RENDERING THE FIRST WORLD WAR: NARRATOLOGY, MODERNISM, AND [RE]VISIONS OF EXPERIENCE

By

SAMANTHA LAUREN SOLOMON

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of English

MAY 2018

© Copyright by SAMANTHA LAUREN SOLOMON, 2018 All Rights Reserved
To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of SAMANTHA LAUREN SOLOMON find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

________________________________________
Jon Hegglund, Ph.D., Chair

________________________________________
Carol Siegel, Ph.D.

________________________________________
Donna Campbell, Ph.D.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation developed out of a number of interests and circumstances that aligned at exactly the right time. Had I not met my future husband, a military veteran, at the exact time that I was taking a Modernism class at Rutgers University that covered literature of the First World War, there is a chance that I might not have pursued the foundational studies that led to this project. Also, had I not had the very specific educational path that I did—from Middlesex County College, to Rutgers University, to Seton Hall University, to Washington State University—which was lined with continually shifting interests and failed first attempts at attending graduate school, there is a chance that I might not have pursued this project where I did, when I did, and in the company that I did.

To my committee chair, Jon Hegglund, thank you for being a driving force in my progress over the course of my time at Washington State University—from the graduate classes that I took with you that allowed me to explore new avenues of research that I had never thought to pursue, to your continual mentorship over the course of this project. I am grateful for your simultaneous ability to push me to innovate, while also not causing me to question the foundations and inspirations that led me to this topic. To my committee members, Carol Siegel and Donna Campbell, thank you for pushing me to think critically about how my research interests intersect with others. It is because of your graduate classes and your feedback in the beginning stages of this project that women’s narratives and American perspectives feature so heavily in it. To the Department of English, and especially to Todd Butler, thank you for your support of my research and professionalization pursuits, both emotionally and financially. Your support has allowed me to travel to present at conferences and pursue research both nationally and internationally that have not only shaped this project, but have shaped me as a professional, a
scholar, and a person. I am also grateful for the financial support of the John W. Ehrstine Scholarship Endowment and the Basil and Ella Jerard Endowment, without which this project would not have evolved in the ways that it did.

I am also grateful for the experience that had a strong influence on the direction of this project—the “Facing” First World War Battles at Battlefields Summer School for Graduate Students that I attended in northern France in the summer of 2016. This summer school allowed me the opportunity to visit and study important First World War battlefields and memorials, and to be part of history by attending the ceremony for the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme on July 1st, 2016 in Thiepval. I would like to thank the institutions that hosted and funded the summer school that made the experience possible. To the organizing committee, instructors, guides, presenters, and my 25 fellow summer school cohorts, thank you for allowing me to be a part of an international community with shared interests and goals, and for being a key part of the experience that shaped my research and my identity.

Finally, to my friends and family, thank you for being a constant source of love and support for me. The friendships that I have formed during my time in Pullman—those formed by the shared difficulties of graduate school, countless hours working in coffee shops, and the occasional breaks to unwind, as well as the ones formed outside of the university that allowed me to maintain a sense of identity outside of my piles of books—are ones that I will always cherish. To Mom, Dad, and my brother, Tom, thank you for your support, in all forms, and especially for your unwavering support of my interests throughout all of the experiences that led me to this point. You allowed me to carve out my own path in life, to follow my passion, and to truly appreciate everything that I have. To Grandma, you have been my constant cheerleader and fan—thank you for pushing me to feel pride in my work. To Uncle Tom and Ariel, thank you for
giving us a second place to call home in Washington and for giving us the opportunity to enjoy
the love of family during our time here. To my extended family and my friends back home,

thank you for your continual support of my pursuits and for reminding me during holiday visits
just how much love I have at home. I would be remiss to not also mention my pets, Finn and Luna, for sitting by my side every single day as I worked on this project—they made what is

usually a solitary task seem less so. Finally, to my husband, Mike, I could have never made it to

this point without your love, dedication, and support. Thank you for being my partner in this

adventure of five years, two coasts, and many difficulties and fun times along the way. You were

my rock when I felt as if I could not continue, and I owe a lot of where I am today to your

couragement.

I am truly lucky to have been supported in so many ways by so many people, and I hope
to continue making you all proud in the journey that comes next.
This dissertation analyzes narratives that render the experience of war in ways other than the realist representations that dominate the literary history of the First World War. While narratives that focus on the soldier in battle have been traditionally valued for their implied direct access to the experience of war, I argue that all war narratives are mediated representations of experience, and therefore, no genre or form can communicate war more authentically than another. Using the theoretical frame of cognitive narratology, which primarily studies the ways that readers interact with texts, I analyze the various ways in which war narratives immerse the reader in experiences of war that are spatiotemporally distributed, that decenter the individual human perspective, and that subvert our expectations for the ways in which war ought to be represented. Chapter One challenges the assumption that war can be directly accessed through any mode of representation, even visiting a battlefield. Chapter Two examines how modernist representations of war, such as David Jones’ epic poem In Parenthesis, blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction to communicate war as a spatiotemporally-distributed experience. Chapter Three analyzes how Edith Wharton’s Fighting France and Virginia Woolf’s “Time Passes” evoke empathy for
nonhuman elements of war through descriptions of empty spaces and ruined architecture.

Chapter Four argues that frontline nursing narratives represent the liminal spaces of war through their narrators’ dual positionality in the frontline and the homefront. Finally, Chapter Five analyzes how visual war narratives, like composite photography and humorous cartoons, construct the experience of war in ways that subvert our expectations for what mediums best represent war. I argue that each of these narratives use considered rhetorical strategies for rendering the war experience to the audience in specific, evocative ways. Therefore, the reader’s experience of the text, and the strategies that invite that experience, are more important evaluative markers for what constitutes a war narrative than the degree to which they adhere to aesthetic or realistic modes of representation. This dissertation seeks not just to revise our understanding of First World War narratives, but to revise our expectations of war narratives altogether.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Introduction: Constructing the First World War</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Reader Experientiality and Distributed Spatiotemporality in David Jones’ <em>In Parenthesis</em></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Structures of Empathy: Narrative Ways of Worldmaking, Embodied Immersion, and the Nonhuman</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Narrating the Liminal Spaces of War: Dual Positionality in Frontline Nursing Narratives</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Rendering Visual Narratives of War: Frank Hurley’s Composite Photography and Bruce Bairnsfather’s Cartoons</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Conclusion: Toward a Revised Understanding of War Narratives</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.1</td>
<td>My contribution to the cemetery register</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.2</td>
<td>The caribou statue at the entrance to Beaumont-Hamel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.3</td>
<td>Remnants of trench reinforcements and a sign marking the second offensive line</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.4</td>
<td>Standing in “No Man’s Land,” with the “danger tree” on the left</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.5</td>
<td>The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.6</td>
<td>The inscription at the top of the memorial</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.7</td>
<td>The perfectly aligned, uniform, cemetery headstones at Douaumont Ossuary</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Hurley’s composite, “The Raid”</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
<td>One of the original images in “The Raid”</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.3</td>
<td>Another original image in “The Raid”</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.4</td>
<td>The size of Hurley’s “The Raid” as it appeared in the London exhibit in 1918</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.5</td>
<td>Hurley’s composite, “Death the Reaper”</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.6</td>
<td>The original image in “Death the Reaper”</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.7</td>
<td>Hurley’s composite of Hellfire Corner</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.8</td>
<td>Hurley’s composite of wounded soldiers</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.9</td>
<td>Hurley’s composite, “Battle Scarred Sentinels”</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.10</td>
<td>The original “Battle Scarred Sentinels”</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.11</td>
<td>Hurley’s composite “The Dawn of Passchendaele”</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.12</td>
<td>The original image in “The Dawn of Passchendaele”</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.13: A second “The Dawn of Passchendaele” .................................................................130
Figure 5.14: A third “The Dawn of Passchendaele” ....................................................................130
Figure 5.15: Bairnsfather’s “Where did that one go to?” ............................................................134
Figure 5.16: Bairnsfather’s “A Matter of Moment” ........................................................................134
Figure 5.17: Bairnsfather’s “The Things that Matter” .................................................................135
Figure 5.18: Bairnsfather’s “The same old moon” ......................................................................135
Figure 5.19: Bairnsfather’s “That Sword” ...................................................................................137
Figure 5.20: Bairnsfather’s “War!” ..............................................................................................137
Dedication

For those who can’t,
and those who told me I could.
Despite the cold there were a handful of other visitors at the Memorial Park. The smaller cemeteries are deserted. Sometimes there are intervals of three or four weeks in the visitors’ books. Often people come to visit one particular grave: a great uncle, a grandfather. They are always touching, these personal inscriptions in the book, especially when the pilgrimage is the fulfilment of a lifetime’s ambition. Most comments, though, are generic: ‘RIP’, ‘Remembering’, ‘We Will Remember Them’, ‘Lest We Forget’, ‘Very Moving’... The pages of these visitors’ books are clipped in a green ring-hooped binder. When no pages are left, new ones are clipped in. What happens to the old ones? Burned? Filed away in the archives? If the latter, then perhaps an academic will one day salvage all these pages and use this hoard of raw data as the basis of a comprehensive survey of the attitudes to the war, the ways in which it is remembered and misremembered. There is certainly enough material to fill a book: people who come here are moved and want to record their feelings, explain themselves.

Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*

On June 26th, 2016, I was one such visitor who wrote something generic in the green, ring-hooped binder that I pulled out the cemetery register compartment at Hunters Cemetery in Newfoundland Memorial Park—“Never Forgotten” (fig. 1.1). This generic response was indicative of an attitude toward war that I had on the very first day that I stepped foot onto a First World War battlefield in person, but I did not yet know what shaped that attitude, and how it would change. What follows is not a “comprehensive survey” of the attitudes that the cemetery register reflects about war, but it originates from the same questions: how do people think about war, and why, and how do narratives of war shape the way that we perceive what war is like? This project is an analysis of the ways that our understanding of war is shaped by narratives that communicate the experience of war to us in specific ways. It is also an exploration of the ways in which certain narratives are considered valued representations of war, while others have been relegated to the margins of the literary history of the First World War. More than anything else, it is a survey of the many ways that art, literature, and history offer us evocative renderings of warfare that complicate our understanding what constitutes a war narrative.
The Draw of the Battlefield:

Stepping onto the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial site in northern France, the first thing you see is a statue of a large bronze caribou on a raised rock-formation pedestal surrounded by a neatly-landscaped, spiral walkway (fig. 1.2). At the top of the monument, metal arrows embedded in the concrete point to, and indicate the distance between, other significant memorial sites from where you are standing. From this vantage point, the pockmarked landscape of the battlefield, which consists of both deep ruts and elevated mounds, is visible for 360 degrees around you, framed in the distance by tall trees and cemeteries. Following the walkway back down, you are led to a narrow walkway of wood planks and wire railings; these trace the paths of former trench lines and allow you to walk across the battlefield safely, since years of battle and battlefield reconstruction have made a vast majority of it unsafe for people to walk on. As you cross the field, you can see wooden stakes and wire mesh that are remnants of trench
reinforcements as well as signs marking troop positions as they advanced the frontline (fig. 1.3).

Eventually, you reach a point of the field that is slightly elevated, and that overlooks a valley—here you are standing in the middle of No Man’s Land. “If you were a British or Commonwealth soldier standing here on July 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1916,” the guide says, “you would be looking down at the German frontline, and rows of machine guns staring back at you.” In front of you is a petrified tree buried in cement (fig. 1.4), which is thought to be the remains of The Danger Tree—a tree that was situated half-way between British and German frontlines, and which served as a rendezvous point for the Newfoundland Regiment on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.\footnote{The Battle of the Somme, so named because it occurred in the Somme department of northern France, took place between July 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1916 and November 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1916. It the battle that most people associate with the First World War because of its significant casualties—over one million. (Brosnan)} The guide rattles off the statistics of what occurred in the exact location you are standing—of the 801 soldiers in the Newfoundland Regiment that advanced to this spot on the first day of the Somme, 233 were killed, 386 were wounded, and 91 were missing (“Beaumont-Hamel”), and this was just in the first hours of the Battle of the Somme (Commonwealth, Somme).
Beaumont-Hamel was the first battlefield that I visited in the summer of 2016 as part of the “Anatomie” des Batailles de la Grande Guerre” summer school hosted by the Centre International de Recherche de l’Historial de la Grande Guerre. I traveled to France seeking a more intimate understanding of the mindset of the soldiers fighting in World War One. Since my research focuses on representations of war that primarily take place outside of the locus of the trench, it was important to me that my research was informed by the ethos of someone who had learned about these sites of war by visiting them, and not by ignorance or inexperience. After years of studying the war through literature, I expected that my first time standing on an actual battlefield would be transformative and mind-changing, and it was, but not in that moment, or even in that week. This experience changed the way that I understood the First World War through the very ways in which I did not gain any more of an intimate understanding of the war by standing in those spaces. The truth is that while standing on the battlefields or in front of

---

2 In English, the “Facing” First World War Battles and Battlefields summer school, hosted by the International Research Center for the History of the Great War.
monuments over the next several days, I was often struck by how often I felt like I was missing the point. What I had gone to France expecting was an experience of war that was superior in some way to the experience of reading about it. Surely, if reading about something can render the experience of it so strongly, then being in that place must be even closer to the experience itself. But, over and over again, I found myself relying on my literary experiences of war to explain the significance of what was in front of me, instead of the other way around. The place that I was standing in looked nothing like what I expected of a battlefield. The brown, muddy deforested terrain gouged by deep timber-lined trenches and clouded by smoke that is brought to mind by reading narratives of the First World War, and by looking at photos and paintings of battle, is now a sweeping green grassy field, filled with towering trees, and covered by sunny blue skies. It was difficult to reconcile the knowledge one has of what happened there with the normalcy of the landscape now.

What I came to realize over the next week of the summer school was that, contrary to my expectations, these spaces do not speak for themselves. Through various signposting and narrative guidance, whether by literal signs directing my attention to significant evidence of the war, or by the historical facts, figures, and stories that our tour guides told us as we navigated these sites, which figuratively signposted what we were looking at, I was able to immerse myself in the narratives these spaces evoked. But, in most cases, I would not have been able to otherwise; the most obvious proof of this being that, when our guides only spoke French, and my subpar listening skills prevented me from following along, I no longer felt immersed; I was an outsider trying desperately to be let in. In The Past is a Foreign Country (1985), David Lowenthal highlights how much we rely on such cues to understand the past: "Some traces of antiquity are so faint that only contrivance secures their recognition. In the absence of signposts,
how many visitors to an old battlefield could tell that it was a historical site?" (265) Standing there during the centenary of the First World War, I noticed that the images of war in my mind were erased by one hundred years of environmental change and human intervention—I was chasing the idea of a moment in history that disappeared the instant it happened. It was only through the guiding presence of narrative that I was able to reconcile these images in my mind alongside the modern-day landscape. When that happened, I felt that what was in front of me explained the mythical draw that brings people like me to sites of war in order to better connect with history. When it did not, I lost that connection. What I did not realize at the time was that, in addition to relying on the narrative cues that invited my immersion, the spaces themselves, through careful design, communicated specific narratives of war that were deemed the most authoritative by modern-day people, and that they were not, and could never be, a direct representation of the past.

**Constructing the Narrative of War:**

My decision to conduct my dissertation research on narratives of the First World War that do not center on the soldier or the battlefield was inspired by questions about what is typically considered a war narrative in general, and what types of narratives have traditionally been considered First World War narratives specifically. As a scholar of literary modernism, I was intrigued by the way that authors such as Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence rendered the effects of war so vividly, often without mentioning the word “war” at all, and I wondered why I only encountered these texts in classes about experimental literature and not in the context of history. This is, of course, because of the implied truth value ascribed to historical narratives, and the assumed inability of literary narratives to represent historical truths. In the now-well-known
“The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” Hayden White argues that this distinction is problematic, because history, through its narrativization, is a constructed retelling of events, rather than an unfiltered, direct line of representation from past to present. The retelling of history in any form or medium involves framing and organizing events in specific ways:

How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian’s subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making operation. And to call it that in no way detracts from the status of historical narratives as providing a kind of knowledge. (85)

White makes the important point that both historical and literary narratives use the same strategies for representing or making sense of historical events (98), and therefore, that neither represent a nearer approach to truth than the other. In the same way that a literary text’s representation of a historical event would not make it any less fictional, “So too, to say that we make sense of the real world by imposing upon it the formal coherency that we customarily associate with the products of writers of fiction in no way detracts from the status as knowledge which we ascribe to historiography. It would only detract from it if we were to believe that literature did not teach us anything about reality” (99). Yet, when it comes to narratives that recount historical events, such as war narratives, there is still a value placed on representations and genres that would seem to get closer to the “real” events that history is supposed to be concerned with (98),3 which leaves other forms of representation excluded from the category of “war narrative.”

Even though my own research was concerned with the ways in which all war narratives,

---

3 This will be discussed more at length in the next chapter.
regardless of genre or form, are mediated representations, and therefore, should not be assessed according to an implied authenticity, I still assigned an importance to visiting First World War battlefields for the very reasons that readers seek out military history books rather than fiction. It was this through this realization that I began to understand that the reason why I did not feel like I had understood the experience of the war any more profoundly by standing on a battlefield was because, in many ways, I did not. The ways that I made meaning out of my experiences touring battlefields in France was the exact same way that I make meaning from reading about war—through interpretation of narrative cues being offered to me in my surroundings. The meaning that I garnered from the spaces themselves was different and important, but in no way was it the end-all-be-all of war representation. Battlefield sites and war memorials are narratives of war constructed in much the same ways as literary narratives, and for this reason, what is more important is not how close a narrative gets to revealing some inherent truth about the war, but rather, how any narrative renders the experience of war to the receiver, and how the receiver interprets it. For some people, the most profound representation of war is standing on the battlefield, but for others, it is not, and the way that all of those people make meaning of the war is equally important. What was profound and mind-changing about standing on the battlefields for me was my improved awareness of the ways in which war narratives guide and invite my experience of war in different ways.

As I came to learn, a significant amount of thought and effort goes into designing and reconstructing the spaces of war for a modern audience, and this affects how visitors understand the experience of war that the spaces communicate. For example, the former battlefield of Beaumont-Hamel, which is now a modern sweeping grassy field shadowed in towering trees has been created to look that way today for a reason. In “Sites in the Imagination: The Beaumont
Hamel Newfoundland Memorial on the Somme,” Paul Gough points out that Beaumont Hamel is “perhaps the most completely preserved tract of battlefield” because it was purchased by the Newfoundland Government immediately after the First World War to be used as a memorial park (241-242). Since then, the site has been a major stop on any tour of First World War Battlefields. In 1997, the site was designated as a Canadian Historic site which continues to attract over 250,000 visitors each year (247). In 1922, after the Government of Newfoundland’s purchase of the land was finalized, all of the remaining bodies, debris, and ordinance left over from the war were cleared away from the land, and the trenches were reinforced and preserved to make the battlefield safe for visitors to walk on (Gough 242), they began designing the park to communicate the narrative of the Newfoundland regiment that fought there in the Somme.

The bronze caribou monument was placed at the entrance of the park to serve both as place to view the battlefield and as a symbol of the Newfoundland Regiment, and “In an attempt to recreate a fragment of the Newfoundland landscape, [the landscape architect] imported plant material native to that region, and the caribou is surrounded with white spruce, birch, dogberry and juniper” (Gough 243). The effort to introduce native Newfoundland flora into the landscape was continued elsewhere throughout the battlefield site as well: “During the planting of the park some 35,000 seedlings and trees were brought from Newfoundland, Scotland and Holland to complement the Lombardy poplars planted around the park’s perimeter. [The landscape architect] purposefully selected ‘trees and shrubs of different foliage to soften the whole [effect]’” (Gough 243). In addition to landscaping the site with trees that are not native to

---

4 In “Modern Warfare as a Significant Form of Zoogeomorphic Disturbance upon the Landscape,” Joseph P. Hupy and Thomas Koehler point out that trees are often planted on battlefield sites as a design element. For example, in Verdun, another significant First World War battlefield site, “Austrian pines have been planted primarily in areas that are heavily visited, because it is believed that the trees case a memorial like, soft lighting” (174).
France, the trench lines themselves have been reconstructed over the years to look as they did on the first days of the Battle of the Somme, despite the fact that the land was a site of many major battles between the Somme and the end of the war, meaning that “the late 1916 and 1918 battle landscape was largely eradicated so as to reinscribe the narrative of July 1916” (Gough 247). When one visits Beaumont-Hamel with a tour guide, therefore, they also communicate the narrative of July 1st, 1916, because that is the only narrative that fits with the surroundings. This narrative is an important one to tell, especially considering how largely this region of France was affected by the Somme, and how much of its modern landscape serves as a memorial to those who died in it. Yet because the space has been constructed around one specific spatiotemporal reality, and to communicate one peoples’ war experience, other narratives were decidedly erased.

This is the case because it is impossible to carefully preserve a historical site like a battlefield in a way that does justice to the distributed spatiotemporality that is more indicative of the war experience. War cannot be reduced to one single time and place—it is a process that takes place over an extended time, and involves many different people in many different places simultaneously. In preserving the spaces of war, it is not possible to visually represent all of these moments, or to have guides narrate every element of history at once as they tour visitors through it. A choice has to be made about what narrative will be told, which is, in itself problematic, because it may be something that was erased moments after it happened. Lowenthal sums up nicely how complicated it is to make any attempt at recreating the past, and like White, argues that representations of the past can never act as a direct line to what it was like to experience something:

[I]t is impossible to recover or recount more than a tiny fraction of what has taken place, and no historical account ever corresponds precisely with any actual past... First, no
historical account can recover the totality of any past events, because their content is virtually infinite. The most detailed historical narrative incorporates only a minute fraction of even the relevant past; the sheer pastness of the past precludes its total reconstruction. Second, no account can recover the past as it was, because the past was not an account; it was a set of events and situations. As the past no longer exists, no account can ever be checked against it, but only against other accounts of that past; we judge its veracity by its correspondence with other reports, not with the events themselves. Historical narrative is not a portrait of what happened but a story about what happened… This is not to deny that historical consensus and collective memory are anchored in reality and provide real knowledge of the past. Indeed, it is only our sense of cumulative temporal experience that gives present judgements any meaning. (214-215)

The reconstruction of Beaumont-Hamel is just one example of the ways in which the attempt to preserve the past is a process that erases, revises, or newly contextualizes the past through its own recreation of it. However, this does not mean that our representations of the past, however far separated from the actual experiences they may be are not, in themselves, valuable methods of engaging with history.

**Who Controls the Narrative?**

My understanding of the First World War while in France was shaped by the visual, textual, and oral narratives that were available as we were touring battlefields, monuments, mine shafts, and museums. There was always a supplement, sometimes multiple supplements, to guide us through what we were witnessing and why it was important, not only because it would be difficult to understand them otherwise, but because this how history is communicated—without
narrative, we would have no method of recording history, organizing it into a sense of time, or communicating it to those who did not live through it. Where the visual impact of the landscape lacked, the stories told by the tour guides filled in, by asking us to imagine the events that were known to have happened in certain places, and by pointing out what the remaining physical indications of warfare meant. In some places, those guides were historians who traveled with us as part of the summer school who would give us historical facts and figures about the battles and monuments that they had studied, while in others, those guides were people whose family had lived on that land for generations, who informed us about their family history of the war that had been passed down to them through oral narrative and family possessions. In all cases, the guides’ education and experience helped us reimagine the space of war and layered facts, figures, and individual experience over the visual landscape.

Our guides expanded my knowledge of the war by coloring these spaces over with narrative, which also sometimes rewrote my own understanding of what happened there, and drew attention to the absence of other narratives. As passionate and educated as our guides were, they, like any other person, had their own interpretations of the war, and in the case of the tour guides who had gained knowledge of the war from family history, it is worth noting the implicit bias they (perhaps rightfully) showed to the way they were affiliated with the war—by regiment, by country, by systems of belief. One of our guides, who navigated us through the Butte de Vauquois and the elaborate system of mine shafts and soldier living spaces underneath it, recited the stories of the families living in the nearby villages and how they were impacted by the war in

---

5 H. Porter Abbott’s *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2008), he argues that narrative is universal—that it is something that we use every day to describe actions and events, to organize time, and even to organize our own nonverbal thought processes (1-3). In short, he argues that in various ways, narrative is what structures the human life—from our earliest linguistic developments that enable us to engage in narrative discourse, to the way that we perceive the world around us by organizing our experiences into an understanding of space and time (1, 3-10).
a way that was quick to reveal his disdain for Germans. Not just the German soldiers that his own personal connection to the war they were positioned as villians, but for the German people who were part of the summer school group, which he made clear by joking about their assumed lack of importance and understanding in the stories that he told. He showed equal distaste for women’s understanding of, and participation in, the war despite the fact that his wife was responsible for touring the other half of our group through the same places, and that she and her family had lived in the area just as long as he had; in the narrative of the First World War that he had adopted over years of hearing stories and retelling them, women did not have an equal place. Had I been in the half of the group that was guided by his wife instead of him, it is likely that I would have heard a different spin on the same facts and stories, or maybe even different stories altogether. This again speaks to the fact that the past cannot be represented directly, and that no one narrative of the past is an inherent truth. People connect to the past in different ways, and because of that, we all represent, and interpret, the past in ways that reflect our relationship to it.

However, while the ways that narratives are interpreted depends largely on who is receiving them, historical spaces themselves can influence what narratives are told, and not told. For example, the narratives that visitors are exposed to when touring battlefields and memorial sites reflect the dominant discourse of the First World War as a whole. The importance of these sites as material representations of warfare means that they will largely impact the narrative of war as locatable through soldiers, battles, guns, and bombs, and that the experiences of women, non-combatants, and civilians will likely be excluded from those narratives entirely. Alternative spaces of war, where the effects of war reside, but battles do not, are not part of the experience, and therefore, do not contribute to the way war is represented. The dominant discourse of the First World War is nowhere better represented than at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of
the Somme, just a few miles away from Beaumont-Hamel. The memorial is 185 feet wide, 135 feet deep, and 160 feet tall (Stamp 138), and is inscribed with 72,244 names (Commonwealth, “Thiepval”), and rising, of missing soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Somme (fig. 1.5). Across the top of the arches, below the British and French flags are the words, “AUX ARMEES FRANÇAISE ET BRITANNIQUE L’EMPIRE BRITANNIQUE RECONNAISSANT” (fig. 1.6). The memorial is dedicated to “‘The Missing of the Somme’: more than 72,000 members of British and South African forces who were killed in the sector between July 1915 and March 1918. Other Dominion governments listed their Somme missing elsewhere” (Commonwealth, Somme). As the Beaumont-Hamel memorial was designed to communicate the narrative of one spatiotemporal experience of war, the Thiepval memorial, and the other dominion governments’ memorials, communicates the narrative of one specific group of people, thus determining what narrative belongs to which spaces.

6 “TO THE FRENCH AND BRITISH ARMIES, FROM THE GRATEFUL BRITISH EMPIRE” (Commonwealth, Somme)
The numerous memorial sites built and maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), of which the Thiepval Memorial is the largest, use the same architectural and landscape design principles, and the same system of grave identification. This ensures that each separate site one visits adheres to the same conventions of representation, but each site is treated separately in that it serves as a burial and memorial site for people only from specific battles, countries of origin, and sometimes, from specific religions. Some cemeteries maintained by other authorities more starkly separate soldiers by country or by religion, but also go to great lengths to ensure the perfect organization and alignment of the gravestones. For example, the Douaumont Ossuary in Douaumont, France, is a French national cemetery commemorating those who died in the Battle of Verdun. The most interesting thing about this cemetery is that each square plot of headstones is perfectly organized to form the same size and shape plot as the others, even if that means erecting a blank headstone over an empty grave. The blank headstones serve the dual purpose of reinforcing the absence of a body, since the bones of many unidentified bodies are housed in the ossuary, and contributing to the powerful visual effect of the seemingly endless square plots of graves (fig. 1.7). The memorial sites of the First World War, then, communicate the narrative of war in a slightly different way than the battlefield sites: while the battlefields offer narrative signposts to explain the space, the overbearing visual impact of the memorials and cemeteries impose a sense of narrative order that is immediately recognizable. In either case, these spaces have been constructed to communicate the experiences of war in specific ways to visitors that immerses them in the narrative that is being communicated. This is

---

7 The CWGC cemeteries and memorials have a consistent system of identifying the soldier commemorated there: “Every grave has a headstone with the same dimensions, regardless of rank, class or religion. If the identity of the soldier is known, you will usually see a regimental or unit badge, a name and service details, a religious emblem, and sometimes a personal inscription provided by the next-of-kin” (Commonwealth, Somme).
why, almost all of the 250,000 visitors per year to the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial (Gough 247), myself included, write trite things in the cemetery registers like “Never Forgotten.” All of the narrative cues in memorial places tell you that this is the appropriate way to explain yourself.

