 1931 she called the "didactive demonstrative style" and the

"dramatic," what two years later would be given form in "the essay-novel" called *The

Pargiters* (*Diary IV*, 129).[15]

In 1931 "The Open Door" was not yet a struggle; it was, like Smyth's speech for

the LNSWS, "rollicking and direct" (*Diary IV* 7). Woolf's speech begins with its own

"rollicking and direct" characterization of the Smyth's achievements as a composer and

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[14] Pippa Strachey, Lytton Strachey's sister, was very active in the fight for suffrage; Barbara Caine, in *Bombay to Bloomsbury* (2006)*,* investigates the progressive politics of the Stracheys, linking the children's feminist sensibilities to their mother's influence.

[15] Woolf ends her speech by characterizing "the next step" as "opening the door" (Leaska xliv). Hermione Lee lists the numerous titles given to what eventually became *The Years*: *The Pargiters*, *Here and Now*, *Music*, *Dawn*, *Sons and Daughters*, *Daughters and Sons*, *Ordinary People*, *Other People's Houses* (*Virginia Woolf* 629). Woolf writes on November 2nd, 1932: "[I]ndeed, I find myself infinitely delighting in facts for a change, & in possession of quantities beyond counting: though I feel now & then the tug of vision, but resist it. This is the true line, I am sure, after The Waves – The Pargiters – this is what leads naturally on to the next stage – the essay-novel" (*Diary IV* 129).

feminist, portraying her as "one of the race of pioneers, of pathmakers [who] has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who came after her" (Leaska xxvii-xxviii).[16] Smyth, notorious for her role in the prewar militant campaign for women's suffrage and equally notorious, some would argue, for "making scenes" as an advocate for her compositions, played an important role in the political and cultural emancipation of British women and was beginning to play an integral part in Woolf's reflections on egotism, gender politics, and women's history (St. John 178).

As an admirer and close friend to Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, Smyth dedicated two years of her life (1910-1912) to the cause of women's suffrage generally and to the Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) particularly. During these two years, Smyth put her career on hold – except to compose "The March of Women," the official anthem of the WSPU – in order to conduct at rallies, break windows, write pro-suffrage articles, and eventually serve a prison sentence with Mrs. Pankhurst at Holloway. Her involvement with militant feminism encouraged Woolf initially to describe Smyth as "*one of the ice breakers, the gun runners, the window smashers*" (Leaska xxvii).[17] The cancelled section continues, revealing, I would suggest, Woolf's ambivalence regarding Smyth's role in the "fight" for women's rights: "*The armoured tanks, who climbed the rough ground, drew the enemies fire, and left behind her a*

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[16] An early version of the speech is published in Leaska's *The Pargiters*; the speech was later revised by Woolf and published as the well-known "Professions for Women." All quotations are taken from Leaska's edition.

[17] The italics indicate cancelled portions of the typescript, editorially restored for publication in order to illustrate the evolution of the manuscript. See Leaska.

pathway – not yet smooth and metalled road – but still a pathway for those who come after her" (Leaska xxvii). Considering the pacifist holding the pen, the military rhetoric found in the original manuscript, so similar to Woolf's characterization of Rose's adventure in *The Years*, suggests Woolf may have had some misgivings regarding her new friend's feminist tactics.

However, Woolf herself resorts to violence in her speech that night. In what would become her well-known essay "Professions for Women" (1942), Woolf not only introduces the "ideal of womanhood," the Angel of the House, but also confesses to killing her: "I turned upon that Angel and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse – if I were to be had up in a law court and charged with murder – would be that I acted in self-defense. If I had not killed her, she would have killed me – as a writer" (Leaska xxxi). But Woolf's violence, unlike the militancy of the WSPU, is imaginative. The Angel of the House is a powerful creation of the British cultural and national imagination and, consequently, Woolf's retaliation is imaginative as well.

The Angel of the House polices and reinforces the powerlessness of women within Victorian society and family, reminding women to always be "pleasing to men" and never, ever "disturb them with the idea that you have a mind of your own" (Leaska xxxi). "Almost every Victorian house had its angel," explains Woolf, whether or not there was a writer inside (Leaska xxx). The Angel is easy to identify:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult [*scenes*] <arts> of family life. She soothed, conciliated, sacrificed herself took the hash if there was only chicken enough for one, and in short was so constituted that she

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never had a wish or mind of her own but preferred to sympathise with the

wishes and minds of others. (Leaska xxx)

Since a young, unmarried, female novel-reviewer cannot write "without expressing an

opinion upon charac[ters,] morality, human relations," such a writer cannot escape the

wrath of the Angel of the House (Leaska xxxii). The only course of action available to

the would-be woman writer is to be selfish and prove she has a mind of her own: in other

words, kill the Angel. And that is what the female novelist of the speech does.

Reality, however, complicates Woolf's vision of imaginative violence and

writerly emancipation. Her growing friendship with Smyth forces her to examine and

articulate her opinions about egotism, the very quality necessary to ensure the survival of

the would-be woman writer of the speech. Smyth, as a writer and a composer, could be

considered the ultimate model for the emancipated professional woman: her first priority

was her work. Simultaneously endearing herself to, and making enemies of, many

important people in the world of music, Smyth would take every opportunity to win her

compositions the recognition she was certain they deserved. She would orchestrate

dinner parties with wealthy and connected patrons, seek out and, without introduction,

appear at the offices of well-known producers and conductors, not to mention fill her

personal correspondence with complaints of her ill-treatment, all in service of her plan –

to become the "*grande dame* of international opera, a female Wagner" (Collis 75).

However, according to Smyth, the only thing that stood in her way of her goals was her

gender. In a historically male-dominated field, being a woman was far from an

advantage and initially positioned Smyth as an object of ridicule, caricature, and

contempt.

Such a commitment to her art and to gender equality would suggest that Woolf

admired Smyth, celebrating her as an outstanding example for women artists. Although

Woolf did admire Smyth, her admiration was tempered by her strong desire for

anonymity, a quality that Woolf associated with unconsciousness. It was anonymity and

the unconsciousness that attended it that, for Woolf, were necessary for the production of

great art. In *A Room of One's Own* it is Shakespeare's incandescent mind that represents

the desired state of unconsciousness:

> For though we say that we know nothing about Shakespeare's state of
>
> mind, even as we say that, we are saying something about Shakespeare's
>
> state of mind…his grudges and spites and antipathies are hidden from us.
>
> We are not held up by some "revelation" which reminds us of the writer.
>
> All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to
>
> make the world a witness of some hardship or grievance was fired out and
>
> consumed. (*A Room of One's Own* 56)

In this passage, Woolf evokes Britain's most legendary writer as the exemplar of

anonymity. There is no "revelation" reminding the reader of the author's presence or

personality, suggesting, as Anna Snaith argues, that for Woolf, "egotism is restrictive"

and "an impediment to the flexibility necessary for creativity" (*Public and Private*

Negotiations 48). As in Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), in

which poetic impersonality is lauded as the common thread connecting the great poets,

embedded in Woolf's celebration of Shakespeare's anonymity is a distinction between

public and private: the author belongs to the private sphere while his art takes its place in

the public sphere of canonical literature. For Woolf, for whom the line between the

public and private was as important as it was permeable, anonymity and unconsciousness were the tools necessary to turn autobiography into artful fiction and, by extension, biography into proper history.[18]

Smyth's egotism stands in direct contrast to Woolf's description of Shakespeare's anonymity. Like many of Smyth's friends, Woolf reacted to her with a mixture of "pleasure, mockery, and wariness," in turn fascinated with and aggravated by Smyth's "self-absorption and enthusiasm" (Lee 587), calling her a "blazing egotist" in a letter to Vita Sackville-West (*Letters IV* 272). Woolf's diary illustrates the Janus-faced nature of her reaction to Smyth. Sometimes Woolf is charmed by Smyth's unconventionality and sincerity: "Ethel stood at the piano in the window, in her battered felt, in her jersey & short skirt conducting with a pencil…Ethel's pince nez rode nearer & nearer the tip of her nose…but everything she does with such forthrightness and directness that there is nothing ridiculous. She loses self-consciousness completely" (*Diary IV* 9). In this representation, Smyth, although humorous with her unfashionable attire and odd mannerisms, is not portrayed with contempt; rather she is a woman concentrating on her art, oblivious to the world of convention and decorum. Other times, as Woolf becomes more attentive to, and more a victim of, Smyth's egotism, she is overwhelmed by distain for Smyth's self-serving theatrics: "Sense of drum & blare: of Ethel's remorseless fangs: her irresistible vanity…how tawdry how paltry: her facing out the failure of The Prison; her desperate good cheer; her one bouquet; her old battered wigged head…but all effort

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[18] In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the narrator explains that Septimus Warren Smith volunteered to fight in World War I "to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Poole" (86). As this excerpt suggests, the connection between great literature and the idea of a great nation is powerful.

& strain: & the sense of the futility of it all" (*Diary IV* 12).[19] Here, Smyth is not even

accorded the goodhearted comedy of the previous passage. Rather, she is tawdry and

paltry, unrelenting in the face of failure, vain and childlike, straining against what Woolf

interprets as the futility of the entire affair. Artistic unconsciousness is denied by

Smyth's insatiable desire for recognition and success; her vanity and egotism saturate the

evening and perhaps even the performance.

Woolf was not the only one with criticisms and misgivings: Smyth feared Woolf's

ability to be "'calm, cool and Cambridge,'" going as far as to nickname Woolf the Frozen

Falcon in her diary (Collis 224). For as egotistical and demanding as Smyth could be,

Woolf could be equally as remote and indifferent. Their letters offer a glimpse of their

intense but tumultuous friendship: Smyth filling pages with her life story, posing

questions for Woolf, and demanding not only Woolf's opinions but also her intimacy.

Through their letters, Hermione Lee suggests, they became each other's "psychologists":

Smyth's egotism giving Woolf permission to speak directly and reflectively about her

own life (*Virginia Woolf* 587).[20] Lee credits "Ethel's self-absorption and enthusiasm" for

inspiring "a new kind of autobiographical writing in Virginia's letters," connected, Lee

argues, "to the lonely soliloquies in *The Waves*, to her lifelong argument about egotism,

and to the political questions she was asking about the effects on women's lives and

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[19] Woolf recounts the party at Lady Rosebury's after the first London performance of
Smyth's *The Prison*. Woolf was reluctant to go but felt bullied into attending by Smyth;
what follows is the first of many quarrels.

[20] Marder, in *The Measure of Life* (2000), identifies the importance of the Woolf-Smyth
correspondence: "There's more of Virginia in these letters, more of the unadorned
Virginia…Why? Because Ethel intensely, vehemently demanded to know" (33-4).

writing of anonymity, silence and repression" (*Virginia Woolf* 587).[21] This confluence of

egotism, politics, gender, and history – Smyth representing a certain past and the

Younger Generation a certain present, all as the future was beginning to look dark –

became the crucible for Woolf's fictional experiments as the decade progressed, her

correspondence with and reflections on Smyth providing a venue in which to further hone

her thinking about gender, egotism and history, private and public.

Egotism, however, became an obstacle, ultimately insurmountable, to further

intimacy between Woolf and Smyth and cooled their once fevered friendship. In a letter

from June 1933, Woolf characteristically advises Smyth: "Leave your case out of it;

theirs will be far far far stronger…If [I'd] have [used my life story in *A Room of One's*

Own] theyd have said; she has an axe to grind; and no one would have taken me

seriously" (*Letters V* 195). Reading accounts of Smyth's continual criticisms of the

male-dominated music world and her insistence that every snub or bad review was a

personal and gendered indictment offers insight into her participation in the militant

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[21] Lee and Marder are two of the few Woolf scholars who give Woolf's relationship with
Smyth the critical attention it deserves; her impact on Woolf's thinking during the thirties
is often trivialized, a view that Woolf's caricatures of Smyth only encourage. However,
the predominance of letters and references to Smyth in the last two volumes of Woolf's
collected letters suggest the relationship was an important component of Woolf's
personal and intellectual life in the thirties. Revising *The Waves* (1931) during the early
days of their friendship, Woolf was immersed in the lyrical anonymity of her
experimental play-poem. Yet, after her speech for LNSWS, Woolf, through Smyth, was
reminded of the history of feminism, the continuing struggle for women's rights, and the
gendered dimensions of being a female artist. These two areas of Woolf's mental life
(anonymity and feminist political history) overlapped with a period characterized by
politics and youth at the Hogarth Press, inaugurated by Leonard Woolf's 1931
publication of *After the Deluge* and the apprenticeship of John Lehmann (whose
friendship with Julian Bell and Isherwood kept the Woolfs in contact with the writing of
the Younger Generation).

WSPU and suggests that she and Woolf differed not only over egotism but also over feminism.

Woolf's early feminism is best illustrated in *A Room of One's Own*. In this book, Woolf's criticisms of the male "I" or ego are met by her own authorial self-effacement: "call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please – it is not a matter of any importance" (*A Room of One's Own* 6-7). Thus, it is not her own case that she pleads; rather, by making her personal self anonymous, Woolf is able to tell the story of many women, a story she just so happens to have experienced firsthand. In doing so, she writes herself, as well as the Mary Betons, Mary Setons, and Mary Carmichaels of the world, into the history of women writers, shining light on the history otherwise overshadowed by Great Men and their authorial egos. Through anonymity, Woolf is able to make accessible a history that is otherwise obscured as well as protect herself politically "against the danger of being exploited by the establishment, flattered or bribed into standing in for the 'great man'" (Marder 138).

Smyth, conversely, chose a feminism seemingly dependent upon the individual agency of its members although actually dominated by the egotism of its leaders. Suffragettes were continuously charged to undertake militant acts; however, individual acts of militancy always had to fall under the current program, be it window-smashing, sabotaging pillar boxes, or committing arson.[22] Scholars have noted an "apparent

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[22] For example, the WSPU member Emily Wilding Davidson is often characterized as the suffragette who went too far, regularly choosing unauthorized acts of militancy and perpetrating them out of sync with her suffragette colleagues. She ended her suffragette career by throwing herself in front of the King's horse, dying four days later. Although ostensibly celebrated as a martyr for the cause, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were privately distressed by the insubordination illustrated by her heroics. See Sophia van Wingerden.

paradox" within the WSPU with its contradictory emphasis on "individual authenticity"

and the "autocratic basis" of its leadership (Holton 16). As Brian Harrison notes,

"encouraging leader-worship was no preparation for democratic politics" (*Prudent*

Revolutionaries 41); some scholars even propose that once militancy began escalating in

1910, militant acts took priority over the vote.[23] For Woolf, such individualism was

illusory in the face of the fundamental loss of personal autonomy that attends this type of

collective action, regardless of its intentions.[24] One cannot help but draw similarities

between the militant tactics, classism, and conservatism of the WSPU and the "Hitlerism"

that Woolf declares "holds us all down" in her 1940 essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air

Raid" (*The Death of the Moth* 245). [25]

Although they would always differ over egotism, and by extension feminism, they

shared similar positions as outsiders: both women, despite their successes and relative

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[23] See Harrison (41).

[24] Radin suggests Smyth's participation in the WSPU motivated Woolf to think about the
difference, if any, between the "'heroism' of Ethel Smyth and the 'heroics' of those who
led men into senseless battle" (*Virginia Woolf's The Years* 5). If women can be attracted
to heroism then they, too, can be advocates for military action; for women, traditionally
disempowered, war presents a national performance of power accessible to all through
patriotism. In another sense, as Marie-Luise Gättens argues, war offers an "escape" from
the "narrowness of domestic life and the dissatisfying" – and unequal – "relationships
between men and women," providing women with experiences and authority
conventionally denied them by patriarchal conventions ("*Three Guineas*, Fascism, and
the Construction of Gender" 34).

[25] Histories of the WSPU highlight the dictatorial nature of Emmeline and Christabel
Pankhurst's leadership and their slow but steady conservative turn. Smyth, despite her
pioneering work and fight for gender equality, is similarly conservative in inclination,
keeping the "outlook of the sporting and hunting set from which she came" exemplified
by her father the General (Marder 26). In her chapter on Smyth, Lee reminds her readers
that other than Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, and Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell,
most of Woolf's female friends were traditionalists and anti-modernists (*Virginia Woolf*
579).

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celebrity, remained on the outside of the very worlds in which they staked their claim.

Despite Woolf's place at the center of Bloomsbury modernism as well as within the

broader evolution of the novel in the first half of the twentieth century, she was long

excluded from the modernist canon because of her gender, derided either as a feminine

aesthete unconcerned with reality or as a stereotypical female novelist interested only in

sentimentality and personal relationships. Similarly, especially early in her career, Smyth

was considered less a composer of merit and more an object of humor, female composers

being so rare and prejudice against them being so strong.[26] In addition to their struggles

against the patriarchal structure of their professions, both women were associated with

unconventional sexualities.[27] In many ways, Woolf and Smyth found common ground in

their position as outsiders notwithstanding the differences in their responses to their

outsider status.

