DISTRESSED HISTORIES: LATE MODERNISM AND EVERYDAY LIFE,  
1929–1945

A Dissertation

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Most readers and critics of twentieth-century literature tag the years between 1930 and 1945 as the long twilight of high modernist formal innovation. For many literary historians, the definitive political disasters between these years hampered, even reversed, the astonishing revolutions in literary and visual culture that began at the turn of the century. A literary and cultural history that runs parallel with the Great Depression and the Second World War, Distressed Histories argues that these world-historical events reformulate the question of everyday life and, by extension, spur a new wave of aesthetic response. Neither the Heideggerian scene of ontological privation nor the grey, oppressive la quotidienne of the Marxists, the everyday emerges in late modernism as a symptom of this period’s political conflicts and, consequently, as one of its foremost preoccupations. Part of what makes late modernism’s confrontation with the everyday so compelling, and indeed so perplexing, is its unlikely combination of modernist formal techniques—montage, fragmentation, defamiliarization—with a scrupulous attention to the details of daily life. I argue that
this volatile realignment of realist epistemology and modernist aesthetics converges with the influence of new documentary technologies—hand-held cameras, newsreels, broadcast radio—to beget a “documentary modernism.”

The dissertation focuses on key texts by a group of writers—Virginia Woolf, Mass-Observation, George Orwell, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Elizabeth Bowen—who were integral to the changing priorities of modernist writing in the 1930s and 1940s. Ranging over the multiple genres these writers deploy and disfigure to capture the everyday—the family chronicle, the autoethnography, the travel book, the short story—I show how the everyday emerges as a register of historical experience, bearing the traces of past events, internalizing the conflicts and contradictions of the present, and, perhaps, serving as a mute indication of possible futures.
For Ernest, Nelda, and Cecil
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INTRODUCTION: WITHOUT MERIT: LATE MODERNISM AND EVERYDAY LIFE

In *Lions and Shadows*, a hybrid *bildungsroman* and autobiography published by Hogarth Press in 1938, Christopher Isherwood expressed his extraordinary interest in the most ordinary features of daily life: “I was, and still am, endlessly interested in the outward appearance of people—their facial expressions, their gestures, their walk, their nervous tricks, their infinitely various ways of eating a sausage, opening a paper parcel, lighting a cigarette” (85). He goes on to explain his powerful attraction to cinema for its “astonishing revelations about the tempo and dynamics of everyday life: you see how actions look in relation to each other; how much space they occupy and how much time” (Isherwood *LS* 85-6). Isherwood thinks that art, be it cinema, writing, or otherwise, possesses a unique capacity to capture the everyday, to generate new ways of looking at it, and, perhaps, to help us understand its complexity. In one way, we might say that Isherwood articulates one of literary modernism’s primary concerns; that is, art’s relation to everyday life. His index of “outward appearances” might impel readers to recall the 1920s novels of Virginia Woolf or perhaps Leopold Bloom’s amusing and often unsavory actions in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*; his curiosity about the “tempo and dynamics of everyday life” may evoke Henri Bergson’s theories of time and their immeasurable influence on pre-World War I writers like T.E. Hulme (as well as Wyndham Lewis’s acerbic retort to high modernism’s fascination with time). Indeed, one could quite easily make the argument that modernism is *the* art of everyday life, drawing not only from

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1 See Bryony Randall’s *Modernism, Daily Time, and Everyday Life* for a sustained investigation of the influences of William James and Henri Bergson on modernist conceptions of daily time, routine, and the everyday.
Anglophone writers and artists, but reaching further out to the European avant-gardes (Dada, Surrealism, Futurism), novelists like Alfred Döblin, Marcel Proust, and Robert Musil, Bertolt Brecht’s plays and dramatic theory, Hannah Höch’s collages, and, without provoking too much of a scandal for periodization, Baudelaire’s poetics and critical essays. But if the everyday is truly ubiquitous in modernism, it is not the case that its allure is uniform: the attraction to the everyday is manifold and, moreover, that attraction is never idle, never innocent, and never disinterested. For Isherwood and those late modernists writing in the 1930s and 1940s, the question of everyday life was shaped and formed by the historical events and political crises that defined those years: the Great Depression, the rapid collapse of liberal democracies across Europe, the growing threat of fascism, endless wars, the Second World War, the Holocaust. In late modernist writing, the everyday emerges as a register of historical experience; it bears the traces of past historical events, internalizes the conflicts and contradictions of the present, and, perhaps, serves as a mute indication of possible futures.