Modes of Representation:

If the spaces where war was fought do not allow us direct access to inherent truths about the experiences of war, then pursuit of an authenticity or higher degree of truth from any war narrative is not only not possible, but not necessary. Any narrative, by the very process of mediating experience into representation, covers over that experience with language that has gaps, absences, and distortions, which means that any narrative can render the experiences of war meaningfully and evocatively for a receiver regardless of the mode of representation chosen to do so. A highly aestheticized modernist novel could render the experience of war just as effectively, or even more effectively, than a soldier’s diary, or standing on the battlefield itself.
As neither representation can be a nearer approach to truth, it is only the receiver of the narrative who can determine what resonates most strongly. However, the literary history of the First World War has largely valued representations that would seem to more “realistically” capture the experience of war. Specifically, while many representations of the war are influenced by modernism, and therefore, render the war in stylized or experimental ways, they have been dismissed by First World War scholars and historians because of the ways in which they diverge from the expected mode of representation that claims authenticity and objectivity through realism.

For example, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), which is likely the most well-known work of scholarship on the First World War, author Paul Fussell argues that modernist literature reflects non-combatants’ tendency to speak about the war in imprecise ways because they, unexposed to battle, are unwilling or unable to speak about it:

Logically there is no reason why the English language could not perfectly well render the actuality of trench warfare: it is rich in terms like *blood, terror, agony, madness, shit, cruelty, murder, sell-out, pain* and *hoax*… Logically, one supposes, there’s no reason why a language devised by man should be inadequate to describe any of man’s works…[S]oldiers have discovered that no one is very interested in the bad news they have to report. What listener wants to be torn and shaken when he doesn’t have to be?

We have made *unspeakable* mean indescribable; it really means *nasty* (169-170).

He continues on to suggest that the language of modernism reflects an inability to render the horrors of war in literary form: “The point is this: finding the war “indescribable” in any but the available language of traditional literature, those who recalled it had to do so in known literary terms. Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Pound, Yeats were not present at the front to induct them into new
idioms which might have done the job better… But what was needed was exactly the clinical—or even obscene language” (174). It is this way of thinking about modernism as a form of avoiding, or being unable or unwilling to speak about the war that has characterized it as having divergent interests from that of war literature. However, those interests are clearly aligned—whatever mode of representation an artist chooses to communicate the effects of war, and however much they may diverge from realist strategies of storytelling, the goal is nonetheless to communicate an experience of war to the receiver of that narrative.

This dissertation is concerned with the various ways in which representations of the First World War diverge from the tradition of the realist, linear, soldier-on-the-battlefield type of narrative that we most associate with the literary history of the war. By using the theoretical frame of cognitive narratology, which primarily investigates the interaction between readers and texts, I investigate how war narratives communicate the experience of war to readers. Chapter Two begins by immediately shifting our understanding of the realist/modernist dichotomy by analyzing how David Jones’ highly aestheticized epic prose poem about the First World War, *In Parenthesis*, uses myth and allusion as a way of communicating a spatiotemporally-distributed experience of war to the reader. Chapter Three analyzes how descriptions of empty spaces and ruined architecture and in Edith Wharton’s *Fighting France* evoke empathy from the reader for elements of war that do not center on the human. This chapter also looks at how Wharton’s narrative, when analyzed alongside similar strategies for communicating the experience of war in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, suggest that immersing the reader in a narrative of war that decenters human experience is a textual strategy that is not genre-specific. Chapter Four shifts the focus to frontline nursing narratives of war, specifically Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* and Ellen Newbold La Motte’s *The Backwash of War*. I analyze how narratives that are situated
in the liminal spaces between the frontline and the homefront give readers access to an experience of war reserved for observers with dual positionality, thus further highlighting the distributed spatiotemporality of war. Finally, Chapter Five moves beyond text-based narratives of war to demonstrate how visual narratives of war such as Frank Hurley’s composite war photography, or Bruce Bairnsfather’s humorous war cartoons further disrupt our expectations about how war ought to be rendered in narrative form. Each chapter argues that these narratives, none of which adhere to the expected representational strategies, and therefore, do not have a prominent place in the literary history of the First World War, use considered rhetorical strategies for rendering the experience of war to the reader in specific, evocative ways. Ultimately, by analyzing the various modes of representation available to communicate war, this dissertation seeks not just to revise our understanding of First World War narratives, but to revise our expectations of war narratives altogether.
CHAPTER TWO: READER EXPERIENTIALITY AND DISTRIBUTED SPATIOTEMPORALITY IN DAVID JONES’ IN PARENTHESIS

Each person and every event are free reflections of people and things remembered, or projected from intimately known possibilities. I have only tried to make a shape in words, using as data the complex of sights, sounds, fears, hopes, apprehensions, smells, things exterior and interior, the landscape and paraphernalia of that singular time and of those particular men. I have attempted to appreciate some things, which at the time of suffering, the flesh was too weak to appraise. There are passages which I would exclude, as not having the form I desire—but they seem necessary to the understanding of the whole.

David Jones, Preface, In Parenthesis

In the age of “reality” television and with movies increasingly touting the “based on a true story” tagline to evoke emotional reactions of all sorts, modern audiences are accustomed to narratives that blur the lines between fact and fiction for the purpose of audience engagement. More and more, value is placed on the impact that a narrative has on its audience rather than on its degree of fictionality. In “Ten Theses about Fictionality,” Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh argue that the rhetorical purpose or intention behind a narrative’s fictionality—whether fictive, nonfictive, or an intentional blur between both—is more important than the degree to which the narrative divides fact from fiction (64-65). And yet, even as narratology understands fictionality as a narrative technique, one genre of narrative has been largely excluded from this discussion—war narratives. In war studies, questions regarding the degree to which an element of a war narrative is fictive or nonfictive are often tied in with value judgements about how effectively the narrative communicates the horrors of war. Narratives typically understood as nonfictional—such as soldier diaries, memoirs, and military history, connote credibility, and therefore,

---

8 Though this is a term that has been defined in many different ways by narrative theorists, I define fictionality as rhetorical communicative mode as in Walsh (2007), Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh (2015), and Gjerlevsen (2016).
authenticity. For war narratives especially, the mark of authenticity presupposes a different relationship with the audience than one that is understood as fictional, and when authenticity is assumed to be falsely adopted, it is seen as a violation. One need only look to the controversy surrounding the representation of Chris Kyle in *American Sniper* (2014) as an example. Yet, as with any other narrative, it is more important to consider the intention behind the choice to communicate fictively or nonfictively than it is to assess how the narrative fits into those categories. If anything, it is more important to consider the degree of implied fictionality in a war narrative as a rhetorical act for the purpose of audience engagement.

First World War narratives in particular are subject to evaluation according the fictive and nonfictive divide because of the war’s concurrency with literary modernism. Where Modernism is an aesthetic project that rejects traditional forms of thinking in the face of unstoppable markers of modernity and industrialization, First World War narratives place the evidence of that modernity—the horrifying reality of the world’s first mechanized war and its traumatic effects on humans and the environment—front and center. Where one denies the past as a source of truth, the other presents the past as didactic. The problem with defining modernist literature and First World War literature according to these basic parameters is that it leaves us with little way to evaluate texts that are both modernist in form and style and about the war—and a significant number of texts from the early-to-mid-twentieth century are just that, to varying degrees. On the one hand, canonical texts such as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Virginia Woolf’s

9 In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), for example, Paul Fussell notes that “The further personal written materials move from the form of the daily diary, the closer they approach to the figurative and the fictional” (310).

10 According to a January 20th, 2015 article in *The Washington Post*, a “culture war” was started by *American Sniper* because of the controversy surrounding the unverifiability of Chris Kyle’s military actions, and whether some of them were exaggerated or false. This caused a political and cultural debate about what constitutes as heroism and how we should honor military service members (Larimer), and these debates were largely divided among political party lines (Larimer). This is an indication of the value of authenticity that we place on war narratives.
Mrs. Dalloway, and D.H. Lawrence’s Women in Love are modernist, and they are about the war, but they are rarely considered war narratives. On the other hand, Siegfried Sassoon’s poetry and prose, Wilfred Owen’s poetry, and war memoirs such as Robert Graves’ Goodbye to All That, are considered war narratives, but are rarely studied as texts influenced by modernism. It is because of this that the value judgements placed on fictive and nonfictive narratives belonging to both genres have survived as long as they have. Even today, almost 100 years after the end of the First World War, hardly any attention has been paid to these texts that represent what some would consider to be competing rhetorical discourses.

In this chapter, I look at one such text—David Jones’ modernist epic prose poem In Parenthesis (1937), a yet relatively understudied text in both modernist scholarship and First World War scholarship—as one example of a war narrative that offers an evocative rendering of warfare through the very ways in which it subverts the narrative expectations of war literature. The poem, which is partially based on Jones’ own experiences serving in the First World War, follows the character of John Ball and the soldiers in his battalion as they assemble and march from place to place toward their duty station. The text is broken into seven parts, each narrating the battalion’s movement in increasingly fragmented poetry, and ultimately culminating in the soldiers’ participation in the Battle of the Somme on the French western front, where several characters are killed, and John Ball is injured. The poem at times adheres to the narrative conventions of realism, and at times is highly allusive, often transitioning between moments of narrative realism and literary, scriptural, and cultural myth abruptly, thus jarring the reader from one spatiotemporality to another and blurring them together. I argue that by relying on modes of representation that walk the line between fictive and nonfictive, such as allusion and myth, and by blurring the lines between his own experiences in the war and his characters’, Jones makes
the rhetorical choice to move beyond the limitations that come with clearly denoting a narrative as either fictional or nonfictional. This forces readers to construct the experientiality of war separately from any assumptions that come with entering into a narrative they deem fictive or nonfictive. Additionally, I argue that the ways in which Jones’ narrative technique shifts the focus away from the fictive-nonfictive dichotomy and onto the reader’s interaction with the text has implications for the ways that we understand the supposedly competing discourses of modernist literature and First World War literature. By examining narratives that subvert readers’ expectations about the aesthetic project of modernism and the realist project of First World War literature, we can expand our understanding of what constitutes a war narrative.

**In Parenthesis as Modernist War Narrative:**

Modernist scholars will likely not disagree that Jones’ *In Parenthesis* should be considered an accomplished work of modernist literature. Although it was published in 1937 when “the excitement of the early years of modernism had lost some of its newness” (Merwin ii), the text’s highly allusive prose poetry, its fragmented and non-linear narrative style, and its mixture of myth and hyper-realistic sensory detail, is decidedly modernist in both form and influence. In his introduction to the text, T.S. Eliot praises it as “a work of genius” that uses “language in a new way or for a new purpose” (vii), and he goes on to compare Jones’ writing to that of James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and his own (vii-viii); an assessment that is echoed in W.S.

---

11 I am responding here to Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh’s third and seventh theses on fictionality. First, if the intentionality behind the use of myth matters to whether it is perceived as fictional and nonfictional (“Ten Theses” 65), then Jones’ use of myth in *In Parenthesis* as a method of representing the experientiality of the First World War would be a form of nonfiction, which is an indication of his intentionality in doing so. Additionally, if readers bring with them a set of assumptions about whether the events in a fictional narrative are possible in the real world, and about whether the events in a nonfictional narrative are credible (67), then Jones’ choice to not assert either, means the reader is freed from these assumptions.
Merwin’s 2003 Foreword of the text (i). Though this work remains overlooked in modernist studies when compared to the volume of scholarship on more canonical modernist works, those who have studied and written about it have already done an extensive amount of work detailing Jones’ modernist influences, where his work diverges from or aligns with his modernist contemporaries, and why the work itself remains understudied.\footnote{For information about Jones’ modernist influences and where he fits in with other modernists, see Thomas Dilworth’s \textit{Reading David Jones} (2008), Jack Dudley’s “Transcendence and the end of Modernist Aesthetics: David Jones \textit{In Parenthesis}” (2015), Kathleen Henderson Staudt’s \textit{At the Turn of a Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics} (1994). For discussions about the categorization of \textit{In Parenthesis} and why the work remains obscure, see Diane DeBell’s “Strategies of Survival: David Jones, \textit{In Parenthesis}, and Robert Graves, \textit{Goodbye to All That}” (1976), Saskya Iris Jain’s “Ancestral Memory, Ancient Unity: Footnotes as Poetic Device in David Jones’s \textit{In Parenthesis}” (2011), and Elizabeth Judge’s “Notes on the Outside: David Jones, ‘Unshared Backgrounds,’ and (The Absence of) Canonicity” (2001).}

Because Jones’ place within the modernist tradition has been thoroughly and provocatively explored by other scholars, this is not the task that is laid out for me here. Rather, I aim to consider the ways in which Jones’ method of writing about the war—a method that is so consciously contrary to the tradition of what is considered a “war book” (xii)\footnote{As I will explain later, this quote, where Jones states that he “did not intend \textit{In Parenthesis} as a ‘War Book’” (xii) is often understood to mean that Jones did not want the text to be considered war literature, but I assert that the quotation marks around this phrase could also indicate Jones’ calling into question the assumptions surrounding the way we categorize a war book rather than attempting to set his text apart from that tradition altogether.}—opens up new opportunities for readers to understand the experience of warfare, and to think of war as an event that transcends any one individual narrative or spatiotemporal location.

I argue that Jones’ rendering of the war, for all of its modernist influence, is a complex and evocative attempt at capturing the experientiality\footnote{I am referring here to Monika Fludernik’s definition of experientiality in \textit{Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology} as “the quasi mimetic evocation of real-life experience” (12). Fludernik’s definition of experientiality implies a “cognitively grounded relation between human experience and human representations of experience” (Caracciolo, par. 1). My definition of experientiality aligns best with both David Herman’s and Marco Caracciolo’s more recent understanding of experientiality as a phenomenon that captures “what it’s like” to undergo events within a storyworld-in-flux (Herman x), and that requires both certain qualities within the text itself and the reader’s interaction with the text. Caracciolo furthers this definition by arguing that experientiality must be enacted by the reader’s interaction with the text that must involve his or her own past experiences and embodied, sensory experiences of the world (Caracciolo 100-101).} of warfare—both its banality and
disorienting traumas—at the expense of making the reader comfortable or meeting their expectations. Indeed, this may be precisely the point. Scholars have pointed out that *In Parenthesis* is an uncomfortable read primarily because of the complexity of the work, but also because of simultaneous density of the poetry accompanied by the exhaustive footnotes that Jones includes with the text, that would seem to over-define its meaning. However, no study of *In Parenthesis* has fully considered that, in addition to being informed by modernist aesthetics and by a resistance to the traditional forms of war literature, the text might be using poetry and allusion as a considered strategy for simulating the fragmented temporality of war, fusing together the seemingly disparate aims of modernist texts and war narratives. Considered in this way, the disorienting experience of reading the text and how it affects the reader would be more important than whether or not the representation itself is an accurate reflection of the reader’s expectations and knowledge of war, or even, more important than whether or not the representation of war is rooted in a spatiotemporal reality at all.

Jones’ preface to the text offers support for the idea that the project of rendering war experientially is more important than the text neatly fitting into the categories of either modernist text or war narrative, or into the categories of fictive or nonfictive. In adopting an experiential project, a narrative does not cease to be representational, but rather, adopts experientiality as the main rhetorical intention over representation. In *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*, Marco Caracciolo argues for a study of narrative that separates representation from experience in an effort to subvert the assumption that all narratives are representational objects (23). While representation is object-based and spatiotemporally locatable, the reader’s

---

15 See Diane DeBell and Thomas Dilworth.
16 See Elizabeth Judge’s argument about Jones’ footnotes being at fault for its obscurity and lack of canonization as well as Saskyra Iris Jain’s response to this argument about Jones’ use of footnotes as poetic device.
experience with a text concerns a number of other factors, including the stylistic choices made in storytelling, and the life experiences that might make them more likely to empathize with a character (41). In his preface, Jones immediately subverts the assumption that In Parenthesis is strictly representational by specifying its genre: “I did not intend this as a ‘War Book’—it happens to be concerned with war. I should prefer it to be about a good kind of peace—but as Mandeville says, ‘Of Paradys ne can I not speken propurly I was not there; it is fer beyonde and that for thinketh me. And also I was not worthi” (xii-xiii). This statement has both been quoted in other analyses of the text to prove that Jones did not wish In Parenthesis to be included in the literary tradition of the First World War, 17 and has also been deliberately disregarded as meaningful piece of information altogether. 18 However, the quotation marks around the phrase “War Book,” coupled with the oft-ignored quote Jones includes from Sir John Mandeville’s Travels after it, 19 seem like an attempt to call the categorization of any text as a “war book” into

17 For example, in David Jones: Mythmaker, Elizabeth Ward argues that this is Jones’ “deliberate dissociation of his work from the ‘war books’ though it has not “prevented critics from reinstating it firmly in that tradition” (77) and that Jones’ preface and the form of In Parenthesis itself indicate that it is “most appropriate” to view the text as being in the tradition of experimental writers such as Eliot, Pound, and Joyce more so than any other that it is situated in (77). Though Ward explains in some detail why the text is inspired by both of these traditions, this is indicative of the false dichotomy between modernist experimental narratives and war narratives that implies a text cannot be both.

18 William Blissett’s “In Parenthesis among the War Books” (1973) begins by quoting this same passage and argues that: “In spite of this disclaimer, In Parenthesis by the bias of its material substance is a war book, whatever the author’s expressed intentions” (258).

19 While I do not have the space to completely do justice to the complexity of Sir John Mandeville’s Travels here, it is worth noting that the text, published somewhere between 1357 and 1371, is a travel narrative of questionable origin that was assumed to recount the authentic travels of the author (Bowers, pars. 1-2). According to Henry Southern’s analysis of the text in volume three of The Retrospective Review (1821), the author blended together descriptions of places the character traveled with fantastical descriptions of supernatural places and beings, “giv[ing] an apparent reality to fiction” (284-285). Southern goes on to quote the same passage about paradise that Jones does in his preface saying, “Paradise is described as particularly by the traveller, as in the romance... though the author is modest enough to abstain from drawing too largely on the credulity of his readers, by speaking of it from actual observation” (285). Mandeville walks the line between reality and fiction to describe the places he has been while refraining from describing a paradise he could not have experienced. In that same way, Jones blends reality and fiction while describing his experiences of war while avoiding a representation of peace that cannot be experienced after being to war. Like Mandeville’s travel narrative, then, Jones’ text is “concerned with” a subject, but is “not intend[ed]” to be a completely realistic representation of it, making Mandeville a particularly apt figure to quote if Jones is working toward renegotiating the current understanding of a “war book.”

26
question more than it does an attempt to exclude *In Parenthesis* from the category of war literature. By stating that his text is not a “War Book,” Jones may be distinguishing it from other well-known “War Books” with which the reader would be familiar, such as Robert Graves’ *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War* (1928), and Ernst Jünger’s *Storm of Steel* (1920)—all autobiographical war memoirs that seek to represent the author’s own individual experiences in the war. However, Jones’ distinction between a “war book” and a book “concerned with war” calls into question what distinguishes one type of war narrative from another, and seems to affirm the key role that the rhetorical and stylistic choices play in the reader’s engagement with the text.

Jones further subverts the expectations one might have of a war narrative by establishing the text’s break from the tradition of chronological realism, which is a common mode of representation in war literature. The early lines of the preface, “This writing has to do with some things I saw, felt, & was a part of… None of the characters in this writing are real persons, nor is any sequence of events historically accurate. There are, I expect, minor anachronisms” (ix), establish *In Parenthesis* as a text that is intentionally neither wholly autobiographical nor wholly fictional, immediately distinguishing it from other First World War narratives that readers would be familiar with—not because other war memoirs are wholly autobiographical (they, of course, are not)²⁰—but because establishing the autobiographical nature of one’s narrative is the modus

---

²⁰I do not mean to imply that war memoirs do not realistically represent warfare or the authors’ experiences of war, but I do hope to complicate the assumption that war memoirs provide more unfiltered access to the conditions of warfare because of their autobiographical nature. War memoirs, like any other war narrative, are constructed for a rhetorical purpose.
operandi of the First World War memoirs that were popular at this time. While Jones maintains his ethos as a direct participant in the frontlines of war, he does so passively, establishing that he “saw,” “felt,” and “was a part of” “some things,” but without specifying the value that his personal role in these events have on understanding the text. More than merely blurring the lines between reality and fiction, this seems to call for an entire abandonment of reality as a necessary condition of the narrative altogether. Later, in that same passage, Jones points out that “In the earlier months [of the war] there was a certain attractive amateurishness, and elbow-room for idiosyncrasy that connected one with a less exacting past,” and, right before noting that the text is not historically accurate, that “it is exclusively with the earlier period that this writing deals. Earlier still, before my participation, it must have been different again” (ix). Here, Jones calls for an understanding of the experience of war as something that can never be any more authentic for one person than another—this is something dictated by experience, situational context, expectations, and a number of other subjectivities that are not spatiotemporally rooted, and therefore, are not able to be represented to another person. The fact that Jones’ text “deals with” his own retrospective understanding of his naivety only further invites a system of signification outside of the parameters of reality in his rendering of the war experience. His layering of mythic allusion over the detailed moment-by-moment goings on in the day of the soldier do not suggest a rejection of reality altogether, but rather, suggest a need to transcend the spatiotemporal constraints of one single reality in order to render the experientiality of war.

See, for example, the first line of Robert Graves’ *Goodbye to All That*, which reads “As proof of my readiness to accept autobiographical convention, let me once record my two earliest memories” (1), or the introduction to Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War*, which establishes its authenticity even while it accounts for details that have been misremembered as memory fades: “I know that memory has her little ways, and by now she has concealed precisely that look, that word, that coincidence of nature without and nature within which I long to remember… But I am inclined to think that her playfulness has been growing rather more trying lately, and perhaps I am gradually becoming colder in my enthusiasm to win a few games. If these things are so, it is now or never for the rendering, however discoloured and lacunary, which I propose” (3).
Time and Experientiality:

In the 2013 series one finale of BBC Two’s *Peaky Blinders*, the main character Thomas Shelby, a veteran of the First World War and leader of the misfit English gang for which the show is named, prepares himself for a fight against a rival gang while dealing with the recent end of a romance. When speaking to a bartender about his failed past relationship, Thomas goes on to say: “The past is not my concern. The future is no longer my concern either… [My concern is] one minute. The soldier’s minute. In a battle, that’s all you get. One minute of everything at once. And anything before is nothing. Everything after, nothing. Nothing in comparison to that one minute” (“Episode 6”). Thomas’ commentary on “the soldier’s minute” reflects the rupture of temporality that occurs during traumatizing moments in battle. In war narratives, this same trope is used over and over again, almost always to communicate trauma. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, for example, linear time is disrupted by a shell explosion: “At the sound of the first droning of the shells, we rush back, in one part of our being, a thousand years. By the animal instinct that is awakened in us we are led and protected. It is not conscious; it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible, than consciousness. One cannot explain it” (Remarque 56). In *A Farewell to Arms*, time slows when the soldier is injured: “[T]hen there was a flash… I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on I felt myself slide back” (Hemingway 54).

The manipulation of time to signal the effects of trauma is one system of signifying the experientiality of war that is common in all types of war literature, whether fictional or
nonfictional. This consistency indicates that communicating the feeling of the traumatic moment is more important than representing that moment in a spatiotemporally realistic way, especially when considering that a person’s reaction to a traumatic moment is already something that affects each person differently, and therefore cannot be represented in any one consistent way. Further, the attempt to enact experientiality through the use of sensory descriptions or figurative language seems to be a consistent aim of all war literature, regardless of genre or country of origin. Whether asking the reader to imagine the circumstances that a single soldier experienced, or asking them empathize with the plight of a group of people because of the conditions of war, the participation of the reader is the only way that a war narrative can become meaningful to anyone beyond the writer. Because of this, both writer and reader must suspend the need for unfiltered authenticity in exchange for rhetorically constructed writing that is more effective at communicating the experience of war through its considered strategy of

For example, this passage from Ernst Jünger’s Storm of Steel, a German soldier’s autobiography, uses the same trope of suspended time: “Innumerable shells came howling and hurtling over us. Thick smoke, ominously lit up by Verey lights, veiled everything. Head and ears ached violently, and we could only make ourselves understood by shouting a word at a time. The power of logical thought and the force of gravity seemed alike to be suspended. One had the sense of something as unescapable and as unconditionally fated as a catastrophe of nature” (96).

See Ruth Leys’ Trauma: A Genealogy (2000) for a discussion of the ways in which trauma has been historically misunderstood as a false dichotomy of either psychologically inescapable (in the “mimetic” theory) or psychologically unrepresentable (in the “antimimetic theory). This leads to, among other things, the assumption that all trauma presents in the same way for all victims and that one’s reaction to trauma can be predicted (298-307).

The understanding of how a narrative evokes empathy in a reader is a provocative avenue being explored today in narrative theory. While there are conflicting ideas about how a narrative evokes empathy and why, I mention empathy here because narratives of war, whatever form they take, seem to all share the goal of helping a non-combatant reader empathize with the circumstances of war. This type of empathy is what Suzanne Keen, in Empathy and the Novel (2007) would refer to as “ambassadorial strategic empathy,” or, the way that a narrative addresses members of an “out-group” to garner empathy for a situation they have not also experienced. War narratives also rely on what Keen calls “broadcast strategic empathy,” which is a way of garnering empathy from all readers, regardless of whether they share the experience depicted in the text or not, by highlighting common and universal emotions (142).

This is not to say that a war narrative cannot be written for the sole purpose of the writer working through his or her own experiences of war, but most war narratives that readers are familiar with were published with the intention of the author, and therefore, imply a desire to communicate a meaning of that experience to an outside audience.
fictionalizing its subject as a means of engaging with reality.\textsuperscript{26} Of course, the assertion that every-thing in the narrative is true and accurate carries a stronger sense of ethos, resulting in the exclusion of narratives that do not claim authenticity from the category of war literature even though the effect on the reader is paramount in both cases.

\emph{In Parenthesis} also uses the manipulation of linear time as a device to indicate the traumatic experience of warfare, but it also represents time as an irrelevant system of measurement for soldiers at war by punctuating linear and chronological descriptions of mundane daily activities with non-traumatic experiences of fractured time and allusion. The patterns of fractured representations of time and allusion are a meaningful strategy for representing the experience of warfare because they disorient the reader at crucial moments in the text where the characters are also disoriented. The strongest indication that the text attempts to mirror the temporality of the characters for its readers is the shift from narrative realism to fragmented allusion between parts two and three of the text. In keeping with Jones’ observation in the preface that “In the earlier months [of the war] there was a certain attractive amateurishness” (ix), the first two parts of the text are significantly less allusive,\textsuperscript{27} and therefore, more coherent than the later ones, and they are concerned mostly with describing the sights, sounds, and smells that make an impression on the characters. For example, passages like “They heavily clambered down, in their nostrils an awareness and at all their sense-centres a perceiving of strange new things. The full day was clear after the early rain. The great flats, under the vacant sky, spread very far” (18), situate the reader within the imaginative cognitive space of the

\textsuperscript{26}I am relying here again on Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh’s argument that fictive discourse is a rhetorical strategy for engaging with the actual world, just as much as nonfictive discourse is (“Ten Theses” 63).

\textsuperscript{27}That there are significantly fewer endnotes to these two parts combined than in any other one part of the text is an indication of this. There are a total of 13 endnotes to parts one and two combined, while every other section has more than 40 endnotes.
amateur soldier for whom all of these experiences and settings are new. Such passages are experiential since they rely on the reader’s emotions of suspense and curiosity to communicate the temporality of the inexperienced soldier.28

In these early pages, Jones’ understanding of the amateur soldier’s naivety is obvious, and so is his awareness that this naivety will soon end. This is indicated by the ways in which Jones’s descriptions become increasingly defamiliarized as the narrative pushes towards the first moment of disillusionment for John Ball, the main character, and his fellow soldiers—when they experience a shell explosion for the first time at the end of Part Two. The soldiers’ naive observations begin to become layered over with the voice of experience—and this perspective can only be the narrator’s retrospective insight of what is to come. We see this for the first time when Private Saunders’ thoughts are focalized early in Part Two: “He regarded the place with a certain wistfulness, as he poked jagged twisted tins, and litter of all kinds into the smouldering heap; the freely drawn rectangle of sodden green with its willow boundaries called familiarity to him… It had all the unknowingness of something of immense realness, but of which you lack all true perceptual knowledge…The last few moments came, and became the past” (15-16). Here, Jones begins using the language of “familiarity” and “realness” to represent the soldiers’ assimilation of past experiences with the present, but also to suggest something imperceptible about life on the First World War battlefield that they have not yet experienced. This sets the characters up to reevaluate their expectations,29 and by extension, sets the reader up to reevaluate their understanding of the experientiality of war. This clash between expectation and reality, between familiarity and unfamiliarity becomes even stronger in the following pages:

28 See Caracciolo’s description of temporality and reader suspense, curiosity, and surprise on page 44 of The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach.