   Despite their differing feminist and artistic philosophies, Smyth's impact on

Woolf's thinking and writing in the thirties was significant. Smyth's presence in Woolf's

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[26] However, even after Smyth could claim victory over the male-dominated musical establishment, she continued to face resistance to the claim that she was one of Britain's greatest composers, as opposed to Britain's greatest *female* composer. Christopher St. John, Smyth's biographer, recounts Smyth explaining late in her career that she "spent years fighting abroad, I have given up that as hopeless. Now I mean to fight for my place in my own country, a place which everyone knows I deserve" (*Ethel Smyth: A Biography* 134). Woolf, in a letter to Smyth, responds to what must have been a characteristic complaint: "Why do you attach such enormous importance to *recognition* when on your own showing the best judges know your worth, when you've quite enough to live on?" (qtd. in St. John 134).

[27] Smyth had a long and devoted love affair with Henry Brewster, who she refused to marry even after the death of his wife, and numerous passionate relationships with women; Woolf's marriage was unconventional in that she and Leonard strove for an equal partnership and remained childless, a marriage rendered only more unconventional by Woolf's romantic relationship with Vita Sackville-West.

later fiction, especially as Rose in *The Years*, suggests a new emphasis in Woolf's

thinking about women as outsiders. Although Rose is not an artist she is a militant

suffragist, like Smyth, once imprisoned for her activities.[28] However, even after Rose

won her cause and received distinction for her patriotism during the Great War, she

remained on the outside of the political structure she fought to enter.[29] Her persistent

outsider status is represented in the "Present Day" section of the novel by her deafness.

An echo of Smyth's egotism, Rose can easily talk about herself and repeat the well-worn

banter characteristic of sibling rivalry but cannot hear what others are saying,

symbolically in terms of her inability to consider Kitty's continued support of non-

violence (*TY* 179, 420). Rose will forever be only "the spit and image," never the true

successor, of "old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse," proud of her family and country

but perhaps more frustrated than proud of her sex (*TY* 416). As an unmarried woman

Rose is still very much a Pargiter, the family that in *The Years* offers a corollary to

Empire and nation. In this manner, Rose is an "insider" in all but sex – and, the novel

suggests, sexuality – and it is her awareness of the prohibitions that accompany her sex,

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[28] Another of Woolf's characters influenced by Smyth is Miss La Trobe. In Miss La
Trobe, Smyth's outsider-artist role is emphasized as well as her lesbianism. It is worth
noting, however, that suggestions of Rose's lesbianism do exist in *The Years*: for
example, in the "1910" section Rose discusses with Maggie and Sara how she lived
"round the corner. With a friend" (*TY* 166-70). Considering that Maggie thinks Rose
"more like a man than a woman," the implication of Rose's cohabitation with her friend
is romantic (*TY* 170). The earlier drafts of what was eventually published as *The Years*
explicitly explore the politics of sex and sexuality (see Leaska and Radin).

[29] Rose was a suffragist and her cause, the vote, was won in 1918 and expanded in 1928.
In *The Years* there are quite a few references to Rose having received distinction for her
contribution to the war effort (see pages 359 and 420, for example). The questions
implied in the tension between Rose's imprisonment as a suffragist and her wartime
patriotism are ones Woolf takes up explicitly in *Three Guineas*.

and her fight against them, that keeps her on the outside of the very novel that once, as *The Pargiters*, bore her name.

Rose, whose militant suffragism was transformed into patriotism during the Great War, echoes the behavior of many WSPU members. As Sophia van Wingerden explains, "the WSPU was soon campaigning as zealously to defeat the Germans as they had previously agitated for the vote," going as far as to hand out white flowers to conscientious objectors (*The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain* 156). Smyth did not receive decoration for her wartime patriotism like her fictional counterpart Rose, but she did receive recognition from the national and educational establishment. In 1922 she was created a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, twelve years after she had been awarded her first honorary degree of Doctor of Music from Durham University.[30] "Titles had always meant a lot to her," explains Louise Collis: Smyth "knew their worth as advertisement" (*Impetuous Heart* 99).

It is this type of "official" recognition, bestowed by the very establishment that Smyth had opposed as a composer and as a suffragette, about which Woolf harbors deep ambivalence. For Smyth, her egotism persuades her to accept such honors while Woolf's desire for anonymity and the critical perspective provided by her outsider position convinced her to be wary of and ultimately resist recognition by the patriarchal establishments of university and nation. Coincidently, it is her work on *The Years* that crystallizes her beliefs. In March 1933 Woolf was invited to accept an honorary Doctor of Letters from Manchester University and in her diary it is Elvira Pargiter (Sara in *The Years*) who responds in her stead to the invitation: "It is an utterly corrupt society I have

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[30] Later, Smyth was honored with a Doctor of Music from Oxford (St. John 189).

just remarked, speaking in the person of Elvira Pargiter, & I will take nothing that it can give me" (*Diary IV* 147). She continues, "as Virginia Woolf, I have to write – oh dear me what a bore – to the Vice Chancellor…& say that I refuse to be made a Doctor of Letters" (*Diary IV* 147).

As a militant suffragette, Rose in *The Years* is, like Smyth, a "blaster of rocks;" however, unlike Smyth, she is not a "builder of bridges." In the "1910" section of the novel, Rose, now over forty, visits her younger cousins Maggie and Sara in Hyman Place. The area is familiar to Rose who once lived "[r]ound the corner. With a friend" (*TY* 166). Between the lines of the narrative is the suggestion that this friendship was a romantic one, causing Rose heartbreak upon the announcement of her friend's engagement. Unspoken personal secrets and untold stories such as this surface throughout Rose's visit to her cousins – the most prominent being Rose's childhood encounter with an exhibitionist the night she went to Lamley's – like the family memories they discuss. "Her past seemed to be rising above her present" the narrator observes, explaining that "for some reason" Rose wanted "to talk about her past; to tell them something about herself that she had never told anybody – something hidden" (*TY* 166). But Rose does not. Rose is a "blaster of rocks" not a "builder of bridges" and thus is left feeling dissatisfied and alone: "They talked as if they were speaking of people who were real, but not real in the way in which she felt herself to be real. It puzzled her; it made her feel that she was two different people at the same time; that she was living at two different

times at the same moment" (*TY* 167). Her story remains untold, the bridge, between

women and between generations, left unbuilt.[31]

And this is where Smyth differed from Rose, and perhaps why Woolf can

describe Smyth as a bridge-builder as well as a rock-blaster: Smyth's egotism was so

great that she could *not refrain* from telling her story. There was never "something

hidden" with Smyth; in her numerous memoirs and autobiographical books she shared

her adventures, her struggles, and her successes, both personal and professional, in great

detail. Although Woolf praised Smyth's first autobiography, *Impressions that Remained*

(1919), as a "masterpiece" (*Letters V* 40), she criticized *Female Pipings in Eden* (1934)

for being too personal, explaining that "the personal details immensely diminish the rest"

(*Letters V* 191): "I hate the writer to talk about himself; anonymity I adore" (*Letters V*

191). Despite wanting "to pull the curtain over this indecency" (*Letters V* 191), Woolf

later charges Smyth to write a female autobiography that would compete with Rousseau's

sexually explicit memoirs. Woolf inquires rhetorically: "Now why shouldn't you be not

only the first woman to write an opera, but equally the first to tell the truth about

herself?...I should like an analysis of your sex life as Rousseau did his. More

introspection. More intimacy" (*Letters VI* 453). The conflict between Woolf's praise of

anonymity and her desire for intimacy and introspection reveals a productive tension

within Woolf's response to egotism. Autobiographies like Smyth's provide readers with

stories that otherwise might remain untold, such as stories of militant feminism, of the

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[31] Susan Squier suggests otherwise, proposing that Rose, like Smyth, built bridges
between women through her work as a suffragette (*Virginia Woolf and London* 174).
Squier's reading does not take into account the dictatorial nature of the militant suffrage
movement nor Woolf's opinions on violence, militancy, and collective political action.

battle for gender equality, of love between women: all stories Rose is unable to tell in *The Years*, suggesting that egotism is the stuff from which bridges are built.[32]

Self-Consciousness and Autobiography: Is History the Biography of Great Men?

In the "Present Day" section of *The Years*, Peggy Pargiter finds herself "face to face with a young man she thought she knew but could not put a name to" (*TY* 360). His "queer face," "knit up; nerve-drawn; fixed," and his air of superiority suggests to Peggy that he is a poet. In response to her question – "How do you manage [poetry], if you are in an office?" – the young poet commences a narcissistic monologue, causing Peggy's attention to wander:

> I, I, I – he went on. It was like a vulture's beak pecking, or a vacuum-cleaner sucking, or a telephone bell ringing. I, I, I. But he couldn't help it, with that nerve-drawn egotist's face…he could not free himself, could not detach himself…he had to expose, had to exhibit…For what do I care about his 'I, I, I'? Or his poetry? (*TY* 361)

Peggy's description of the young poet could have been lifted from Woolf's letters or diaries, so likely was Woolf to have turned her critique of the Younger Generation writer into an unflattering caricature.[33] Despite the prominence of Younger Generation writers

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[32] Smyth's autobiographical writing seems to stand as an exception to Woolf's lament in her own attempt at personal memoir, "Sketch of the Past," that memoirs "leave out the person to whom things happened" (65).

[33] In a 1933 letter to her nephew Quentin Bell, Woolf writes of Spender: "He on the other hand talks incessantly and will pan out in years to come a prodigious bore. But he's a nice poetic youth; big nosed, bright eyed, like a giant thrush; The worst of being a poet is one must be a genius; and so he can't talk long without bringing in the abilities and disabilities of great poets" (*Letters V* 262). Another example is found in Woolf's diary, December 1933: "S[pender] has the makings of the long winded bore. That's odd. A handsome poetic boy to look at – & very ardent, & a great egotist" (*Diary IV* 195).

in Woolf's private writings and professional life during the thirties – especially in the figures of Spender, Lehmann, and Bell – this is the only reference to them in *The Years*, a novel visibly engaged in exploring generational development and difference. Peggy, the youngest Pargiter to have a role in the narrative, when asked to speak for the younger generation, refuses, explaining "I'm not the younger generation" (*TY* 422). Even though Peggy's age suggests she very well may be one of the Younger Generation, her refusal to be counted among their ranks implicates the gender politics of male privilege. Also, what Peggy's response suggests is that although Woolf is both interested in and frustrated by the Younger Generation of writers coming through the doors of the Hogarth Press, and despite their presence in her essays of the decade, they are not the subject of her fiction. Rather than being about the Younger Generation of writers – a plausible inference considering the title of the last section, "Present Day" – *The Years* shares their concerns, exploring the relationship between personal and private history, public events and private lives, in service of an examination of North Pargiter's claim that 'it was their past condemning his present" (*TY* 395).

Although one of the youngest Pargiters in the novel, North is too old to be a member of the Younger Generation that Woolf writes about in "A Letter to a Young Poet" (1932) and "The Leaning Tower" (1940). Unlike Spender and Lehmann, North fought in the Great War, and unlike these two Oxbridge graduates, North did not go to university. However, like the Younger Generation, his life is influenced by Great Men: those national "heroes" whose lives comprise the *Dictionary of National Biography* edited by Woolf's father and are celebrated as models for young men to emulate. But North is not the only one whose life is effected by Great Men. The question, "Does

history consist of the biography of Great Men?" – first encountered by Jacob Flanders at Oxbridge in Woolf's 1922 *Jacob's Room* – reappears in an updated form in the "1917" section of *The Years*: "We were considering," explains Nicholas, "the psychology of great men…[b]y the light of modern science" (*TY* 281). Sitting in the dark before an air raid, Nicholas summarizes his conclusions for Eleanor: "I was saying we do not know ourselves, ordinary people; and if we do not know ourselves, how then can we make religions, laws, that…" (*TY* 281). "That fit, that fit," offers Eleanor (*TY* 281). This tension between the so-called "Great Men" and the "ourselves" and "ordinary people" – women, like Eleanor, and even sexual and national outsiders like Nicholas – is one of the organizing themes of *The Years* and, as the two previous chapters demonstrate, a preoccupation of the Younger Generation.

Smyth's autobiographies provide one alternative to national history as the biography of Great Men. As an outsider, Smyth's memoirs complicate and often contradict a national story based on imperialism, militarism, and heroic masculinities. The climaxes differ: if the outbreak of war in 1914 is the tragic climax to a national plot driven by imperial hubris and progress then Black Friday 1910 is the dramatic beginning of a narrative fueled by entrenched gender inequality and female oppression.[34] But egotism dominates both. The militant suffragettes replicate a patriarchal structure that encourages bellicosity and tyranny, hero-worship and soldier-sacrifice. Smyth may be an outsider but an outsider determined to be an insider; Smyth is not interested in "living

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[34] Black Friday, November 18th, 1910, is the day that the WSPU ended their truce with the Government over the Conciliation Bill and recommenced militant tactics, most notably by rushing the House of Commons. This event quickly turned into a clash between suffragettes and police characterized by extraordinary violence.

differently," a refrain sung throughout *The Years*. A Great Man she is not, but, if Smyth could have her way, a Great Woman she would be.

The Younger Generation, too, were preoccupied with, if critical of, Great Men. Unlikely outsiders, the Younger Generation seemed more like insiders with their public school adolescence, Oxbridge educations, and middle-class male privileges. Yet the Younger Generation writers were "outsiders-within": literally and metaphorically orphaned by the Great War, these young men felt acutely the pressure placed upon them by family and nation.[35] Calling upon his national literary inheritance in order to complicate it, Spender likens the young men of his generation to Shakespeare's orphaned egotist, Hamlet: "We were the Divided Generation of Hamlets who found the world out of joint and failed to set it right" (*World Within World* 202). In a postwar Britain still saturated by memories of World War I,[36] the men too young to fight in the war but old enough to remember emerged as inheritors of its consequences and thus were intensely "conscious": conscious not just of their class, as Woolf proposes in "The Leaning

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[35] Isherwood calls the young men of his generation Sacred Orphans, explaining the concept in his book, *Christopher and His Kind*, as well as in the commentary to his parents' letters, which he collected and published as *Kathleen and Frank*. His novel, *The Memorial*, explores, in part, the effects of the Great War on the generation too young to fight.

[36] The twenties and early thirties were saturated with memories and reminders of the Great War: for example, memorials to fallen soldiers were being built, Armistice Day commemorations were becoming ritualized, and a flood of war-memoirs were published during the late twenties. Henry Green's 1940 autobiography, *Pack My Bag*, provides a look at the adolescent years of the Younger Generation writers during the Great War and underscores the impact their home front perspectives had on their social, gendered, intellectual, and literary coming-of-age. Green's *Pack My Bag* is also one of many autobiographies written by the Younger Generation that Woolf identifies as a distinguishing feature of the generation's oeuvre; do not publish until the age of thirty, she writes in "A Letter to a Young Poet," in response to this trend in (early in life) autobiographical writing.

Tower," but also of the roles a national history oriented by imperialism and war had scripted for them. Consequently, the Younger Generation took up what Woolf calls in a letter to Spender "the 1935 angle" (*Letters V* 407).

Writing to Spender in June 1935 about his new book of literary criticism, *The Destructive Element* (1935), Woolf describes the "1935 angle" as the tension between "then" and "now," or generational difference, and the Younger Generation's desire to "teach and help," or, in more menacing terms, preach and propagandize (*Letters V* 408). Woolf praises the first portion of Spender's new book as having gotten "hold of something very hard and genuine" (*Letters V* 407). However, she critiques the last part of the book, its subject living writers, as "a little scrappy…the effect of the 1935 angle" (*Letter V* 407). She continues:

> The transitions from poetry to prose are not natural yet. But I'm sure its vigorous and on the lines of something big, which is more than most of them are. Here again my hatred of preaching pops out and barks. I don't think you can get your words to come till you're almost unconscious; and unconsciousness only comes when you've been beaten and broken and gone through every sort of grinding mill. But then for your generation the call to action in words is so much more strident than it was for mine. (*Letters V* 408)[37]

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[37] In *World Within World*, Spender recalls advice he once received from Woolf: "She said that no one should publish before he or she was thirty, 'Write till then, but scrap it or put it aside.' She herself had covered reams of paper with what she called 'just writing for the sake of writing,' and she had scrapped it all" (154). One can imagine how Woolf associated her process with authorial maturation and the development of unconsciousness: she "scrapped" all the egotism out of her writing, striving instead for the anonymous and impersonal.