Because of its close attention to the complexities of everyday life, its combination of genres and forms, its interest in visual culture, and the political freight packed into the dark year of its publication, Isherwood’s observations in Lions and Shadows sharply exemplify what I argue is an overwhelming preoccupation with everyday life in late modernist writing, a preoccupation that has everything to do with the historical and political turmoil of the 1930s and 1940s. How to look at the everyday, how to capture the “tempo and dynamics” of the ever-changing, often elusive, dimensions of daily life, designates, even if only indirectly, a point of convergence between late modernist form and history. Isherwood’s feeling that the everyday was proper material for art, that it
could sustain endless inquiry and investigation, and, most importantly, that the everyday actually meant something, is not his feeling alone. If one of high modernism’s signal features is its inward turn towards psychology and subjectivity, late modernism moves outward to the everyday. That the everyday was not the ground of experience, but a question to be explored and constantly re-examined underwrites a wide array of literary and cultural projects in late modernism: John Grierson’s British Documentary Film Movement jettisoned plot and climactic narrative structures in favor of snapshots of the daily grit of everything the fishing industry to the postal service; detective and espionage plots with their emphasis on the secrets encoded in everyday things became enormously popular and figure in the novels of Graham Greene and Elizabeth Bowen among others; the mid-1930s also witnessed a brief love affair with Surrealism, an avant-garde movement predicated entirely on revolutions in everyday life; another wave of little magazines and journals like *Fact, Contemporary Prose and Poetry*, and *New Verse* contain multiple ruminations on art and everyday life by notable figures like Storm Jameson, Stephen Spender, Charles Madge, and Herbert Read among others; autoethnographies by J.B. Priestley, George Orwell, and Mass-Observation sifted through the varieties of everyday experience in all facets of English life; travel books by the likes of Evelyn Waugh, W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, and Rebecca West proliferated as well, relaying the oddities and peculiarities of daily lives abroad to an avid English readership. Hardly meant to be exhaustive, this selective sampling of literary and cultural activity conveys the wide appeal of the quotidian, but it also suggests that the turn to everyday life spawned a new wave of aesthetic innovation.
*Distressed Histories* focuses on a group of writers and genres that crystallizes late modernism’s preoccupation with the everyday. My investigations show how the turn to the everyday initiates a series of formal and generic disfigurations and how these forms themselves operate as symptoms and solutions to the political antagonisms of these troubled years. The writers I cover in these four chapters—Virginia Woolf, Mass-Observation, George Orwell, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Elizabeth Bowen—all treat the everyday as a sign of history; it is the place where contemporary history becomes legible, made visible for analysis, scrutiny, and, sometimes, bewilderment. While I argue that the political and aesthetic import of these works is inscrutable without understanding their relation to everyday life, I do not believe that these writers are individual instances of a single, larger late modernist project. To be sure, the looming threat of another war and the manifest weaknesses of liberal democracies to manage the crises of the 1930s and 1940s is arguably the ultimate horizon of late modernism; it is impossible to read anything written in these decades separate from its historical situation. The everyday only becomes an object of interest when it is disrupted, threatened, or thrown into crisis as it surely was time and time again during these decades. Although each writer I take up here seems convinced that the everyday means something, what the everyday means and how it is to be understood differs greatly. In the chapters that follow I show how the everyday is investigated and marshaled to account for four situations: the long, traumatic afterlives of historical violence (Woolf), the deepening crisis of liberal democracy in the late 1930s (Mass-Observation), the changing character of political sovereignty and war (Orwell, Auden and Isherwood), and the transformation of the metropolis from a center of cultural and intellectual activity into a veritable war zone (Isherwood and Bowen). Individually and collectively, these chapters show how late
modernists deploy and disfigure four literary forms—the novel, the auto-ethnography, the travel book, the short story—to construct the optics for looking at the everyday. But more than that, these chapters suggest that the way late modernists tell the story of everyday life during these turbulent years also tells the story of how four key facets of modernity—History, democracy, war, the city—were changed irreparably by mid-century.