29 In the next section, I speak at length about what these expectations would have been and why.
It was not that the look of the place was unfamiliar to you. It was at one to all appearances with what you knew already. The sodden hedgeless fields—the dykes so full to overflowing to bound these furrows from these, ran narrow glassy demarkations…the same astonishing expanse of sky…but what was the matter with that quite ordinary tree. That’s a very unusual looking farm house. The road was as Napoleon had left it. The day itself was what you’d expect of December. (18-19)

If, prior to this passage, the purpose for the narrative’s progression from familiar to unfamiliar was not clear, the use of the second-person “you,” here makes it more so. Here, the reader is implicated into the text and is able to experience anew the familiar-unfamiliar visions of this landscape—not only through the character’s consciousness, but also through his or her own. Additionally, one can start to see a protective layer of myth coating over the defamiliarizing storyworld—this day meets one’s expectations for a day in the month of December, but the road, for whatever reason, cannot be reconciled with the modern landscape, and so is, “as Napoleon had left it.”

At the end of Part Two, when Ball’s battalion is hit with its first shell, the narrative immediately shifts away from this mode of discourse. The language becomes more referential, and the narrative temporality dramatically slows to describe, in hyper-realistic detail what happens next as the soldiers attempt to reconcile a traumatizing moment. This freezing effect begins with John Ball’s “senses highly alert, his body incapable of movement or response” (24), and continues into a description of the scene surrounding him:

The exact disposition of small things—the precise shapes of tree, the tilt of a bucket, the movement of a straw, the disappearing right boot of Sergeant Snell—all minute noises, separate and distinct in a stillness charged through with some approaching violence—
registered not by the ear nor any single faculty—an on-rushing pervasion, saturating all existence; with exactitude, logarithmic, dial-timed, millesimal—of calculated velocity, some mean chemist’s contrivance, a stinking physicist’s destroying toy. He stood alone on the stones, his mess-tin spilled at his feet. Out of the vortex, rifling the air it came—bright, brass-shod, Pandoran; with all-filling screaming the howling crescendo’s up-piling snapt. The universal world, breath held, one half second, a bludgeoned stillness. Then the pent violence released a consummation of all burstings out; all sudden up-rendings and rivings-through—all taking-out of vents—all barrier breaking—all unmaking” (24).

In the moment that the narrative temporality slows to magnify the details of the shell explosion, the passage also transcends the spatial barriers of the event. The shell is not an object dropped on their location by chance, it is evidence of a complex network of events far removed from the battlefield that had to happen first for this moment to happen. The narrator also does not attribute the shell hit to German soldiers or any other enemy—it is a product of “some mean chemist’s contrivance” and “a stinking physicists destroying toy.” This description also reimagines the agency of warfare by moving away from the idea that the individual soldier figure is the sole executor of war’s violence, and into an understanding of warfare as part of a larger distribution of circumstances that transcend any one individual experience or spatiotemporal context. While the scientific institutions that contribute to the material aspects of war are spatially removed from the battlefield, they nonetheless are central to this moment; while human enemies may have launched the shell at them, they neither created it, nor facilitated the war that caused it to be created.

This traumatic moment signals a transition into a more fragmented, allusive, and poetic
narrative in which Jones relies on layering myth over mundane moment-to-moment details about the soldiers’ movement through the battlefields in order to represent the soldiers’ fractured temporality. The first page of Part Three immediately disorients the reader with its more fragmented writing, which is visually apparent by the way that text is arranged on the page, and by its heavier reliance on footnotes. There are eight footnotes in the first three pages of this section—more than the total number in each of the first two sections. The first sentence of Part Three describes the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord, a somber Catholic ritual performed only on Good Friday, which indicates a move beyond the literal and toward scriptural myth to make meaning of what the soldiers have experienced. Immediately after this, the poetry describes that the soldiers move to a new location with a more knowing, and less positive attitude toward their purpose: “when they paraded / at the ending of the day, unrested / bodies, wearied from the morning, / troubled in their minds, / frail bodies loaded over much, / ‘prentices bearing this night the full panoply, the complex paraphernalia of their trade. / The ritual of their parading was fashioned to austerity, and bore a new directness” (27). This shift can be read not only as Jones’ attempt to mirror for the readers the soldiers’ naivety shifting into disillusionment, but it can also be read as Jones’ call for a new rendering of the experientiality of war that moves from the realist linear narratives of the individualized soldier into a narrative that blends fiction and nonfiction in a strategic way to draw attention to the totalizing horrors of warfare. The two parts of the text before the shell hit are informed by myth of another kind—the myth of “dulce et

---

30 Jones’ footnote after this section reads “Good Friday Office (Rubrics), Roman Rite” (194). *The Roman Missal* indicates that this Rite is performed in remembrance of the Passion of the Lord (Christ’s crucifixion) on Good Friday. The ritual begins without a cross, without lights, and without speaking, and is the only day of the year that sacraments are not offered, except to the sick or dying (314-338). The absence of these things is meant to signify feelings of sadness and loss, and appreciation of sacrifice, and Catholics are expected to maintain this attitude throughout Good Friday and Holy Saturday (“Good Friday”).
that soldiers would have learned about in school or from their fathers, but once this is proven to be false, myth becomes a way to assimilate the horrors of war that they see before them. It becomes clear then, that myth, rather than being altogether separate from reality, is an evocative method of representing the experientiality of fighting in the First World War because of how strongly it informed the soldier’s understanding of his purpose.

**Spatiotemporal Layering and Myth:**

Throughout the remaining parts of *In Parenthesis*, myth is used as a means of representing the defamiliarizing experience of life in the First World War trenches. While the mythical allusions disrupt the linear realist narrative, they also make the actions of the individual soldier in one exact space and time a part of a larger experientiality of war in the mind of the reader that is neither rooted in one space and time, nor necessarily in reality. Because of this, the allusiveness of the narrative adds layers of meaning to the soldiers’ interactions with the world around them. For example, in Part Three, as the soldiers move away from the site of the shell explosion, they come upon a wall of stacked-up sand bags blocking their path that they must first check around for safety. Upon being given the command to move forward some time later, the narrative shifts to the inner thoughts of Mr. Jenkins, the platoon commander, who narrates their movement: “Mr. Jenkins watched them file through, himself following, like western-hill shepherd. / Past the little gate, / into the field of upturned defences, / into the burial-yard— / the grinning and the gnashing and the sore dreading—nor saw he any light in that place” (Jones 31).

---

31 In Latin, this means “It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country.” The phrase is most famously used ironically by Wilfred Owen in his poem “Dulce et Decorum Est” to further demonstrate how modern warfare has destroyed traditional conceptions about war. According to Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), this phrase originates from Horace and was a phrase that was taught to young British schoolboys (158).
An endnote to this passage cites Sir Thomas Malory’s *L’Morte d’Arthur*, a collection of the Legends of King Arthur, written around the mid-1400s, and this is the first of between 20 and 30 references to Malory or Arthurian legends that Jones makes in the text. A few lines later, the narrative switches back to prose, still focalized in Mr. Jenkins’ consciousness: “sprawling the receding, unknowable, wall of night—the slithery causeway—his little flock, his armed bishopric, going with weary limbs” (Jones 31). This layering of myth over the narrative suggests that Jenkins imagines himself as an Arthurian hero preparing for battle as he leads his men into a potentially dangerous situation, as Sir Launcelot is in Malory’s passage. Though this allusion disrupts the narrative’s rootedness in one space and time, it is a means of communicating experience by relying on the reader’s awareness of Jenkins’ sense of responsibility and feeling of foreboding in this moment in a way that a description like “the men walked cautiously through the wall of sand bags” does not. Jenkins’ education about war informs his conceptions of heroism and masculinity, and these frames of reference would necessarily be integrated into his actions on the battlefield and dictate the sense of responsibility that he feels for his other men.

While representing the war through mythical allusion may seem counterintuitive, especially considering that the First World War was the first modern war, and therefore, calls for careful representation of the horrific effects of modern mechanized technologies, this approach is well-justified and supported by modernist literary scholars and First World War scholars for

---

32 The original passage from Malory describes how Sir Launcelot protects himself with his shield from 30 intimidating Knights, who allow him to pass unharmed: “Sir Launcelot departed, and when he came unto the Chapel Perilous he alighted down, and tied his horse unto a little gate. And as soon as he was within the churchyard he saw on the front of the chapel many fair rich shields turned up-so-down, and many of the shields Sir Launcelot had seen knights bear beforehand. With that he saw by him there stand a thirty great knights, more by a yard than any man that ever he had seen, and all those grinned and gnashed at Sir Launcelot. And when he saw their countenance he dreaded him sore, and so put his shield afore him, and took his sword ready in his hand ready unto battle, and they were all armed in black harness ready with their shields and their swords drawn. And when Sir Launcelot would have gone throughout them, they scattered on every side of him, and gave him the way, and therewith he waxed all bold, and entered into the chapel, and then he saw no light but a dim lamp burning” (Malory 202).
much the same reason that Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh see myth as a reflection of narrative intentionality. T.S. Eliot’s “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” argues that James Joyce’s use of myth as a foundation for *Ulysses* is an unprecedented attempt to manage the realities of the modern world, and therefore, is a clear strategy for representing the conditions of modernity in narrative form: “In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him… It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (177). Jones’ use of myth can likewise be understood either as system of ordering something that is otherwise unorderable, or as subverting the need for order in such chaos altogether. Where the traditional method of linear realism fails to capture the experientiality of warfare because of its reliance on order, myth renders war as an event that has causes and effects rooted in times and places outside of its own.

This method of rendering the war is significantly more controversial in war studies because of the ways in which aestheticizing warfare or representing it allusively seem to detract from the horrors of warfare. For example, in *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (2000), Margot Norris responds directly to Eliot’s idea that using myth can help represent contemporary history: “[T]he ‘mythical method’ incurs the risk and cost of dehistoricizing—and thereby depoliticizing—its historical subject. An even greater danger lies in the use (or abuse) of the ‘mythical method’ to idealize, apotheosize, occlude, or occult problematic ideologies embedded in the art” (209). Further, the way the war is represented in *In Parenthesis* specifically has been criticized most famously by Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) for

---

33 Though Eliot does not comment on Jones’ use of myth in his brief introduction to *In Parenthesis*, it is likely one of the features of his writing that he saw as comparable to Joyce’s and his own.
exactly this reason. He argues that “*In Parenthesis* poses for itself the problem of re-attaching traditional meanings to the unprecedented actualities of the war… For all the criticism of modern war which it implies, *In Parenthesis* at the same time can’t keep its allusions from suggesting that the war, if ghastly, is firmly in ‘in the tradition.’ It even implies that, once conceived to be in the tradition, the war can be understood” (146-147). A number of scholars have extensively disagreed with Fussell’s assessment of *In Parenthesis*, pointing out that a false dichotomy exists between rendering the war through allusions to historic and ancient forms of war and the experience of modern war. Experiencing modern war does not necessarily erase one’s heroic conceptions of older forms of warfare, and the use of these allusions does not necessarily condone war or deem it glorious.

To detach the experience of modern warfare from older conceptions of war entirely is to overlook how early twentieth century soldiers would have thought about the role they were to play in the war upon entering it for the first time. Amateur soldiers like Jones would have grown up learning about the glories of going off to war, not only from their teachings in school, but also from their own fathers, who had fought in wars before them—“The period of the individual rifleman, of the ‘old sweat’ of the Boer campaign (ix) that Jones mentions in his Preface. In *A War Imagined* (1991), Samuel Hynes coins this trope “the Myth of the War,” and argues that the use of this myth, used both in fictional and nonfictional narratives, is often rehashed as an attempt to understand the significance of the war. He lays out this myth in his introduction:

---

34 See Thomas Dilworth’s *Reading David Jones*, Kathleen Henderson Staudt’s *At the Turn of a Civilization*, Vincent Sherry’s “David Jones’ *In Parenthesis*: New Measure” and Elizabeth Ward’s *David Jones: Mythmaker* for further discussion on Fussell’s argument about the text and counterarguments to his analysis.

35 Both Thomas Dilworth and Vincent Sherry point out that Fussell’s criticism originates in Jones’ use of ancient references to war that glorify it (30; 375), such as the continual allusion to King Arthur and knights, as I’ve pointed out above.
A brief sketch of that collective narrative of significance would go something like this: a generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance. (xii)

Here, Hynes attempts to create a universal narrative that explains the inevitable disillusionment that soldiers like Jones (and, by extension, the character of John Ball in *In Parenthesis*) experienced upon realizing that their expectations of war would not live up to the romanticized narratives that they had heard growing up. Hynes is careful to point out that his use of “myth” should not connote an intentional misrepresentation of real events, but rather, should urge the reader to think of the myth of the Great War as a developing imaginative version of what the war was, and what it represented to those who fought in it (xi). In this context, then, the use of myth is a rhetorical act meant to mimic the temporality of soldiers whose participation in war was informed at every level by myth.

In *No Man’s Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (1979), Eric J. Leed argues that myth and fantasy were essential to the soldiers’ ability to construct and articulate their experiences in battle: “While one must observe the distinction between significant and silly legends propagated in the war, it is arguable that, in general, the myths and fantasies of war cannot be regarded as false imprints of phenomenal realities. They were the necessary articulation of the combatant’s experiences of realities” (116). Like Hynes, Leed calls for a new
understanding of myth as it is used in soldiers’ narratives and in First World War literature since the traditional connotation of “myth” implies regression or an attempt to escape reality (118) rather than an attempt to organize or render experience. Rather than implying a need to escape the realities of the trenches, Leed asserts that myth-making was particularly important to the soldier’s process of renegotiating his expectations of war with its realities, and thus, was an essential move toward confronting them: “The technological actualities that immobilized the front also eviscerated previous conceptions of war and the warrior. The myths and fantasies of war attempt to revive these conceptions in a new landscape. They attempt to close the gap between the surprising realities of life and initial expectations” (116). Leed’s and Hynes’ analyses of myth open new possibilities for interpretation of war literature that relies on myth, allusion, or metaphor; they show how myth can be used to expand meaning and make experience more communicable to readers who do not share the experience of warfare. The same myth that soldiers relied upon to negotiate their own experiences can be understood as a productive way of enacting these experiences in a reader’s consciousness. They also demonstrate that reality is neither a necessary condition of, nor an effective standard by which to judge, a war narrative.

The narrative’s attempt to “revive [the previous conceptions of war and warrior] in a new landscape” (Leed 116) can be seen at multiple levels in In Parenthesis. The constant use of language indicating naivety or unfamiliarity is the foundational level at which the narrative communicates the clash between the soldiers’ expectations of glory and the horrors of war. This defamiliarization is sometimes related to the soldiers’ inexperience: “for they were unseasoned, nor inured, not knowing this to be much less than the beginning of their sorrows” (65), and sometimes related to their difficulty accepting the conditions of warfare in a landscape that is close to home, and yet completely new: “but these sit in the wilderness, pent like lousy rodents
all the day long; appointing scape-beasts come to the waste-lands, to grope; to stumble at the margin of unfamiliar things—at the place of separation (70). In either case, the effect of defamiliarization is compounded by the layering over of the another time or space—a future time in which the more seasoned soldier is retrospectively narrating these experiences, and the space of the familiar.

This revision of war in a new landscape is most direct in the text’s use of myth and allusion that is layered overtop of the narrative of the day-to-day goings on of the war, as in the case of the frequent references to Arthurian myths already mentioned. In these cases, it is important to note that while allusion may read as an abrupt departure from any sense of linear realist narrative, it is often the case that allusion is triggered by something in the narrator’s spatiotemporal reality. In part four, when John Ball is the assigned sentry, his observations about the details around him often seamlessly drift into mythical allusion and back again into reality:

Across the very quiet of no-man’s-land came still some twittering. He found the wood, visually so near, yet for the feet forbidden by a great fixed gulf, a sight to powerfully behold his mind. To the woods of all the world is this potency—to move the bowels of us. To groves always men come both to their joys and their undoing. Come lightfoot in heart’s ease and school-free… come perplexedly with first loves… Come with Merlin in his madness, for the pity of it; for the young men reaped like green barley / for the folly of it. (66)

The wanderings of John’s mind as he thinks about the draw of the woods is natural, and in a long list of reasons that one comes to the woods, the allusion to Merlin seems out of place. Yet, as the footnote indicates, the myth of Merlin suggests that he went mad after witnessing battlefield violence and escaped to the woods for comfort (Jones 204). The allusion to Merlin is not an
abstract diversion from the narrative, but rather a fitting reference to the comfort that the woods offer in contrast with the battlefield that John calls up in his mind as he looks over both. The intrusion of Merlin’s myth into John’s thoughts at this moment is an indication of his own self-consciousness about his role in the war—will the violence of the war drive him mad, as it did Merlin? Jones’ blending of fictive elements into this otherwise-realistic scene allows the reader to attribute an experiential consciousness to the character through the ways in which the character’s mythic explanation of the woods as sanctuary from violence invite empathy.

**Subverting the Expectations of War:**

The outermost layer of the narrative’s reimaged rendering of war occurs at the authorial level, where Jones establishes *In Parenthesis* as a narrative written in a liminal space, emotionally and historically. Even beyond the ways that Jones complicates readers’ assumptions about modernist narratives and war narratives, and about fictionality and autobiography, he also complicates our understanding of where the war, and by extension, his text about the war, fit in with a historical understanding of space and time:

This writing is called ‘In Parenthesis’ because I have written it in a kind of space between—I don’t know between quite what—but as you turn aside to do something; and because for us amateur soldiers (and especially for the writer, who was not only amateur, but grotesquely incompetent…) the war itself was a parenthesis—how glad we thought we were to step outside its brackets at the end of ’18—and also because our curious type of existence here is altogether in parenthesis. (xv)

At first glance, it would seem that Jones calls for the war to be understood as a suspension of the natural progression of time, where humanity “turn[ed] aside” to fight a war that neatly ceased “at
the end of '18.” However, this passage suggests the inability to neatly bracket one’s war traumas into one historical time—Jones specifies that he wrote the text “in a kind of space between,” and acknowledges that the soldiers “thought” they were glad for the war to end in 1918. This indicates that yet another symptom of Jones’ naivety as a young soldier, even after becoming battle-hardened, was that he could leave the war behind, inside the years of 1914-1918, and move on from it. That impossibility is not only evident in Jones’ penning of this narrative nearly two decades after the end of the war, but also in the way he chose to write it: rendering an experience that defies all of one’s expectations in a linear fashion would not do justice to what it was like to have that experience. For Jones, the most noteworthy experience that he had of war was that it subverted all expectations of what war would be like, and how he would be equipped to deal with it.

*In Parenthesis* renders the First World War in a way that eschews genre conventions in favor of a rhetorically-informed method of engaging with the realities of warfare in order to shift the focus away from the assumptions that make a text fictional or nonfictional, and toward a focus on reader experientiality. The quality or effectiveness of a war narrative should not be determined by its ability to capture a spatiotemporally realistic idea of what war is like because even this approach to writing a war narrative will never be wholly accurate or authentic to either the writer’s experiences or the reader’s expectations. An effective war narrative will render an evocative experientiality of war for the reader rather than confirming previously-held assumptions. The ways in which this rendering affects the reader is a much more important project in conveying the conditions of warfare than whether the narrative reproduces realistic details of war.
CHAPTER THREE: STRUCTURES OF EMPATHY: NARRATIVE WAYS OF
WORLDMAKING, EMBODIED IMMERSION, AND THE NONHUMAN

Back they went, disappointed yet half-relieved, to the resounding emptiness of porterless hall, waiterless restaurants, motionless lifts: to the queer disjointed life of fashionable hotels... Meanwhile it was strange to watch the gradual paralysis of the city... Every great architectural opening framed an emptiness; all the endless avenues stretched away to desert distances. In the parks and gardens no one raked the paths or trimmed the borders. The fountains slept in their basins, the worried sparrows fluttered unfed, and vague dogs, shaken out of their daily habits, roamed unquietly, looking for familiar eyes. Paris, so intensely conscious yet so strangely entranced, seemed to have had curare injected into all her veins.

Edith Wharton, “The Look of Paris”

The first section of Edith Wharton’s Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort, a collection of articles written about the state of France in the early years of the First World War, situates the reader within a liminal space of presence and absence—of action and paralysis. The article, though published first in the collection, was written after Wharton had left Paris to set out on the first of five trips to the French Western Front, and therefore, is a retrospective analysis of the city in transition from peacetime to wartime. Written six months after the start of the war, “The Look of Paris” juxtaposes images of upper-class Parisian women walking their dogs and shopping for indulgent items with images of empty store shelves and hotels being converted into makeshift hospitals to illustrate how a bustling city becomes frozen in the face of mobilization. In communicating this sense of emptiness and paralysis, Wharton repeatedly uses a descriptive approach by which she does not simply state what is not there, but does so through the indication of what was there. The reader is asked not just to picture an empty restaurant or a motionless

36 A drug, originating from a plant-based poison, that causes neuromuscular paralysis, and is used as a muscle relaxant or anesthetic.
37 According to Hazel Hutchison’s The War that Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War, Wharton had written a letter to her publisher, Charles Scribner, asking if he wanted her to write her impressions of Paris at the beginning of the war, but his telegram was delayed due to the chaotic early months of the war, so it was not until February, after she had already left for her first visit to the front, that she began writing her impressions of Paris (75-76).
elevator, but a restaurant absent of the waiters that usually occupy it, and an elevator absent of people to transport. Later in the article, the same method of communicating absence is used to explain the uncanny simultaneity of Paris’ paralysis because of the war, while not having any interaction with it: “Another fact that kept the reality of war from Paris was the curious absence of troops in the streets. After the first rush of conscripts hurrying to their military bases it might have been imagined that the reign of peace had set in… Paris scorned all show of war” (25).

From the first article in the collection and throughout, Wharton communicates the experience of war in a way that only text-based narratives can—through the simultaneous narration of two different temporalities rooted in the same space—and this endows the reader with a knowledge of both past and present, resulting in feelings of nostalgia and loss for that which is given and immediately taken away through the process of narration.  

_Fighting France_ recounts Edith Wharton’s impressions of various locations in France starting with the outbreak of war in July 1914 through August of 1915 in five articles that were serially published in _Scribner’s Magazine_ and _The Saturday Evening Post_ between May 1915 and November 1915 (Kelly 9-19). The five articles, “The Look of Paris,” “In Argonne,” “In Lorraine and the Vosges,” “In the North,” and “In Alsace,” were later collected into book format along with an additional concluding section titled “The Tone of France,” and published in America by Scribner’s in November 1915 (17-18). Because each article recounts Wharton’s observations of different parts of France during wartime in an effort to gain American readers’

---

38 In “Simultaneity in Narrative,” Uri Margolin categorizes this effect as one example of “apparent concurrent narration,” which “involves a deictic shift in that the events being ostensibly reported in real time as they unfold are in fact past or future with respect to the speaker’s temporal position. Past events may be re-lived by the speaker or conjured before his mind’s eye (the clairvoyant), while future events may be experienced in their full immediacy by a speaker-prophet” (para. 18).

39 Wharton refers to her reports as “impressions,” specifically to allow for her own interpretation of what she witnesses, thus avoiding the claim to unaltered realistic reporting (Kelly 23).
support for intervention in the war (20), each article is characterized by a blend of journalistic war reporting and literary propaganda. The driving force behind this mixture of generic qualities is Wharton’s continual oscillation between absence and presence, crowdedness and emptiness, and action and paralysis that she uses to both literally describe what parts of France are actively engaged in warfare, and to figuratively represent the losses of war. As such, Wharton mediates the experience of war not through an individual human, as many war narratives do, but through the characterization of space and nonhuman entities within it, and this mode of representation has significant implications for both modernist literature and war literature.

Though the degree to which Wharton’s writing was influenced by literary modernism is debated, several scholars have pointed out where Fighting France reflects a tension between modernist influences and realist influences in its mixture of romantic and realist descriptions of the war (Olin-Ammentorp 29-34), and in its simultaneous rejection and adoption of sentimentality (Price xv). This tension is also evident in Wharton’s representation of space: while detailed descriptions of space and place is a well-known realist mode of representation, experimental representations of space through indirect or contextual descriptions—what Stephen

40 According to Alice Kelly’s introduction to Fighting France, Wharton’s established literary acclaim in the United States made her an influential expatriate figure, and therefore, uniquely positioned to alert American readers to the need for intervention in the war (20). Though Wharton offered to report on the war rather than being recruited to do so, the propagandistic nature of the text has led to its dismissal as a worthwhile war narrative (Kelly 1, 20-21). Specifically, the analysis of landscape and architecture and the absence of human figures that I am discussing here has led to criticism about the ways that the text avoids direct discussion of war deaths and other horrors and therefore, reads as a tourist narrative at best, and as a failure of journalism at worst (Kelly 21). However, as Kelly points out, and as I will expand on in this chapter, there is a literary intentionality behind these narrative choices that is often overlooked in the analysis of this text (21).

41 Wharton had a complex relationship to literary modernism. Some scholars, such as Julie Olin-Ammentorp argue that while her prewar writings demonstrated her experimentation with modernist form, her postwar writing clearly rejects it (157-158). Others point to Wharton’s distaste for certain elements of modernism such as the “inappropriate reversal of the private and the public” and the use of bathos in the works of modernists such as D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce (Price xv), and her dislike of modernism’s “deliberate sensationalism” at the expense of historical fact (Lee 610). For a full description of Wharton’s modernist influences, as well as an analysis of Wharton’s own writing on modern fiction, see chapter six Julie Olin Ammentorp’s Edith Wharton’s Writings from the Great War and chapter 18 Hermione Lee’s Edith Wharton.
Kern refers to as “textured space” or “positive negative space”\(^{42}\)—is characteristic of modernism. It is not surprising then, that many modernist authors communicated the losses of war through absence and emptiness—Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* perhaps being the most prominent examples of the figurative uses of this motif. While spatial descriptions in realist novels reinforce the traditional, hierarchical distinctions between “valued and degraded spaces” in their reflection of privilege and class (Kern 76), modernists’ emphasis on absence or empty spaces are used as a way to “focus on the nature of space itself” (Kern 77) and recalibrate its meaning by making empty space meaningful. *Fighting France* uses descriptions of absence and empty space to simultaneously represent events that have taken place within different temporal frameworks, which also lends agency to the spaces themselves to communicate a narrative of war—thus displacing an individual human narrator from this role and assigning “what formerly did not count…a constitutive function” (Kern 76).

Wharton’s reliance on communicating the effects of war through absence or emptiness, as well as her continual focus throughout the articles on nonhuman elements of war such as architecture and the landscape, makes *Fighting France* an important study in the ways in which narratives in general, and nonfictional narratives specifically, invite empathy from readers. Because the origin of the articles collected in the text have a well-known (and not necessarily concealed) propagandistic and persuasive element through their effort to gain American support for intervention in the war, there is no question that Wharton intended to present the reader with a convincing representation of the plight of France. However, the question as to whether this representation leads to sympathy for the French people, or empathy, is important, especially if

\(^{42}\) In Kern’s *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction*, he argues that modernists assigned negative elements of space “a positive, constitutive function,” thus contributing to a “rehierarchization of space” (76).
one considers empathy to be a necessary condition for a narrative to resonate with a reader and inspire action. Amy Coplan’s “Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions” (2004) argues that empathy involves adopting the “psychological perspective [of another], and imaginatively experiencing, to some degree or another, what he or she experiences” (143). Feeling with rather than for another is what distinguishes empathy from other emotional mechanisms such as sympathy, which is feeling for another rather than sharing another’s experience (145), or emotional contagion, which is an unintentional mimicking or transfer of emotions from one person to another (144-145). Coplan notes that unlike emotional contagion, where another’s emotions are experienced as our own (145), “self-other differentiation” is crucial to empathy. Though empathy means experiencing the same emotions as another through perspective-taking, those emotions are clearly distinguishable from one’s own experiences (144). Because of this barrier, we are able to simultaneously feel with another, and experience our own separate feelings as a result of empathy (144), and those separate feelings that empathy triggers may or may not inspire action. Suzanne Keen’s Empathy and the Novel (2007)43, explores the relationship between empathy and altruism, arguing that although the relationship between empathy and altruistic action is hotly debated and yet unproven (26), it is nonetheless a belief that informs the ways that writers construct narratives (xxii), and the goal of generating empathy in readers of fiction is something she traces back to the eighteenth-century sentimental novel (37). While she points out that narratives in the twentieth century approached the task of generating empathy quite differently, especially given the “inward turn” of literary modernism (58), Keen argues that generating empathy, and any action or shift in perspective that results

43 It is important to note that Keen addresses fictional narratives in her study, and though Wharton’s text is not fictional, I will argue that Keen’s hypotheses on narrative empathy are applicable to any narrative if one considers the strategies of narrative design at work for use by the reader.
from it, is a consistent goal of fiction that has taken different forms over time.