As in her correspondence with Smyth, Woolf advocates for writerly unconsciousness, rejects preaching and propaganda, the products of egotism in Woolf's mind. However, the last sentence of the above passage suggests that Woolf is thinking about more than simply literary propaganda. Her use of the phrase "call to action" alludes to the pervasive politicization of literature in the thirties, reminiscent of her description of Smyth's feminism and musical achievements in military terms. Despite her "hatred of preaching" and the ambivalence embedded in her language, Woolf's letter implies that the "something very hard and genuine" in the writing of the Younger Generation is worth examination. "But I'll have another look," she concludes, revealing her own investment in the intersection of public events and the private mind in the 1930s (*Letters V* 408).[38]

Woolf undertakes a sustained investigation into the "1935 angle" in her 1940 essay "The Leaning Tower."[39] In this essay she attempts to articulate the "force, influence, [and] outer pressure which is strong enough to stamp itself upon a whole group of different writers so that all their writing has a certain common likeness" ("TLT" 129-30). Although "theories are dangerous things," so pressing for Woolf is the tension between literature and politics – writing under the threat of war realized – her essay begins by proposing a theory about the "movement" constituted by the Younger

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[38] Interestingly, the last paragraph of her letter mentions both Auden's and Isherwood's play, *Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935) – which she has not yet read – and Eliot's drama, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935): a perfect example of the kind division literary critics like to evoke when attempting to make distinctions between modernist writers and thirties writers both writing at the same time. Although Woolf likely does not place Eliot and Auden in the same category, she is interested in reading both and harbors misgivings about each; that she connects them within the text of her letter suggests that she is less inclined to rely on superficial aesthetic or generational distinctions.

[39] A paper read to the Workers' Educational Association, Brighton, in May 1940.

Generation of writers ("TLT" 129). However, in a characteristically Woolfian irony, her stated intention is more rhetorical than literal. Taking her cue from Eliot's "historical sense" in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Woolf attempts to situate the Younger Generation in a national-literary genealogy. Less interested in *isolating* the Younger Generation of writers from their predecessors and contemporaries in order to illuminate their "common likeness" and to identify their agenda, Woolf is more interested in *writing them into* the literary family tree: "Books descend from books as families descend from families. Some descend from Jane Austen; others from Dickens. They resemble their parents, as human children resemble their parents; yet they differ as children differ, and revolt as children revolt" ("TLT" 130). In this somewhat clichéd analogy, Woolf indicates her essay's true intention, a project, I believe, she shares with her subjects: not mythologizing but *historicizing* the Younger Generation and their writing. Understanding the Younger Generation of writers as attempting to write themselves into the literary-historical narrative of nation that since the Great War has discriminated against them, Woolf interprets the egotism of the Younger Generation as committed not only to "blasting rocks" but also to "building bridges" – historical bridges – creating for themselves a place within the family of literature – and of nation – that Woolf alludes to in her essay.

To propose an analogy between the nation and the family is not new and the novel has long been a corollary to nation and a vehicle for state ideology masquerading as family values. In the Victorian age, the relationship between family values, gender politics, novel, and nation reached a climax. Women's fiction, serial novels printed in periodicals, and even the gothic and romance, by celebration or condemnation, conveyed

the presence and importance of imperialism and progress to the nation and, by extension, the family. However, after Victoria's death, and moreover, after 1914 – Woolf suggests that the nineteenth century lasted until 1914 ("TLT" 135) – the family and the nation are revealed as rather dysfunctional. Orwell, the contrarian of the Younger Generation, employs the nation-as-family analogy to describe England in 1941:

> …it resembles a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control – that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase. ("The Lion and the Unicorn" 35)

In Orwell's analysis, the Victorian family is seen from the vantage point of interwar England: not a utopia of domesticity derived from the spoils of imperial expansion and industrial developments but rather the reality of an outdated class structure on its last gasp, economic security based on exploitation, and a culture unable to throw off the yoke of impotent traditions. However, Orwell's conclusion – that England, like the "stuffy Victorian family," "closes its ranks" "at the approach of an enemy" – provides a lens through which to read the Younger Generation.

So often mythologized as rebellious sons, the Younger Generation, I would argue,

"closes its ranks": their critique and rejection of impotent and outdated national

ideologies betrays their investment in, rather than their outright rejection of, England and

its political and literary history. In Spender's autobiographical novel, *The Temple*

(1929),[40] this familial feeling is exemplified by the character Paul whose relationship

with his fellow writers both mirrors the public, national family and offers an alternative

to it. The narrator describes Paul's feelings upon receiving a letter from his fellow writer

and friend, William: "This letter gave Paul an elated sense of belonging to a family

outside either his own or William's families. Their writing was the blood and spirit of

their friendship. Each wrote in his separate circumstances, his separate life, yet each was

a member of one body of literature, common to them all" (*The Temple* 145). And even

though Spender, represented by Paul, and his friends – William Bradshaw and Simon

Wilmot in *The Temple* are Isherwood and Auden respectively – use their writing as the

vehicle for their cultural rebellion, they continue to see themselves, their poetry, and their

prose as assuming their rightful place within the pantheon of national literature.

In a passage describing a state surprisingly analogous to Woolf's unconsciousness

and Eliot's impersonality, Spender mixes both arrogance and humility in order to position

himself as an inheritor of British literary tradition: "Other poetry, as soon as I had read it

became identified with an experience which seemed already to have existed

unconsciously within myself. When I read certain sonnets of Shakespeare, Wordsworth,

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[40] Spender began *The Temple* in 1928 or 1929 but never finished it and eventually forgot about it; it was not until the 1980s that the manuscript emerges and comes to Spender's attention. He edits the first section of the novel, Paul's initial trip to Germany in 1929, and adds the second portion of the plot, Paul's return trip to Germany in 1932. See Spender's introduction to the novel for his account of the manuscript and novel.

Keats, I seemed to know them at once as though I had known them before: and yet I had not done so" (*World Within World* 92).[41]   Although dissatisfied with and disillusioned by their families and their nation, the Younger Generation writers are unable to disavow their literary birthright and what Eliot would identify as their historical sense. Woolf, historically disenfranchised by the national family because of her gender, perceives in the writing of the Younger Generation not simply willful rebellion but rather an investment in the history – and the future – of the national family.

In fact, as Woolf argues in "The Leaning Tower," the precarious position of the Younger Generation in the 1930s is part of their national and cultural inheritance. Sitting "upon a tower raised above the rest of us," "built upon his parents' station and his parents' gold," the Younger Generation writer inherits a certain "angle of vision" derived from security, peace, and "the knowledge of a settled civilization ("TLT" 138). Until 1914. War had an enormous impact on their towers of privilege, education, and tradition. After 1914, the towers leaned, became unstable, and the angle of vision changed: "But what a difference in the tower itself, in what they saw from the tower. When they looked at human life what did they see? Everywhere change; everywhere revolution" ("TLT" 139). Despite their knowledge of Marxism, their self-pity and anger, and their commitment to the working class, Woolf explains, they can not come down from their left-leaning towers, can not disregard their expensive educations and class privileges.

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[41] Compare with Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "[A]nd the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (4).

Edward Upward captures this tension in his retrospective 1962 novel, *In the Thirties*. The main character, Alan Sebrill, an exemplary leaning-tower writer, describes the plight of his generation: "We ourselves, in our own way, are doomed too…We shall always be misfits, not properly belonging to any social class" (*In the Thirties* 17-8).

The Younger Generation writer, for Woolf as for Sebrill, "is betwixt and between": "a dweller in two worlds, one dying, the other waiting to be born" ("TLT" 147). Between the dying world and the world-waiting-to-be-born there are the 1930s: "nothing settled to look at; nothing peaceful to remember; nothing certain to come" ("TLT" 147). Consequently, Woolf writes, "they were stung into consciousness – into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of all things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps about to come" ("TLT" 147). They were stung, I would add, into historical consciousness: consciousness of the mythologies that compose their national history, of the Great Men who it is written for and about, and *acutely* conscious that they do not want to take their "proper" place in it – especially when "proper" includes compulsory heterosexuality and national service.

"Betwixt and between": the Younger Generation can be understood in the terms set out in Madelyn Detloff's study of historical loss and modernist mourning, *The Persistence of Modernism* (2009). Taking her cue from the modernists themselves, Detloff turns her critical gaze to Ancient Greece finding in the *metic* a corollary for the positionality exhibited in both the texts and the lives of the modernist women her project examines. According to Detloff, *metics* were "resident aliens of the polis," "operat[ing] within the polis without being fully enfranchised by it," always in danger of being exiled (*The Persistence of Modernism* 138, 7). Detloff focuses on the way the female gender

both disempowers and circumscribes women, granting them a *metic* sensibility, Woolf's

writing providing her most convincing examples. However, considering the historical

position Woolf details in "The Leaning Tower," it is worth thinking about the Younger

Generation in similar terms. Despite inheriting cultural tradition and privilege, these men

felt disenfranchised by their nation and many attempted to reject their station and status

in favor of the liminal position of the *metic*.

In Detloff's analysis, the figure of Antigone is suggestive of the *metic* position: a

familial and civic dissenter, Antigone is simultaneously a product and victim of the

governing structure as well as its most strident critic. In *The Years*, *Antigone* is the link

between Edward and Sara, who, according to Detloff, are "the two most obviously

'queer' members of the Pargiter family (*The Persistence of Modernism* 140). Although

Edward's university career places him securely within the Establishment, the tension

between his latent homosexuality and his idealized heterosexual attraction to Kitty set

him apart from his peers: Hugh Gibbs, the sportsman, and Ashley, the aesthete. Sara,

whose slight deformity, social eccentricity, and disregard for social convention place her

outside heteronormative patriarchal structures, is, however, granted a central place in the

narrative, her lyrical outbursts and mimicry drawing the other Pargiters to her.[42]

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[42] Detloff acknowledges that the link between Sara and Edward made visible by their
reading of *Antigone* is about more than this shared text. Edward's latent homosexuality
and his continued bachelorhood place him outside "heterosexual circuits of desire and
exchange" in a manner similar to, even if more acceptable than, Sara, who reads
Edward's translation of *Antigone* in her attic room while the rituals of heterosexuality – a
dance – are enacted outside her window (Detloff 140). Radin goes as far as to suggest
that the "Antigone legend" provides a "mythic analogue for the confrontation between a
feminine system of ethics based on feeling conformity to an external social code"
(*Virginia Woolf's The Years* 47). For the culturally emasculated and symbolically
disenfranchised Younger Generation, *Antigone* not only offers a cultural and political
corollary but also calls into service their class privilege, since, as Woolf explains in her

Dissidents of sorts but products of the Establishment nonetheless, the Younger

Generation share with Antigone an awareness of the ways in which the private can be

politicized.

In *The Temple*, set in Germany in 1929 and 1932, Spender presents *metic*

positionality through Spender's fictional counterpart, the character Paul, and his German

friends. Paul, a young British man, anxious and dissatisfied, seeks liberation from the

conventions of his bourgeois, Oxbridge life in Hamburg. He makes many friends during

his visit in 1929; however, when he returns in 1932 he finds his pleasure-seeking, sun-

loving friends transformed by historical circumstances. The significance of "being

German" has changed; it no longer represents, as it did for Paul and his friends in 1929,

youth, modernity, and emancipation. Already in 1932, the designation "German" has

charged political connotations, especially for those with Jewish heritage. Paul's friend

Ernst explains that "being German" means "'different things at different times in history.

There were moments when even Goethe felt himself a foreigner in Germany…So did

Hölderlin…Nietzsche…Rilke. When the vast majority of Germans are feeling very

German, the minority may begin to feel themselves a little foreign'" (*The Temple* 172).

For Ernst, who believes his business contributions to the nation will compensate

for his Jewishness, "German" is a sliding signifier employed by those in power to draw

lines in the political sand, creating groups of privileged insiders and oppressed outsiders.

Paul, who not only sympathizes but also identifies with his German friends, shows his

solidarity by evoking his own German-Jewish heritage in the face of a Nazi youth leader

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essay "Not Knowing Greek" (1925), training in classical languages is a distinguishing
feature of middle- and upper-class male education.

(*The Temple* 163). However, his gesture is undermined by his friend Joachim who is

becoming cognizant of the dangers accompanying the evolution of German nationalism:

"It is all right for you – you are English – but my grandmother…" (*The Temple* 163).

Even in 1932, having a Jewish grandmother is enough to make Joachim think twice

before speaking out against the Nazis. But according to Joachim, Paul's Englishness

neutralizes his Jewishness, rendering his courageous confession naïve in the face of

Joachim's caution. In Germany, Paul is not easily identifiable as an insider or an

outsider, his (male, bourgeois) Englishness placing him in a position of privilege despite

his identification with and desire for outsider status (his Jewish heritage).

This scene from *The Temple* reinforces Peter Widdowson's claim that "it is not

merely the problem of how to act against the forces which threaten" – a question

explored in Spender's *Forward from Liberalism* (1937) – but rather "the bewilderment of

discovering that the present is a kind of no-man's land…*in between* cultures" ("*Between

the Acts*?: English Fiction in the Thirties" 135). Echoing Woolf's characterization of the

Younger Generation writers as "betwixt and between," Widdowson evokes the trope of

betweeness so prevalent in the rhetoric of the 1930s: the interwar, the frontier, and even

the airman represent this liminality. (The airman is exemplary of the consequences of

such betweeness as it is a symbol evoked by both the left and the right.) In this cultural

no-man's land, the "dimly perceived forms are those of a world one does not recognize"

and "has no equipment to comprehend" (Widdowson 135).[43] The only equipment

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[43] Marder argues that even Woolf is "betwixt and between," feeling in the thirties as if
she belonged to two incompatible worlds, one of the "detached artist" and the other of the
"angry outsider" (*The Measure of Life* 196). Widdowson's contribution to both Woolf
studies and study of 1930s literature is significant in the context alluded to by Marder.
Unlike the majority of scholars of modernism and of the thirties, Widdowson identifies

available to the Younger Generation writer is himself: "You are looking within," Woolf

observes in "A Letter to a Young Poet," and "not without" (216). But with "everywhere

change; everywhere revolution" ("TLT" 139) what promise does looking without instead

of within hold? For the Younger Generation, and I would argue for Woolf, too, the

literary dilemma is "how to come to terms with the 'fantastic realities' of the present"

(Widdowson 135).

Autobiography provides an answer, if, for Woolf, an unsatisfactory one. Spender,

in his postwar autobiography *World Within World* (1951), offers a suggestion as to why

autobiography might be so compelling to the Younger Generation writers:

> An autobiographer is really writing a story of two lives: his life as it
>
> appears to himself, from his own position, when he looks out at the world
>
> from behind his eye-sockets; and his life as it appears from outside in the
>
> minds of others; a view which tends to become in part his own view of
>
> himself also, since he is influenced by the opinion of those others. (viii)

At first, Spender seems to be appropriating the decade's penchant for documentary

realism for egotistical purposes. The incorporation of the mundane and quasi-scientific

detail – eye-sockets – suggests a parallel to Isherwood's well-known "I am a camera"

passage from *Goodbye to Berlin*. However, just as Isherwood's documentary trope is

more complicated then the open-and-close of the shutter, so too is Spender's. The "two

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the "real interest of fiction in England in the thirties" as "the uncertainty of direction, the
tense irresolution" exhibited in the novels, whether written by a modernist or one of the
Younger Generation ("*Between the Acts*?: English Fiction in the Thirties" 134).
Additionally, Widdowson implicitly critiques the way modernists studies reads the late
work of canonical modernists only in light of their earlier, and by extension, "better"
work ("*Between the Acts*?: English Fiction in the Thirties" 134).

lives" Spender is interested in are not only the life-lived and the life-seen-by-others.

Considering the Younger Generation's historical position as detailed by Woolf, the two

lives also represent the discrepancy between the life scripted by tradition and nation and

the life opening up before them: unemployment, economic insecurity, the rise of fascism,

and the threat of war. Woolf herself understands the duality inherent in autobiography,

although unlike Spender the two lives she is interested in are distinguished not by

perspective but by history. In "Sketch of the Past" (1939-40) Woolf ponders the

autobiographical project she reluctantly undertakes near the end of her life: by using the

present moment as "a platform to stand upon," Woolf acknowledges that "the two people,

I now, I then" would "come out in contrast" (75). Anticipating Spender's analysis that

the "two lives" of autobiography are inextricable, Woolf concludes that "this past is much

affected by the present moment" ("Sketch of the Past" 75).[44]

What is most interesting in Spender's explanation, however, is his confession that

both lives combine to form one. This perhaps accounts for the tension, so obvious and

irritating to Woolf, between the public and the private in the writing of the Younger

Generation. Expected to become private citizens serving national interests, the Younger

Generation writers become public figures employing private stories, not only

autobiography but also a kind of private language comprised of in-jokes, nicknames, and

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[44] Woolf begins "Sketch of the Past" on April 18th, 1939. She has been encouraged by her sister to write her memoirs and, although reluctant, Woolf desires a distraction from the biography of Roger Fry in which she is immersed. Interestingly, "Sketch" is not only a memoir but also a meditation on the genre of autobiography, the function and reliability of memory, and the present prewar moment. See Jeanne Schulkind's edition of *Moments of Being* (1985).

fantasy worlds.[45] For example, Upward's Mortmere stories, described in Isherwood's

Lions and Shadows (1938) and often referred to by Auden in his lectures and poetry

(Bergonzi 19), not only incorporated a variety of literary antecedents but also provided an

outlet through which to fictionalize the dramas and power struggles of public school and

university life. Since school is an experience common to the Younger Generation

writers, a point Orwell considers significant enough to note in "Inside the Whale," it

became a "source of personal fantasies *and* public metaphors" (Bergonzi 32, emphasis

mine). Early critics of the establishment – be it family, school, or nation – the Younger

Generation writers found in their personal imaginings and shared experiences a language

with which to criticize the very structures that guaranteed them, by virtue of their gender

and class, access to the platforms (literary magazines and publishing houses) from which

they spoke out so publically. Like Smyth, their politics are personal and, consequently,

they, too, are "great egotists" ("TLT" 148).