Considering how prevalent it is for writers to evoke empathy from readers of fiction, often with the goal of changing reader attitudes or encouraging altruistic action, it is possible that this strategy is even more prevalent in nonfiction that engages with real-world topics in kairotic moments, such as war narratives. However, theories of narrative empathy almost entirely revolve around fictional work, and there are not currently any studies that explore the ways that nonfictional texts invite or evoke empathy from readers (Keen, “Narrative Empathy” para. 2). Because of this, more critical attention should be paid to the ways in which nonfictional narratives, or narratives that otherwise do not align with existing hypotheses of narrative empathy produce empathetic responses in readers. If we are to understand that empathy is identifiable through a felt or shared experience of emotions rather than an identification of another’s emotions (Coplan 143, Keen 5), then textual cues or overall narrative construction that would seem to invite such a response are locatable in any narrative, regardless of genre. For example, one important precondition for narrative empathy is the reader’s degree of immersion in the narrative (Caracciolo 130), since empathy involves not only emotions, but cognition as well (Keen 27-28, Coplan 143), and therefore, a form of imaginative projection of the self. Coplan summarizes empirical research that has been done on readers’ engagement with fictional narratives that finds that “adopting the perspective of fictional characters typically plays an important part in our engagement with narratives,” and that this engagement involves the readers’ adoption of “a position within the spatiotemporal framework of narratives that is based on the position of the protagonist” (141). Moreover, several studies found that readers process emotions relayed in a narrative through the perspective of a protagonist more quickly (142), which supports the claim that immersing in a specific narrative point of view is an important
precondition of narrative empathy (143). Therefore, while the existing research on narrative empathy focuses on readers’ interactions with fictional texts, these findings suggest that textual cues that invite such immersion or perspective- adoption can be measured in fictional and nonfictional narratives in the same way, because constructing a narrative in a way that a reader can become immersed in it is indicative of a rhetorical design that has various uses in both genres.

In this chapter, I will use Wharton’s *Fighting France* as an example of a narrative that both invites and evokes reader empathy despite the fact that all of its characterizing features—its unstable genre categorization, its lack of human targets of empathy, and its fragmented descriptions of space and place—would all seem to resist empathy. Though there has yet to be a comprehensive study of how all narratives, regardless of genre and form, evoke empathy, *Fighting France* offers one possible means of evaluating a narrative’s potential for reader empathy based on analysis of textual markers that invite narrative immersion and worldmaking. Additionally, I will argue that the narrative both decenters the human and individual perspectives of warfare through its invitation to empathize with nonhuman entities. However, although targets for narrative empathy do not necessarily have to be human, its attribution of human-like qualities to nonhuman entities demonstrates there is not currently, and is likely not ever to be, a way of understanding empathy that does not rely on anthropocentric

---

44 Wharton’s text is difficult to categorize generically because of its blend of war reporting and propaganda (Kelly 20). Hazel Hutchison points out that the articles have been referred to by critics as “essays, articles, reportage, journals, autobiography, or travel writing” but also notes that it includes “vivid metaphors and casual statements that belong to fiction or political rhetoric” (76-77). If anything, this demonstrates the difficulty of evaluating any narrative based on genre alone.

45 The term “worldmaking” is used by David Herman to describe the reader’s process of “Mapping words (or other kinds of semiotic cues) onto worlds” as a fundamental process of “narrative sense-making” (*Basic Elements* 105). Worldmaking, he argues, involves not only the textual cues within a narrative, but also the external conditions in which the narrative is received by the audience, such as the reader’s own knowledge of real and imagined worlds (108-109).
tendencies. To do so, I will not only analyze the ways in which *Fighting France* invites reader empathy, but I will also use the “Time Passes” section of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* as an example of a fictional text that invites empathy in the same way as its nonfiction contemporary. In analyzing both, I will demonstrate that the similar rhetorical design to invite empathy through perspective-taking and experiencing *with* another further destabilizes our assumptions about the realist/modernist divide in First World War literature—though we see Woolf’s mode of narration in “Time Passes” as radically experimental, its similarity to Wharton’s narrative in its use of absence to invite empathy suggests a common strategy for representing loss in wake of war that is not genre-specific. In doing so, I also hope to demonstrate the potential for evaluating the conditions for narrative empathy across genres.

**Ascribed Intentionality and Worldmaking:**

As I argued in my previous chapter, First World War narratives, and indeed the genre of war narratives altogether, come under particular scrutiny for the degree to which they represent events realistically, given the expectation of war literature to accurately capture the conditions of war. David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* offers one potential means of evaluating war narratives that blend fictive and nonfictive elements through its use of myth and allusion as a means of rendering the experience of war in a way that transcends the boundaries of realism. In addition to analyzing the considered strategies of representing experience at work in a narrative, it is important to consider the textual cues built into a narrative that influence the way that the

---

46 In *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Herman discusses how narrative theorists have differing opinions about whether the cues in a text, or the mental operations in the mind of the reader that allow a reader to interpret a narrative (118-130). For his part, Herman blends the two approaches by analyzing “how particular textual cues prompt interpreters to *spatialize* storyworlds, that is, to build up mental representations of narrated domains as evolving configurations of participants, objects, and places” (131). I am using the concept of “textual cues” here in the same way as Herman.
reader engages in interpretation. In *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (2013), David Herman argues that “interpreting narratives… invites or rather mandates ascriptions of reasons for acting to the tellers or creators of stories” (23), and therefore, that the interpretation of narrative has a basis in intentionality. While literary scholars have long pushed back against the kind of literary analysis that revolves around determining authorial intention, Herman argues that readers necessarily seek out indications of intentionality in order to “infer what sort of world is being evoked through an act of telling, and also why and with what consequences that narrational act is being performed at all” (24). Additionally, though it is often argued that it is important to not interpret narratives based on assumptions about the “real author,” studying the relationship between narrative and cognitive processes in the interpreter’s mind requires an understanding that the interpreter sees textual cues as meaningful, and ascribes intentions to them (55-56). Herman pushes back against anti-intentionalist stance and Wayne C. Booth’s concept of the “implied author” arguing that they are at odds with contemporary studies in several fields that demonstrate how ascribing intention is crucial to human reasoning (57-58). Instead, it is important to acknowledge that this reasoning process is both necessary, and attributes reasons for acting to authors that can change, and that can be wrong, and therefore, that the figure of the implied author is not needed—rather, those inferences are simply a part of narrative interpretation (58-60). This approach to intentionality acknowledges narrative interpreters’

---

47 The real author is the actual author of a narrative. Because authors construct intermediary personas that, though they may have similar experiences, beliefs, and values, are not representations of their actual selves, basing literary analysis around assumptions about the author is, what Wimsatt and Beardsley call “The Intentional Fallacy” (Herman, *Storytelling* 37).

48 In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth argues that the implied author is an important concept because we must “avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as ‘sincerity’ or ‘seriousness’ in the author” (75). Herman notes that the concept of the implied author—the persona of the real author that is created through the rhetorical design of the narrative—was developed by the New Critics as a response to biographical criticism, and in order to differentiate between the real author, and the reader’s idea of the author that is constructed through the process of engaging with a narrative (*Basic Elements* 69).
cognitive processes as an important part of how readers engage with texts.

In *Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009), Herman argues that an essential function to making sense of any narrative is the reader’s almost-automatic process of narrative worldmaking (105). The way that narratives construct storyworlds is largely medium-specific in that cues that trigger the process of worldmaking can be visual, textual, auditory, or a mixture of these. In text-based narratives, these semiotic cues include everything from the use of specific words and phrases, to typography, to the formatting of words on the page, to subtleties built into a narrative that suggest the way that the storyworld operates, thus acting like “blueprints” (107). Therefore, locating how a narrative invites worldmaking in specific or distinct ways from others gives insight into how the narrative ought to be read. It is important to note that, what matters is not whether readers correctly ascribe authorial intention in the interpretation of these cues, or even if that intention leads to meaningful textual analysis, but rather, the fact that seeking out such cues is important to the reader’s process of narrative worldmaking. This is especially important for war literature because it demonstrates that whether or not readers correctly identify what aspects of a war narrative are real or fictional, or what aspects should be taken literally rather than figuratively, such textual cues will determine how the reader experiences the narrative. The way that the narrative is constructed to evoke specific worldmaking processes then becomes more important than the degree to which that narrative adheres to certain generic qualities.

Narrative ways of worldmaking also influence the degree to which readers can immerse in a narrative. Herman argues that because “[i]nterpreters of narrative do not merely reconstruct

---

49 The term “storyworld” refers to “representation of the worlds evoked by stories” (Herman, *Basic Elements* 106). Storyworlds can be the world evoked by narratives in any medium and “are global mental representation enabling interpreters to frame inferences about the situations, characters, and occurrences either explicitly mentioned in or implied by a narrative text or discourse.”
a sequence of events and a set of existents, but imaginatively (emotionally, viscerally) inhabit a world” (*Basic Elements* 119), the way that world is constructed for the reader will influence their degree of immersion, and therefore, how one experiences the storyworld. A key component of Herman’s theories of narrative worldmaking is the assertion that narratives do not simply represent a world, but a world that being disrupted, changing, or in disequilibrium, and that the narrative communicates these disruptions through human or human-like agents (133). Herman’s argument is influenced by Jerome Bruner’s concept of “canonicity and breach” in “The Narrative Construction of Reality” (1991), which argues that “to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence to… the ‘legitimacy’ of the canonical script” (Bruner 11, Herman 133). Of import here is that, no matter what world a narrative creates, the communication of world-disrupting events helps immerse the reader in a storyworld by indicating not only what is canonical in that world, but what has changed in that world, because of what events, and why those events are worth telling (Herman 134-136). For example, the passage from Wharton’s “The Look of Paris” that begins this chapter represents a storyworld in disequilibrium—Paris has become paralyzed during the process of mobilization for war. This passage, and others like it in the opening section of *Fighting France*, help immerse the reader into the scene by simultaneously communicating both what Paris is normally like (canonicity), and what is has become when disrupted by war (breach). In a few sentences, the reader is not only cued to what the world is normally like, what has changed, and why it has changed, but also why these changes are important to the narrative.

Narratives can also build worlds that push the boundaries of reality in order to immerse readers in other minds or in storyworlds that differ from our own in experimental ways. In “Modernist Life Writing and Nonhuman Lives: Ecologies of Experience in Virginia Woolf’s
Flush” (2013), Herman uses Woolf’s Flush: A Biography, a fictional biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning told through the perspective of their dog, as an example of a text that intentionally leaves out textual markers that distinguish between fictional and nonfictional discourse in order to enter into the nonhuman mind. Herman points out that the absence of words such as “perhaps” and “possibly” (551),\(^{50}\) which he refers to as “hedged constructions,” eliminate textual cues that the reader might use to determine what is fictional and nonfictional in a narrative. Additionally, both the identification of a text as a certain genre, while deviating from that genre’s conventions (for example, claiming the genre of “biography,” while the text is narrated by a nonhuman), and direct mentions by the author about the degree to which parts of the narrative are fictional are also ways to blend the fictional and nonfictional (550-551). One example of this can be seen in the preface of In Parenthesis, where Jones specifies that “This writing has to do with some things I saw, felt, & was a part of… None of the characters in this writing are real persons, nor is any sequence of events historically accurate. There are, I expect, minor anachronisms” (ix), which signals to the reader that the text is neither wholly autobiographical, nor wholly fictional, and therefore guides the reader’s process of narrative worldmaking and the interpretation of the text. Herman’s studies in narrative intentionality and worldmaking suggest that analyzing the textual cues in a narrative can be a reliable method of determining the cognitive processes that will be triggered in the reader’s mind during interpretation. It is also possible to analyze how writers may neglect the use of such signposts in order to subvert readers’ expectations and therefore, to guide the readers’ interaction with the

---

\(^{50}\) Part of Herman’s argument relating to the authorial intentionality behind leaving these words out of the text is that Woolf took inspiration from Lytton Strachey’s methods of composing his 1921 biography of Queen Victoria and Harold Nicolson’s life writing practices in Some People, both which use textual cues to clarify what is fact and what is fiction, and decided to leave those out of her own fictional biography (551).
text in specific ways—for example, by decentering the human experience, or by inviting empathy for specific circumstances.

In Wharton’s *Fighting France*, there are several textual cues that signal the reader to the ways in which the text should be read, and several to indicate the ways in which the text should not be read. Like Herman’s example of Woolf’s *Flush*, these cues guide the reader to understand the narrative in a way that does not rely on their expectations of genre—though the narrative is nonfictional, they indicate a strategic mixture of fiction and nonfiction. This is especially important considering that Wharton is describing the real world and not a fictional storyworld, so these cues acknowledge that the text can be experienced by the reader in different ways based on narrative construction, in much the same way that a novel can. Wharton often directly signals to the reader what should be taken literally and what should not, establishing the narrative as one that both reports real situations and that includes fictionalized elements to engage the reader’s imagination. For example, in “In Argonne,” which details Wharton’s first trip to the frontlines, and describes some of the most infamous battlefront locations of the First World War, including Verdun, she describes some of the ruined villages she encounters: “The villages along the road all seemed empty—not figuratively but literally empty. None of them has suffered from the German invasion, save by the destruction, here and there, of a single house on which some

---

51 In response to Max Saunders’ argument in *Self-Impression: Life Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2010) Herman argues that Woolf’s representation of the nonhuman point of view in *Flush* “wrenches the point of view away from the human participants” and “shows the limitations of the human point of view” (442), Herman suggests that such blending of fiction and nonfiction destabilizes the genre of the text. More specifically, he argues that the blurring of fiction and life writing in *Flush* subverts our understanding of the boundaries between fictional and nonfictional minds, and between human and nonhuman minds, thus suggesting that experiences of other subjects can be engaged with (553-554).

52 This may be especially important considering Wharton’s already-established career as a novel and fiction writer. It is possible that her inclusion of such textual cues are in place to direct the reader to important elements of real-world reporting so that the narrative is not dismissed as unimportant—an unfortunate possibility for war narratives that use fictional elements.

53 Though the Battle of Verdun would not take place in this location until February-December 1916, Wharton identifies its significance as a site of battle in “In Argonne,” which she wrote in early 1915.
random malice has wreaked itself; but since the general flight in September all have remained abandoned” (48). Here, Wharton directly signals to the reader that she means “empty” literally and not figuratively, which suggests both that this observation has a potential figurative meaning and that the figurative meaning would be different than what she intends to communicate. The description also contains deictic expressions that alert the reader to the spatial layout of the scene that Wharton is describing, such as “along the road” and “here and there.” These evoke a specific storyworld that readers can imaginatively transport to, and in combination with the adverb “literally,” the reader understand that an exact place is being described. Interestingly, these cues draw attention not just to the meaning of this sentence, but to her figurative uses of emptiness elsewhere—signaling that both are used to convey the meaning of emptiness differently throughout the narrative.

In other parts of the text, this signaling is even more direct. Wharton begins the next section, “In Lorraine and the Vosges,” with a description of flowers on her table: “Beside me, on my writing-table, stands a bunch of peonies, the jolly round-faced pink peonies of the village garden” (93). While readers would immediately understand that the flowers are being described in order to introduce a moment of significance in Wharton’s narrative, in part because of the deictic phrase “beside me,” she directs the reader’s interpretation of their significance: “My pink peonies were not introduced to point the stale allegory of unconscious Nature veiling Man’s havoc: they are put on my first page as a symbol of conscious human energy coming back to replant and rebuild the wilderness” (93-94). Again, Wharton asks the reader to resist reading the details of her experience in one way, and guides the way that it should be read—symbolically

---

54 Because deictic expressions rely on the context in which they are used, this is an important textual element of building storyworlds, and necessary for narrative worldmaking. (Herman, Basic Elements 113-114, 123-124).
rather than allegorically. She goes on to describe the flowers as visible proof that people are returning to the villages and tending to the land again, so while the peonies are still figurative in that they are symbolic, she does not want this symbol to rise to the level of having an underlying moral (allegorical) meaning about man versus nature; rather, they are a physical marker of change and progress. These passages include textual cues that suggest an intentionality at work in the construction of the narrative. While Wharton has clearly not limited her narrative to any one mode of representation—figurative or literal—the fact that she signals potential differences in meaning suggests her awareness of reader’s reliance on such cues to interpret the text. In this case, it is understood that the narrative’s use of literal and figurative language is a thoughtful element of narrative worldmaking, based on the ways in which Wharton has chosen to communicate the narrative’s purpose.

**Enactment, Embodiment, and Empathy:**

Narrative worldmaking is paramount to interpreting a narrative text, since both the textual cues built into a narrative, and the rhetorical intentions ascribed to those cues inform the way that the reader interacts with the text. However, the ways in which that process does or does not translate to evoking reader empathy is dependent on a number of other factors. Suzanne Keen’s 168-page book on narrative empathy develops 27 hypotheses (169-171) about how empathy is generated, but each is also dependent on factors that vary widely, such as narrative genre and form, the reader’s beliefs and experiences, the author’s intended or unintended purpose, or the situational context in which the narrative is read. This is likely why there is not yet a rubric by which to assess the conditions for narrative empathy in nonfictional texts, let alone a common core theory of narrative empathy. However, Amy Coplan’s analysis of narrative
empathy alongside empirical research conducted on empathic responses in real-world situations shows that this generic distinction can be broken down. As mentioned earlier, one important precondition for empathy seems to be the reader’s ability to immerse in the narrative through imaginative projection. In his book *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach* (2014), Marco Caracciolo argues that empathy is a “simulative mechanism, one that allows us to understand other people’s mental states by ‘putting ourselves in their shoes’—by imagining how we would react if we found ourselves in their situation” (130). This process of mental simulation serves as the foundation for his theory of consciousness-enactment, which occurs when a reader’s own experiential background overlaps with a character’s experience, thus blending a reader’s real-world experiences with cues built into a text (110). The question becomes, then, how consciousness-enactment leads to immersion in the text, and thus, a step closer to empathy.

In response to a number of theories about how readers are “transported” into a narrative, Caracciolo argues that because consciousness is not a real object, and therefore, is not actually “transportable” to other locations, the ability to immerse in a narrative is actually a result of the reader’s memories of their own bodily movements in an environment (160). It is also important to note that while empathy serves as an underlying mechanism of consciousness-enactment in Caracciolo’s model, it always occurs alongside what he calls consciousness-attribution, or, “the simple ‘recognition’ that a particular event referred to by the story is experiential” (41). In other words, consciousness-attribution means attributing a consciousness to another mind, with the understanding that a conscious mind has the ability to experience. While this means that we can attribute consciousness to (and therefore empathize with) the fictional and the nonhuman, our perception of consciousness is based entirely on our own experience of consciousness, so that consciousness needs to more or less resemble what we understand that to be (115-116). The
mental simulation required of empathy is informed both by identification with the experiences represented in a narrative and by “memories of our past sensorimotor interactions with the environment” (161), and is therefore, both anthropocentric and individualized.

When readers become immersed in a narrative, they project a “virtual” version of their real body (with real experiences, memories, and sensorimotor interactions) into the storyworld (161-162), so the immersive experience happens more readily when a narrative offers a human or human-like consciousness interacting with a descriptive environment, and Wharton’s *Fighting France* provides that in its representation of the nonhuman. However, even when a narrative is absent of a fictional, perceiving consciousness or body for the reader to project onto, this does not mean that there is no chance for empathy. In *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* (1996), Monika Fludernik introduces the concept of figuralization, which describes “the evocation of a deictic centre of subjectivity in a reflector-mode narrative55 that has no ruling figural consciousness attached to it” (197). When figuralization occurs in a narrative, the deictic center, or the spatiotemporal reference point being described in a narrative, is “empty,” because though the description suggests that the scene is being perceived or experienced, there is no clear perceiver or experiencer present. Fludernik argues that this absence can actually invite imaginative projection: “[T]he empty centre, if it remains empty, a mere centre of perception, can induce reader identification, allowing a reading of the story through an empathetic projection of the reader into the figure of an observer ‘on the scene’” (198). Additionally, passages with figuralization may include the emergence of a speaker through the inclusion of words such as

55 Fludernik is using F.K. Stanzel’s phrase “reflector-mode narrative,” from *A Theory of Narrative* (1984), which is a narrative that consistently uses internal focalization—the mediation of events in a narrative through a character or narrator’s perspective—to communicate events in the narrative. The figure whose perspective the narrative is focalized through is referred to as the reflector figure (Fludernik 27, 384 n. 14). These types of focalization and narrative perspective will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter.
“you” or “one” (197-198). Caracciolo argues that although instances of figuralization are rare, since not all “aperspectival” descriptions reflect an observer figure (170), in these cases, the absence of a fictional body to anchor onto “is so conspicuous that we almost automatically see it as indicative of our own (virtual) presence” (169). Here again, the reader’s understanding of consciousness as well as their own sensorimotor awareness allows virtual bodily projection (not the projection of consciousness itself) into a space, despite there being no fictional bodies present. Figuralization, when present, is empathetic in that it requires the interpreter of the narrative to embody the speaker figure—here, empathy takes on a slightly different form in that it requires the interpreter to project themselves onto a figure in order to take on a perspective, but this is not necessarily an emotional act.

In *Fighting France* figuralization is prevalent in “The Look of Paris,” where Paris is described by an unseen speaker.  For example, certain descriptions invite empathy by way of a mixture of deictic expressions, disembodied description, and personification: “Below the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs Elysées sloped downward in a sun-powdered haze to the mist of fountains and the ethereal obelisk; and the currents of summer life ebbed and flowed with a normal beat under the trees of the radiating avenues. The great city, so made for peace and art and all humanest graces, seemed to lie by her river-side like a princess guarded by the watchful giant the Eiffel Tower” (6). The specific spatial organization of this scene enables the reader’s virtual body to inhabit the space (even more so if the reader has visited the Champs Elysées—a strong example of consciousness-enactment) while the narrative figure influences the reader’s

---

56 It is possible that Wharton’s narrative being a report of her own observations complicates Fludernik’s concept of figuralization, since, unlike in a novel, the reader knows who is doing the “speaking” and “observing.” However, I argue that the effect of figuralization in this genre has the same effect on the reader since knowing who the speaker is does not necessarily discount the reader’s need to embody the speaker in these descriptions.
perception. Some passages more directly gesture toward a perceiving figure, and in doing so, place the reader in the place of the spectator:

Looked back on from these sterner months those early days in Paris, in their setting of grave architecture and summer skies, wear the light of the idea and the abstract. The sudden flaming up of national life, the abeyance of every small and mean preoccupation, cleared the moral air as the streets had been cleared, and made the spectator feel as though he were reading a great poem on War rather than facing its realities. (15)

The inclusion of the pronoun “he,” acts in the same way as “you” would in the sentence since there is no actual “he” on the scene, which invites reader projection into the empty center of perception. In this case, the imaginary projection into the scene is only part of the empathetic effect, since the passage also clarifies how the perceiver feels—“as though he were reading a great poem on War rather than facing its realities.” Through this double-invitation of empathy (embodiment and the adoption of another’s emotion), the scene communicates the uncanny feeling of reconciling the horrors of warfare with the feelings of pride and unity than it ignites in a more visceral way than if the passage simply stated this contrast outright. Interestingly, the consciousness-attribution of the disembodied “he,” and the reader’s adoption of that perspective abruptly shifts the reader from pure perception to uncanny feeling of perceiving with—in other words, empathizing with—a completely unfamiliar entity. This lends another feeling of uncanniness to this section, but also demonstrates that there are very few barriers that prevent the reader from perceiving through other minds.

Decentering the Human:

While many of the descriptions in Fighting France invite empathy through figuralization,
Wharton’s continual decentering of the human experience through anthropomorphized descriptions of the nonhuman invites us to attribute consciousness to nonhuman entities and agents, and often, to empathize with them. Throughout *Fighting France*, there is strong emphasis placed, not on the gruesome details of human casualties, or on individual experience, as one might expect of a war narrative, but on the toll that war takes on architecture and the landscape, which is communicated through detailed spatiotemporal descriptions of various sites of war. Though it has been argued that Wharton’s focus on these elements throughout the collection is a reflection of her known fascination with architecture and living spaces, this is also a rhetorically-significant way of decentering the human narrative of war and representing war’s effects on humans and nonhumans alike. I argue that instead of human casualties, nonhuman causalities serve as the narrative’s method of communicating world-disruption (Herman 133), and therefore, that the reader’s immersion into the storyworld is invited by the simultaneous spatiotemporal descriptions of destroyed spaces, and what those spaces once were. The anthropomorphic descriptions of destroyed nonhuman elements generate multiple targets of reader empathy while also reflecting the degree to which war narratives rely on anthropocentrism to communicate the horrors of warfare and to generate empathy for its victims.

In “The Look of Paris,” Wharton uses descriptions of the city and surrounding countryside to reflect the effects of war, and specifically, uses the landscape and architecture as narrative devices to show how the city changes in the face of war. Herman argues that the

---

57 See Kelly, page 37, Hutchison, page 82, and Mary Carney’s “Cosmopolitan at War: Wharton and Transnational Material Culture” in *Edith Wharton and Cosmopolitanism*.

58 In *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Herman notes the importance of simultaneous narration in the temporality of storyworlds. He notes that Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), identifies different modes of narration that structure the narrative and influence worldmaking (129). Simultaneous narration, he says, presents events “in tandem with the interpreter’s effort to comprehend the contours and boundaries of the narrated domain,” allowing “the impact of events on the storyworld [to] remain tentative, probabilistic, open-ended” (129).
beginnings of narratives serve as important prompts for worldmaking, and that the way a narrative begins allows readers to “take up residence” in the storyworld (Basic Elements 112). The beginning of a narrative not only alerts the reader to the “distinctive protocols for worldmaking,” but also could indicate to the reader the text’s characteristics, based on knowledge of existing generic differences (112). The first two pages of the article situate the reader within a storyworld where meaning is derived from the nonhuman: “The particular bit of landscape before us spoke in all its lines of that attachment. The air seemed full of the long murmur of human effort, the rhythm of oft-repeated tasks; the serenity of the scene smiled away the war rumours which had hung on since morning” (3-4). This description of the landscape is followed immediately after by one of a cathedral that Wharton visited in Chartres, a town sixty miles from Paris (Kelly 86), on July 30th, 1914, just two days before France officially mobilized and entered the war:

Framed by such depths of darkness, and steeped in a blaze of mid-summer sun, the familiar windows seemed singularly remote and yet overpoweringly vivid. Now they widened into dark-shored pools splashed with sunset, now glittered and menaced like the shields of fighting angels… When one dropped one’s eyes from these ethereal harmonies, the dark masses of masonry below them, all veiled and muffled in a mist pricked by a few altar lights, seemed to symbolize the life on earth, with its shadows, its heavy distances and its little islands of illusion. All that a great cathedral can be, all the meanings it can express… the cathedral of Chartres gave us in that perfect hour. (4-5)

In both descriptions, the fear of impending war is projected onto the scenery as Wharton
reconciles the serenity and familiarity of the French countryside\textsuperscript{59} with the violence and displacement that she will witness in the coming years. While warfare is entirely caused by humans, it is not entirely carried out by humans, and does not only affect them. Therefore, narrating the effects of war through such descriptions of the nonhuman seems to both lend agency to nonhuman victims, while also drawing attention to the ways in which the nonhuman reflects both positive and negative human action—something that a majority of war narratives fail to do in their sole focus on the human victims of war.

Throughout \textit{Fighting France}, these descriptions of the natural and architectural are used in various ways, but most often, to symbolize the violence of war or as evidence of its totalizing effects not just on humanity, but on the environment, civilization, and France and its history as a whole. For example, descriptions of violent weather are used in “The Look of Paris” to signal the outbreak of war: “Like a monstrous landslide it had fallen across the path of an orderly laborious nation, disrupting its routine, annihilating its industries, rending families apart, and burying under a heap of senseless ruin the patiently and painfully wrought machinery of civilization… In an instant we were being shows what mobilization was—a huge break in the normal flow of traffic, like the sudden rupture of a dyke” (9). Here, the metaphors of a landslide, or the rupturing of a dam are used to connote the uncontrollability of war once it begins, there is also the implication of self-destruction—that the violence of war is dependent on the very advancements of civilization that led to its outbreak, and therefore, that war is ultimately self-defeating. It is

\textsuperscript{59} In her introduction to \textit{Fighting France}, Alice Kelly notes that Wharton chose to begin with descriptions of Paris and the French countryside rather than descriptions of the frontlines as a means of appealing to her audience: “Aware that she was writing for the educated, predominantly middle-class, often well-travelled American readership of \textit{Scribner’s Magazine} who might well have been familiar with France, Wharton provided her readers with an affirmation of their knowledge of French geography and culture. For those readers who hadn’t been to France, this was her chance for her to describe the country she loved to them” (22).
also important to note that because land and man-made structures are reflections of national pride and identity, Wharton’s focus on the destruction of French land and structures is another way to communicate the totalizing effects of war on a people as a whole.

Later in the collection, the relationship between human and nonhuman becomes even more blurred, as Wharton visits the frontlines, observes how the land works to either aid or hinder warfare, and notes the toll war has taken on both. One interesting example of this appears in “In Loraraine and the Vosges,” where Wharton approaches the German frontlines, and notes the way that the serenity of the landscape is tainted by well-hidden German soldiers: “Nothing but the wreck of the bridge showed that we were on the edge of war. The wind was too high for firing, and we saw no reason for believing that the wood just behind the Hospice roof at our feet was seamed with German trenches” (109). Switching into figuralization, the passage continues: “[A]s one peered through an embrasure of the ancient walls one gradually found one’s self reliving the sensations of the little mediaeval burgh as it looked out on some earlier circle of besiegers. The longer one looked, the more oppressive and menacing the invisibility of the foe became. “There they are—and there—and there” (109-110). In this passage, the projection of the reader’s virtual body into the empty center of perception is quite literal, given the deictic expressions that suggest being surrounded. The passage also uses the presence of human agents to anthropomorphize the landscape they inhabit: “[T]he whole place seemed to be sleeping the sleep of bucolic peace. ‘They are there, ’ the officer said, and the innocent vignette framed by my field-glass suddenly glared back at me like a human mask of hate. The loudest cannonade had not made ‘them’ seem as real as that!” (110-111). The landscape becomes the enemy because it is harboring the enemy, assigning the nonhuman the agency to participate in war in its own way.
Wharton’s Architectural Corpses:

Wharton’s strategic anthropomorphism of the nonhuman is nowhere more clear than in her descriptions of several ruins along the frontlines. In “In Argonne,” for example, she describes a series of ruined towns, and one in particular as “the most piteous of the group: the village of Heiltz-le-Maurupt, once pleasantly set in gardens and orchards, now an ugly waste like the others, and with a little church so stripped and wounded and dishonoured that it lies there by the roadside like a human victim” (82). The rubble is not only equated to a human victim, but is described as being “dishonoured”—a term that Wharton uses again in the next article, “In Lorraine and the Vosges,” to describe an actual human victim: “One old woman, hearing her son’s death-cry rashly looked out of her door. A bullet instantly laid her low among her phloxes and lilies; and there, in her little garden, her dead body was dishonoured” (99). The human and the nonhuman take on equal importance in these moments, since both are attributed qualities of living and conscious beings. In this same article, one town is attributed the disturbing quality of hanging on to life: “Oh, that poor town—when we reached it, along a road ploughed with fresh obus-holes, I didn’t want to stop the motor; I wanted to hurry on and blot the picture from my memory! It was doubly sad to look at because of the fact that it wasn’t quite dead; faint spasms of life still quivered through it. A few children played in the ravaged streets; a few pale mothers watched them from cellar doorways” (123). In this passage, the anthropomorphized description of a dying town is a much stronger target for empathy than the actual humans in the passage. In fact, the humans, though likely real people that Wharton observed, seem to be included here to further the metaphor of a dying town—it is the town as a collective whole, human and nonhuman included, that is “poor,” and “spasm[ing].”

The most vivid and provocative example of a ruined town that is a target for empathy in
the narrative, however, is Ypres, a Belgian town on the Western front—and appropriately so, given that it was the region of some of the most horrific battles of the First World War. In “In the North,” Wharton recounts the trip that she took to Ypres on June 21st, 1915, immediately noting the severe state of the town in relation to others she had seen: “[A]s we passed through the last village and approached the low line of houses ahead, the silence and emptiness widened about us. That low line was Ypres; every monument that marked it, that gave it an individual outline, is gone. It is a town without a profile… We had seen evacuated towns—Verdun, Badonviller, Raon-l’Étape—but we had seen no emptiness like this” (151-152). First, Wharton extends our understanding of emptiness by specifying that it is not just the evacuation of people that makes Ypres the emptiest ruined town—but the erasure of the town’s “individual[ity]” and “profile.” In the pages that follow, Ypres is described as being bombed to death, and in much the same way that the “faint spasms of life” (123) attribute consciousness to the town described in the previous article, here, the fact that Ypres is irrevocably damaged, while still presenting as an operable city makes it a corpse: “We had seen other ruined towns, but none like this. The towns of Lorraine were blown up, burnt down, deliberately erased from the earth. At worse they are like stone-yards, at best like Pompeii. But Ypres has been bombarded to death, and the outer walls are still standing, so that it presents the distant semblance of a living city, while near by it is seen to be a disemboweled corpse” (153). The corpse of Ypres—a nonhuman body that outwardly presents as living, but is dead—is personified through its absence of life.

These nonhuman corpses not only decenter our assumptions about the individual human occupying the locus of the war narrative, but they also speak to a larger focus on nonhuman phenomenology in early-twentieth-century narratives. Erin E. Edwards’ The Modernist Corpse (2018) argues that “the corpse in American modernism is involved in a trenchant reexamination
of who—and what—counts as human and as ‘alive’ in the early twentieth century” (2). Specifically, she argues that the corpse “acquire[d] a new cultural visibility across a range of early-twentieth-century technical media. Photographs of World War I corpses gave U.S. subjects visual access to transatlantic battlefields and subterranean trench cities of the dead, graphically materializing the impossible calculi of ‘body counts’ through which the gains and losses of war are measured” (1). While human corpses do not occupy a central place in Wharton’s narrative, nonhuman corpses, such as Heiltz-le-Maurupt and Ypres, do; and what’s more, Wharton gives her reader access to these corpses in both textual and visual forms. In Alice Kelly’s edited edition of *Fighting France* the photos that Wharton took during her five trips to the frontlines, which were left out of earlier versions of the text (Kelly 3), are reprinted along with the narrative. Many of the photos show architectural corpses in the form of ruined buildings, streets filled with rubble, and they often show soldiers, civilians, or Wharton herself standing among the ruins. When viewed alongside the narrative, these images further establish the devastation of war and particularly, the devastation to war’s nonhuman victims.

If the imagery of a disemboweled corpse is not a strong enough metaphor for the destruction of Ypres, Wharton continues: “Every window-pane is smashed, nearly every building unroofed, and some house-fronts are sliced clean off, with the different stories exposed” (153). This description mirrors the potential injuries to a human body at war so much so that it is almost hard to read. Add to this the details that follow about familiar objects left behind in the wake of destruction, such as family photos, furniture, and diplomas, and the glorified descriptions of Ypres as “destroyed but not abased,” with structures that remain “with a majesty that seems to silence compassion,” and that is “so proud in death” (154), the section memorializes Ypres in exactly the same way that one would a human death. In doing so, Edwards’ idea of the corpse as
a “nonhuman ‘other’” that should be further examined for its relationship to the human (3),
makes Wharton’s architectural corpses other others—corpses that were never human, and yet
assigned humanity through “death.”

With all of the destruction that Wharton witnessed at the front, it is likely that she saw
just as much, if not more, human suffering and death, but those are not the focus of her narrative.
In her introduction to Fighting France, Alice Kelly argues that Wharton’s disturbing descriptions
of ruined towns “prevents the distressing direct presentation of the war dead, and simultaneously
allows for the hopeful possibility of renewal and regeneration, which would have been
impossible if she had depicted corpses directly” (30). Though Edwards notes the increasing
access to imagery of corpses, there were still widespread censorship of war imagery and writing,
including England’s Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), which, among other things, made it a
criminal offense to “either by word of mouth or in writing or in any newspaper, periodical, book,
circular, or other printed publication, spread reports or make statements intended or likely to
cause disaffection” (Hynes 80). Therefore, it was still fairly common for civilians at this time to
have a conception of war’s violence without ever seeing a victim’s corpse—an issue that Allyson
Booth refers to as “death experienced as corpselessness” (21). It is possible, then, that if
Wharton’s narrative represented human corpses, instead of architectural corpses, the reader
would be repelled from the narrative instead of immersed in it. To this I would add that
Wharton’s architectural corpses allow for the possibility of evoking stronger empathy because
their anthropomorphized descriptions evoke the images of both a human corpse, and a nonhuman
corpse, and therefore, represent a sort of dual death—an effect that is important to representing
war’s wide-reaching effects. Additionally, because the descriptions of architectural corpses
require more spatial cues than a description of a human corpse would, such descriptions offer the
opportunity for reader immersion through the projection of the reader’s virtual body. Communicating the effects of war through the nonhuman in this way can be viewed as a radically experimental mode of representation, but when one considers that the civilian experience of the First World War was marked by a pervasive sense of absence—that is, the absence of human bodies, whether because of censorship, mobilization, or death—the nonhuman is tasked with reflecting that absence. Therefore, rather than being a mode of representation that is reserved only for experimental modernist war narratives, this strategic deployment of nonhuman phenomenology is seen to be used in similar ways across genres—from Wharton’s war reporting to Virginia Woolf’s novels about the war.

**Woolf’s “Time Passes,” and Empathy through the Nonhuman:**

Virginia Woolf’s writing has been consistently used to demonstrate some of the key issues in Cognitive Narratology because of the very ways in which her experimental form, which would seem to resist things like reader immersion and empathy, actually invite them, thus serving as a strong example of the ways in which narratives across genres do so. In fact, the four primary narrative theorists cited in this chapter so far have used Woolf’s texts to exemplify their arguments. David Herman uses Woolf’s *Flush* to examine how textual cues can invite readers into other minds, Suzanne Keen uses Woolf’s essay “Modern Fiction” as support for her argument that modernist methods of rendering consciousness invite empathy, Monika Fludernik analyzes Woolf’s *The Waves* in its use of figuralization, and Marco Caracciolo performs his own analysis of *The Waves* in response to Fludernik’s argument about figuralization. Given the ways in which Woolf’s writing serves as a point of intersection not only for all of these narrative theories, but also for understanding how readers interact with narratives of all types, my own
analysis of the “Time Passes” section of Woolf’s novel To the Lighthouse is included here for a similar purpose. Because Woolf uses the motifs of absence and emptiness and nonhuman phenomenology in similar ways to Wharton, our understanding of the realist/Modernist divide is further destabilized. Rather than being reserved for the radically experimental modernist narrative, like Woolf’s, the use of the nonhuman to communicate the effects war and descriptions of “textured space” (Kern 76) in both speaks to similar strategies for representing the losses of war that pervaded non-battlefield sites.

“Time Passes” has been sufficiently analyzed by modernist scholars, war scholars, and environmental scholars as a representation of the war filtered through objects and nature rather than through direct discussion. However, an analysis of this section of the text based on the ways in which it invites narrative worldmaking and reader immersion is important to understanding how the reader experiences this brief section of the text as a stand-in for war in the absence of human narrators, when the text never explicitly states that as its function. I argue that “Time Passes,” much like Wharton’s Fighting France, is constructed in such a way as to invite reader immersion through consciousness-attribution and figuralization and, it is through the reader’s immersion in the empty and chaotic space of “Time Passes,” that empathy for both human and nonhuman victims of war is invited. This process of reader immersion into the

---

60 For example, see David Trotter’s analysis of the parentheticals in “Time Passes” in his essay “The Modernist Novel” in The Cambridge Companion to Modernism (81), Stephen Kern’s analysis of fractured temporality in The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction (109-110), Timothy Morton’s analysis of foregrounded environment in The Ecological Thought (107), Allyson Booth’s analysis of “Time Passes” as representative of modernists’ representation of war in her introduction to Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War (3-8), Samuel Hynes’s analysis of “Time Passes” as a stand-in for war in A War Imagined (458), James M. Haule’s analysis of Woolf’s revisions to this section in his essay “To the Lighthouse and The Great War: The Evidence of Virginia Woolf’s Revisions of ‘Time Passes’” in Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth (164-167), and Vincent Sherry’s analysis of bracketed sections and response to Haule’s argument about Woolf’s revisions in The Great War and the Language of Modernism (294-297), just to name a few. The novel, and specifically this section, has received so much critical attention that it is difficult to account for it all.
abandoned Ramsay family home, which is the setting for “Time Passes,” begins in the first two sections with a series of metaphors meant to signal the outbreak of war, and with a gradual breakdown of human bodies and experiences into a catalog of anthropomorphic objects. The section begins with Mr. Bankes’ assertion that “Well, we must wait for the future to show,” and Andrew’s reply that the future is “almost too dark to see” (125). This leads into an interplay between the metaphors of lightness and darkness, where the family extinguishes the candle light burning in the house and are implied to leave the house as time, and the forces in and surrounding the home, continue on without them: “So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin” (125-126). While an apt metaphor for darkness overtaking a home after the extinguishing of a light, this figural narration implies that a perceiving consciousness is present and that it is informed by knowledge that the family’s departure from the home is brought on by forces that are not described.

This disembodied presence narrates the passage of time and the effects that nonhuman forces have on objects left behind by the family, and through the continual emphasis on “emptiness,” “absence,” and “nothingness,” throughout the section, the perceiving consciousness serves to invite the reader’s virtual presence into this space. The reader is easily and immediately immersed in the empty house after the Ramsay family leaves because of the ways in which the forces acting on the house triggers the reader’s own sensorimotor awareness: “So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in the bedroom
or drawing-room that wholly resisted them but only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of a tables, sauce pans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked” (128-129).

What begins as a metaphor for the wind blowing into the house like “great armies”—which, I argue, is also part of a larger metaphor for the mobilization of war—quickly shifts to an instance of consciousness-enactment, as the reader’s own embodied experience of the space being described overlaps with our recognition of this wind-like force as a conscious, experiencing entity (consciousness-attribution). As the nonhuman entity enters this space, brushes against floors and the bare legs of tables, moves through bedrooms, and into the kitchen, so too does the reader’s virtual presence. From this point forward, the narration in “Time Passes” is figural—the narrator is a disembodied presence that is perceiving the scene, and in the absence of a physical version of that perceiver, the reader adopts this perspective, and becomes “transported” to the narrative in its place.

It is important to note that though “Time Passes” does contains human agents—primarily Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, the maids who upkeep the Ramsay home in their absence—the disembodied narrator’s (and by extension, the reader’s) perspective is never completely interrupted, except by the bracketed passages that announce events occurring outside of the Ramsay house that the narrator knows of, but does not experience. Even when the narrative switches into free indirect discourse,\(^1\) the disembodied narrator’s voice is still not overtaken—the sense of immediacy that free indirect discourse provides is more sharply interrupted by the narrator. For example, in chapter five, when Mrs. McNab is present and cleaning the house, the narrator observes several of her actions in a way that indicates that the nonhuman narrator is

\(^1\) A type of third-person narration that slips into a character’s internal thoughts without use of punctuation signposting or switching into the grammatical first-person (Abbott 77).
present alongside the human: “Rubbing the glass of the long looking-glass…sound issued from her lips—something that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps… as she lurched, dusting, wiping, she seemed to say how it was one long sorrow and trouble… It was not easy or snug this world she had known for close on seventy years… How long, she asked,…. how long shall it endure?” (Emphasis mine, 130-131) Because the passage contains what Herman calls “hedged constructions” (“Modernist Life Writing” 551)—the words “perhaps” and “seemed,” which communicate a lack of certainty—communicates a sense of distance from Mrs. McNab’s consciousness.

In chapter eight, this happens even more obviously when the narrator focalizes Mrs. McNab’s thoughts, but simultaneously maintains its positionality as outside observer, which is indicated by parentheticals: “Thinking no harm, for the family would not come, never again, some said… Mrs. McNab stooped and picked a bunch of flowers to take home with her. She laid them on the table while she dusted. She was fond of flowers. It was a pity to let them waste. Suppose the house were sold (she stood arms akimbo in front of the looking glass) it would want seeing-to—it would” (135). Later, in the same chapter, these two levels of narration are more obvious: “There was [Mrs. Ramsay’s] old grey cloak she wore gardening (Mrs. McNab fingered it). She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers (the garden was a pitiful sight now, all run to riot, and the rabbits scuttling at you out of the beds)—she could see her with one of the children by her in the grey cloak” (135-136). Even considering the narrative function of free indirect discourse—the ability for the narrator to float seamlessly in and out of the character’s mind—such interruptions of the disembodied narrative presence give the feeling that we are prevented from fully entering a human consciousness. Even as we clearly internally focalize Mrs. McNab’s thoughts, we also see her bodily movements and surrounding
actions externally, like a split-screen visual of two cameras recording simultaneously. This effect is important because it demonstrates that the figural narration operates consistently throughout “Time Passes,” even when humans are present, and therefore the reader always observes the scene through the perspective the figural narrator—we are always “an observer ‘on the scene,’” and therefore, “an empathetic projection” (Fludernik 198).

The emphasis on the nonhuman in “Time Passes” can also be seen in the ways that abandoned possessions and other objects take on meaning in the absence of the humans that typically use them. In much the same way that Wharton’s “The Look of Paris” communicates the experience of war through simultaneous narration of space in two different temporalities, “Time Passes” juxtaposes the pre-war and post-war worlds through the temporality of objects. For example, objects serve as a stand-in for the humans that used them: “What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons; how once the looking-glass had held a face” (129). In the same way that the “waiterless restaurants” and “motionless lifts” in Wharton’s narrative (12) represent a storyworld in disequilibrium, these objects, deprived of their human-centered functions, anchor a temporal past to the present and immerse the reader in a storyworld that has been disrupted by war. Other nonhuman forces, such as the weather, the changing of the seasons, and plants and animals, serve a similar purpose. They not only indicate the increasingly-rapid passing of time, and mirror the violence of war that occurs at a distance, but they also signify the totalizing, uncontrollable effects of war. Like Wharton’s metaphor of the landslide or breaking of the dam (9), Woolf’s descriptions of natural forces use the nonhuman to reflect violence that humans set in motion, and therefore characterizes war as self-defeating: “The house
was left; the house was deserted… The saucepan had rusted and the mat decayed. Toads had
nosed their way in… A thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder. The swallows nested in
the drawing-room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid
bare… What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?” (138). Though
not in the path of the war, the Ramsay household is still destroyed by war—the changes that war
brings about is what leaves their home vulnerable to such forces.

Whether by emphasizing emptiness and the absence of human bodies, or by relying on
nonhuman forces to stand-in for the human, both Wharton’s and Woolf’s texts represent the
experience of war in a way that does not rely on the human or on the individual. As a result, it is
clear that these methods of communicating the effects of war to the reader are not reserved for
highly experimental texts, but rather, seem to speak to a pervading sense of absence that these
modes of representation adequately capture. Nonetheless, it is also clear that even while the
human is decentered in such narratives, they rely completely on human’s anthropocentric
tendencies to immerse the reader in the narrative. By relying on the reader’s understanding of
consciousness, and knowledge of their own sensorimotor experiences, or by inviting empathy for
nonhuman entities by anthropomorphizing them, these narratives suggest that while we can
decenter the individual human perspective of war, we cannot abandon it completely, even if that
individual perspective becomes our own through the process of narrative worldmaking and
narrative immersion. However, in war narratives that represent perspectives other than that of the
individual on the battlefield, any method of repositioning the reader, or subverting their
expectations, strongly contributes to altering the understanding of war. Sometimes that shift
occurs as a result of the ways that narratives situate the reader, and sometimes, it occurs as a
result of the situatedness of the narrative discourse itself, as is the case with narratives written by
those who occupy both the soldier and civilian spaces of war—a topic that I will explore in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: NARRATING THE LIMINAL SPACES OF WAR: DUAL POSITIONALITY IN FRONLINE NURSING NARRATIVES

The motor cars have all gone wrong. They are queer. They are not doing what they were designed to do when they were turned out of the factories. The limousines were made to carry ladies to places of amusement: they are carrying generals to places of killing. The limousines and the touring cars and the motor lorries are all debauched; they have a depraved look; their springs sag, their wheels waver; their bodies lean to one side. The elegant limousines that carry the generals are crusted with old mud; the leather cushions of the touring cars are in tatters; the great motor lorries crouch under vast burdens. They crouch in the square ashamed, deformed, very weary; their unspeakable burdens bulge under canvas coverings. Only the snobbish ambulances with the red crosses on their sides have self-assurance. They have the self-assurance of amateurs. The business of killing and the business of living go on together in the square beneath the many windows, jostling each other.

Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*

In the in-between spaces of war, objects and actions from the pre-war world take on new meaning and new purpose. In their insular hyper-focused descriptions of missions and daily operations, narratives that take place exclusively on the battlefield often neglect such spaces where war co-exists with daily life. However, frontline nursing narratives of the First World War capture the uncanniness of these spaces because of nurses’ simultaneous occupation of the homefront and the frontline, and their relative freedom to move about, and observe, both. In the passage above, from one of the fragments in Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* (1929) entitled “The Square,” the narrator’s recognition of the way that pre-war objects have been repurposed for use in the war suggests how her positionality in this in-between space is distinct from that of both civilians and soldiers. She goes on to note the limited view of the civilian townspeople:

---

62 Throughout this chapter, I will refer to “the narrator,” or “the nurse narrator,” and not Borden or La Motte themselves. Though both of these narratives recount the real experiences of Borden and La Motte, and the narrators are meant to represent their past experiencing selves, their narratives, as with any other narrative, are constructed for the audience and are therefore, composed thoughtfully to represent these experiences in certain ways. As I will explain later, these narratives demonstrate the rhetorical design at work in reconstructing a narrative from memory, and for a specific purpose. Since there is no direct line between experience and narrative representation, I argue that the narrators in these narratives relay experiences to the reader in specific ways.
“The little women of the town are busy… They ignore the motors; they do not see the fine scowling generals, nor the strained excited faces in the fast touring cars, nor the provisions of war under their lumpy coverings. They do not even wonder what is in the ambulances. They are too busy… There is no room in the square for the generals, nor for the dying men in the ambulances” (18). However, she also notes that the soldier’s view is limited: “As for the men on the stretchers inside the smart ambulances… they can see nothing and hear nothing of the life that is going on in the square; they are lying on their back in…the ambulances, staring at death. They do not know that on Saturday mornings their road does not lie through the big bright square because the little women of the town are busy with their market” (18). The narrator’s role as a frontline nurse allows her to simultaneously observe the daily routines of the civilians, and the mechanisms of war at work. When they clash, she is able to critique the limited understanding of both—the civilians’ ignorance (intentional or unintentional) of war, and the soldiers’ ignorance (willful or forced) of everyday life carrying on despite their suffering—as a result of her access to both worlds. The nurse’s positionality in the liminal space between the homefront and the frontline serves as another example of the distributed spatiotemporality of war—while the two spaces are divided, each operating within separate temporalities, the nurse’s ability to oscillate between both allows her to highlight how they come into conflict.

First World War nursing narratives not only inhabit these liminal spaces of war, but they also represent mental and bodily in-between states of war that are rarely the focus of war narratives—the uneventful time in between attacks, interruptions in routine, the thoughts of home and family while on the frontline, and the moments between life and death. Often, these in-between states subvert our expectations for the ways in which the horrors of war are addressed in war narratives. For example, in her nursing narrative The Backwash of War (1916), Ellen
Newbold La Motte writes about a part of war that few except doctors and nurses see—the time between life and death: “There are three dying in the ward today. It will be better when they die. The German shells have made them ludicrous, repulsive. We see them in this awful interval between life and death. This interval is when they are gross, absurd, fantastic. Life is clean and death is clean, but this interval is gross, absurd, fantastic” (86-87). Frontline nurses not only see the liminal processes of war, but the parts of war that subvert the overarching narrative of war as glorious. Later in this fragment, aptly titled “The Interval” since it deals not only with the interval between life and death, but also with the procedures that take place in the intervals between major attacks, the narrator describes the honors received by a dying soldier in a way that dispels the myth that dying in war is glorious. After describing her patient Rollin’s injury and resulting symptoms in graphic detail, she notes that “On the wall, above his bed, hang his medals. They are hung up, high up, so he can see them. He can’t see them today, because now he is unconscious, but yesterday and the day before, before he got as bad as this, he could see them and it made him cry” (88). One would forgive the reader for expecting an uplifting story about the soldier’s valorous actions, and his pride in serving his country to come next, but it does not:

He knew that he had been decorated *in extremis*, because he was going to die, and he did not want to die. So he sobbed and sobbed all the while the General decorated him, and protested that he did not want to die. He’d saved three men from death, earning those medals, and at the time he never thought of death himself. Yet in the ward he sobbed and sobbed, and protested that he did not want to die. (88)

While the nurse affirms the selflessness of the soldier’s actions, she refuses to represent his impending death as neat and clean—it is not the case that every soldier dies bravely and calmly

---

63 Meaning, decorated at the point of death—in an extreme circumstance.
as a result of his actions. Many, like Rollin, die horrific and fearful deaths, and the fact that
commons are not privy to that fact does not erase their suffering.

Borden and La Motte’s narratives contain detailed and grotesque descriptions of injuries
and death that strongly contrast the “sanitized images of recruiting posters and… popular
literature” (Hutchison, The War 91, 151) that shielded the horrors of war from anyone who had
not seen it themselves. These descriptions, juxtaposed with passages describing civilians
carrying on with their everyday lives, or stories about Generals making surprise visits to the
hospitals to enforce rules and regulations that disrupt soldiers’ care, critique both the
spatiotemporal divide between the spaces of war and the way that war operates. This is not
always the case in war narratives because of censorship laws and rules restricting how the war
could be discussed. The regulations that may have influenced Wharton’s depiction of war in
Fighting France—namely, that it was a criminal offense in some places to “spread reports or
make statements intended or likely to cause disaffection” (Hynes 80)—would have also affected
Borden and La Motte, but even more so, considering that they were part of the military system,
and therefore, required to adhere to additional security and privacy guidelines. Because these
narratives render the war through an eyewitness narrator figure who occupies both the homefront
and frontlines of war, the narratives convey an ethos that labeled them as particularly damaging
because of their implied authenticity. Because of this, both Borden’s The Forbidden Zone and La

---

64 I stress “anyone” here, because I think it is important to emphasize that this ignorance of what war was like would
have affected everyone equally, until such time as one experienced it for themselves. A great deal of emphasis is
sometimes placed on how nursing narratives reflected women’s shock at the horrors of war, because of their shift
from domestic life to wartime, but, as I address in my next section, this argument universalizes the experiences of
women based on the knowledge of conventional gender roles at the time. This, however, was the result of the lack of
visibility of the war itself, and this same shock was awaiting soldiers at the frontline.

65 The issue of censorship during the war—whether that was censorship of soldiers’ letters home from the front,
facts and statistics about war casualties, artistic representations of the war that shed officers and soldiers in a non-
heroic light, or representations likely to stir up hostility from other countries—was widespread and affected both
men and women, soldiers and civilians (Demm 9-13).
Motte’s *The Backwash of War* were censored or pulled from publication in their time for their “stark and depressing” (Robson v), representations of war that were “too controversial and potentially damaging to wartime morale” (Hutchison, Introduction xiv).However, these narratives were not censored because their content is any more truthful than other representations of war; rather, their highly stylized narrative design represents experiences of war in a way that powerfully critiques the militaristic rhetoric that other narratives perpetuate.

In this chapter, I will argue that Borden and La Motte render the war experience in narrative form in several noteworthy ways that are diverge both from Fusellian-realist soldier-on-the-battlefield narratives and civilian narratives like Wharton’s. The nurse narrators’ dual positionality in the homefront and the frontline allows them to critique issues that other war narratives do not, such as the absurdity of certain rules and regulations, conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and jingoism, and, by extension, allows readers access to spaces and perspectives of war that are typically marginalized or shielded in other narratives. By rendering their experiences in fragmented narratives that resist neat conclusions, and by using character-narrators who filter both their own experiences and others’, the narratives invite the reader to experience the liminal spaces of war through the perceived immediacy of the narrator figure. I will first turn to contemporary perspectives on feminist narratology, and their evolution

---

66 Borden tried to have an earlier version of *The Forbidden Zone* published in August of 1917, but the publisher refused to publish it while the war was ongoing. It was eventually published, in a revised and expanded form, in 1929, at the same time that a surge of other narratives of the First World War were being published (Hutchison, Introduction, xiv). La Motte’s book was published in 1916, but was not published in England or France and was banned by the American government in 1918, one year after the United States entered the war (Robson v). In 1918, La Motte’s book was advertised in the *Liberator*, thought to be a radical journal, and though the advertisement was censored before publication, this public association of her book with pacifistic political views was damaging, especially since the United States had entered the war and its citizens’ opinions on the war were more closely watched (Hutchison, *The War* 158). Not only was her book pulled from publication in the U.S. until 1934, but she also had to cancel her attempt to get a travel passport to China after this incident, for fear of “further official scrutiny or surveillance” (Hutchison, *The War* 158-159).