"No other ten years can have produced so much autobiography as the ten years

between 1930 and 1940" declares Woolf ("TLT" 148). What might be read as Woolf's

contempt for egotism is tempered by the same impulse that encouraged Woolf to "have

another look" at Spender's book. Woolf calls them truthful – "the nineteenth century

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[45] Although the majority of the Mortmere stories are lost, "The Railway Accident" was
published and provides a glimpse into the literary fantasy world of Isherwood and
Upward while at Cambridge. Despite their inaccessibility, the Mortmere stories have
achieved a certain degree of notoriety by way of reference. Another example of the
Younger Generation's privacy and exclusivity, even in the public sphere is their practice
of mutual dedication: the prefatory material of their books reads like a who's who of
thirties literature. Lastly, the practice of using thinly veiled autobiographical material as
the content for fiction, drama, and poetry contributed to the tension between public and
private in their writing. Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows,* most notably from his early
oeuvre, as well as Spender's *The Temple*, employ pseudonyms to convert autobiography
into fiction.

writers never told that kind of truth" ("TLT" 148) – and although disparaging of their

poetry and prose, she praises their autobiography. In their self-consciousness resides

their courage: "the courage to tell the truth, the unpleasant truth" about themselves and

their nation ("TLT" 149). "If you do not tell the truth about yourself," explains Woolf,

"you cannot tell it about other people" ("TLT" 148). An allusion to the conversation

about Great Men that Nicholas recounts for Eleanor, Woolf finally arrives at a resolution,

tenuous but hopeful, regarding the intersection of literature and politics, public and

private, that dominates her thinking through the thirties. And the answer resides not only

in the present – pressing in from all sides by the end of the decade as her diary makes

clear[46] – but also in history:

> By analysing themselves honestly, with the help of Dr. Freud, these
>
> writers have done a great deal to free us from nineteenth-century
>
> suppressions. The writers of the next generation may inherit from them a
>
> whole state of mind, a mind no longer crippled, evasive, divided. They
>
> may inherit that unconsciousness which, as we guessed – it is only a guess
>
> – at the beginning of this paper, is necessary if writers are to get beneath
>
> the surface, and to write something that people remember when they are
>
> alone. For that great gift of unconsciousness the next generation of writers

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[46] Woolf writes in her diary in March 1936: "L. says that considering Europe is now on
the verge of the greatest smash for 600 years, one must sink private differences & support
the League…But its odd, how near the guns have got to our private life again. I can quite
distinctly see them & hear a roar, even though I go on, like a doomed mouse, nibbling at
my daily page" (*Diary V* 17). This is just one example of many in which Woolf records
feeling as though the public world, politics and war, are invading her private realm, home
and mind.

will have to thank the creative and honest egotism of the leaning-tower

group. ("TLT" 149)

Recalling the family of books and authors with which Woolf begins, this passage

essentially undermines the stated intention of the essay – to propose a theory about the

literary movement constituted by the Leaning Tower writers – by writing the Younger

Generation into the history of English literature. Woolf seems to propose that writers

cannot restrict their vision to the present – the General Strike, the Slump, blackshirts, the

Spanish Civil War, rearmament – but also must examine the past and imagine the future.

Thus, by writing the Younger Generation writers *into* the national and literary historical

narrative from which they are so often excluded, Woolf aligns herself with her youthful

fellow writers. In Woolf's "absolute silence about her own situation" in "The Leaning

Tower," Widdowson positions Woolf as one "of the secure generation who grew up

before the Great War shattered civilization" whose interpretation of the present derives

from the knowledge of a secure and prosperous personal and national past ("*Between the

Acts*?: English Fiction in the Thirties" 137). However, Woolf's sensitive if critical

analysis of the Younger Generation implies that she, too, felt "the influence of change"

and the "threat of war," suggesting that perhaps she and Younger Generation share a

similar "angle of vision."

Making that Country Our Own Country

"That is your problem right now, if I may hazard a guess – to find the right

relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world

outside," Woolf writes in "A Letter to a Young Poet," identifying the problem that results

from the "1935 angle" (220). This problem, however, is as much the aging modernist's

as it is the young poet's, confirmed by Leonard Woolf who declares in the fourth volume

of his autobiography that he has "reached the period in my autobiography in which our

lives and the lives of everyone have become penetrated, dominated by politics"

(*Downhill All The Way* 27). In the same paragraph he describes Virginia Woolf as "the

least political animal since Aristotle invented the definition," a characterization often

quoted out of context (*Downhill All The Way* 27). Leonard Woolf clarifies later in the

same paragraph that Virginia Woolf was actually "intensely interested in things, people,

and events, and…highly sensitive to the atmosphere which surrounded her, whether

personal, social, or historical. She was therefore the last person who could ignore the

political menaces under which we all lived" (*Downhill All The Way* 27).

What sets Woolf apart from *both* her Bloomsbury peers, Leonard Woolf, John

Maynard Keynes, Desmond McCarthy, and the Younger Generation is the way she

manifests her politics. Rather than instruct and analyze – like her male contemporaries –

or preach and postulate – like the Younger Generation – Woolf writes fiction, and in so

doing, indicates her own deep commitment to "finding an alternative to fascistic

discourse," a discourse essentially constituted by instruction and preaching (Rosenfeld

154). The only way to "prevent war would be to counter and dispel ideologies that

consider war justifiable, even inevitable," and the novel, according to Detloff, is Woolf's

"attempt to understand, on a minute and daily level, how it is that human beings come to

accept the extreme forms of nationalism and supremacist ideology" (*The Persistence of

Modernism* 33): in other words, the connection between private and public power

structures, the relationship between the family and the nation, the correlation between

individual and the dictator. As Woolf explains in "A Sketch of the Past," "I feel that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else" (73).

Rather than join the chorus of propaganda common across the political spectrum in the 1930s, Woolf is motivated to renegotiate her own authorial egotism and self-consciousness through an exploration of gender and national history in her fiction. "A Letter to a Young Poet" and her correspondence with younger poets like Lehmann, Spender, and Bell, according to Lee, were "part of her argument that modern times required new forms of fiction which could somehow maintain the threatened connection between the private creative self and the catastrophically alien public world" (*Virginia Woolf* 610). As attentive to the "shadow of the authoritarian proclaiming his will" (Rosenfeld 153) as she was to the shadow cast by the authorial "I" that darkens the page in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf offers an answer to the question posed by Spender in his poem "Shadow of War": "Who live under the shadow of war, / What can I do that matters?" (*Collected Poems* 34). Woolf's answer is unequivocal: write.[47]

Although Woolf's personal negotiations regarding her political methodology intensified in the thirties, throughout her writing career Woolf "sought to explore and make clear the connections between public and private violence, between domestic and civic effects of patriarchal society, between male supremacy and the absence of peace, between ethics and aesthetics," Mark Hussey explains in his introduction to the collection

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[47] While bombs fall and invasion threatens, Woolf records in her diary: "This idea struck me: the army is the body: I am the brain. Thinking is my fighting" (*Diary V* 285). And thinking, for Woolf, *is* writing, as the connection between writing her book and the war makes clear: "Anyhow, it cant last, this intensity – so we think – more than 10 days. A fateful book this. Still some blank pages – & what shall I write on the next 10" (*Diary V* 285).

Virginia Woolf and War (3). For Woolf, who perceives the connections between, as Hussey suggests, male supremacy and the absence of peace, militarism is a national corollary to domestic patriarchy and as such patriotism is not enough – not when the deaths of young men, like Peggy's brother Charles Pargiter, are justified in its name. The Great Men who compose and constitute history might extol the virtues of patriotism but women like Edith Cavell, whose monument Peggy and Eleanor pass in *The Years*, and Woolf, who leaves the inscription on the monument, "patriotism is not enough," unspoken, patriotism is not only not enough, it is also part of the problem (*TY* 336). In writing *The Years*, Woolf offers an alternative to unexamined nationalism by revisiting her lifelong concerns with a new urgency as history – traditionally the domain of Great Men – increasingly became the province of dictators and tyrants – Fascist and otherwise. Woolf "could never see how valid history could be written without a knowledge of the daily lives of ordinary people" and, moreover, "the lives of the obscure" (Radin 31), an interpretation confirmed by Woolf's focus on the individual, the detail, and the untold story in her essays and fiction. However, as the 1930s progressed and the "daily lives of ordinary people" and the "lives of the obscure" became increasingly threatened by tyranny and violence, Woolf asks in "The Leaning Tower": "are we not commoners, outsiders?" (154).

In *Three Guineas*, it is women who constitute the "Outsiders Society." However, considering that *Three Guineas* grew out of what was first the "novel-essay," *The Pargiters*, later *The Years*, I would propose that Woolf may count others among her outsiders. For the Younger Generation, war creates insiders and outsiders: born "outside" the First World War, the Younger Generation writers were reluctant to be on the "inside"

of a second. They refused to become soldier-poets like Rupert Brooke or even like

Wilfred Owen. They may be, by birth, inside, but, Woolf reluctantly recognizes, they

are, by choice, outside. They are outside of their father's houses – family homes,

university halls, Houses of Parliament – and all they represent. Spender's poem "Us"

expresses the tension between the Younger Generation's privileged cultural inheritance

and their Marxist sympathies, anticipating Woolf's leaning tower analysis: "Oh young

men oh young comrades / it is too late now to stay in those houses / your fathers built"

(*Collected Poems* 32).

I read *The Years* as Woolf's examination of "those houses your fathers built": an

attempt to write a history of "outsiders-within" the national family. "I think this [*The*

Pargiters] will be a terrific affair," declares Woolf in her diary, "I want to give the whole

of present society – nothing less: facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both.

Is this possible?" (*Diary IV* 151-2). As such *The Years* not only must tell the story of

national and familial *metics* but also must incorporate fact and vision, politics and poetry,

the public and the private.

For Spender, writing from the vantage point of midcentury, the distinction

between fact and vision is akin to the separation between modernist writing and

contemporary writing. (His 1963 book, *The Struggle of the Modern* attempts to detail the

difference between modern and contemporary writing and writers.) Modern writing,

according to Spender, is characterized by the "poetic method" which is "seismographic

[and] barometric" whereas contemporary writing is exemplified by the "prose method"

which is "sociological and cataloguing" (*Struggle of the Modern* 118). However, for

someone like Woolf who, as Spender admits in is autobiography, has "profound political

insight," the modern poetic method "held at bay vast waters, madness, wars, destructive forces" (*World Within World* 154). Although it is unclear whether the madness, wars, and destructive forces referred to are Woolf's psychological struggles or Europe's political turmoil, Spender admits that he and Woolf did not disagree over the political issues themselves; rather, Woolf "objected to the way in which our writing was put into the service of our views" (*World Within World* 158). If, for Woolf, patriotism is not enough, for Spender, "sensibility is not enough": whereas Spender rejects Woolf's privatization of the political, Woolf objects to Spender's politicization of the private (*World Within World* 159). And it was this objection, Woolf's disapproval of egotism and self-consciousness, that transformed what was initially a terrific affair (*The Pargiters*) into a difficult and exhausting one (*The Years*).

As Lee explains, Woolf's "difficulty was that she has to make sure that *The Years* would avoid the very things it was attacking. So she struggled to keep out what she called, writing about the 1930s poets, 'the pedagogic, the didactic, the loudspeaker strain'" (*Virginia Woolf* 665). For Woolf, "rhetoric and propaganda were the method of the enemy, of Hitler and Mussolini" – their "baying" and "howling" (*Diary V* 178) – and she refused to align herself with such tyrannical forces, even if only in form (Rosenfeld 156). Her distaste of the authorial ego facilitated her sensitivity to the political ego; thus the autobiographical trend within the Younger Generation of writers seemed to her dangerously similar to the dictatorial "I" that appeared to have "taken over and was dictating the narrative of European history": aesthetically distasteful and politically unsound (Rosenfeld 153). As evidenced by the repeated mention of the year 1914 in Woolf's diary during the 1930s, history seemed to be repeating itself, and as Natania

Rosenfeld suggests, Woolf's writing aimed "to disrupt the litanies of the patriarchs, reactionaries, and dictators" that compose the menacing refrain of war, reprised in the late thirties (*Outsiders Together* 154). Woolf's interruption, however, will not be the voice of another "I"; already the chorus of egos at home and abroad so loud and so shrill. *The Years*, according to Susan Squier, "practices the politics it refuses to preach" (*Virginia Woolf and London* 168).

Ironically though, Woolf, like her Younger Generation counterparts, turned first to autobiography.[48] The themes explored in *The Years* are those that comprise Woolf's own life: "the history of her family, her childhood, her war, her life in London, her friends" (Lee 627). Initially, as *The Pargiters*, this history would be transformed into excerpts from an unwritten novel, interspersed by "interchapters" which would analyze the fictional scenes, offering a political and feminist analysis, demonstrating the link between the public – politics, history – and the private – the Pargiter family. This form, Woolf hoped, would hold in counterweight the "rival demands of fiction and polemic" and also contribute to the fictionalization of what was fundamentally autobiographical material (Lee 628).

"This immediately ran aground," explains Lee (*Virginia Woolf* 628), noting that in February 1933 Woolf had decided to leave out the interchapters: "I'm leaving out the interchapters – compacting them into the text" (*Diary IV* 146). Quickly it seems, Woolf became uncomfortable with the authorial presence required by the interchapters; as Radin

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[48] Woolf turned to autobiographical material when writing *The Years*, rereading old diaries. The personal material, however, is thickly disguised in the novel by the presence of a narrative voice, exemplified by the weather-related interludes that begin each dated section, and the absence of a centralizing "stream of consciousness."

suggests, in "abandoning her authorial detachment" Woolf was "placing herself in a radical stance between her novel and its readers," essentially serving "as her own interpreter" (*Virginia Woolf's The Years* 15). Although her analytical role as commentator shifted the focus of the text from the personal – autobiographical material – to the public – cultural analysis – it was still too didactic for Woolf's aesthetic and political tastes.

Ultimately, *The Years* enacts Woolf's own struggle between the modern and the contemporary, to use Spender's terms, between the seismographic and the sociological. The "Present Day" section of the novel illustrates the tug-of-war between fact and vision as it manifests in the interactions between Eleanor and Peggy, separated by nearly forty years, as they prepare for Delia's party. Eleanor had been talking about her childhood, a subject to which Peggy desperately wants to return; her aunt's past "seemed to her so peaceful and so safe" (*TY* 326). But Eleanor, who thinks Peggy's life so "much more interesting," responds vaguely to her niece's inquiries, insisting to herself, "I do not want to go back to the past…I want the present" (*TY* 336). However, Eleanor's present is saturated with the past: throughout the "Present Day" section, memories surface, creating a dappled present, both shadowed and illuminated by the past. For Peggy, the thirtysomething doctor, the past is distinct from the present; it is "unreal" (*TY* 333). The present, on the other hand, is real and observable, a situation to be assessed, an illness to be diagnosed: "What is the tip for this particular situation," Peggy asks herself upon entering the party, "as if she were prescribing for a patient" (*TY* 351). And later, half-listening to a story her old Uncle Patrick tells, Peggy wonders "what makes up a person…no, I'm not good at that" but is comforted by reminding herself "I am good at

fact-collecting" (*TY* 353). As the night continues, Peggy searches for facts while Eleanor attempts "to enclose the present moment…to fill it fuller and fuller with the past, the present and the future" (*TY* 428).

"The younger generation following in the wake of the old," North thinks as the Pargiters process downstairs for dinner, trying, like his younger sister Peggy, to make sense of their past and its relation to the present (*TY* 394). But this genealogical pageant, like the novel, is not exactly linear. Peggy's exclamation that she "will never be as young" as her Aunt Eleanor – in her seventies in the "Present Day" section – is characteristic of a novel interested in disrupting the march of history. The historical chronology and autonomy are undercut by what Radin identifies as the "reverberative structure" (*Virginia Woolf's The Years* xxii). It is not the chronological succession of years that link scenes and characters as much as "the series of echoes and re-echoes of words, phrases, and incidents" (Radin xxii). In this manner, the sociological tendency represented by the dates is complicated by the more seismographic nature of the narrative. Or, to put it differently, *The Years* attempts to represent the "hidden pattern" behind what Woolf calls in "Sketch of the Past" "the cotton wool of daily life" (70-72). The hidden pattern, for Woolf, is not dictated by chronology but by connection: "that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" ("Sketch of the Past" 72).