67 Here I am referring to Paul Fussell’s preference for realistic depictions of war over aestheticized descriptions noted in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, which has been mentioned in earlier chapters.
alongside criticism of First World War nursing memoirs to demonstrate that while we cannot separate these narratives from the authors’ gendered experiences, it is important to locate the ways in which these narratives communicate the experience of war in ways that are a result of each woman’s distinct experiences and occasions for telling. Because these narrator figures are representations of Borden and La Motte that are the product of retrospect, they both capture the women’s individualized experiences of war at the time, and are also informed by each narrative’s situatedness in a post-war spatiotemporality. While analyses of First World War nursing narratives typically focus on how representations of war are gendered, it is important to resist a reading of women’s war narratives that implies a universalized experience for all women, or a direct line between experience and representation, thus ignoring the strategic design at work.

**Situatedness and Feminist Narratology:**

Episode one of the 2014 BBC One miniseries *The Crimson Field,* which was inspired by La Motte’s *The Backwash of War,* begins by showing the character Catherine “Kitty” Trevelyan leaning over the side of the ship, turning her wedding ring over in her hand, and eventually letting it drop into the water. She then turns and walks off the ship and onto the dock, where she enters a crowd of soldiers—one of whom, egged on by the others, flirtatiously yells: “Miss! You one of them volunteer nurses? Can you soothe my brow? I’m feeling a bit feverish,” to which she responds, “You look fine to me,” smiles, and walks away. She is immediately met by a couple of women, and one, who introduces herself as Flora, states: “Oh! Are you one of us?” Later, upon arrival to the front, the nurses are immediately met by a number of unfamiliar and uncomfortable experiences—working alongside men, sleeping in a tent and using a chamberpot, disposing of amputated limbs, and being asked to lie to soldiers’ families that they died a peaceful death, just
to name a few (“Episode 1”). Though none of the characters in the series are meant to directly represent Ellen La Motte or any other historical nurse figure, this depiction of women leaving their lives behind and being thrown immediately into the thick of war serves to represent the transition into war service that nurses would have undergone. This representation also speaks to the multilayered context in which nurses worked, and by extension, in which nursing narratives were produced. While the context of the frontline battlefield, and all that comes with it, certainly shapes experience, so too does one’s pre-war life—social class, educational background, family, and other life experiences. While this outer layer of narrative context is rarely discussed in any frontline narratives (nurse or soldier), these contrasting contexts often impact the way a narrative is communicated because of the ways in which they offer the communicator an occasion for telling.

Nurses’ positionality in the liminal spaces of war is indicative of both the increasing agency that women gained during the First World War, and male combatants’ loss of agency through reorganization of prewar social class hierarchies, physical and psychological injury, and death. Though men’s experiences and narratives of war have traditionally been considered more authoritative in that they depict frontline combat, the social, physical, and psychological effects of war on male combatants destabilized many male-centered institutions, opening up opportunities for women to take on greater roles in society and therefore, greater agency. Sandra M. Gilbert describes this reversal as a source of power for women: “[A]s young men became increasingly alienated from their prewar selves, increasingly immured in the muck and blood of No Man’s Land, women seemed to become, as if by some uncanny swing of history’s pendulum,

---

68 Quoted here from “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,” but this article is also later expanded on in a chapter by the same name in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century.*
ever more powerful” (425). Though narratives of the First World War written by women have only started to gain critical attention in the past few decades, there is a significant amount of scholarship that demonstrates how powerfully women fill in the gaps in the literary tradition of war left by the overwhelming prevalence of soldier’s battlefield narratives. However, of the existing work on women’s narratives of war in general, and on frontline nursing narratives specifically, not much attention has been paid to the ways in which nursing narratives situate readers differently than narratives for which the trench is the locus of experience.

In Basic Elements of Narrative, David Herman argues that narrative representations are “situated in—[and] must be interpreted in light of—a specific discourse context or occasion for telling” (37), which he refers to as narrative situatedness. The idea that narrative both shapes, and is shaped by, the communicative context in which it is created (37) is especially important in the analysis of war narratives because they not only reflect the conditions of war in which they were produced (in tone, content, and construction), but they also serve as most readers’ sole entryway into the experience of warfare, and therefore, have a crucial impact on the way that noncombatants imagine what war is like. For Borden and La Motte, the situatedness of their narratives is multilayered and complex. On the one hand, we cannot, and should not, ignore each woman’s situatedness in a context that was a complete revision of conventional gender roles for women in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, it is crucial to view each woman’s

69 The existing scholarly research on the ways in which women contributed to the war—as nurses, munitions factory workers, and in their taking over of businesses and other homefront responsibilities in the absence of men—is significant and comprehensive. In addition to Sandra Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s three-volume No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century (1988, 1991, 1996), referenced above, the most prominent studies include Angela K. Smith’s Women, Modernism, and the First World War (2000), Hazel Hutchison’s The War that Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War (2015), Susan R. Grayzel’s Women and the First World War (2002), Margaret R. Higonnet’s edited collection Nurses at the Front: Writing the Wounds of the Great War (2001), and Sayre P. Sheldon’s edited collection Her War Story: Twentieth-Century Women Write about War (1999), among others.
experience of that context as both individualized and intersectional with other elements of her identity. As Hazel Hutchinson points out, Borden and La Motte’s shared experiences during the war as a result of working together and having a personal relationship, means that they are often written about together—something that she admits (and that I must now also admit) that she is guilty of doing—and therefore, their work is often lumped together, despite their differences (The War 149-151). Though they shared similar experiences while nursing, the women came from very different backgrounds, and therefore, viewed the situation they were entering into very differently.

Ellen Newbold La Motte was from a “relatively privileged” (Robson iii) family, and was a professional nurse who was trained at Johns Hopkins Training School for Nurses. After graduating in 1902, she went on to work as a nurse in several hospitals and developed a controversial method for treating Tuberculosis, which involved quarantining patients from the general population in hospitals, rather than being treated at home by visiting nurses, which was the established method (Hutchison, The War 143). She published her treatment methods in The British Medical Journal, which received a mixture of praise and criticism, and later authored a book on Tuberculosis and published articles on other public health issues (143). These experiences meant that by the time she arrived in Paris in 1914 to serve as a nurse in the war, she was in her early 40s and was already an established medical professional who was versed in

---

70 La Motte and Borden were introduced in 1915, and it is theorized that American author Gertrude Stein introduced them, because of her friendship with the Borden family, and because she attended Johns Hopkins Nursing School at the same time as La Motte, but ultimately dropped out (Higonnet, “Introduction” xi). Stein mentions both nurses in Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (Higonnet ix, Hutchison, The War 144) so it is thought that the Stein sent the letter that said “Come—American Ambulance” that caused La Motte came to France to work as a nurse (Hutchison, The War 141). Later, Borden and La Motte worked together as frontline nurses after Borden created her own surgical unit in Belgium, and La Motte joined it (Higonnet ix). Also, though they worked together during the war and each wrote about some shared experiences, they do not feature in important or obvious ways in each other’s narratives, and there is no proof that they kept in contact after the war (Hutchison 148).
writing in the medical field. By contrast, Mary Borden (then Mary Borden-Turner), who was 28 years old when she arrived in France as a nurse, was a wealthy socialite and aspiring novelist who joined the French Red Cross as a volunteer with no previous nursing experience (Higonnet viii-ix). When she volunteered, she left behind her husband, three young children, and had recently ended an affair with writer Wyndam Lewis (Hutchison, *The War* 87-88). Despite Borden’s lack of experience as a nurse, and her limited French (88), she was thrown into nursing in 1915 in an overcrowded, underfunded, makeshift hospital in the Malo-Les-Baines casino in Dunkirk (87-88). Horrified by the conditions of the hospital, she used her wealth to establish her own field hospital, Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No. 1 in Rousbrugge, Belgium, within only a few weeks (88-89). She completely stocked the hospital with supplies that she paid for with her inheritance, and she assumed the position of director of the hospital and was therefore, able to hire her own nursing staff (89). Because the War Office in London at this time was completely male-dominated, it refused offers of help from women who wanted to contribute to the war through nursing (89). Borden’s wealth and authority enabled her to not only employ herself, but several other female nurses, including Ellen La Motte, and within six months of opening, her hospital had the “best survival rate of the entire front and Borden was told that wounded French soldiers pleaded to be sent to her hospital” (89-90). Both Borden and La Motte approached the task of nursing in very different, but equally resourceful ways, and while their similar (and for a time, shared) experiences in nursing is what often makes them interesting to study together, their entirely different backgrounds situated them differently in the task of nursing, and these differences affect how they represent war.

These differences in background are not always acknowledged in the existing criticism on women’s frontline nursing narratives. Early scholarship on First World War nursing from the
1980s through the early 2000s focused on bringing women’s voices into the conversation about the First World War. Many frame their approach very directly by stating their goal to “reclaim the Great War as an arena of female experience” (Smith, *Women’s Writing* 1), to “make women’s war writing more accessible to readers and students” (Sheldon x), to “rediscover the wealth of writing produced by women during and after the war” (Smith, *Battlefield* 3), and to “incorporate women into the picture and to locate their suffering” (Higgonet, *Lines* xxxii).

However, the focus on the broad category of “women’s experiences” or “women’s writing” risks universalizing women’s experiences of war in much the same way that the experience of war has traditionally been universalized from a male soldier perspective. Hutchison notes the prevalence of this issue in response to her decision to analyze Borden and La Motte’s narratives together: “[I]f research into women’s accounts of the First World War has achieved anything in recent years, it has been to expose the dangers of creating such types, of attempting to generalize about women’s experience of the conflict—indeed about anybody’s experience of it” (*The War* 150). Therefore, while we have reached a point in First World War scholarship where men’s and women’s narratives are both receiving critical attention, there is still a need to pay more attention to what situates any war narrative—regardless of author, degree of fictionality, genre, or

---

71 I am certainly not the first to point out this issue. In addition to Hutchinson’s criticism of this issue above, others point out how even in considering women’s perspectives of war, we neglect to consider important differences in experience. For example, see Sharon Ouditt’s *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (1994), Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate’s edited collection *Women’s Fiction and the Great War* (1997), Nancy Sloan Goldberg’s ‘*Woman, Your Hour is Sounding’: Continuity and Change in French Women’s Great War Fiction* (1999), and others. Additionally, other sources point out that this issue occurs even when we focus on nursing narratives of the First World War specifically. First, scholarship on women’s nursing narratives often neglects to distinguish between the experiences of professional nurses and amateur, volunteer nurses, which is important both because this affected the way the nurse was treated and received in war, and because it in part determined the way the nurses would respond to traumatic instances (Hallett and Fell 3-4). Additionally, the nursing narratives that are written about are largely those of middle or upper-class volunteer nurses, and therefore, do not represent a wide range of perspectives, even in this narrow category (Hallett 327). Others point to how increasing scholarship on Borden and La Motte’s narratives makes their works canonical in contemporary discussions of the First World War, while other, lesser-known women writers of the time still do not gain enough critical attention (Potter 51).
setting—within specific occasions for telling, and how that occasion shapes the narrative itself. This shifts the focus away from locating narrative markers of gender difference and toward an approach that recognizes the authority of these narratives separately from assumptions about a group or category to which they belong. Our impulse to categorize narratives as fitting in with a specific perspective or representation of war not only implies universality of the war experience, but also implies that an individual narrative is easily assessable according to standards established by the whole. Even arguing that a specific narrative type represents something differently than others in its category risks assuming these same standards.

The study of women’s First World War nursing narratives seems to have followed, more or less, the same trajectory of feminist approaches to the study of narrative, known as feminist narratology, over the last several decades—from disrupting established perspectives through the inclusion of women’s voices, to seeking out markers of difference that establish the authority of women’s perspectives separately from men’s, to looking toward a method of understanding women’s narratives that does not rely on universalizing experiences or stereotypes. In *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (2006), Ruth E. Page notes that in the 1980s, the field was seeing a shift in the definition and purpose of narratology, and that this occurred at the same time that feminist narratology was introduced (3). She argues that the shift from classical approaches to narratology, to what David Herman terms “postclassical narratology,” was ushered in partially because of the inclusion of feminist perspectives (45). While classical narratology valued an abstract, universal system of structuralist approaches to narrative in all its forms and functions, postclassical narratology moved toward a broader, interdisciplinary approach that embraced other analytical frameworks and “matters of meaning, context and evaluation” (2-5). Specifically, she credits Susan S. Lanser’s “Toward a Feminist Narratology”
(1986) as being the first to disrupt classical narratology with a feminist point of view, but argues that contemporary narratology must move beyond Lanser’s approach (45).

Lanser’s article begins by laying out her task to “ask whether feminist criticism, and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods and insights of narratology and whether narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understandings of feminist criticism and the experience of women’s texts” (342). This relationship between feminism and narratology is important because, as she explains, “virtually no work in the field of narratology has taken gender into account either in designing a canon or in formulating questions and hypotheses. This means, first of all, that the narratives which have provided the foundation for narratology have either been men’s texts or texts treated as men’s texts” (343). While Lanser’s proposal ushered in new feminist perspectives on the study of narratives, it is the issue underlying the idea of women’s texts being “treated as men’s texts” that Page criticizes—the suggestion that women’s writing is markedly different from men’s. Lanser’s argument is that narratology may offer a framework for “exploring one of the most complex and troubling questions for feminist criticism: whether there is indeed a ‘woman’s writing’ and/or a female tradition, whether men and women do write differently” (346). Page notes that this approach aligns with the values of second wave feminism insofar as it emphasizes women’s differences in an effort to incorporate their voices into a canon where it was previously absent (46-47). However, this perspective would now be understood as problematic because it suggests that gender is biological rather than socially constructed (47)—that women inherently communicate differently in writing than men, and that there are identifiable markers of such difference. Page also criticizes Lanser’s approach because it not only ignores the distinction between author and narrator in the study of writing, but also portrays women as one universal group through its
Lanser’s approach, which was understandably flawed in its newness, was built upon by several scholars. In *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse and the Victorian Novel* (1989), Robyn Warhol does not abandon the idea of locating gendered markers in narrative entirely, but views these markers as being a reflection of gender as a social construct instead of sexual difference (ix). She argues that "To say that women don't write like men is to place men at a normative center and women in the margins; to say that women write differently from men is to decenter the observation slightly, but this formulation still retains men's writing as the standard against which the difference of women's writing must be defined" (9). Additionally, she views the relationship between narratology and feminism as beneficial to one another, as Lanser does, but argues for an expanded use of it by “augment[ing] narratology with history, by placing differences [that might occur among structures in men’s and women’s texts] in context: that is, to consider their relation to the culture’s concept of gender differences at the time the text in question was written” (16). Lanser’s later work, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992) expands on and revises some of her ideas to include both social context and narrative form. She moves away from analyzing markers of sexual difference and toward analyzing the conditions that shape women’s authority in given historical periods, and how that authoritative voice translates to narrative: “I am postulating that the authority of a given voice or text is produced from a conjunction of social and rhetorical properties. Discursive authority… is produced interactively; it must therefore be characterized with respect to specific receiving communities” (6). Similarly, Kathy Mezei’s edited collection *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (1996) features essays that explore how feminist narratology can be used to elucidate the narrative strategies at work in women’s writing that is
“subversive, evasive, or perplexing” (1). She argues that this approach helps deconstruct “sites of ambiguity, indeterminacy, and transgression in aspects of narrative and in the sexuality and gender of author, narrator, character, and reader” (2), which furthers the use of feminist narratology to include reader-centered approaches.

Feminist narratology today continues to broaden and expand its functions. Ruth E. Page’s approach also centers around how women’s texts are informed by socially constructed concepts of gender, but adds that the sociocultural context in which a text is written affects not only content, but the structure of the narrative itself (72). In this era of what she calls “postmodern feminist narratology” (173), there are still no “universalized conclusions” (179). On the contrary, the decades of work done within the field shows that “there is no unequivocal relationship between narrative form and gender” (179). Finally, she calls for ways in which the field can be further expanded, by becoming more interdisciplinary and intersectional (183-184). Interestingly, Warhol and Lanser’s recent edited collection *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (2015), seems to be opening up the field in exactly those ways. The collected essays bring together perspectives from narrative theorists, “scholars of literature, performance studies, biography, and popular culture,” on feminism, queer studies, and narratology, which includes considerations of “women, men, bi-, trans- and gender-queer people across other diversities of culture, race, ethnicity, class, age, (dis)ability, religion, and nationality (3). This is a clearly interdisciplinary and intersectional approach that also acknowledges that these are not the only ways in which the field can be expanded.\(^2\) As mentioned, this evolution of feminist

---

\(^2\) This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of contributions to feminist narratology. These are, however, the texts that most strongly impacted the development of the field. For a more expansive representation of early sources, see Mezei’s “Select Bibliography on Feminist Narratology” in *Ambiguous Discourse* (269-272). For a representation of where the field is moving today, see the collected essays in Warhol and Lanser’s *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (2015).
narratology seems to have occurred alongside the criticism of women’s nursing narratives of the First World War, which speaks to a larger movement in literary studies to continually revise and improve our methods of analyzing texts by women. The need to resist readings of women’s nursing narratives that either reinforce stereotypes, universalize the experiences of nurses, or that neglect intersectional aspects of her identity, is important to moving the field of First World War scholarship forward. Moving toward readings that emphasize the nurses’ situatedness in sociocultural contexts that shaped their experiences and grounding analyses in the ways in which their narratives, in turn, communicate those experiences to the reader, help to consider how nursing narratives shift our understanding of the First World War—not just because of the sex of their authors, but because of the ways in which liminal situatedness of such narratives requires us to resist the hegemonic discourse of war.

**Occasions for Telling:**

It is not only the nurses’ gendered experiences during this time period that affects the content and construction of their narratives, but also, as mentioned above, their situatedness in a liminal space of war that allows them to critique the mechanisms of both the homefront and the frontline. It is not surprising, then, that in the introductions to their narratives, Borden and La Motte each suggest the ways in which they will expose the reader to a new narrative of war, while also suggesting that the reader’s expectations have been informed by other narrative conventions. Borden’s introduction begins by noting that she has “not invented anything in this book” and that the book is titled *The Forbidden Zone* because “the strip of land immediately behind the zone of fire where I was stationed went by that name in the French Army” (3). This both anticipates the reader’s familiarity with both fictional and nonfictional war narratives, and
situates the reader within a space that is reserved for select observers, to which readers will now have access through her experiences. She continues:

To those who find these impressions confused, I would say that they are fragments of great confusion. Any attempt to reduce them to order would require artifice on my part and would falsify them. To those on the other hand who find them unbearably plain, I would say that I have blurred the bare horror of facts and softened the reality in spite of myself, not because I wished to do so, but because I was incapable of a nearer approach to the truth. (3)

Here, Borden hits on a crucial issue with readers’ expectations of war narratives, which has been one major focus of this project, and that is the impossible standard that war narratives are meant to live up to by both representing reality clearly and accurately, while not representing reality so much as to be uninteresting. Though it is easy to assume that Borden’s “incababilit[y] of a nearer approach to the truth,” is meant to communicate an inability to represent traumatic events,73 the rest of the introduction suggests that the fragments communicate a sense of reality that adequately renders her experience of war, and no one else’s, and therefore, that they cannot be represented any more realistically. She ends the introduction in support of this point: “I have dared to dedicate these pages to the polius74 who passed through our hands during the war, because I believe they would recognise the dimmed reality reflected in these pictures. But the book is not meant for them. They know, not only everything that is contained in them, but all the

---

73 This argument has been made, for example, by Angela K. Smith in The Second Battlefield, who states that Borden’s use of fragments “provide the most effective way to articulate the unspeakable,” although she also suggests that the use of fragments may be an instance of “accidental modernism” (85). This argument is problematic because, as I have mentioned, trauma is not inherently unspeakable.

74 A word referring to French infantrymen. Translated, it means “hairy men,” but this is a term of endearment rather than insult.
rest that can never be written” (3). The passages are, therefore, meant to render the experience of war—in all of its confusion, moments of horror, and boredom—to those who did not experience it, affirming the goal of including the reader in this representation of reality.

La Motte’s introduction notes a similar intention. She foregrounds the experience of war as encompassing both action and boredom: “This war has been described as ‘Months of boredom, punctuated by moments of intense fright.’ The writer of these sketches has experienced many ‘months of boredom,’ in a French military hospital, situated ten kilometres behind the lines, in Belgium” (xiii). Though she goes on to also address the “moments of intense fright,” she notes that her narrative is concerned more with the instances in between such moments: “But when there is little or no action, there is a stagnant place, and in a stagnant place there is much ugliness. Much ugliness is churned up in the wake of mighty, moving forces. We are witnessing a phase in the evolution of humanity, a phase called War—and the slow, onward progress stirs up the slime in the shallows, and this is the Backwash of War” (xiii-xiv). This metaphor, that gives the narrative its title, again draws attention to what happens in the spatiotemporal in-between of war. She uses this to not only explain the fragmented nature of the narrative (and her goal to represent experiences that are typically overlooked) but also to suggest that the truest narrative of war exists in the in-between. The metaphor continues: “There are many little lives foaming up in the backwash. They are loosened by the sweeping current, and float to the surface, detached from their environment, and one glimpses them, weak, hideous, repellant… By examining the things cast up in the backwash, we can gauge the progress of humanity” (xiv). It is the stories that are overlooked that represent the totalizing effects of war, and La Motte’s positionality in the war is what exposes her, and her readers, to them.

One of the key ways that these narratives subvert our expectations of war is by
communicating experiences in a way that gives the reader access to the inner workings of war. Both Borden and La Motte use autodiegetic narrators, which are first-person narrators who are also the main characters of the storyworld, and internal focalization, in which the events of the narrative are filtered through one perspective. Because both Borden and La Motte render their experiences through a constructed narrative form, the narrator is a tool that allows for a retrospective interpretation of events that occurred. This kind of narration gives the reader a sense of immediacy to the action unfolding, while still being layered over with the rhetorical design of the present-tense author—the nurses who actually experienced the events. The most intense and memorable example of how this narrative mode is used in each narrative is in the story of a soldier who attempted suicide, which is an experience that both women shared, and is therefore represented in both narratives, albeit in very different ways. These two different representations of the same event give perhaps the best insight into how each narrative is rhetorically constructed in a way that captures the uncanniness of these liminal spaces of war as each nurse experienced them. La Motte’s narrative begins by relating this story in a fragment named “Heroes:”

When he could stand it no longer, he fired a revolver up through the roof of his mouth, but he made a mess of it. The ball tore out his left eye, and then lodged somewhere under his skill, so they bundled him into an ambulance and carried him, cursing and screaming, to the nearest field hospital… To save his life, he must reach the hospital without delay, and if he was bounced to death jolting along at breakneck speed, it did not matter. That was understood. He was a deserter, and discipline must be maintained. Since he had failed in the job, his life must be saved, he must be nursed back to health, until he was well enough to be stood up against a wall and shot. This is War. Things like this also
happen in peace time, but not so obviously. (3-4)
This passage is shocking in its clinical way of describing injury and the possibly of death. However, the circumstances surrounding this soldier’s injuries make this much more unsettling than detailed descriptions of injury—the soldier not only attempted suicide, which is an element of war rarely represented, but will now have his injuries cared for only so that he can be tried, and likely executed, for desertion.

The nurse narrator in this opening passage is immediately understood as authoritative and experienced, much like La Motte herself. She is fully immersed in the way that war operates, and without anyone telling her so, she knows what the consequences will be for this soldier. Yet the narrator clearly is not relating these experiences to an audience with the same level of knowledge. Her point that “Things like this also happen in peace time, but not so obviously,” presupposes the reader’s horror and communicates that such instances in war are not unprecedented in peace time, but that they are so “obvious” during war, because it is a symptom of the way that war relies on concepts of heroism, discipline, and, I would argue, masculinity, to function. While the tone of the narration has been described as “detached,” this does not necessarily reflect a lack of care for the soldier, but rather, reflects the feeling of futility that the nurse narrator is communicating to the reader. For example, in what follows, there are a number of statements made by the narrator about the soldier’s actions that would seem to be harsh judgements about the soldier’s cowardice, but they are clearly a criticism of both the regulations in place, and the ways of thinking that would deem the man’s actions as “cowardly,” and that would see his suffering as an inconvenience.

75 La Motte’s narrative voice has been described as “detached” by Sheldon (69) and Smith (The Second 80), and as “marked by reserve and irony” by Hutchison (The War 150).
Once arrived at the hospital, the narrator notes that the soldier “behaved abominably,” “was very disagreeable,” and was not “reasonable” (4). Then, when the soldier gets blood on “the immaculate white uniform of the Directrice” (4), the narrator recounts that “It was disgusting. They told him it was La Directrice, and that he must be careful. For an instant he stopped his raving, and regarded her fixedly with his remaining eye, then took aim afresh, and again covered her with his coward blood. Truly it was disgusting” (4-5). This passage is written in such a way that, though focalized through the narrator’s perspective, it does not necessarily claim these judgements as her own. The facetious tone with which the narrator describes how one could possibly be seen as “disagreeable” in this soldier’s situation, and how “they” (presumably, the other doctors and nurses in the room) react to the soldier getting blood on the “immaculate” uniform, suggests that this entire experience has been colored over with critique. The nurse’s dual positionality in this situation highlights the distributed spatiotemporality of war—the image of the soldier’s blood on the nurse’s “immaculate” uniform draws clear attention to the ways in which the violence done to the soldier’s body comes into conflict with a temporality of war where something as trivial as cleanliness is valued, even in the presence of such an injury. Though it is possible that real people that La Motte worked with reacted this way, it is equally possible that these figures are stylized versions of real people that are designed to stand-in for a system of values with which La Motte does not agree—and that system is one that wastes time and resources to uphold a dichotomy of heroism and cowardice among soldiers.

The narrator emphasizes this waste when she notes the difficulty with which the man was put under anesthesia: “As the Médicin Major stood there patiently fingering the hairs on his hairy arms, he calculated the amount of ether that was expended—five cans of ether, at so many francs a can—however, the ether was a donation from America, so it did not matter. Even so, it was
wasteful” (5-6). Here, the narrator’s impressions of the doctor’s actions are clearly her own and not his, as she notes the waste in resources that keep this man alive, despite his wishes, and despite his likely punishment. She goes on to reinforce that the efforts made to keep the man alive involved not only a very advanced operation, but constant care and observation following the surgery, and this leads her to reflect on the role that she plays in this system:

He was so different from the other patients, who wanted to live. It was a joy to nurse them… By expert surgery, by expert nursing some of these were to be returned to their homes again, réformés, mutilated for life, a burden to themselves and to society; others were to be nursed back to health, to a point at which they could again shoulder eighty pounds of marching kit, and be torn to pieces again on the firing line. It was a pleasure to nurse such as these. It called forth all one’s skill, all one’s humanity. But to nurse back to health a man who was to be court-martialled and shot, truly that seemed a dead-end occupation. (7)

While the narrator acknowledges the rewards that can come from the skill of nursing, this passage does more than suggest that the skill is wasted on someone who is to be executed for desertion. It also points out that the doctors and nurses are tasked with healing patients that will end up victims of the circumstances of war no matter what—whether permanently disabled, or made well enough to return to the front. The narrator’s “joy” of nursing such cases does not suggest support for this fact, but actually the opposite—it communicates the only means that she has of exhibiting her “skill” and “humanity” in such a hopeless system. At the same time, she does place value on wanting to live, versus wanting to die. To a degree, it does not matter if the narrator (or even La Motte herself) believes that suicide in war is cowardly, or if she correctly interprets the soldier’s desire to die, because either way, what is represented here is the cruelty of
keeping a man alive who the system has already determined is not worth living, and it is that knowledge that truly reflects the sense of futility.

Toward the end of the fragment, the narrative switches from an internal focalized perspective to a more distanced narration, when the narrator ceases to narrate her own experiences and instead is referred to in the third person as “the night nurse” (8). The passage more directly recounts some of the issues underlying the earlier sections: “One night, about midnight, she took her candle and went down the ward, reflecting… How pitiful they were, these little soldiers, asleep. How irritating they were, these little soldiers awake. Yet how sternly they contrasted with the man who had attempted suicide. Yet did they contrast, after all? Were they finer, nobler, than he? (8) The narrator goes on to describe the ways in which each soldier in the ward, in his own way, violates the understanding of honor and bravery that they are expected to operate under. As Hutchison points out, this both questions the concept of heroism altogether (what is a hero?), but flips the idea of heroism on its head, suggesting that in a context as hopeless as this, might the soldier’s attempts to escape it be seen as heroic? (The War 152). She continues: “Wherein lay the difference? Was it not all a dead-end occupation, nursing back to health men to be patched up and returned to the trenches, or a man to be patched up, court-martialled and shot? The difference lay in the Ideal…The others had ideals, and fought for them… And suddenly she saw that these ideals were imposed from without—that they were compulsory” (11-12). If there were any doubt that the nurse narrator from earlier in the passage was questioning the system in which she operates, then the third-person narration directly states that here. The fact that this first fragment of the narrative ends with such a direct questioning of both the narrator’s own assumptions, and by extension, questions the reader’s assumptions, establishes the narrative as one designed to invite questioning. Though maybe not in the way that
one expects, the earlier parts of the fragment repeat many of the ideals of heroism and bravery that war narratives, and war itself, operates on. However, the ending clearly rejects these ideals as ones by which to understand war, and therefore, forces us to confront why we would value the imposition of those ideals in war narratives.

Borden’s representation of this same experience accomplishes the same purpose, but in such a different way that it supports the need to interpret these narratives by their situatedness in specific occasions for telling. Borden’s fragment about the soldier’s attempted suicide is named “Rosa,” and interestingly, this was not one of the fragments originally included in the version of the narrative that she tried to have published in 1917 (Hutchison, The War 91). This fragment was one of the five that were added to the 1929 version of the narrative (91), and though the stylized nature of Borden’s narrative already clearly demonstrates that it a constructed version of her experiences, the fact that “Rosa” is a product of a decade of reflection is an important factor to the narrative design, especially considering her choice to add it in after the initial publication attempt. Unlike La Motte’s “Heroes,” which is the first fragment in the collection, Borden’s “Rosa,” comes almost exactly in the middle of hers, and is the last fragment in “Part One: The North,” which precedes “Part Two: The Somme.” It is worth noting that “Rosa” and one other added fragment, “Enfant de Malheur,” which comes right before it, end Part One of the narrative. The remaining three added fragments—“Blind,” “The Priest and the Rabbi,” and “The Two Gunners”—are placed at the end of Part Two. Additionally, each of these five added sketches is followed in the table of contents by the qualifier “A Story” (i.e. “Rosa: A Story”), while none of the other original ones are. These details would seem to suggest that the added fragments serve an important connective function in the overall narrative, and that Borden signaled their constructed nature to the reader so that they stood apart from the rest in the way that they
represent the war.

The opening of “Rosa” does read more like a fictionalized narrative in that it keeps the reader in suspense of the soldier’s situation, which may be meant to mirror Borden’s own unfamiliarity with soldier suicide due to her inexperience. After the narrator describes the details of the how the soldier is brought in and begins to be cared for, she overhears that the soldier was “‘Shot through the mouth. Revolver bullet lodged in the brain’” (64). There is then a shift from dialogue to internal focalization of the narrator as she questions the soldier’s injury, which has not yet been attributed to any cause:

But how? I wondered. How queer, I thought. Shot in the mouth—through the roof of the mouth. He must have been asleep in the trench with his mouth open. And I imagined him there, sprawling in the muddy ditch, an exhausted animal with his great stupid mouth open; and I saw a figure crawl in beside him and put the barrel of a revolver between his big yellow teeth. Fool, I thought. You fool—you big hulking brute beast—going to sleep like that in utter careless weariness. But no, it was impossible. In this war such things didn’t happen. Men were killed haphazard… but not shot nearly through the roof of the mouth with a revolver. (64-65)

This is certainly not the authoritative and experienced narrator that we encounter in La Motte’s “Heroes,” but is rather, the amateur’s perspective, layered over with retrospective knowledge. The narrator clearly identifies these as her own thoughts, but the “I” in this passage is likely both the stylized narrator and the author Borden, who knows that these thoughts are “impossible,” and has clearly represented the narrator’s lack of experience. It is not until the narrator is told that the man attempted suicide that she realizes it, and even then, she does not understand why.

Borden’s representation of this event oscillates between dialogue of the doctors and
nurses, and passages of internally focalized reflection, which clearly distinguishes the events unfolding in the scene from the narrator’s reflections. When the nurse is informed that the soldier will be “court-martialed and shot, Madame, for attempted suicide” (66), the narrator immediately reacts: “‘Don’t do it!’ I shouted suddenly. ‘Leave him alone.’ I was appalled by his immense helplessness…They didn’t hear me. Perhaps I had not shouted aloud. ‘You don’t understand!’ I cried. ‘You’ve made a mistake. It wasn’t fear. It was something else. He had a reason, a secret. It’s locked in there in his chest. Leave him alone with it. You can’t bring him back now to be shot again’” (66). Here, the critique of how this soldier is treated is much more direct, and also much more distinguishable from the narration of the experience itself, unlike La Motte’s representation. It is unlikely that a narrator who was, only pages before, completely ignorant of the fact that the soldier had attempted suicide and why he had done it would have a sudden epiphany about the of nature trauma, and the potential motivations for suicide that are suggested here. Although, this seems to be precisely the point.

Since Borden added this fragment into the 1929 edition of the narrative, it is likely that she would have had much more of an understanding of the prevalence of such traumas because of their increased visibility in the decade following the end of the war. By constructing her narrator with this knowledge, Borden acknowledges the increasing public attention being paid to soldier’s trauma, and ensures that her reader is informed by that knowledge as well. The rest of the fragment after this is strongly informed by an understanding that the soldier’s attempted

76 The year that Borden’s narrative was eventually released is within the period of time that Modris Eksteins, in *Rites of Spring* (1989), refers to as the “‘war boom’ of 1929-1930” (277). Spurred on by the successful publication of Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, this was the time when “The sudden public interest in the war meant that moldy manuscripts, previously rejected by wary publishers who thought the war would not sell, were now rushed into print. New books, too, were quickly commissioned and quickly written” (277). Because of the lack of understanding that traumatized soldiers encountered upon returning home from war, the narrative of the battlefield was largely hidden from the public eye until the late 1920s (Eksteins 276).
suicide was not an act of cowardice, but a reflection of trauma. The nurse narrator humanizes the soldier by giving much more detail about her care for him—even in her checking to “see if, happily, he were dead” (67), and by recounting his repeated mumbling of the name “Rosa,” who she assumes is a woman he loves (68). When told by the General that the man has to be executed for his attempted suicide, because there are “epidemics of suicide in the trenches” and without the punishment “the thing would spread” (68), the narrator says, “I argued. I explained that this man was not afraid of being killed, but of not being killed, that his luck was out when the enemy missed him; that he had been kept waiting too long… and a woman called Rosa let him down, or perhaps she died. Perhaps he simply wanted to go to her” (68). Her recognition of both the trauma of trench warfare, and also of the added stress of separation from loved ones, is a complex recognition of the soldier’s experience. In this way, Borden’s narrative is doubly-situated in two different occasions for telling. The earlier fragments, written closer to Borden’s own experiences of the events they represent, are situated within that time and communicate her own liminal positionality in the space of war. The later fragments are situated in a different time—one in which the public discussion of the war is acceptable again, and where the flawed understanding of war trauma is beginning to be realized. These additional fragments ensure that the narrative is part of the contemporary conversations that it is situated in.

Perhaps the most striking difference between Borden’s version and La Motte’s version of this experience is the way that the fragments end. La Motte’s ends with a transition into a third-person narration that guides the reader in the overarching criticism of war that the rest of the narrative reflects. In her narrative, the last that we hear of the soldier is that his care required a lot of supplies that were wasted on a man who was to be killed. In Borden’s narrative, the story of “Rosa” has a clear ending, and one that involves the narrator. After criticizing the fact that the
soldier will be executed for his actions to the general, the narrator states: “I didn’t dare go back to Rosa. I went to the door of the hut and called the nurse… He’s killing himself in spite of us all, I thought. He’s succeeding… Given the chance, he’ll pull it off. Well, he’ll have his chance. I almost laughed. I had been a fool to go to the General and plead for his life. That was the last thing he wanted me to do for him. That was just the wrong thing” (69). Her recognition that the man wants to die, and the fact that he knows the sentence for his “crime” (67), leads her to instruct the other nurse on duty to stop replacing the bandages that he is continually tearing off, therefore, letting him die if he wishes. The next morning, as “Rosa” is close to dying, she visits him and “detect[s] a look of recognition in his eyes, perhaps even a faint look of gratitude” (70), which further cements the nurse narrator’s role in allowing him to die. Whether this is something that Borden really did, something like what she did, or simply a complete invention by the author Borden who wished to further acknowledge the man’s suffering by giving him the symbolic agency to control his own death, is impossible to know. Both Higonnet and Hutchison point out that there are no records of the women’s actions in the war that could fill in the gaps of what they have written (Higonnet x, Hutchison 148)—this is perhaps one of the reasons why they are written about together so often. However, each narrative communicates an experience of the war to the reader in a way that seeks to disrupt the overarching assumptions and idealistic beliefs that shield the outside world from what war is like. As with the other texts discussed so far, the degree to which the narratives are invented or represent real lived experiences does not matter. Each narrative is situated in a specific occasion for telling that dictates the way that the narrative is constructed to communicate the experience of war to the reader. Because of the nurse narrators’ dual positionality in the war, these narratives demonstrate how spatiotemporally fragmented the experience of war is.
CHAPTER FIVE: RENDERING VISUAL NARRATIVES OF WAR: FRANK HURLEY’S COMPOSITE PHOTOGRAPHY AND BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER’S CARTOONS

None but those who have endeavoured can realise the insurmountable difficulties of portraying a modern battle by the camera. To include the event in a single negative. I have tried and tried, but the results are hopeless… Now, if negatives are taken of all the separate incidents in the action and combined, some idea may then be gained of what a modern battle looks like.

Frank Hurley, “War Photography”

It was during these long, sad days that my mind suddenly turned on making sketches… It was nothing new for me to draw… Yet it was not until January 1915, that I had sufficiently resigned myself to my fate in the war, to let my mind turn to my only and most treasured hobby… I didn’t fight against it, and began by making a few pencil scribbles with a joke attached, and pinned them up in our cracked shell of a room. Jokes at the expense of our miserable surroundings they were.

Bruce Bairnsfather, Bullets and Billets

From August 23rd, 1917 to November 10th, 1917, James Francis (Frank) Hurley served as the official photographer to the Australian Imperial Forces (A.I.F.) in the Flanders region of Belgium—the location of some of the most devastating battles of the First World War. As the first person to be assigned this role, Hurley, along with another photographer, Lieutenant Hubert Wilkins (O’Keefe 5), were hired to photograph “an authentic experience of modern warfare” (Dixon and Lee xiii). At the time of his appointment, Hurley was already a famous photographer and was most known for his photography as part of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s 1914 Antarctic expedition, which left members stranded in Antarctica for almost two years after their ship became trapped in ice (O’Keefe 5). Because of this, Hurley not only missed the early years of the war, but until they were rescued, 77 he and the other members of the Antarctic expedition were

77 Hurley’s first mention of the war is in his diary on the day after their rescue, where he wrote that “The war news and multitudinous magazines and cablegrams furnished us with a profusion of data that will acquaint us with all the worlds [sic] doings to which we have been strangers” (Shackleton 31 Aug. 1916). The diary of one of the other men on the expedition, Thomas Orde Lee notes that during their time in Antarctica, most of them men assumed the war to already be over (Wyk para. 2).
unaware that a war had continued on during the time they were gone (5). Almost exactly one year after his rescue, Hurley was stationed along the Ypres salient in Flanders and began photographing the war. When he first arrived in France, en route to Belgium, he noted the way in which the evidence of war is difficult to locate on the homefront: “Soon the French coast came in sight… We had a particularly fine view just before entering the port of the beach, where great numbers of folk were bathing. Nothing seemed more distant than war, and had it not been for the great number of troops embarking and disembarking, everything was serenely peaceful” (Official 21 Aug. 1917). A few days later, he reflects on his first experience of seeing an active battlefield:

It’s the most awful and appalling sight I have ever seen. The exaggerated machinations of hell are here typified. Everywhere the ground is littered with bits of guns, bayonets, shells and men. Way down in one of these mine craters was an awful sight. There lay three hideous, almost skeleton decomposed fragments of corpses of German gunners. Oh, the frightfulness of it all. To think that these fragments were once sweethearts, may be, husbands or loved sons, and this was the end… Until my dying day I shall never forget this haunting glimpse down into the mine crater on Hill 60. (23 Aug. 1917)

Thus, Hurley’s first experiences of war were marked by the sharp contrast between the homefront and the frontline, and these initial impressions, which reflect the difficulty that he had reasoning out such horrors, would influence the ways in which he chose to render the war in photographic form.

In the earlier years of the war, another visual artist, Captain Bruce Bairnsfather, served in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in France and Belgium as a machine-gun officer (Bryant, “Bairnsfather” para. 4). Bairnsfather had a military education, but excelled most at art, even selling his first drawing at the age of 17 (para. 3). He ultimately chose to pursue a career in the
military, but failed both of the entrance exams for officer cadet school, and instead was commissioned into the Cheshire regiment, though he resigned shortly after to pursue art school (paras. 2-3). In 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, he rejoined his regiment and was quickly stationed in France, where he took part in the well-known “Christmas Truce” of 1914, in which Allied and German troops agreed to a ceasefire for the holiday, and even comingled, dined together, and played soccer. In one of his autobiographies, *Bullets and Billets* (1916), Bairnsfather recounts: “After months of vindictive sniping and shelling, this little episode came as an invigorating tonic, and a welcome relief to the daily monotony of antagonism. It did not lessen our ardour or determination; but just put a little human punctuation mark in our lives of cold and human hate… The whole spirit of Christmas seemed to be there” (73-74). Later, Bairnsfather goes on to note the contrast between these early years of the war and the later years: “People who read all these yarns of mine, and who have known the war in the later days, will say ‘Ah, how very different it was then to now.’ In my last experience in the war I have watched the enormous changes creeping in. The began about July, 1915… I found that much of the romance left the trenches” (124). Until he was injured and hospitalized in April of 1915 for shell-shock and damaged hearing (Bryant para. 4), the war that Bairnsfather experienced was one full of horrors and discomfort, but which was also characterized by a different mood from the later years—one that was more hopeful, and at times even jovial. It was during these earlier years that Bairnsfather began submitting his humorous cartoons about the conditions of war for...

---

78 Throughout, I will be referring to Bairnsfather’s work most often as “cartoons,” since that is the best medium to describe most of his work, and since that is how they are most often categorized. However, some of his work can arguably be considered “comics” since they contain more than one frame and align with Scott McCloud’s definition of comics as “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). It may also be possible that his work, which is most well-known for being collected into eight separate volumes of *Fragments from France*, and which uses the same familiar characters align with the “comic” medium because they can often be read and interpreted as a narrative whole.
publication to the magazine *The Bystander*, which started appearing in January of 1915. His work is credited with significantly boosting wartime morale among troops from both sides, and for the civilian public. The cartoons eventually gained such popularity that he was promoted to the position of “officer-cartoonist” and in February 1916, his work was collected in a paperback collection by *The Bystander* called *Fragments from France*, which was the first of eight volumes that were published (Bryant, “The Man” 57).

Frank Hurley’s photography and Bruce Bairnsfather’s cartoons are some of the most striking visual representations of the war because of the ways in which they subvert expectations of what war is like. In this final chapter, I will turn to visual narratives of war to further challenge the assumptions that we have about how war ought to be rendered in narrative form. Hurley’s photographs, which often used techniques such as composite photography, and staging, and reenactment, challenges our idea that photography is an objective, historically realistic art. Bairnsfather’s cartoons, which represent his experiences of the war in humorous ways, challenges assumptions that war cannot be rendered in humorous form, and that cartoons cannot serve as a meaningful mode of representation for a topic as somber as war. Admittedly, these are not entirely new concepts to audiences in 2018. Our widespread use of social media and the prevalence of photographic manipulation through editing or filtering has shaped our understanding of photography as a medium that does not necessarily reflect reality. Additionally, in recent years, cartoons and graphic novels have become increasingly valued as texts that engage with difficult topics. Graphic novels such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* or Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* demonstrate that this medium can be (auto)biographical and can engage with

---

79 Composite photography, or what Hurley referred to at the time as “combination printing” (O’Keefe 6), is the layering of several different photographic negatives to produce one photograph that shows all of the separate images in one.
historical topics such as the Holocaust or the Islamic Revolution. However, such visual narratives of the First World War are still rarely discussed alongside text-based narratives of the war. For example, there is no mention of either Hurley or Bairnsfather in Hynes’ *A War Imagined*, Leed’s *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, Keegan’s *The First World War*, or Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. There is a one-sentence mention of Bairnsfather in Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, but nothing of Hurley. The fact that these visual representations of war are not mentioned in the most well-known historical texts about the First World War proves, at best, that these representations have not received enough scholarly attention, and at worst, that they are not seen as having equal value as text-based narratives of war. I will argue that these texts, composed and released to the public during the war, demonstrate that the experience of war was communicated in various mediums and with varying levels of artistic representation, and therefore, that the value placed on realism in contemporary treatments of the war fails to accurately consider the variety of representational strategies that were at work at the time.

**The Narrativity of Visual Representations:**

Similar to the value placed on text-based narratives in the literary and historical tradition of the First World War, narratology has also not always been a field that engages with modes of representation in various medias. In her introduction to *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (2004), Marie-Laurie Ryan argues that although narratology was “conceived from its earliest days as a project that transcends disciplines and media,” it is only recently, “in a period of swelling interest in both comparative media studies and narrative” that attention has shifted to the study of narratives in transmedial form (1). While narratology has traditionally
focused on text-based or verbal/linguistic narratives, the study of narratives in various mediums is important because media does more than repackage verbal narratives—each medium requires different methods of interaction from the audience, and therefore, uses different, meaningful strategies of representation. The question surrounding narratives in all mediums, but especially those in non-literary or non-verbal/linguistic mediums is their degree of narrativity, or their ability to be “readily interpreted as a story” (Herman 135), and not as another form of representation. H. Porter Abbott argues that the concept of narrativity is disputed because there is “no definitive test that can tell us to what degree narrativity is present,” so narrative scholars tend to place emphasis on different elements of narrative that suggest narrativity to them (25).

However, Abbott points out that most scholars would agree that narrativity reflects a “set of qualities marking narrative” (Keen 121, qtd. in Abbott), and that narrativity can be measured to varying degrees (25).

David Herman expands on how narrativity might be measured by arguing that one of the ways that narratives exhibit higher degrees of narrativity is if they represent what it’s like to be in a storyworld-in-flux, or instances of world disruption. In evoking a storyworld, the degree to which a representation foregrounds a more or less marked (and thus noteworthy or tellable) disruption of the canonical or expected order of events is itself one of the factors or properties explaining how readily the representation can be interpreted as an instance of the text-type category narrative, versus, say, description” (135). In Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology (2014) Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon similarly argue that narrativity is related to the creation of storyworlds since “the concept of storyworld… captures the kind of mental representation that a text must evoke in order to qualify as a narrative” (3).

---

80 These concepts were discussed in chapter three.
Because this allows for potential of narrativity in any medium that creates a storyworld, and not just literary narratives, Ryan argues that the concept of storyworlds has a “place in the toolkit of media-conscious narratology” (“Story/Worlds/Media” 37). However, she also points out that different mediums evoke storyworlds in different ways that may affect interpretation: “We may also want to ask how the mental construction of storyworlds is affected by the types of signs that a medium uses… Language-based narratives require an extensive filling-in work because language speaks to the mind and not directly to the senses… Visual media, by contrast, saturate the senses and leave much less to the imagination” (42). It seems then, that visual media could exhibit less potential for narrativity if it resists imaginative interpretation either by providing too much or too little information.

Still images, such as photographs or cartoons, can, therefore, exhibit narrativity by evoking storyworlds or by triggering narrative worldmaking processes in very similar ways to textual narratives. One of the ways that this might occur is through the image’s suggestion of a spatiotemporal framework that the viewer contextualizes the image within. As Abbott points out, viewers automatically place static images within a temporal framework in order to account for the events that led up to the scene depicted (6-7). Images also rely on the “many narrative templates in our minds” to help viewers put the image into a context and make it into a story (8). Wendy Steiner similarly argues that there are several preconditions for what she calls “pictorial narrativity” that are very similar to the measures of narrativity in literary narratives (147). Though she is primarily analyzing the medium of painting, her conditions for high levels of pictorial narrativity translate well to most static images. These include the depiction of subjects engaging in some act (148), an indication of spatiotemporality (149), or more specifically, the indication of an ordering of events in a specific space (150). Werner Wolf’s recent essay expands
more on the concept of pictorial narrativity, positing that there is a difference between “indirect narrativity” and “direct narrativity” in single pictures (265). “Indirect narrativity” refers to images that, on their own, may be more descriptive than narrative, but when contextualized within an existing narrative text, such as a story to which the image refers, or cultural knowledge with which the viewer is familiar, exhibits indirect narrativity (265-266). By contrast, “direct narrativity” refers to a single picture that does not rely on a contextual framework to trigger narrative worldmaking processes (266). Examples of direct narrativity can include spatial juxtaposition that is meant to indicate temporal succession, visual cues in the image that trigger familiar experiences or that indicate that the figures in them are capable of consciousness, detailed spatial settings that indicate place and time to the reader, and events unfolding in that place and time (268-269).

While these approaches to assessing narrativity in visual media are effective for both photography and cartoons, several have recently laid out strategies for better understanding graphic narratives. For example, Herman points out several elements of graphic narratives that provide additional cues for narrative worldmaking. Because graphic narratives are multimodal in their combination of visual imagery and words, the storyworld is evoked by both visual and written cues and also by additional characteristics of the graphic narrative medium such as “the arrangement of characters in represented scenes, the shapes of speech balloons, and the representation of the scenes in panels that form part of larger sequences of images and textual

---

81 I am speaking broadly here about research on all types of graphic narratives, which would include graphic novels, comics, and cartoons, though, as mentioned above, Bairnsfather’s work fits most appropriately into the medium of cartoons, and occasionally comics.

82 Though the graphic narrative medium almost always relies on the combination of images and text, some other visual narratives do as well. For example, Hurley’s photography was almost always accompanied by captions that had the potential to trigger specific narrative worldmaking processes, so in this regard, his photography also relies on multimodal components.
elements” (107). In this regard, graphic narratives rely both on the combined meaning of words and images and on the ways that they are spatiotemporally arranged on the page or drawn to provide additional layers of meaning. Ryan points out that graphic narratives often rely on additional extradiegetic\textsuperscript{83} cues that impact interpretation, such as the way speech bubbles differentiate between speech or thought, the way the narrative is divided into frames that can impact the reader’s understanding of temporal sequencing, or the way that narrational text is displayed differently from speech or thought (39). While almost all mediums rely on extradiegetic elements to build a storyworld—some narrators in literary narratives, the camera in films, or the menus in video games (37-39)—graphic narratives rely heavily on readers’ ability to distinguish between extradiegetic and intradiegetic elements, and use them together to make meaning in the act of interpretation.

While there is no established rubric by which to assess the narrativity of textual or visual representations, there are a couple of key points about narrativity that I will rely on in my analysis of Hurley’s photography and Bairnsfather’s cartoons. The first is that, while it is likely possible for visual representations to have no narrativity, I resist the argument that the visual narratives being discussed here could have no narrativity. Since they have been clearly created for an audience, and with the purpose of representing the experience of war at a time where viewers would not have been exposed to the experience of warfare, the subject matter of the narratives alone evokes a readily interpretable storyworld. While some of the images have lower levels of narrativity than others, or rely on what Wolf calls “indirect narrativity” (265), they still serve as meaningful representations of the war in specific contexts. The second is that a key

\textsuperscript{83} Cues that impact the way that a narrative is presented, but are not within the storyworld, or, intradiegetic (“Story/Worlds/Media” 37).
component to assessing the narrativity of visual representations is the viewer’s ability to interpret the image as existing within a spatiotemporal context within a storyworld. I will also argue that the spatiotemporal context outside of the storyworld is relevant to determining narrativity as well—the ways in which the viewers physically interact in space and time with these images can also make them narrative in nature, even if the images themselves would not seem to be otherwise. The circumstances under which viewers would have interacted with these narratives—in photographic exhibitions or in magazines—would have meant that the narratives were contextualized in specific ways and alongside other content that would have invited viewers to understand the images as unfolding within the spatiotemporal framework of the storyworld to which they belonged.

**Frank Hurley’s Photographic Narratives of War:**

As mentioned, the first days of Hurley’s role as the official photographer to the A.I.F. were marked by an immediate and abrupt immersion into dangerous and horrific battlefields. Within two weeks of arriving, Hurley was so accustomed to the violence of the war that he wrote “I’m afraid that I’m becoming callous to many of the extraordinary sights and sounds that take place around me, and things which astonished me when I landed, now seem quite commonplace” (Official 4 Sept. 1917). By late September, Hurley was frustrated by the fact that he was continually risking his life to capture images of war that, when developed, failed to capture the war in the way that he was experiencing it: “I’m sick of being amongst killed and wounded and hearing that hellish din of cannonade and dodging shells… for to get pictures one must go into the hottest and even then come out disappointed. To get War pictures of striking interest and sensation is like attempting the impossible” (26 Sept. 1917). It was at this point that Hurley
decided that, in order to capture the effects of war—in all of its simultaneous chaos—in photographic form, he would have to compose several images together to make a whole scene. However, Captain Charles Bean, Official Australian War Records historian and the man who hired Hurley, strongly disagreed with this artistic vision. Bean believed that photographs of war should not be altered, and referred to composite images as “fakes” (qtd. in Dixon and Lee xxi). Hurley strongly believed that this representation of war was necessary, and immediately resigned from the position:

Had a lengthy discussion with Bean re pictures [sic] for exhibition and publicity purposes. Our Authorities here will not permit me to pose any pictures or indulge in any original means to secure them. They will not allow composite printing of any description, even though such be [sic] accurately titled, nor will they permit clouds to be inserted in a picture. This absolutely takes all possibilities of producing pictures from me. I have decided to tender my resignation at once. I conscientiously consider it but right to illustrate to the public the things our fellows do and how war is conducted. They can only be got by printing a result from a number of negatives or reenactment. This is out of reason and they prefer to let all these interesting episodes pass. It is unfair to our boys and I conscientiously could not undertake to continue the work. (1 Oct. 1917)

A few days later Hurley was given permission to make six composite images as part of his collection and withdrew his resignation. In addition to feeling that the composite images would most effectively communicate the experience of war to the public, he noted that the images “will be no delusion on the public as they will be distinctly titled, setting forth the number of negatives used, etc. All elements will be taken in action” (6 Oct. 1917). For Hurley, composite images were not a violation of the truth, but a combination of several truths into one.
Hurley’s most famous composite photograph, known most often by the title “The Raid” (fig. 5.1), was created for the Australian Official War Photographs and Pictures exhibition in the Grafton Galleries in London, which took place from May through September of 1918, and featured several of Hurley’s images of the First World War in France, Belgium, Egypt, and Palestine, including four composite images (Wishart). The image is, by far, his most ambitious composite. It depicts both ground and air warfare, giving the impression of a significant battle in action, but the image is actually made up of 12 separate negatives that were taken by Hurley at different times. The image reflects Hurley’s goal to communicate a narrative of war rather than a static image of one—though these events did not occur simultaneously, the photo gives the impression that they did, and therefore, represents a series of events unfolding in time in a way

![Figure 5.2: Hurley's composite, "The Raid"](image)

84 The photograph went by several other titles throughout its various exhibits. It has also been titled “A Raid,” “Over the Top,” “A Hop Over,” and “An Episode after the Battle of Zonnebeke.” Titles for Hurley’s photos varied both because he renamed them for different exhibits, and because in later exhibits, the captions for the photos were not written by the photographers themselves, and descriptive captions were given to them instead (Wyk para. 10).
that a single frame could not have. Interestingly, Hurley often presented his composite images alongside their originals, meaning that some of the same images represented the war in different ways. For example, one of the main images of soldiers in the foreground of “The Raid” was presented in Hurley’s 1919 exhibition of war photographs in the Kodak Salon in Sydney under the title “A wave of Infantry going over the top to resist a counter attack, Zon-nebeke” (fig. 5.2) while the image of the airplanes was also presented separately under “Shrapnel bursting amongst reconnoitering planes” (fig. 5.3). (Hurley, “Catalog”). In the same exhibit, “The Raid” appeared under the title “An episode after the Battle of Zonnebeke,” which suggests that Hurley both wanted to communicate the origin of the original images that the composite depicts, while also placing them into a new narrative context where they appear to be parts of a single battle unfolding in time.