Like the pageant histories popular at the time, *The Years* chronicles the past from the historically omniscient position of the present; but unlike a historical pageant, *The Years* focuses not on Great Men but on ordinary people and their personal narratives, thus disguising the seismographic in the trappings of the sociological. For Woolf, determined

to navigate a course between fact and vision, this structure offers an alternative to the history of Great Men represented by Kitty's father, the master of his college in Oxford, whose history of the college is doubtless a succession of dates and events, detailed throughout the years by the men who learned and taught there.[49] It is this gendered and historical discrepancy that creates distinctions between insiders and outsiders, history and memory, and, dangerously in the late 1930s of the "Present Day," between those in power and those threatened by it. By resisting "both 'hero-making' and teleological narrative closure" (Detloff 33), *The Years* becomes "a gesture against totalitarianism," its "indirection and suggestion" resisting the "agents of tyranny" (Lee 666).

Reflecting upon her venture into the writing of history – the history of the Pargiters – in a letter to Spender after the publication of *The Years*, Woolf both reaffirms her commitment to facts and vision while simultaneously doubting her success:

> But what I meant I think was to give a picture of society as a whole; give characters from every side; turn them towards society, not private life; exhibit the effect of ceremonies; Keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts: envelope the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere…suggesting that there is no break but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern; of which of course we actors are ignorant…Of course I completely failed. (*Letters VI* 116)

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[49] Kitty, the daughter of an educated man, may have, as her female history tutor suggests, "an original mind," but, according to her father, the historian, as a woman, she shares "'the inability of your sex…to grasp the importance of historical facts'" (qtd. in Radin 30).

Unlike *Three Guineas* in which the emphasis is on outsiders, in *The Years* the *distinction between* outsider and insider is overshadowed by an investment in the *wholeness* and *connectedness* of society, the personal as a reflection of the public, continuous development, and recurring patterns. The "recurrence of some pattern" Woolf seeks belies an understanding of history, public or private, as derived from an ideology of progress while "continuous development" signifies her belief in the connectedness of people, the ties that bind commoners and Great Men. Through the Pargiter family Woolf illustrates the inextricable *connection between* outsiders and insiders, the relationship between being inside history and being outside, the fluidity and instability of both positions. And perhaps it is the inescapability of the relationality between insiders and outsiders, between Younger Generation and Older, that leads Woolf to fear failure. Instead of writing a "history of the defeated" – what Diana Wallace contends is the project undertaken by many women novelists in the thirties – Woolf writes a history in which winners and losers are revealed as two sides of the same patriarchal coin.

Most of the characters in *The Years* demonstrate this dual positionality. Eleanor, for example, the eldest of the Pargiter children and the head of the family after her father's death, represents the persistence of Victorian gender roles; although she remains unmarried and travels the world, Eleanor represents Woolf's angel of the house: "My life has been other people's lives," reflects Eleanor, alluding not only to her family but also to her work with the poor (*TY* 367).[50] To her nephew, North, Eleanor "is just the same" as

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[50] Woolf writes about Eleanor to Spender in a 1937 letter: "Eleanor's experience though limited partly by sex and the cramp of Victorian upbringing was meant to be all right; the others were crippled in one way or another – though I meant Maggie and Sara to be outside that particular prison" (*Letters VI* 122). Although Eleanor my be modern in regard to her sexuality and her attitudes about sex – arguably no longer a quintessential

she has always been (*TY* 308), a relic from the Victorian past; to her niece, Peggy, she is a "portrait of a Victorian spinster" (*TY* 333). However, Eleanor exhibits sincere interest in and respect for, the younger generation of Pargiters – "things have changed for the better" (*TY* 386) – and demonstrates the loosening of Victorian gender constraints – "we've changed in ourselves…we're happier…we're freer" (*TY* 386). And Eleanor, more overtly than any other character in the novel, expresses frustration at the state of international politics in the "Present Day" section. A newspaper with Mussolini's photograph catches her eye, incenses her. Peggy observes her aunt's anger: "It was as if she still believed with passion – she, old Eleanor – in the thing that man had destroyed. A wonderful generation, she thought, as they drove off. Believers…" (*TY* 331).

North, Eleanor's nephew who fought in the Great War and spent the following years farming in Africa, is another outsider-within who exhibits shifting positionality: as a soldier in the Great War, North is included within the history of Great Men but, back in London after years in the colonies, North "felt an outsider" (*TY* 317), on the margins of his family as well as modernized society. Continuously asked about his future plans, North is struck by the presence of the past – "their past condemning his present" (*TY* 395) – and struggles with the tension between change – "one thing seemed good to one

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Victorian woman – her reflections on such issues represent the pervasiveness and power of a Victorian moral and social code well into the twentieth century. When Eleanor meets Nicholas, for example, and his homosexuality is revealed, her first reaction is "repugnance"; although Eleanor's initial distaste is quickly replaced by "one feeling, one whole – liking," her overall response reflects her ties to the Victorian society of her youth and young adulthood (*TY* 297-8). Interestingly, Woolf herself is struggling with ambivalence toward male homosexuals in the thirties; in a 1933 letter to Quentin Bell, Woolf proposes to call Spender, William Plomer, Auden, and their male lovers "Lillies," and asks, in direct reference to Forster, "why this passion for the porter, the policeman and the bootmaker?" (*Letters V* 262).

generation, another to another" (*TY* 326) – and repetition – "phrases ready-made" (*TY* 309). "Nothing would be easier," muses North, "than to join a society" and become, by implication, an insider, part of a group: "But he did not believe in joining societies, in signing manifestos" (*TY* 404). Even then there is "a gap, a dislocation, between the world and the reality" (*TY* 405). Peggy, North's sister, calls attention to his predicament, accusing him of failing to live differently: "'You'll write one little book, and then another little book,' she said viciously, 'instead of living…living differently, differently'" (*TY* 390-1).

For Woolf in the 1930s, writing "one little book, and then another little book" might just be the first step to living differently. Woolf writes in "The Leaning Tower" that "English literature will survive this war, if we teach ourselves how to read and to write, how to preserve, and how to create" ("TLT" 154). But the key to English literature's survival does not reside in the act of writing only. Rather, writing from the position of the outsider, the outsider who trespasses inside: "Literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground…Let us trespass freely and find our own way for ourselves" ("TLT" 154). If literature is common ground, so should history be, as *The Years* suggest. History as common ground emerges out of the very qualities Woolf criticized in others and struggled with late in her life: egotism and self-consciousness. Egotism and self-consciousness are the very qualities through which writers in the thirties may be able to find the right relationship between the self and the world and in the process "make that country our own country" ("TLT" 154). It is not, as North initially thinks, simply "*their* past condemning *his* present" (*TY* 395, emphasis mine). Rather, as

North concludes later, "If they want to reform the world…why not begin there, at the centre, with themselves?" (*TY* 405).

Despite North's emphasis on the private self and, by extension, his "home" country, I would argue that "mak[ing] that country our own country" ("TLT" 154) is about more than cultivating an emergent cultural nationalism, as Jed Esty proposes in his book, *A Shrinking Island*. Investigating the relationship between "a fading imperialism and the putative death of English modernism," Esty proposes that in the 1930s Woolf participated in the rise of "culturalism": "an ethnographic and anti-elitist approach to symbolic practices" that Esty identifies as an "anthropological turn" (*A Shrinking Island* 2). In other words, nation-as-empire is replaced by nation-as-island as modernist writers find consolatory potential in the rituals and traditions of rural England. This perspective, however, perpetuates a separation between modernists like Woolf and the Younger Generation along aesthetic and generational lines and ignores the international orientation attending the political climate in the thirties. Moreover, Esty's argument implies yet another means of separation: geographical. Emigration during and after World War II, for Esty, severs any relationship to nation that the Younger Generation may have had, ignoring the ways in which Eliot's religious commitment and Forster's homosexuality, for example, complicate what he perceives as their growing Anglocentrism.

For Esty, the decade offers two distinct perspectives on the intersection of literature and nation. Esty focuses on Woolf, Eliot, and Forster, representatives of "residual modernism": the "discursive process…whose insular integrity seemed to mitigate some of modernism's characteristic social agonies while rendering obsolete some of modernism's defining aesthetic techniques" thus participating in the "rise of an

Anglocentric cultural paradigm" (*The Shrinking Island* 2). In contrast, Esty's gestures toward the "next generation" depend upon the literary-historical claim that "the end of British hegemony was *a fait accompli* to the [Younger Generation] and therefore not the occasion for searching attempts to manage the transition between imperial universalism and national particularism" (*The Shrinking Island* 8). For the Younger Generation, children and adolescents before and during the Great War, the nation they entered as adults was already a fallen world, the prewar Eden that marks the modernists' coming of age nothing but a national fairy tale. Thus, having inherited the "cultural detritus and political guilt of empire without the corresponding advantages," the Younger Generation, according to Esty, "did not vest English culture" with "recuperative possibilities" (*The Shrinking Island* 9).

In this manner, Esty, like so many scholars of modernism, fails to see the national and political circumstances of 1930s as a common thread running through the writing of *both* the aging modernists and the Younger Generation. Instead, implicitly following the lead of literary-historical studies that use the decade designation to represent not a period of history so much as a group of writers, Esty reads the Younger Generation's writing of the thirties through the lens provided by the outbreak of war, the development of the welfare state postwar, and the shadow cast by their midcentury careers. In other words, although Esty employs late imperial decline as the motivating condition under with Woolf, Eliot, and Forster write in the thirties, he suggests that the Younger Generation writers, too young to reap the benefits of the British Empire at it pinnacle, do not experience England's imperial decline as their motivating condition. Or, to put it yet another way, Esty reads modernism from the nineteenth century forward and the writing

of the Younger Generation from the postwar welfare state backwards. This unexamined

tendency, so common in literary studies of the thirties, only reinforces uncomplicated

distinctions – young and old, political and aesthetic – disregarding the fact that modernist

and Younger Generation writers not only *often* shared political opinions but also *always*

shared the experience of living through the difficult events that have come to characterize

the decade and that derive their significance from World War I as much as from

nineteenth-century ideologies of progress and imperialism.

However, if we read literature of the 1930s as examining, critiquing, and

reorienting national historiographies, then Woolf can be read as writing *alongside, not

against*, the Younger Generation of writers, especially since both position themselves

outside historiographic narratives of empire and war, even as they are implicit

participants in and beneficiaries of such national histories, Woolf because of her age and

the Younger Generation writers because of their gender. As self-identified *metics*, Woolf

and the Younger Generation writers are not threatened by English postwar imperial

decline; rather, their historical and political disenfranchisement offers them an

opportunity to assess and revise narratives of imperial contraction from an outsider's

perspective: "We are going to add our own experience, to make our own contribution"

declares Woolf ("TLT" 153). Add and contribute: Woolf's word choice is important. It

is not about simply writing an alternative history of the defeated or, as Esty argues,

resurrecting a history derived from a romanticized English pastoral that would undermine

the history being written by Great Men, Fascist dictators abroad and dictatorial politicians

at home. Instead, Woolf's charge to add and contribute suggests that history belongs to

everyone, the celebrated and the obscure, and that the best way to critique it, claim it, and revise it is to write one's self into it.

Consequently, what literature of the 1930s demonstrates more than an anthropologic turn is a historiographic turn. Modernists, as exemplified by Woolf, and the Younger Generation alike use their writing as their weapon against the forces of history threatening not only to dictate national narratives but also to tyrannize the lives of "commoners and outsiders like ourselves" ("TLT" 154).[51] Additionally, by recognizing the historiographic turn indicative of thirties writing, readers of the decade's literature can begin to contextualize and connect, rather than categorize and separate, the concerns that kept writers writing even "under the influence of change and the threat of war":

> Write daily; write freely; but let us always compare what we have written with what the great writers have written…If we are going to preserve and to create, that is the only way. And we are going to do both. We need not wait till the end of the war. We can begin now. ("TLT" 153-4)

It is precisely through writing – even egotistical, self-conscious, autobiographical writing – and by comparing that writing to the writing of the past – great literature, not Great Men – that the Younger Generation, and Woolf herself, find "the right relationship…between the self that you know and the world outside" ("Letter to a Young

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[51] Interestingly, the three modernists central to Esty's study all share a similar national disenfranchisement – Woolf as a woman, Eliot as a immigrant, and Forster as a homosexual – acknowledged by Esty although the consequences of their shared positions is not adequately examined. Scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Vincent Sherry, and Terry Eagleton (among many others) have taken the quintessential un-Englishness of English modernism into account in a manner that would, I believe, only complicate and enrich Esty's argument and ultimately *open up* the last days of Empire as a historical period of study instead of *closing it off* as the province of the Younger Generation or as the "last lap" for modernist writers (*Diary V* 298).

Poet" 220). As *The Years* suggests, the "1935 angle" is a historical one, composed of the

personal and the public, the past and the present, and looking toward the future.

"My life has been other people's lives": whether Eleanor's confession is a

regretful lament is uncertain (*TY* 367). Although echoing the Angel of the House Woolf

killed in her speech, Eleanor, simultaneously the oldest Pargiter (in age) and the youngest

(in spirit), is not without her own egotism: "Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it,"

Eleanor muses (*TY* 367). For the women of *The Years*, the question of egotism is

gendered. Reflecting and commenting on the history of gender inequality as much as

national political history, *The Years* represents Woolf's reluctant admiration of Smyth

and her egotistical feminism as well as her measured appraisal of the Younger

Generation. Kitty, the character most like Woolf, toasts Rose:

> "Oh, if you're all drinking to healths,' said Kitty, "I'll drink too. Rose, to
>
> your health. Rose is a fine fellow…But Rose was wrong," she added.
>
> "Force is always wrong…Still," she said aloud, "Rose had the courage of
>
> her convictions, Rose went to prison. And I drink to her!" (*TY* 420)

The line dividing force and courage is often indiscernible and Kitty, like Woolf, is torn

between, on one hand, disagreement and distaste for egotism and the militancy that

attends it and, on the other hand, admiration and respect for the bravery to act upon

political convictions, also derived in part from egotism. There is a time and a place for

egotism, Kitty's toast seems to admit, and perhaps prewar British feminism was just such

a time and place.

In many ways, Nicholas' speech at the end of the party confirms Eleanor's

intuition that there is an "'I' at the middle of it." His speech, ostensibly an attempt to

unify the party and to make meaning of the evening, is continuously interrupted by the various Pargiters, offering their various remarks which, by this point in the novel, have come to represent something significant about each of them: Edward's commentary on oratory, Kitty's toast to her ideological opponent Rose, Renny's existential questioning, and Maggie's nonverbal communication. Instead of commanding attention and dictating the meaning, Nicholas' fragmented speech provides each Pargiter with the opportunity to "add [their] own experience, make [their] own contribution" ("TLT" 153). As a chorus in Greek drama comments upon but does not determine the performance of the actors, so, too, do the Pargiters obliquely comment on each other, their lives, and the history that has provided the background of their family saga. But just as the chorus seems to speak *not to the actors but the audience*, so too does Nicholas' speech seem to address not the family and friends before him but the entirety of the human race – "I was going to drink to the human race…now in its infancy, may it grow to maturity!" – a seeming irony in the "Present Day" as Europe looks forward with the prescience of death and destruction rather than with the eagerness and anticipation of a child looking forward to maturity (*TY* 426).[52]

But perhaps even in the "Present Day," the late 1930s, there is hope. The novel ends, not with a peroration – "There is going to be no peroration – no peroration!" Nicholas exclaims – but rather with the unrecognizable, distorted singing of children:

> "But it was…" Eleanor began. She stopped. What was it? As
>
> they stood there they [the children] had looked so dignified; yet they had

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[52] "'I thought we were on the verge of a smash…Not that it looked much like it at Covent Garden tonight,'" Kitty counters Patrick's assertion that England is the "only civilized country in the whole world," alluding to the pervasive potential for war (*TY* 399).

made this hideous noise. The contrast between their faces and their voices

was astonishing; it was impossible to find one word for the whole.

"Beautiful?" she said, with a note of interrogation.

"Extraordinarily," said Maggie.

But Eleanor was not sure that they were thinking of the same thing.

(*TY* 430-1)

Sphinx-like, the children, representing the *next* generation, present the Pargiters with a

puzzle: as morning dawns, the question of meaning is left unanswered. There is no

peroration to offer direction or conclusion, only a group of ordinary people, connected by

name, bound by experience, looking out onto the new day holding the ambiguous hope

represented by the *next* generation, unintelligible but eager and perhaps even beautiful.

Thus, despite the jostling egos and the competing narratives – familial and national –

presented by the Pargiter family, Woolf ends her novel hopefully. The voices of the

children, unintelligible at the end of *The Years*, are given significance in the conclusion to

"The Leaning Tower": "For that gift of unconsciousness the next generation will have to

thank the creative and honest egotism of the leaning-tower group" ("TLT" 149).[53]

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[53] The class implications of the singing children must be acknowledged. As children of
the local laborers and domestic servants, the children represent the lower classes, a vexed
identity for Woolf who is sincerely interested in, even if disdainful of, the lives of the
working class. Their unintelligibility is derived in part from their cockney accents and
lack of education, evoking and reinforcing class barriers even while suggesting the
futility of such distinctions in the face of the political threats of the late 1930s. However,
when read in conjunction with "The Leaning Tower," which concludes with Woolf's
prophesy for a future society without class distinctions, the end of *The Years*
demonstrates Woolf's deep investment in changing the patriarchal structure that has for
centuries created unjust and unequal divisions between classes and genders.