When “The Raid” was first displayed to the general public during the Grafton Galleries exhibit, Hurley noted that it measured “over 20 ft. x 15’6” high,” and that the “whole picture is

---

85 The image was presented with the caption: “Australian infantry moving forward to resist a counter attack. On the extreme right, a machine brought down in flames is burning fiercely. Our advance is supported by bombing planes, whilst the enemy is supporting his attack with a heavy barrage” (“Catalog”), which partially includes the titles of the images that make up the composite, ensuring that the original event that the images capture is communicated.
realistic of battle, the atmospheric effects of battle smoke are particularly fine” (26-28 May 1918). The size of the image when displayed in London (fig. 5.4) would have been significantly taller than anyone standing in front of it, giving the impression that one was standing on the battlefield alongside the soldiers, with the aircraft overhead, and therefore, immersing the embodied viewer in the storyworld. The particular scenes of battle that Hurley chose to make up the composite would have immersed the viewer in a scene of intense and simultaneous action, which Hurley felt was indicative of an experience of war that both he and the soldiers experienced, but which he could not capture in a single image. In an article published in 1919, Hurley explains why he felt that conventional photography (at least at this time) was not adequate for capturing the experience of being on a battlefield:

   Everything is on such a vast scale. Figures are scattered—the atmosphere is dense with haze and smoke—shells will not burst where required—yet the whole elements of a picture are there could they but be brought together and condensed. The battle is in full swing, the men are just going over the top—and I snap! A fleet of bombing planes is flying low, and a barrage bursts all around. On developing my plate, there is disappointment! All I find is the record of a few figures advancing from trenches—and a background of haze. Nothing could be more unlike a battle. It might be a rehearsal in a paddock. (“War Photography”)

Composite photographs like “The Raid,” not only have the ability to capture the moments that pass before the photographer can capture them, but they also communicate the ways in which the soldier in battle would have encountered multiple sources of immediate danger, all simultaneously unfolding around him. In the same article, Hurley writes that during the exhibit, he would dress up in civilian clothes and mingle among the patrons to observe how soldier-
patrons in particular reacted to the composites: “I often mingled with the “diggers”\textsuperscript{86} to hear their scathing criticism. When I find they approve and pass favourable judgement, then I feel convinced such impression composites are justified” ("War Photography"). Hurley’s photograph, and its approval by both civilians and soldiers alike suggests yet another way that the experience of war calls for methods of representation that cross the boundaries of realism.

Some of Hurley’s other composite images serve a slightly different purpose. While they still give the impression of a simultaneity of action, they also sometimes attribute a cause to some of the actions depicted in the image, and by extension, place the image within a spatiotemporal context that the original photograph does not. One of these images, called “Death the Reaper” (fig. 5.5) shows the corpse of a young, German soldier submerged in a muddy, water-filled shell crater. Above, there is an image of a shell burst, which some have argued was

\textsuperscript{86} A name for soldiers from Australia or New Zealand.
“brushed in on the negative” (O’Keefe 24), but which is more likely an image of an actual shell burst in another location, since it is clear from the original photograph (fig. 5.6) that the soldier was not found in the location that is shown in the image. In his diary, Hurley notes that the shell burst’s form “resembles death” (26-28 May 1918)—something that he elaborates on in the caption of the image for the 1919 exhibition: “Attention is directed to the remarkable wraith-like form of the shell burst, and to the outline of a white skill surmounting it” (“Catalog”). Hurley’s addition of the shell burst implies that the soldier is a victim of the explosion, when in reality, this soldier’s body was likely one of the several that he witnessed “frightfully mutilated, without legs, arms and heads half covered in mud and slime” near the Zonnebeke railroad in the wake of a battle, and not during one (12 Oct. 1917). While the shell burst may not look much like a skull to all viewers, Hurley’s description of it as such not only gives the image an ominous tone (more so than it had already) by personifying the image as death, but it also places the soldier’s death

87 In his diary, Hurley notes that this image is a composite of two negatives, but does not specify if the negative with the shell burst is one that he actually photographed or not.
within a larger narrative about war and its destructive forces. The storyworld being represented in this image quite literally “foregrounds a… disruption” (Herman 135) since the original image as been flipped so that the soldier in the foreground more clearly aligns with the explosion in the background, visually connecting them. The original image has a low level of narrativity; the soldier’s death is descriptive, and the viewer, especially in the context of the exhibit, could interpret the possible cause of death. But, the composite image has a high level of narrativity; it invites the viewer to interpret the scene in front of them as unfolding within a spatiotemporal series of events, which more fully represents the experience of war. Additionally, by connecting the soldier’s death with a cause, it becomes more comprehensible and less arbitrary—the viewer of the first image could attribute the soldier’s death to any number of human or nonhuman perpetrators, but the viewer of the composite sees only the specter of war itself as the cause, not any human enemy.

In other Hurley composites, shell bursts are added in to images to highlight how other logistical elements of war, such as moving equipment or tending to the wounded, are further complicated by the constant threat of attack. For example, in a photograph that shows overturned supply transportation carts and a barely-visible dead horse in the foreground, Hurley has added a shell burst that makes it look as if the shell has directly hit the carts, with the smoke originating to the far right foreground of the image (fig. 5.7), while in another, a shell burst has been added near the background of the photograph, where soldiers are carrying a wounded soldier to safety, while others in the foreground take cover (fig. 5.8). The first image, which Hurley titled “Hell-Fire Corner. Showing the difficulty of transport along an exposed highway” for the 1919 exhibit, was taken along a stretch of the Menin Road leading to Ypres, specifically, a part of the road
nicknamed “Hellfire Corner” for its constant activity. In his diary on the day that he took this photograph, Hurley wrote:

Unless one sees, it is impossible to convey a pen impression of the throngs of troops, baggage and transports which cram these roads… This is a distance of about two miles, the liveliest two miles I have ever walked. It is along this way that all our supplies and ammunition must go to the Ypres front. It is notorious and being enfiladed by the enemy’s fire is [sic] decidedly the hottest ground on the whole front. The way is strewn with dead horses, the effect of last night’s shelling and battered men’s helmets that tell

---

88 The Menin Road was the site of the Third Battle of Ypres, also called the Battle of Passchendaele, which went on from July 1917-November 1917, almost the entire time the Hurley was photographing in this location (O’Keefe 8). It is the subject of many of his photographs, and specifically, the photograph being discussed here was taken about a week before The Battle of Menin Road, one of its most significant battles, was to begin.

89 In the typewritten manuscript of Hurley’s diary, numbers written in the margins correspond to photograph numbers assigned to specific photographs in his exhibits, which makes it possible to collate which images match up with experiences he is writing about.
the fate of the drivers. The Boche\textsuperscript{90} was very active around Hellfire Corner and his 5.9s were bursting around there in rare style… I saw the Boche put out of action one of our batteries and explode the ammunition dump by a direct hit. I had to seek shelter in an adjacent dugout. (14 Sept. 1917)

Though this action was not ongoing when Hurley snapped this picture, the composite image relates these two distinct experiences as one, thereby contextualizing the scene within the constancy of battle that is characteristic of Hellfire Corner. Similarly, Hurley’s image of the shell burst occurring alongside the soldiers carrying the wounded again communicates a sense of omnipresent and immediate danger, even in circumstances that would seem to be routine—such as moving supplies, or helping the injured. This narrative of war would have been important to communicate to a general public for whom the operations of war at the frontline would have been an abstract concept.

Hurley also used compositing techniques to alter the understanding of what is going on in the scene entirely. One of the most interesting examples of this is in an image named “Battle Scarred Sentinels” (fig. 5.9), depicts what seems to be a soldier taking cover behind a tree stump because of a nearby shell burst. In the original image (fig. 5.10), there is no evidence of an explosion, or any other nearby threat, so the soldier is using the tree stump for a reason not immediately apparent. However, the composite not only places the soldier within a spatiotemporal sequence of events unfolding through the addition of a shell burst, as the other composites do, but also places the soldier in direct conflict with the elements of war. As with “Death the Reaper,” this communicates a narrative of war that features warfare itself as the main antagonist, and not any one specific group of people. In Hurley’s diary, he notes that in the

\textsuperscript{90} A name for a German soldier.
location where this photo was taken, Chateau Wood, he experienced something similar to what is depicted in the composite: “We succeeded in reaching the infamous Chateau Wood without incident, when a fleet of 14 Taubs and Gothas\textsuperscript{91} came over us. They dropped their bombs vigorously a few hundred yards away… We took refuse close beside a big tree stump… a 5.9 shell lobbed only 15 paces off and showered us with mud—a narrow squeak” (28 Oct. 1917). By taking the photograph of the soldier and compositing it with a shell burst, Hurley reframes an experience of war that he had to show how humans are helpless against the significant power of modernized, mechanized warfare.

Additionally, this image, along with the one of the overturned supply cart, features nonhuman victims of war as well as human victims. Hurley’s title of this image—“Battle Scarred Sentinels”— uses “sentinels” in the plural rather than the singular, which suggests that we should

\textsuperscript{91} Types of German aircraft.
interpret not just the “battle scarred” human soldier as a sentinel standing guard against the forces of war, but also the clearly “battle scarred” trees as sentinels. Hurley’s diary demonstrates that he often agonized over the nonhuman victims of war as well as the human victims. On the same day that he took shelter behind a tree in Chateau Wood, he notes: “Chateau Wood must have been a glorious spot with its lake on one side and heavily foliaged timber. It is now so lonely and desolate that one feels as if death alone dwelt there. The trees are smashed and splintered and only stumps… One does not linger more than necessary in this place over which hangs the pall of gloom and death” (28 Oct. 1917). He also wrote often about how the conditions of war affected the horses that were used to pull carts full of supplies and ammunition, much like the one in image of Hellfire Corner: “[T]he horses stumble through, sometimes falling in shell craters. Oh, it is a wicked, agonizing sight. Here and there lay dead half buried in mud, horses and broken waggons [sic] all cogently telling some tragedy and horror, but one is immune to all these and passes by as unperturbed as though they were just pieces of rock” (24 Oct. 1917). Nonhuman victims feature strongly in Hurley’s composites, demonstrating his commitment to representing the catastrophic effects of warfare in general, and not just on humans.

Another composite photograph shows that Hurley also created images that shifted the way that viewers imagine war’s relationship to the natural environment. The composite image, named “The Dawn of Passchendaele,” shows soldiers tending to the wounded at a makeshift first aid post near Zonnebeke (“Catalog”), with sunlight breaking through the clouds overhead (fig. 5.11). The original image (fig. 5.12), only shows the soldiers alongside the pillbox, and cloudless sky in the distance. The composite’s addition of the cloudy sky with sunbeams shining down directly toward the wounded soldiers draws attention to the atmosphere in an otherwise bleak
scene. This addition also places the soldiers within a natural environment that alerts the viewer to the ways in which the landscape is being decimated by war. Interestingly, there exists three separate versions of this same composite image. In addition to the one above, which was the one displayed in the 1919 exhibit, there are two other composites that show the same cloudy sky with protruding sunbeams that have been added to the background of the image. In one (fig. 5.13), the image of the sunbeam has been mirrored, and the foreground has been lightened, giving the impression that the sun is washing over the soldier figures. In the other (fig. 5.14), either another image of a sunburst entirely is used, or an additional negative of the sunbeam has been added to the image, since, in this one, the sunbeams shine over the entirety of the battlefield, making the image overall much brighter, and one that more strongly contrasts the battlefield with the natural environment. Though it is not clear why this particular image was composited in several
different ways, the fact that it was suggests Hurley’s preoccupation with making a composite that communicated a narrative in the way that he wanted it to.

This contrast between the natural environment and the desolation of war is something that Hurley often observes in his diaries. For example, he takes note of how the ruined landscape looks during sunrise: “At sunrise we were in Ypres. I never saw ruins look so majestic or imposing as when silhouetted against the beautiful sunrise this morning” (17 Sept. 1917). At another time, he notes the appearance of the war-torn landscape during sunset: “[A] fine sunset beautified the solemn ruins, that awakened feelings of awe and made one sorrow for the things which war has done” (27 Oct. 1917). In one particularly striking entry he writes about walking through the ruined town of Ypres, and in a way uncannily similar to Wharton’s description of Ypres two and a half years earlier (see chapter three), he discusses the ruins of the Ypres cloth hall, the ruins of its church, and the many human objects that he finds among the destroyed
living spaces. Almost as if speaking back to Wharton’s description, Hurley writes: “The straffed [sic] trees were coming back to life and budding, and there beside a great shell crater blossomed a single rose. How out of place it seemed amidst all this ravage. I took compassion on it and plucked it—The last rose of Ypres” (3 September 1917). Hurley’s sunbeam composites seem to be one way of communicating the juxtaposition of warfare and natural forces that carry on despite human conflict. Each of these composites, though in several different ways, communicates the experience of war in a way that suggests the chaotic simultaneity of battle, or war’s concurrency with other events. More than anything else, however, Hurley’s composites would have invited audiences at his exhibition to place the still images within a larger narrative about war and to see the war in the same way that he, and the soldiers he worked with, would have. The composites allow for static images of war to be placed within a spatiotemporal framework of unfolding events that immerse viewers in the experiences they depict.

**Bruce Bairnsfather’s War Cartoons:**

Though in a different medium and different tone, Bruce Bairnsfather also created visual narratives that represent the war in unexpected ways. His cartoons humorously represent the range of experiences that soldiers had in the trenches, while also critiquing the prevailing discourse of war as glorious in a way that is to be taken seriously. In the Foreword to the first volume of *Fragments from France*, the collected editions of Bairnsfather’s cartoons, the editor writes:

> If this sketchbook is worthy to outlast the days of the war, and to be kept for remembrance on the shelves of those who have lived through it, it will have done its bits.

> For will it not be a standing reminder of the *ingloriousness* of war, its preposterous
absurdity, and of its futility as a means of settling the affairs of nations? When the ardent
Jingo of the day after tomorrow rattles the sabre, let there be somewhere handy a copy of
“Fragments from France” that can be opened in front of him, at any page, just to remind
him of what war is really like as it is fought in “civilized” times. (2)

This introduction to Bairnsfather’s cartoons is hardly what one would expect, given that what
follows is not a somber soldier-on-the-battlefield memoir. And yet, it frames the collection of
cartoons as not only a worthwhile rendering of the experiences of war because of the ways in
which it subverts the narrative of war as glorious, but also as a lasting reminder of what “war is
really like” for future generations. This suggests that such renderings of war that cross the
boundaries of realistic reporting were valued at the time, and that, despite their erasure in the
modern memory of the First World War, they are evocative renderings of the experience of war.

The power of Bairnsfather’s cartoons originates in its combination of humor and
criticism, which work together to form small fragments of a larger narrative about the experience
of war. Monika Fludernik’s “Blending in Cartoons: The Production of Comedy” (2015),
analyses how the cartoon medium generates humor through “the process of blending
incongruous scenarios” (155), and the ways in which cartoons are narrative in the ways that they
require viewers to place the abstract representation of a scenario or scenarios into a broader
framework of meaning. She argues that, when narrative scholars focus on visual narratives, they
most often focus on images in a series, and when a single image is analyzed, it is most often a
painting or a photograph, leaving narratives like cartoons largely absent in the study of narrative
(156). However, she argues that the narrativity of cartoons originates from “the story which the
picture is meant to illustrate” and that a cartoon “derives its significance from the framework in
which it is to be set” (158). Finally, she analyzes how cartoons trigger the cognitive processes
that are required to derive meaning, most notably pointing out that “the more narrativity a
cartoon elicits, the more speculation there is about the motives of the protagonists, thereby
establishing narratives via experientiality” (170). Though Bairnsfather’s cartoons may range in
degrees of narrativity, they all represent an experience or communicate a story that the viewer
must interpret, and therefore, they are all inherently narrative.

The first cartoon that Bairnsfather submitted for publication to The Bystander, and, consequently, the first image reproduced in Fragments from France is an image depicting several soldier figures huddled inside a hut, with a shell exploding overhead and the caption “Where did that one go to?” (fig. 5.15). In Bullets and Billets, Bairnsfather writes that his inspiration for the sketch came when he and his fellow soldiers were waiting out an attack, and repeatedly asked each other where the shells were landing (133-134). He recalls that “We were all inside the cottage now, with intent, staring faces, looking outside through the battered doorway. There was something in the whole situation which struck me as so pathetically amusing, that when the ardour of the Boches had calmed down a bit, I proceeded to make a pencil sketch of the situation” (134-135). In the cartoon, Bairnsfather represents this experience as “pathetically amusing” through the ironic juxtaposition of the caption and the shell exploding overhead. Though the image has very little context, it is immediately clear that the soldiers are being attacked and that the occurrence is something that they have grown used to. The cartoon is humorous in tone while also communicating the constant danger that soldiers experience in the trenches. A similar cartoon, called “A Matter of Moment” (fig. 5.16) shows two soldiers huddled under a structure that has collapsed with the dialogue “What was that, Bill?” “Trench mortar” “Ours or theirs?” In this case, it is the dialogue that communicates the cartoon’s critique: that the
constancy of attacks, combined with the continual movement of the frontline means that attacks can be self-defeating and injure one’s own soldiers. Or, more broadly than that, that attacks from either side are equally dangerous, and therefore, must be equally feared. The cartoon fits in with several others that get to the heart of the pointlessness of the war—at a certain point, if friendly fire is indistinguishable from enemy fire, then it is clear that an objective is not being met.

Some of the cartoons critique the disconnect between those on the frontlines and those either away from the frontlines or on the homefront. “The Things that Matter” (fig. 5.17) shows a soldier in the midst of battle receiving a phone call from his superior who asks to know “as soon as possible, the number of tins of raspberry jam issued to you last Friday.” Here, those away from the frontlines who give orders and control other elements of decision-making are clearly uninformed of the goings-on of the battlefield. The ironic title, coupled with the caption that
indicates that German Headquarters is concerned about the trivialities of jam rations while soldiers on the frontline dying, shows that while war is fought by soldiers who risk their lives in the trenches, they lack any decision-making power or control over their conditions. Additionally, this cartoon is one of the several that feature the caricature of a German soldier, “Colonel Fitz-Shrapnel,” as a victim of war’s circumstances, which suggests that Bairnsfather is representing experiences that all soldiers had, and not just Allied soldiers. Another cartoon (fig. 5.18),92 “The same old moon” shows a woman in the top frame, likely a lover or wife, who, staring at the moon, remarks “And to think that it’s the same dear old moon that’s looking down on him!” In the bottom frame, the soldier—the “him” of the top frame—looks at the moon at notes that “This

![Figure 5.17: Bairnsfather’s “The Things that Matter”](image1)

![Figure 5.18: Bairnsfather’s “The same old moon”](image2)

92 As mentioned, some of Bairnsfather’s multi-frame images may be considered comics, I refer to them here as cartoons since most are single frame.
blinkin’ moon will be the death of us.” There are several narrative levels to this image—the first, is the immediate juxtaposition between the two images, that shows a separation between the two characters. The second is that the moon signifies disparate things to the characters—for one, it is a source of closeness, while for the other, it is a source of light that may lead to their death. The third level is a critique of the psychological distance that exists between the homefront and the frontline—while the woman seems to be romanticizing the soldier being away from home, the soldier is, of course, having a very un-romantic experience. More than a criticism directed at the character herself, this cartoon highlights the ways in which the experiences of war were sanitized for the general public.

Finally, some of Bairnsfather’s cartoons present the conditions of war in a more matter-of-fact way, but in doing so, highlight some of the elements of war that are rarely discussed. In “That Sword” (fig. 5.19), Bairnsfather contrasts a new soldier’s expectations with the actual conditions of war by showing how the soldier “thought he was going to use” the sword versus “how he did use it.” The cartoon ridicules a number of things, not the least of which is the absurdity of being given a sword in a modern war. It also highlights, in the lower frame, how a soldier may spend his down-time, and the limited options that would be available for him to eat. There is also a humorous contrast between the look on the soldier’s face in the top frame, and the look on his face in the bottom one, which more broadly highlights the soldier’s shifting understanding of his role before war, and during it. Another cartoon, “War!” (fig. 5.20) similarly plays on expectations versus reality. The top frame shows an empty field and a lack of action with the caption “This interesting view for 6 months… or,” while the bottom frame shows a chaotic eruption of activity with the caption “This for half an hour.” The image communicates both elements of war—the long stretches of no action, and the short bursts of intense action, and
the caption at the bottom of the image “War!—As it is for most of us” subverts the idea that war is made up only of battle rather than several types of experiences.

Bairnsfather’s cartoons communicate an experience of war that, much like Hurley’s composite photographs, take real experiences and circumstances and communicate them to an audience in a way that engages with a broader narrative of war. In his second autobiography From Mud to Mufti (1919), Bairnsfather reflects on his experience of war, and specifically on the ways in which his drawings, which he drew in “weird, safe, dangerous, and unique spots” (115), capture the amusing circumstances of war, but notes that the artist renderings of war originate from, and represent, very dire circumstances:

Those who read may wonder why—and possibly those who read may never understand,
but to me, the sum total of the ‘idea’ and real horrible reality of this terrible, elementary, and brutal war was burning a hole into my mind and system which time can never heal. Somehow, when I sat in that dreadful death-charged mud, I felt it less—but here—outside and behind it—I got a clear perspective of the frightfulness of the thing. It’s not the actual danger or the death and sorrow, it’s the idea of this drastic antagonism of humanity, separated by merely national aims. But why should I bore or wound people with these thoughts of mine? I will return to the real great and inspiring idea of war: bright uniforms—heroic victories, medals, and cheering multitudes. (119-120)

Bairnsfather, like Hurley, La Motte, Borden, Woolf, Wharton, and Jones, has attempted, through the rendering of the experience of warfare in narrative form, to communicate the hopelessness of a war that is fueled by its own myths of glory and heroism, and fought by people that are themselves victims of the overall system of warfare. Regardless of the way that each of these figures has chosen to narrativize the war, or the role that they each play in the war, these narratives communicate the totalizing effects of war in ways that seek to subvert the myths that perpetuate pointless continued violence. In doing so, they represent war in the most realistic way possible.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION: TOWARD A REVISED UNDERSTANDING OF WAR NARRATIVES

While the narratives represented in this dissertation are in no way an exhaustive survey of the various ways in which the experience of war can be represented, they do indicate several modes of representation beyond the linear realism that dominates the literary history of the First World War. These narratives also render the experience of war in ways that decenter individual, battlefield, and human perspectives of war, thus drawing attention to totalizing effects of war on both humans and nonhumans, civilians and soldiers, and not just on the individual. Jones’ *In Parenthesis* demonstrates the ways in which a fragmented, highly allusive, modernist narrative can communicate the experience of war by representing its distributed spatiotemporalities in narrative form. Wharton’s *Fighting France* and the “Time Passes” section of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* show that strategies for immersing readers in narratives of war can produce empathy for both human and nonhuman victims of war. Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* and La Motte’s *The Backwash of War* further draw attention to the distributed spatiotemporalities of war through the ways in which their narrator figures’ dual positionality in both the battlefront and the homefront allow readers access to the liminal spaces of war, where both temporalities clash. Frank Hurley’s composite photography and Bruce Bairnsfather’s comics further subvert our expectations for the way war ought to be represented highlight how narratives in non-text-based mediums can be used to immerse the reader in the experience of war.

These narratives suggest that the most evocative representations of war do not reside in any one genre specifically, but rather, in the ways in which any narrative communicates the experience of war to the reader. Cognitive narratology offers a theoretical framework by which to understand the ways that all narratives use considered rhetorical strategies to communicate
experience in specific ways. It is important to consider the ways that readers interact with texts, and the cognitive processes that narratives trigger if we are to more effectively evaluate how any narrative immerses the reader in a narrative world and communicates meaning. This project was initially concerned with the intersection between the First World War and literary modernism, and the ways that narratives that are both modernist in form and about the war demonstrate that the two seemingly disparate modes of representation can coexist meaningfully. And in some ways, it still is. However, by focusing on the ways in which readers interact with texts, it has become clear that even the seemingly neat categories of modernist literature and war literature do not encompass all of the strategies of representation at work in the intersection of these fields. War narratives, whether they take the form of a war diary, or modernist fiction, make use of complex narrative strategies to trigger processes of narrative worldmaking, and for this reason, they cannot, and should not be restricted to either category. The analysis of First World War narratives in this dissertation serves to complicate the ways the we think about war in general, and war narratives specifically. While realism and the representation of individual experience are still valued as the most effective ways to communicate war, these narratives prove that it is important to not limit the representation of war to one specific mode, but rather, to revise our understanding of what constitutes a war narrative in order to account for the range of perspectives and experiences that make up war.

Bairnsfather, Bruce. *Bullets and Billets*. G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1917.

---. *From Mud to Mufti with Old Bill on all Fronts*. G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1919. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89016958845.

---. *The Bystander’s Fragments from France*. Edited by *The Bystander*.


Brosnan, Matt. “5 Things you Need to Know about The Battle of the Somme.” *Imperial War Museums*, 11 January 2018, www.iwm.org.uk/history/5-things-you-need-to-know-about-


Accessed 30 Apr. 2015.


“Episode 1.” The Crimson Field, written by Sarah Phelps, directed by David Evans. BBC One, 6 April 2014.


Figure 1.1. Solomon, Samantha. Cemetery Register. 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.

Figure 1.2. Solomon, Samantha. Caribou Statue. 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.
Figure 1.3. Solomon, Samantha. Trench Reinforcements. 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.

Figure 1.4. Solomon, Samantha. “Danger Tree.” 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.

Figure 1.5. Solomon, Samantha. Thiepval Memorial. 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.

Figure 1.6. Solomon, Samantha. Memorial Inscription. 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.

Figure 1.7. Solomon, Samantha. Cemetery Headstones. 26 June 2016. Author’s personal collection.


Figure 5.4. Hurley, James Francis (Frank). P01438.001: A large print of the Australian War Records Section Frank Hurley’s composite photograph “Over the top.” Photograph Collection, Australian War Memorial. www.awm.gov.au/collection/C206274. Accessed
Figure 5.5. Hurley, Frank PXD 21/no. 33: Death the Reaper. Exhibition of War Photographs/
Taken by Capt. F. Hurley, August 1917-August 1918, State Library of New South Wales.

Figure 5.6. Hurley, James Francis (Frank). E00927: A photograph of a ghastly sight in a shell
crater near Zonnebeke. Photograph Collection, Australian War Memorial. www.awm.

Figure 5.7. Hurley, Frank. PXD 21/no. 32: Hell-Fire Corner. Exhibition of War Photographs/
Taken by Capt. F. Hurley, August 1917-August 1918, State Library of New South Wales.

Figure 5.8. Hurley, Frank. PXD 26/no. 47: Carrying in the wounded during the height of battle.
Exhibition of War Photographs/Taken by Capt. F. Hurley, August 1917-August 1918,

Figure 5.9. Hurley, Frank. PXD 26/no. 79: Battle scarred sentinels. Exhibition of War
Photographs/Taken by Capt. F. Hurley, August 1917-August 1918, State Library of
March 2018.

Figure 5.10. Hurley, James Francis (Frank). E01237: View of the gateway to the battlefield of
Ypres through Chateau Wood. Photograph Collection, Australian War Memorial. www.

Figure 5.11. Hurley, Frank. PXD 26/no. 78: The dawn of Passchendaele. Exhibition of War
Photographs/Taken by Capt. F. Hurley, August 1917-August 1918, State Library of


---. My Diary, Official War Photographer Commonwealth Military Forces, 21 August


Jünger, Ernest. The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front. Chatto & Windus, 1929.


---. “Narrative Empathy.” the living handbook of narratology (LHN), edited by Hühn, Peter et al, Hamburg University, 2013.


Margolin, Uri. “Simultaneity in Narrative.” *the living handbook of narratology (LHN)*, edited by Hühn, Peter et al, Hamburg University, 2014.


Mezei, Kathy. Introduction: Contextualizing Feminist Narratology. *Ambiguous Discourse:*


Raitt, Suzanne, and Trudi Tate. Introduction. Women’s Fiction and the Great War, edited by


---. “Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology.”

*Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, edited by Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, University of Nebraska Press, 2014, pp. 25–49.