Hopeful, perhaps, but not uncritical. The "hideous noise" may be extraordinarily beautiful to Eleanor and Maggie but it is, in the moment of interruption, disconcerting and uncomfortable. "So shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless" yet somehow significant, the children's song is encouraged and rewarded – Delia gives them large slices of cake before they sing and Martin gives them coins as they leave – but not understood (*TY* 430). The gulf between the classless future and the class-ridden past is not bridged and, as Woolf explains in "The Leaning Tower," remains dangerous (152). Into this gulf, "literature may crash and come to grief" and the blame, Woolf suggests, could be laid upon England with its patriarchal classist society, its ivory towers of tradition and privilege now leaning precariously ("TLT" 152).

Woolf's caution alludes in part to her own snobbishness, which, despite her gendered disenfranchisement, is one aspect of her own Victorian middle-class cultural inheritance. But moreover, Woolf's caution reveals her investment in critical thinking, reading, and writing. Because "words are so common, so familiar" they are they province of outsiders and ordinary people as well as Great Men ("TLT" 153). Consequently, Woolf's alternative to patriotism is criticism: although she is at pains to avoid "joining the embittered and futile tribe of scapegoat hunters" that she associates with the Younger Generation ("TLT" 152), she is eager to extol the virtues of critical reading, identifying England's public lending libraries as the bridge the between the old world and the new world:

> We have got to teach ourselves to understand literature. Money is no
> longer going to do our thinking for us. Wealth will no longer decide who
> shall be taught and who not. In future it is we who shall decide whom to

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send to public schools and universities; how they shall be taught…Also

we must become critics because in future we are not going to leave writing

to be done for us by a small class of well-to-do young men who have only

a pinch, a thimbleful of experience to give us. ("TLT" 153).

But it is more than literature that Woolf hopes will be read increasingly critically, it is

history as well. If writers, modernists and Younger Generation alike, are to effect change

within the nation, "add [their] own experience" and "make [their] own contribution," they

must be able to read history like literature and attempt to write themselves into it.

In the face of tyranny, dictatorship, and oppression at home and abroad, Woolf

does not preach or propagandize – she promises. Her promise *is* her writing because

"there will be a next generation, in spite of this war and whatever it brings" ("TLT" 149).

By writing the "Present Day," Woolf not only is writing the story of the late thirties but

also is alluding to the story of the future. As Spender explains of the decade in his

autobiography: "within today [the 1930s] there was not only all the injustices of the day –

producing unemployment, poverty and exploitation – but also the victims of tomorrow,

buried as it were within its structure" (*World Within World* 135). However, like many of

his generation, Spender, distracted by egotism and overwhelmed by contemporary events,

did not see, in Woolf's words, the "recurrence of some pattern" of which "we actors are

ignorant":

In general, I thought of public events as happening more or less

incalculably, as the result of clashes of interests, economic factors, the

influence of outstanding personalities in political life. The future was

always uncertain: and this made it unreal to me. For example, I could not

think that in 1931 a war which would take place eight years later existed

within the structure of events, like the foundation stones beneath a

building, or like a past history; that unless the structure was altered the war

would inevitably take place; and that, in order to alter it, methods would

have to be used which could really achieve the alteration. (*World Within*

World 134)

The Years does not preach to the Younger Generation nor does it chastise them; rather it

offers to them a historical perspective that positions them *within* the very national and

literary narrative from which their age and their politics sets them apart. Woolf suggests

that the "methods…which could really achieve the alteration" of the structure of national

history are already at their disposal. To write – even egotistically and autobiographically

– is to build bridges between the past and the present, the present and the future, the older

generation and the younger. As Eleanor tentatively suggests, "perhaps there's 'I' at the

middle of it" after all.

Chapter 4

A Fighting Philosopher:

Autobiography, History, and the Politics of R. G. Collingwood

"The chief business of twentieth-century philosophy is to reckon with twentieth-century history."

— R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*

Alan Sebrill, the protagonist of Edward Upward's novel *In the Thirties* (1962), struggles to integrate his desire to write poetry with his increasing commitment to the Communist Party:

> He must write because, although the political fight must always come first, writing was his best weapon in the fight: but in this epoch of wars and revolution how feeble a weapon poetry was, "whose action is no stronger than a flower." Poetry had lost its influence. Life moved men so much that they no longer had any emotion to spare for imaginative literature. Their tears no longer fell on "holy poets' pages." He would do better to write political tracts. (219)

The tension between political and literary commitment that Sebrill articulates is not restricted to aspiring poets-turned-Communists in the 1930s. Rather, the question of "why I write" pervaded the decade as poets, novelists, and intellectuals alike were forced to negotiate the relationship between literary vocation and political imperative.[1] George Orwell goes as far as to propose that in a peaceful age he might have written ornately and

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[1] I borrow from this phrase from Orwell's "Why I Write" (1947): an autobiographically-inflected essay that examines writers' motivations.

remained "almost unaware" of politics. "As it is," Orwell admits, "I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer" ("Why I Write" 317). But for Orwell, being "a sort of pamphleteer" is not only necessary but also admirable; he explains, "it is where I lacked a *political* purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into…sentences without meaning" ("Why I Write" 320).

Poetry may be a feeble weapon, according to Sebrill, but many of the Younger Generation took up such arms against Fascist sentiment at home and abroad. The writers explored in these pages turned not to poetry but to fiction, enlisting prose in the historiographic turn that sought to integrate the political realities and lived experiences of the 1930s into the longer narrative of national history that privileged imperial ambitions and military masculinities. In my final chapter, I turn from novelists to the philosopher of history R. G. Collingwood, whose quest to find a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history stands as a forceful validation of Sebrill's initial claim that writing is a powerful weapon in fights political.

The purpose of this final chapter is twofold. First, I intend to call attention to Collingwood and his writing of the late 1930s as exemplary of the historiographic turn "National History and the Novel in 1930s Britain" examines. At present, Collingwood and his philosophy of history are known only to professional historians and philosophers in an academic context.[2] However, as a thinker impacted by and writing about the political events of twentieth-century history, Collingwood offers a productive study for

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[2] During his academic career, Collingwood was most well known for his archeological work, especially *Roman Britain* (1923, second edition, 1932). Additionally, Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (1938) positioned him as philosopher of aesthetics and many art critics and historians know him only for this work.

literary historians and scholars seeking both to extend and deepen their understanding of the relationship among the political events of the 1930s, national history, and the decade's fiction. In addition to bringing Collingwood and his work to the attention of literary scholars, I also intend to explore the concept of novelistic historiography: how lifewriting merges with fiction in the 1930s in order to intervene and reorient national historical narratives that shape the relationship between the nation and the individual. Although Collingwood arguably composed his most significant academic writing in the 1930s, it is his *An Autobiography* (1939) that demonstrates the way in which personal history provides the means to engage historical thinking in the service of revising the individual's role in national stories that motivate political action in the present.

And political action is exactly what characterizes the 1930s. Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany in January 1933 and by the end of the year, books had been burnt, concentration camps opened, and Germany had left the League of Nations. By the middle of the decade, Hitler was Führer of Germany, Benito Mussolini's Italian forces had taken Abyssinia, and civil war had erupted in Spain. 1938 ushered in mounting political tensions in Europe, culminating in the appeasement of Nazi Germany in Munich and the consequent annexation of Sudetenland. "Germany's growing power was the chief preoccupation," explains Malcolm Muggeridge, "and as it grew, fear grew" (*The Thirties* 290). Although the consensus was that something should be done, "nothing was done"; rather, with each realization of Germany's growing power, there were "bursts of fear," then crises, "with uneasy lulls in between" (*The Thirties* 290). For Collingwood, ever more frustrated by an ill-informed citizenry and the increasing corruption of democratic principles in Britain, the power of Fascist governments abroad is not simply a

distant threat. Rather, Fascism – "the end of clear thinking and the triumph of irrationalism," according to Collingwood – had already invaded Britain, evidenced by the National Government's "betrayal" of Abyssinia, Spain, and Czechoslovakia (*An Autobiography* 167, 165.)[3]

In 1939, confronted by failing health, premature retirement from academic life, and the dissolution of his marriage, Collingwood undertakes his most ambitious writing project.[4] For the purposes of my investigation, his most ambitious writing project is not *The Principles of History* (1999) or *The Idea of History* (1946), the unfinished manuscripts that Collingwood considered his "life's work," but rather it is his *An Autobiography*.[5] Published in 1939 and written under personal stresses amplified by impending political crises, *An Autobiography* narrates the story of Collingwood's intellectual evolution. Born into a family that cherished literature and art, Collingwood's childhood was characterized by reading, painting, and music; he attended Rugby and

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[3] Collingwood's *An Autobiography* will hitherto be abbreviated *A*.

[4] Fred Inglis, author of *History Man* (2009), the biography of Collingwood, describes his "moral crisis" as follows: "He was coming to the end of his fifty sessions of psychoanalysis, a process no so serious a person could undergo unshaken; he had unmistakably fallen in love with Kathleen Edwardes – it is the only phrase to describe the headlong recklessness with which a world distinguished professor in the dead center of 1930s Oxonian respectability openly kept company with a beautiful actress and former student; he was stricken with mortal illness from which he could no longer 'propose to make a rapid and satisfactory recovery'" (241).

[5] Parts of the manuscripts Collingwood considered *The Principles of History* were posthumously published by Malcolm Knox, to increasing controversy, in *The Idea of History* in 1946. Later, in 1999, W. H. Dray and W. J. Van der Dussen published an edition of Collingwood's essays under the title *The Principles of History*.

began on a path that would lead to a professorship at Magdalen College, Oxford.[6]

However, Collingwood's experience of the Great War – working in London for the

Admiralty Intelligence Division – altered the direction of his intellectual life. Rather than

continuing further into the hallowed halls of academia, Collingwood increasingly traded

scholarly obscurity for political relevance as he integrated his commitment to historical

thinking into his examination of contemporary politics. Although Collingwood is not a

novelist like the subjects of my previous chapters, his *An Autobiography* enacts the

historiographic turn that characterizes the literature of the 1930s and, moreover, it

demonstrates the role personal history can play in reauthoring national stories.

The Nation, the Novel, and Lifewriting

For Benedict Anderson, nations are imagined political communities, inherently

limited and sovereign (*Imagined Communities* 6).[7] For the purpose of my analysis, the

important aspects of this theorization of nation are its imaginary and communal

properties. Anderson explains that nations are imagined "because the members of even

the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even

hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (*IC* 6).

Maintained through the individual imagination of its members and the collective

imagination of the shared culture of its citizens, a nation is a community because,

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[6] Collingwood was always intellectually inclined and his upbringing only encouraged his love of reading and quiet contemplation. Although he detested the public school culture, he enjoyed learning and realized his talents at administrative work during his time at Rugby; an injury kept him off the field and pitch so he was not tempted by a commitment to athletics. At Oxford, Collingwood felt as though he had been let out of prison (*A* 12): he read most days and nights and had a small but select social life.

[7] Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* will hitherto be abbreviated *IC*.

"regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (*IC* 7). Borrowing from Walter Benjamin's concept of "homogenous, empty time," which translates practically into clock and calendar time, Anderson describes the way in which the novel provides the vehicle "for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (*IC* 25). The novel – like the newspaper – portrays societies and the individuals that constitute them as living in a shared calendrical, clock time. And like the nation, within which its members are largely unknown to each other, the novel presents characters who, although they may know each other, perform actions and have experiences unbeknownst to one another, thus representing the kind of anonymous simultaneity that binds citizens within the national imaginary. Community is reinforced through the understanding of shared time and the imaginary is sustained by the constant recognition that others, similar but unknown to each citizen, are investing and engaging in the same recognition.

The novel – unlike the poem – reveals and supports both the imaginary and communal properties of nation by providing a "precise analogue" of the concept. Nation, conceived of "as a solid community moving steadily," linearly, and horizontally through history, is represented and thus reinforced in the structure of the novel (*IC* 26). This format – individuals constituting a sociological organism that moves calendrically through shared clock time – is what Anderson calls the "novelistic format" (*IC* 33). And it is the imaginative and community-building powers of the novel that thirties novelists harness in their historiographic projects.

Through the novel, historically-conscious writers are able to critique the gender politics of national narratives, offer alternate national histories, and illustrate the impact

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military masculinities have on national subjects even in an ostensibly peaceful period. By revising the ways in which the anonymous members of the nation are imagined and by revealing the ways in which the community of nation has been constituted by imperial and military mythologies, authors such as Waugh, Isherwood, and Woolf demonstrate the relationship between literature and the process through which readers author their role as national citizens. Ultimately, the historiographic turn of the 1930s engages readers as citizens and offers to the members of the national community a vehicle for reimagining their nation's history through an examination of the present.

However, in the 1930s, present realities curtail fictional possibilities, as illustrated by Sebrill's lament that "[l]ife moved men so much that they no longer had any emotion to spare for imaginative literature" (*In the Thirties* 219). Or, as Orwell explains, literary aspiration merged with political imperative in the late 1930s so completely that "[e]very line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism" ("Why I Write" 318). Economic depression, political insecurity, and international tensions mounted throughout the decade, shifting the literary focus from imagination to reality as the emerging popularity of documentary realism indicates. In some senses, fiction becomes less fictional in the 1930s. With an impending world war restricting writers' horizons, to paraphrase Marina MacKay, the possibilities of imaginative and literal departure are curtailed ("Is Your Journey Really Necessary?" 1601).[8] MacKay's focus on the decreasing potential of

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[8] Auden and Isherwood traveled to China in 1938 and published their reflections in both poetry and prose under the title *Journey to a War* (1939). Another illustrative example, I would argue, is Rex Warner's now little known 1937 novel, *The Wild Goose Chase*. Although the journey in *The Wild Goose Chase* is fantastic and allegorical, the narrative concerns three brothers whose adventures lead to political liberation through revolution.

travel and its changing intention correlates with the decrease in fictional prospects for politically-attentive writers during the decade. The result is that during the 1930s the national community constructed through the novel becomes less a product of imagination and more a product of political realities. Authors, unable to "travel" in their writing, stay "at home" turning their own lives into fiction and offering themselves as characters. In so doing, writers of the 1930s present their readers with the means to imagine themselves as the subjects of nation.

The relationship between personal experience and political intention is not foreign to the novel, as Pericles Lewis explains. His *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel* (2000) takes this confluence as its starting point. Reading the culminating declaration of James Joyce's Stephan Dedalus – "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the *uncreated* conscience of my race" (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 275-6, emphasis mine) – as representative of the modern novelist's aspirations, Lewis proposes that the "heroic narrator-protagonist became," for Joyce in particular and for modern novelists in general, "the focus for a reawakening of national consciousness centered on the awareness that individuals are both subjects and objects of historical processes" (*Modernism, Nation, and the Novel* 2). This link between the novelist's lived experience and the "forging" of national consciousness, according to Lewis, "epitomizes an attitude that influenced the development of modernism" around the turn of the century (*Modernism, Nation, and the Novel* 3). The explicitness with which writers of the 1930s in Britain incorporated their

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Thus, despite the fantastic and allegorical elements, the content is very much a product of the political reality Warner and his contemporaries confront. In Warner's parable the journey is one that ultimately averts oppression and war through revolution.

lived experiences and the outspokenness with which they championed political purpose in literature suggests their inheritance of the modernist project. But whereas the modern novel "concerns itself with the relationship between the individual consciousness and the external reality that it confronts" (Lewis 4), the 1930s novels examined in this project seek to reveal and revise the relationship between individual consciousness and external reality, ultimately exposing the "createdness" of national identities.

By incorporating lifewriting into their fictional projects, writers of the 1930s demonstrate the way contemporary politics engage them in the creation of national historical narratives, and through the novel, these writers are able to intervene, offering alternatives to national histories derived from imperial and military mythologies. Although many writers of the decade do travel, like Isherwood and Spender, they return, often because of heightened political tensions abroad, to England, where they are confronted by the realities of a nation damaged by war and facing the increasing threat of another. Collingwood is no exception. About to return to England in 1939 from a trip to Java intended to improve his health, Collingwood assesses the political situation that awaits him:

> I began the year in the expectation of two developments: an open clash between the prime minister and the principles of parliamentary government, and a more flagrant repetition, somewhere else, of…the aggression of a Fascist state, rendered successful by support from the British government under the cover of a war-scare engineered by that government itself among the British people. (*A* 165)

Such political realities impinge upon Collingwood's intellectual imagination, "curtailing" the philosophical possibilities of his work; ultimately, like the novelists this project examines, Collingwood, too, is simultaneously *confined* and *motivated* by twentieth-century history. And, again, like the authors explored in these pages, Collingwood harnesses the acute historical sensitivity facilitated by the events of the decade. "If knowledge as to the facts of one's situation is called historical knowledge," Collingwood explains, "historical knowledge is necessary to action" (*A* 148).

An Autobiography, Archeology, and Agency

By utilizing lifewriting, in fiction, in the case of Waugh, Isherwood, and Woolf, and in the philosophy of history, in the case of Collingwood, these writers present a new way to imagine the nation, a way that engages the reader as a character in the story of their country. If the novelistic format provided the means to imagine the community of nation, then the autobiographically-inflected fiction of the 1930s provided the means for readers to imagine their lives as significant in national narratives and their own identities as potential models for national subjects. For Collingwood, whose intellectual project is achieving a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history, autobiography permits the confluence of the historical and the philosophical with the personal. As the "story of his thought" ("Preface"), Collingwood's *An Autobiography* both reveals the "proper" subject of history as self-conscious, reflective thought and enacts his philosophy of history, a process of question-and-answer, "incapsulated" thought, and re-enactment.[9]

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[9] Collingwood details the proper subject of history in the "Epilegomena" of *The Idea of History* (edited by Malcolm Knox) as "the act of thinking itself" (304). He elaborates that historical knowledge is composed of conscious, reflective, purposive thought (*The Idea of History* 304-9).

Ultimately, more than an autobiography, Collingwood's *An Autobiography* is a

handbook for historical thinking and, consequently, a model for political action in the

present. Lionel Rubinoff, an advocate of reading *An Autobiography* as an example of

Collingwood's philosophy of history, argues that by "presenting his thought in the form

of an autobiography" and as an "exercise in historical rethinking," Collingwood both

establishes a historical identity for himself and provides "an opportunity for the reader to

gain privileged access to the questioning process" from which his philosophy of history is

derived ("R. G. Collingwood: Philosophy as Autobiography" 232). Through *An*

Autobiography Collingwood thus redefines history and in so doing makes the present

moment as relevant to historical study as the past: "the past which a historian studies is

not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present…I expressed

this by saying that history is concerned not with 'events' but with 'processes'…which do

not begin and end but rather turn into one another" (*A* 97). By revising the boundaries of

historical thinking, Collingwood reorients the historian's project from simply

understanding the past to understanding the present. "What history can bring to moral

and political life," proposes Collingwood, "is a trained eye for the situation in which one

has to act" (*A* 100).

Collingwood's conception of history as being *as* relevant to understanding the

present *as* to understanding the past derives, in large part, I would argue, from his

lifelong commitment to archeology. "I grew up in a gradually thickening archeological

atmosphere," Collingwood, whose first experience of an archeological excavation came

at the age of three, explains (*A* 80). As an adult, Collingwood was as dedicated to the

excavation of Roman Britain as he was to reaching a *rapprochement* between philosophy

and history.[10] Collingwood's two intellectual commitments, however, are not as distinct

as they may at first appear. What archeology offers Collingwood is a "laboratory of

thought" (*A* 24) in which the tenets of historical thinking could be tried, tested, and

evaluated. The process of question-and-answer that, during the Great War, became a

central principle of Collingwood's philosophy of history, had already, for years, been the

guiding principle of his archeological studies of Roman Britain.[11]

In archeological excavation, history is only discovered through action in the

present; consequently, the history "unearthed" through archeological study is, according

to Collingwood, "open." Understanding history as "open" means that it is an

"inexhaustible fountain of problems, old problems re-opened and new problems

formulated that had not been formulated until now" (*A* 75).[12] In his archeological work,

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[10] Collingwood explains that it was "necessary for the advancement of my philosophical
work that I should be constantly engaged not only in philosophical studies but in
historical studies as well" (*A* 120). For Collingwood, who was early in his career an
"acknowledged master" of archeological studies, Roman Britain provided a "very
suitable" object of historical study (*A* 120). The great master, F. J. Haverfield died in
1919 and most of his students had fallen in World War I, leaving Collingwood as "the
only man resident in Oxford whom he had trained as a Romano-British specialist" (*A*
120).

[11] Evoking principles that Collingwood perceived as more or less unconsciously shared
among archeological historians, he explains that the successful archeologist should "first
of all decide what he wants to find out, and then decide what kind of digging will show it
to him" (*A* 122). In other words, one cannot discover the answer unless one first decides
upon the question.

[12] The opposite of "open" history is "closed" history: "a body of facts which a very, very
learned man might know, or a very, very big book enumerate, in their completeness" (*A*
75). Collingwood details the difference between history as "open" and "closed" in regard
to the history of philosophy. This differentiation emerged from Collingwood's
evaluation, critique, and eventual repudiation of the realist approach to philosophy.
Collingwood begins discussing his critique of the realist approach to philosophy as
conceiving of philosophical problems as "unchanging" and universal. See the chapter
"The History of Philosophy" in *An Autobiography*.

Collingwood realized that "what one learnt depended not merely on what turned up in one's trenches but also on what questions one was asking" (*A* 25). The consequence is that certain kinds of questions produced certain kinds of answers and, for Collingwood, whose *rapprochement* between philosophy and history derives from his archeological experience, "knowledge comes only by answering questions, and that these questions must be the right questions and asked in the right order" (*A* 25).[13] Because the questioner is of the present, his access to and understanding of the past is structured by his contemporary reality: thus "old problems re-opened and new problems formulated."[14] Moreover, the archeological model from which Collingwood's philosophy of history derives positions the historian not simply as an interpreter of the past but rather as an agent in the construction of history in the present.

The "most important condition" of archeological success, according to Collingwood, "was that the person responsible for any piece of digging, however small and however large, should know exactly why he was doing it" (*A* 122). Unlike "blind digging," which dominated archeological excavations in the nineteenth century, excavations governed by the logic of question-and-answer, like those undertaken by

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[13] This is one proposition among many of Collingwood's with which his critics take issue. Historians and philosophers of history are engaged in debate over Collingwood's philosophy of history; see Alan Donogan's *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (1985) and the "Introduction" to the revised edition of *The Idea of History* for a discussion of the debates surrounding Collingwood's philosophy and methods.

[14] *An Autobiography* positions Collingwood's philosophy of history and intellectual evolution in the context of his critique of the realist approach to philosophy, an approach into which he was inducted during his undergraduate tenure at Oxford. When *An Autobiography* was first published in 1939, many of his colleagues at Oxford were taken aback at the candid manner in which Collingwood discussed realist philosophy and its advocates.

Collingwood's mentor F. J. Haverfield, could "settle highly intricate and abstruse problems" efficiently and effectively (*A* 124). Archeology, for Haverfield and his pupil Collingwood, was the study of problems not periods. The opposite, studying sites rather than seeking answers to specific questions, resulted in museums "choked with the finds" while "amazingly little" was discovered about the history of the site (*A* 125). In other words, the questions were posed *after* the excavation in response to what was discovered – questions posed in response to answers – instead of the other way around. Consequently, archeology filled museum cases but did not necessarily enrich the historical study of Roman Britain. Collingwood's logic of question-and-answer shifted the emphasis from the systematic and comprehensive excavation of a site to the focused and purposeful excavation of a site guided by historical questions. Thus, what questions the archeologists applied to the excavation site influenced the history they would unearth.

As an archeologist, Collingwood is acutely aware of his role in the construction of history. The questions he brings to an excavation site determine the answers he discovers. What happens when this historical agency is translated from archeology to philosophy or to traditional historical studies, which have been dominated, since the nineteenth century, by the scissor-and-paste approach made popular by Leopold von Ranke?[15] Collingwood admits that had it not been "for the interruption of my academic life by the war" (*A* 28) he might not have translated his experiences in the "laboratory of

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[15] Leopold von Ranke was a German historian whose work gained prominence in the middle- to late-nineteenth century; he has since become known as the "father" of modern source-based, empiricist historiography, the method Collingwood refers to as scissors-and-paste. Donogan, in his *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (1985), explains scissor-and-paste history as "the attempt to recover the truth about the past by excerpting it from the writings of authorities" (177).

thought" – the archeological excavation site – into a philosophy of history. Walking by the Albert Memorial each day to work for the Admiralty Intelligence Division during the war,[16] Collingwood, who found the memorial "so obviously, so incontrovertibly, so indefensibly bad," wondered "why had [Sir George Gilbert] Scott done it?" (*A* 29). Instead of relying on common responses – Scott was a bad architect or there is no accounting for taste – Collingwood asks "what relation was there…between what he had done and what he had tried to do?" (*A* 29).

It is worthwhile here to reach back to Collingwood's childhood, during which purposeful activity was both privileged and imperative. W. G. Collingwood, Collingwood's father, was the private secretary to the art critic, John Ruskin, in the last years of Ruskin's life and cultivated a Ruskinian perspective within his family. Collingwood provides an illustrative example in *An Autobiography*: "I was constantly watching the work of my father and mother, and the other professional painters who frequented their house…so that I learned to think of a picture not as a finished product exposed for the admiration of virtuosi, but as the visible record…of an attempt to solve a definite problem in painting" (*A* 2). Not only does this approach to painting emphasize the importance of process but also, and significantly for Collingwood's stress on question-and-answer, it foregrounds the relationship between intention and action, thus stressing the role of reflective, conscious, and purposeful thought as a key to

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[16] Collingwood moved to London from Oxford during World War I so that he could work for the Admiralty Intelligence Division; the Admiralty Intelligence Division was housed in rooms at the Royal Geographical Society and Collingwood "walked across Kensington Gardens and past the Albert Memorial" every day. He explains that the Albert Memorial "began by degrees to obsess me. Like Wordsworth's Leech-gatherer, it took on a strange air of significance" (*A* 29).

understanding and as an important aspect of knowledge. If paintings were solutions to certain problems or answers to particular questions, it is no wonder that Collingwood, years later, critically inquires about the relation "between what [Scott] had done and what he had tried to do."

Even research into Scott's own statements regarding the design of the Albert Memorial are not evidence enough for Collingwood, who had long been suspicious of history derived from "sources" and "authorities" as in scissors-and-paste approaches. As he learned through his archeological studies, Collingwood knew that "sources" – like an artifact discovered at an excavation site – were only one part of the historical equation. The other part of the equation was realizing the question that the artifact answered. As Rubinoff explains, illustrating the role purpose plays in the question-and-answer process, Collingwood's inquiries into Roman Britain were "guided by the presupposition that every artifact, action, or thought represents the fulfillment of a purpose, and thus may be considered a response to a specific problem or question" ("R. G. Collingwood: Philosophy as Autobiography" 235). From archeological practice to his reflections upon the Albert Memorial, the foundation of Collingwood's philosophy of history began to emerge:

> I began by observing that you cannot find out what a man means by
> simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he had
> spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful
> intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the
> question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in

yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.

(*A* 31)

The agency required for archeological research, Collingwood's "questioning activity" (*A* 30), translates into historical agency in Collingwood's philosophy of history. The historical question is not simply something waiting to be discovered but rather something to be re-enacted in the mind of the historian in the present.

For Collingwood, the process of question-and-answer and re-enactment work in tandem so that historians begin to resemble natural scientists in their method. Deeply impacted by his early readings of René Descartes and Francis Bacon, Collingwood was committed to the intellectual ideology buttressing the scientific method in that experiments were motivated by specific questions that were continuously readdressed and reformulated in the scientific process. In other words, just as the natural scientist must "'put Nature to the question,'" so, too, should the historian put the sources to the question as well as everything from which the historian seeks to extract knowledge (Donogan 179). However, it would be a mistake to assume that Collingwood believed that the study of history was governed by a set of laws as is natural science. Collingwood distinguishes historical inquiry from scientific inquiry in that history can never be subsumed under general laws. Whereas scientists and historians both should follow "the Baconian method of systematic questioning" – "sifting true from false answers to their questions by means of survivals or traces of the past" – and thus derive their conclusions from their evidence by means of "hypothetical propositions," historians should never presuppose that their hypothetical propositions are structured and governed by the rule of general laws (Donogan 191). Therein lies the difference between historical and scientific

knowledge: scientific knowledge takes nature as its subject whereas historical knowledge takes reflective, conscious, purposeful thought as its subject. Since there are no general laws governing human thought, "hypotheses about past thoughts do not presuppose any general laws" and it is only through the processes of question-and-answer and re-enactment that the historian can access the past (Donogan 191).

The process of re-enactment becomes a central tenet of Collingwood's historical thinking, so much so that he is motivated to declare "all history is the history of thought" (*A* 110). Re-enactment, for Collingwood, guarantees, however, that this "thought" – the proper subject of historical inquiry – is not confined temporally in the past but instead "incapsulated" in the historian's mind in the present. Because this incapsulated thought is re-enacted in the historian's mind in the present, Collingwood concludes "there are in history no beginnings and no endings" (*A* 98). Although a controversial statement to historians and philosophers alike, Collingwood's conclusion is significant for those writing in Britain in the 1930s. If history is "open" and if it exists to a certain extent in the present moment, then history is like a story, capable of revision: or, in Collingwood's terms, it is a series of questions and answers continually reformulated. Moreover, as incapsulated thought, history becomes relevant in the present moment, especially for those historically- and politically-sensitive writers whose work offers alternate national histories and new ways to imagine what it means to be British in the 1930s present.

The relationship between the philosophy of history and literature is highlighted, I would argue, in Eliot's famous essay, frequently referenced in this dissertation, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot and Collingwood are exact contemporaries, born only six months apart, but more than birth date connects the two. In addition to

crossing paths at Oxford,[17] Eliot articulates a philosophy of literary history in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that resonates with the principles of history Collingwood dedicates his later career to propagating. The "historical sense" that Eliot defines in "Tradition" conceives of the past as alive in the present, similar to the way Collingwood's re-enactment and incapuslated thought merge the historian's present with the past he studies. Eliot explains the historical sense as involving

> a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal order together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time of his own contemporaneity. ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 4)

The simultaneity that Eliot emphasizes in his explanation of the historical sense is akin to the simultaneity of past and present that occurs through re-enactment and incapsulated thought. Literary history, for Eliot, is a simultaneous order composed of works of art,

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[17] Eliot spent a year at Merton College, Oxford, in 1914, where he was finishing a thesis on the philosopher F. H. Bradley and where, according to Inglis, he met Collingwood. Collingwood "got along famously" with the poet and later would praise *The Waste Land* as "the greatest of modern poems" (*History Man* 94). Inglis makes much of the connection – practical and theoretical – between Collingwood and Eliot; too much, I would argue, often using Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943) as a lens through which to read Collingwood's late career thinking.

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"modified" by the introduction of the "new work of art" into the order ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 5). Similarly, for Collingwood, history exists outside the historian's mind but is enlivened and, in some senses, modified, to use Eliot's term, in the process of question-and-answer, re-enactment, and incapsulated thought. For Collingwood, the past a historian studies "is not a dead past but a past which in some sense is still living in the present;" for Eliot, the literary past is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the new work of art.

My intention in comparing Collingwood with Eliot is not to simplify either author's philosophy of history or to suggest Collingwood borrowed from Eliot. Rather, by constellating the two, I intend to identify a significant resonance in their approach to history. Both conceive of history as enlivened in the present and, in fact, altered in the present, depending upon what the contemporary author contributes or upon what questions the contemporary historian asks. For both Collingwood and Eliot, then, the present moment is the privileged vantage point for both accessing and interpreting the past. Moreover, the contemporary individual in both Eliotic and Collingwoodian thought is empowered through the simultaneity of the literary and historical order; creatively- and historically-critical individuals are able to enter and alter history through their actions in the present.

With Collingwood's commitment to question-and-answer, re-enactment, and incapsulated thought, the significance of lifewriting, generally, and *An Autobiography*, specifically, becomes visible. The novelistic format of autobiography and autobiographically-inflected fiction engages the national-imagining function of novels in the way Anderson details but because the characters derive, at least partly in the case of

autobiographical fiction, from real life, the relevance, urgency, and importance of their stories for imagining the nation and its citizens is highlighted. And because fictional possibilities were increasingly curtailed in the 1930s, the realism, topicality, and contemporaniety attendant on lifewriting was more a mandate than a luxury.[18]

The journey, as Collingwood reveals in his autobiography, is metaphoric. The ostensible subject of *An Autobiography*, Collingwood, remains stationary, firmly positioned in his late 1930s moment. However, his thought, the true subject of *An Autobiography* according to Collingwood, travels widely, illustrating the ways in which the past lives on in the present through incapsulated, re-enacted thought. In this manner, Collingwood does not *tell* the "story of his thought" as much as he *creates* the story of his thought through rethinking and re-enacting. The result is a model for thinking, writing, and ultimately, acting, that *re-imagines* the story of the past in the present of its telling, empowering authors, readers, and, following Anderson's analysis, citizens to intervene in the project of imagining nation, both its history and its present.

The conclusion of *An Autobiography* reveals the intersection of history, lifewriting, and national identity in the late 1930s present. The last several pages of *An*

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[18] Arguably characterized more by defeatism than urgency, the beginning sentences of Henry Green's 1940 autobiography, *Pack My Bag*, make clear the biographical imperative and imaginative restrictions impacting much of the literary production of the 1930s. I quote at length: "I was born a mouthbreather with a silver spoon in 1905, three years after one war and nine years before another, too late for both. But not too late for the war which seems to be coming upon us now and that is a reason to put down what comes to mind before one is killed…That is my excuse, that we who may not have time to write anything else must do what we now can. If we have no time to chew another book over we must turn to what comes first to mind and that must be how one changed from boy to man, how one lived…All of these otherwise would be used in novels, material is better in that form or in any other that is not directly personal, but we I feel no longer have the time. We should be taking stock" (*Pack My Bag* 1).

Autobiography examine the evolution of Socialism, Fascism, and Parliamentary

Democracy since the end of the Great War and detail recent events in Britain's history,

such as the National Government's policy of non-intervention regarding the Spanish

Civil War and what Collingwood identifies as the "betrayal" of Czechoslovakia. The

"carefully engineered war-scare" in Britain that followed the Munich Crisis convinces

Collingwood that although

> England has not formally bidden farewell to its parliamentary institutions;
>
> it has only permitted them to become inoperative. It has not renounced its
>
> faith in political liberty; it has only thrown away the thing in which it still
>
> professes to believe…It has not ceased to have a voice in European affairs;
>
> it has only used that voice to further the ends of another power even more
>
> jealous and even more grasping. (*A* 166)

Collingwood's fierce indictment of his country's current state of affairs is followed by an

important disclaimer: "I am not writing an account of recent political events in England"

(*A* 167). If this is not, in fact, what Collingwood intends in the last pages of his

autobiography, what does he intend? His explanation is crucial to understanding the

historiographic turn characteristic of 1930s writing. Rather than political analysis,

Collingwood's reflections on national and international events demonstrate "the way in

which those events impinged upon myself and broke up my pose of a detached

professional thinker" (*A* 167). And it is this awareness – that recent political events have

impinged upon the life of the individual – that curtails fictional possibilities, restricts

imaginative journeys, and simultaneously "wakes up" the national subject who is no

longer content with the role so long imagined for him by nation and novel.

The Three R.G.C.s

The discontented national subject who "wakes up" in the 1930s is the "third R.G.C.," one of three personas that Collingwood introduces in his autobiographical reflections. Each one of the three R.G.C.s that Collingwood discusses in his *An Autobiography* represents an aspect of his philosophical attitude. For Collingwood, reflecting upon the way a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history must entail a *rapprochement* between theory and practice, the three R.G.C.s each represent a mode of being. Collingwood explains that although he "no longer thought of" theory and practice "as mutually independent," his "habits were based on the vulgar division of men into thinkers and men of action" (*A* 150). By the 1930s, Collingwood had come to distrust the division between thought and action, believing instead that the relationship between theory and practice "was one of intimate and mutual dependence, thought depending upon what the thinker learned by experience in action, action depending upon how he thought of himself and the world" (*A* 150). But the division between theory and practice was taken for granted in academia, a survival from the Middle Ages, "a medieval interpretation of the Greek distinction between the contemplative life and the practical life as a division between two classes of specialists" (*A* 150). Collingwood admits "three different attitudes" toward the survival of this division and these three attitudes manifest in the three R.G.C.s.

The first R.G.C. advocated a philosophy that realized the division between theory and practice as false; being mutually dependent, both theory and practice "suffer[ed] frustration if segregated into the specialized functions of different classes" (*A* 151). However, the second R.G.C., despite philosophical commitment, behaved "in the habits

of daily life…as if [the division between theory and practice] had been sound" (*A* 151).

These two R.G.C.s were in constant conflict: "I lived as if I disbelieved my own

philosophy, and philosophized as if I had not been the professional thinker that in fact I

was" (*A* 151). It is "underneath" this conflict – and Collingwood's choice of

"underneath" is significant considering his archeological studies – that the third R.G.C.

was buried. For this third R.G.C. the "gown of the professional thinker was a disguise

alternately comical and disgusting in its inappropriateness" (*A* 151). Disgusting and

comical because the academic gown symbolized an "aloofness from the affairs of

practical life" reinforced by images of college gates and ivory towers (*A* 151). Action

was what characterized the third R.G.C. Or, more accurately, the third R.G.C represented

a synthesis: "he was something in which the difference between thinker and man of

action disappeared" (*A* 151). The third R.G.C. represented the *rapprochement* between

theory and practice that politicized Collingwood's *rapprochement* between philosophy

and history, bridging the gap between historical thinking and political action in the

present.

For Collingwood, whose years as an undergraduate at Oxford were characterized

by the tension between vocation in practice and vocation in thought, the third R.G.C.

emerges as the answer to a question Collingwood continually confronted throughout his

academic life. In 1910 when Collingwood began to read philosophy, the most

recognizable "debate" was between "the school of Green" and the realists, who

"undertook the task of discrediting the entire work of Green's school, which they

described comprehensively as 'idealism'" (*A* 18-19). This tension between realism and

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idealism shapes Collingwood's undergraduate experience and establishes the foundation for his sought-after *rapprochement*.

Thomas Hill Green, whose short career as a professor is inverse to his influence, and his intellectual colleagues, most notably Francis Herbert Bradley, did not intend an education in philosophy at Oxford to be the training ground for professional scholars and philosophers; rather, it "was meant as a training for public life in the Church, at the Bar, in the Civil Service, and in Parliament" (*A* 17). Collingwood explains that the school of Green "sent out into public life a stream of ex-pupils who carried with them the conviction that philosophy, and in particular the philosophy they learnt at Oxford, was an important thing, and that their vocation was to put it into practice" (*A* 17). So powerful was Green's influence that the philosophy of Green's school "might be found, from 1880 to about 1910, penetrating and fertilizing every part of the national life" (*A* 17).[19]

Opposing the school of Green was the realist approach to philosophical thought. And it was the realist distaste and contempt for Green's idealism that "obsessed" Oxford during Collingwood's early years there, idealist thought presenting itself "to most Oxford philosophers as something which had to be destroyed" (*A* 19). John Cook Wilson, according to Collingwood, led the charge against idealism, brandishing G. E. Moore's recently published article, "The Refutation of Idealism" (*A* 22). The Oxford realists, as Collingwood perceived them, talked as if knowing "were simply 'intuiting' or a simple

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[19] Collingwood provides a shorthand explanation of the school of Green: "Their philosophy, as far as they had one single philosophy, was a continuation and criticism of the indigenous English and Scottish philosophies of the middle nineteenth century…the philosophy [Green] was working out when his early death interrupted him is best described, if a brief description is needed, as a reply to Herbert Spencer by a profound student of Hume" (*A* 16). The school of Green shared both a knowledge and suspicion of Hegelian philosophy.

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'apprehending' of some 'reality,'" a concept whose Cambridge corollary was located in Moore's notion of "transparency" (*A* 25). In other words, although the mind is actively engaged in knowing, this engagement is "a 'simple' condition" in which an individual, after having worked to put himself in a position to acquire knowledge, did nothing "but 'apprehend' it" (*A* 26-7).

The first consequence of this approach, explains Collingwood, is that knowledge is understood as something "unchanging" and that the "problems of philosophy were, even in the loosest sense of that word, eternal" (*A* 59-60). The second consequence, a corollary to the first, is that realist philosophy thus neglected history, so much so that the realist doctrines are "incompatible" with historical research (*A* 28). For Collingwood, the realist disregard of history is its fatal flaw, and, ultimately, its refusal to grapple with changing historical realities confines realist philosophy behind the very college gates of which the third R.G.C. is so contemptuous. Realist philosophy, for Collingwood, advocates the "aloofness from the affairs of practical life" that a *rapprochement* between theory and practice challenges. Collingwood's growing critique of realism made him a rather "isolated" figure at Oxford between the wars (Van der Dussen xxx), a "lone wolf" as Stephen Toulmin suggests in the "Introduction" to *An Autobiography* (*A* x).[20]

But Collingwood was not completely alone. The third R.G.C. became his constant companion in the 1930s, slowly cracking "the fabric of my habitual life":

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[20] Inglis and others, particularly Christopher Parker in his *The English Idea of History from Coleridge to Collingwood* (2000), explain that Michael Oakeshott was Collingwood's closest colleague intellectually during the interwar period. Oakeshott's 1933 *Experience and Its Modes* critiques the dominant scientism, seeking instead to privilege experience in all its historical contingencies (Inglis 193-4).

He dreamed, and his dreams crystallized into my philosophy. When he would not lie quiet and let me play at being a don, I would appease him by throwing off my academic associations and going back to my own part of the country to address the local antiquarian society. It may seem an odd form of "release" for a suppressed man of action; but it was a very effective one. The enthusiasm for historical studies…which I never failed to arouse in my audiences, was not in principle different from the enthusiasm for his person or his policy which is aroused by a successful political speaker. (*A* 151)

Sebrill fears he will do better "to write political tracts" but Collingwood understands that action is motivated by critical thinking and critical thinking fuels action. When Collingwood follows the lead of the third R.G.C. he recognizes in practice what he philosophizes in theory: that action and thought are inextricable, reciprocal, and mutually dependent. "The purpose of theory is not to provide people with ideals and codes of conduct," David Boucher explains; rather the purpose of theory is "to identify and clarify misunderstandings…and inspire an optimism in the possibility of a satisfactory resolution of practical problems" (*Essays in Political Philosophy* 38). Lecturing at village antiquarian societies, Collingwood manifests his sought after *rapprochement*: academic history (theory) can engage an audience and cultivate their investment in their country's history, implicitly involving individuals in the construction of the past that occurs in the present moment (practice). Outside the college gates and without his academic gown, Collingwood is reminded that the division between theory and practice is both artificial and unproductive.

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It was the historical reality of world war –portrayed by the story of the Albert

Memorial – that initially encouraged Collingwood to evaluate his own approach to theory

and practice, first in the realm of philosophy and then in his personal life. Collingwood

explains that sometimes the third R.G.C. "woke right up," energized by occasions in

which the political and personal merge and result in purposeful action. Although the

third R.G.C. began stirring during the Great War, events of the 1930s provided many

examples of the political interrupting and activating personal action, keeping the third

R.G.C. awake and active. Jarrow is illustrative. "The best-known, if not quite the

saddest, of the towns laid low by the depression," Jarrow was reduced to destitution when

the Palmers' shipyard, upon which the town relied for employment, closed (Mowat 55).

The Jarrow March occurred in October 1936 when two hundred men from Jarrow,

supported by the townspeople, town council, and the local M.P., Ellen "Red" Wilkinson,

marched to London determined that their voices be heard and their experience be

recognized by the government. Arguably, the Jarrow March represents for the third

R.G.C. what Collingwood strove to achieve in his 1930s writing: the "calm but desperate

attempt to connect personal experience to public politics" (Inglis 220). This is exactly

what Collingwood achieves in *An Autobiography* and it signifies that Collingwood, in the

last years of his life, did assume the role of the third R.G.C., a role in which the

distinction between the man of thought and the man of action is as impractical as it is

impossible.

Fight in the Daylight

In this respect, Collingwood finds himself in sympathy with Karl Marx.

Although he remained unconvinced by Marx's metaphysics and economics,

Collingwood, like Marx, seeks a "gloves-off" philosophy that intends to offer solutions to practical problems, not a "scientific toy guaranteed to amuse professional thinkers safe behind their college gates" (*A* 153). Collingwood admires Marx because he is a "fighting philosopher" (*A* 153). In the late 1930s, Collingwood, following the lead of the third R.G.C., finds unlikely company with Marx, in that Collingwood, too, "wanted a philosophy that should be a weapon" (*A* 153). Many of Collingwood's Oxford colleagues saw his appreciation of Marx as a weakness, a sign that Collingwood, too, had "gone over" to Communism like so many discontented young intellectuals and writers during the decade (Inglis 270). The truth is much more nuanced. As Fred Inglis, Collingwood's recent biographer, explains, Collingwood was "untouched by the stirrings of Marxism" and "equally repudiated the revolting complacencies of English Toryism" (214).[21]

Rather than Marxism or Toryism, Collingwood advocated the creation of a "science of human affairs" that was political in nature but not in the binary terms – left or right – dominating national and international discourses in the 1930s. Since World War I, Collingwood had been haunted by the question of "how could we construct a science of

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[21] Boucher, among others including Collingwood himself, characterizes Collingwood's political position as Liberal. I quote Boucher as length because his description of Collingwood's Liberal politics reveals the confluence of Collingwood's Victorian political inheritance and his politicized philosophy of history that crystallized during the 1930s: "Liberalism, for Collingwood, is the political expression of the freedom of consciousness towards which the rational mind strives to develop. The enemies of Liberalism especially Fascism, Nazism, and the totalitarian socialism (but not its democratic variants), seek to subvert the development of rational consciousness and deny individual freedom by circumventing individual choice. Liberalism, for Collingwood, is not a political programme, but a method or style of politics. It is the determination to seek beneath the surface of every conflict some fundamental agreement which will facilitate a solution" (*Essays in Political Philosophy* 6).

human affairs, so to call it, from which men could learn to deal with human situations as skillfully as natural science had taught them to deal with situations in the world of Nature?" (*A* 115). By 1930, Collingwood had arrived at the answer: "The science of human affairs was history" (*A* 115). In Collingwood's science of human affairs, "self-knowledge" is, at the same time, "knowledge of the world of human affairs" (*A* 115). Collingwood details his "train of thought" as follows:

> If what the historian knows is past thoughts, and if he knows them by rethinking them himself, it follows that the knowledge he achieves by historical inquiry is not knowledge of his situation as opposed to knowledge of himself, it is a knowledge of his situation which is at the same time knowledge of himself…If he is able to understand, by re-thinking them, the thoughts of a great many different kinds of people, it follows that he must be a great many kinds of man. He must be, in fact, a microcosm of all the history he can know. (*A* 114-5)

The process of rethinking past thoughts represents the confluence of self-knowledge and historical knowledge, inviting the past into the present in the mind of the historian. Once the past and the present converge in the mind of the historian then an understanding of the past becomes an understanding of the present. In this manner, history provides the means for action. Self-knowledge is historical knowledge and history is the science of human affairs, according to Collingwood. By completing this train of thought, Collingwood achieves the *rapprochement* between theory and practice represented by the figure of the third R.G.C. Moreover, this line of thinking positions the individual at the epicenter of history, thus linking action in the present with historical knowledge, past

thoughts accessed in the present through re-enactment incapsulated in an individual's mind.

The science of human affairs is, in essence, the *rapprochement* that Collingwood so urgently seeks in the 1930s. This "oneness of action and vision (of practice and theory) could only be achieved," Inglis explains, "in a single mind, or in a whole society…by a knowledge of itself as wrung from its history" (*History Man* 31). Self-knowledge – an individual's as well as a nation's – as "wrung from history" is, according to Boucher, the way in which Collingwood imagines individuals can raise "the mind to higher levels of rationality which in turn equips the person better for action" (*The Social and Political Thought of R. G. Collingwood* 39). Collingwood goes as far as to imply that ultimately the aim of history not only is to know the past but also, and perhaps more importantly in the late 1930s, is to understand the present. As Boucher describes, "The situations in which we are constantly having to decide how to act are clarified and made more intelligible by a recourse to history" (*The Social and Political Thought of R. G. Collingwood* 39).

The link between historical thinking and action is what makes Collingwood's science of human affairs a weapon and what makes him, like Marx, a fighting philosopher. In 1939, with the publication of *An Autobiography*, Collingwood threw his philosophical hat into the political ring, fighting against the forces "which have been at work for nearly half a century corrupting the public mind, producing…a generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen to be the dupes of a politician who has so successfully 'appealed to their emotions' by 'promises of private gain'" (*A* 167). Personal safety from the horrors of another war was the "private gain" that appealed to the emotions of British

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citizens, whose concerns regarding political upheaval in Europe were undermined by a desire for peace amplified by fear of invasion. But Collingwood refrains from advancing his criticisms of the National Government because, as he explains, it is "not the business of this autobiography to ask how completely the country has in fact been deceived, or how long the present deception will last" (*A* 167). Rather, as he stated in his "Preface," the autobiography of a man whose business is thinking should be the story of his thought, and the story of Collingwood's thought enacts the very *rapprochement* between theory and practice that buttresses his philosophy of history. Self-knowledge merges with historical knowledge at a moment in history when "fighting" is less a metaphor than a political reality.

And it is with political reality that Collingwood concludes his *An Autobiography*, aligning himself with Marx, the fighting philosopher, and, I would argue, with the novelists this project examines who "fight" with their fiction. Indicting the "purely scientific detachment from practical affairs" traditionally associated with philosophy and history as preparing the way for a coming Fascism, Collingwood revises the story of the professional academic, re-imagining the philosopher as a fighter who wields historical thought as his weapon. Fascism, "the end of clear thinking and the triumph of irrationalism," is the enemy Collingwood opposes, and with his autobiography, he not only positions himself as an intellectual soldier but also offers to his fellow citizens a way to re-imagine their role in a nation which, according to Collingwood, had declared itself, "behind all its disguises," a "partisan of Fascist dictatorship" (*A* 165). Thinking is action for Collingwood who concludes his autobiography by re-imagining his role in the story of his own thought: "I know all my life I have been engaged unawares in a political

struggle, fighting against these thing in the dark. Henceforth I shall fight in the daylight"

(*A* 167).

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