**Prioritizing the Everyday (I): “The Creative Treatment of Actuality”**

In the next two sections I delineate two perspectives, or two ways of prioritizing the everyday: one within late modernist culture and one within contemporary criticism and theory. Part of what I suggest is that there are certain continuities between the modernist conception of the everyday, our object of analysis, and current theoretical models of everyday life, the available tools for analysis. In order to chart those continuities and to explain their methodological consequences with the patience they deserve, I take them one at a time.

I begin here with a comment by Paul Rotha from his 1973 book *Document Diary* that, as far as I know, has made no discernible impact on literary history:

One day it could be instructive for some critical assessor to compare the documentary film people and their work in the 1930s with a similar generation growing up at the same time in Britain in the field of literature. Auden, Isherwood, Day Lewis, Warner, Spender, Graham Greene, Calder-Marshall and others were all exploring poetry and the novel at the same time as we were exploring the cinema medium. Without wishing in any way to denigrate their work, it is worth considering if anything written by this group of authors could
Along with John Grierson, Humphrey Jennings, Basil Wright, Alberto Cavalcanti and many others, Rotha spearheaded the British Documentary Film Movement. He was also one of its greatest historians, penning a number of books on the subject during and after its heyday. In the quote above Rotha identifies a missing piece of literary and cultural history in modernist studies that, somewhat shamefully, has yet to be filled. Rotha is concerned with matters of influence and reception and pursuing those considerations would surely be a worthy endeavor. Rather than attempt to stitch together the reception history that has piqued Rotha’s interest, I want to confirm a link, albeit in an abbreviated way, between the writers and documentarists of the 1930s by tracing similarities in aesthetics, not differences in influence or popularity. What Rotha implies is that documentary film-makers and late modernist writers were all experimenting with aesthetic forms as they sought new ways to capture everyday life. Thus, one need not make an analogical argument between writing and visual culture to indicate their proximity; rather, late modernist writing and documentary film constitute two instances of a wider aesthetic, and indeed political, demand to formulate the everyday as a question and, if possible, to provide an answer.

How might one characterize this aesthetic demand? An obvious reference point is John Grierson’s now famous definition of documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality,” which Rotha would echo when he called it “the use of the film medium to interpret creatively and in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality” (qtd, in Rotha DD xvi). That everyday life resides at the center of documentary film needs little

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2 In addition to *Documentary Diary*, see his *Documentary Film*, first published in 1936.

3 Following David Trotter’s *Modernism and Cinema*, I deal more with the forms of argument one might make between writing and visual culture in Chapter 4.
explanation; that the primary aesthetic for rendering the everyday is not a variation of realist mimeticism, but some form of “creative treatment” may take a bit more explaining. The genealogy of the documentary film in Britain alone complicates any notion that documentary film is mimetic, or objective, or realist in any sense of the word. Although Grierson used the word first in 1926 in a review of Robert Flaherty’s *Moana*, what really caught his eye and arguably lit the fuse for documentary film was Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*. Enthused by Eisenstein’s use of montage, his attention to actuality, and the political force of the film, Grierson would write the first subtitles of the film in English and later host its screening in England (and his own film *Drifters* would play before it). Russian avant-garde film and revolutionary politics were at the root of documentary film, although Grierson would be quick to evacuate montage aesthetics of its revolutionary content and marshal it instead for marketing imperial trade and liberal reformism. Yet, what Grierson always insisted upon was the aesthetic and creative dimension of documentary film. The documentarist, like the “recording…not thinking” (*GTB* 1) camera-eye in Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin*, must do more than collect “natural” material from what Grierson calls “the little daily doings” (84); editing, assembling, and juxtaposing a range of details is the properly poetic moment of documentary film: “You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it” (Grierson 82). The *poiesis* of documentary also shifted the *raison d’être* of the film from description to an interrogation of “the surface values of a subject…which more explosively reveals the reality of it” (Grierson 81). Having studied philosophy in university at Glasgow, Grierson was quite aware of the

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4 Grierson writes that what distinguishes directors is not their ability to work a camera or venture to an exotic locale to make a film, but how “they apply ends to their observation and their movements. The artist need not posit the ends—for that is the work of the critic—but the ends must be there, informing his description and giving finality (beyond space and time) to the slice of life he has chosen. For that larger effect there must be power of poetry or of prophecy” (Grierson 84).
Kantian distinctions between the phenomenal and the noumenal, the actual and the real.

Documentary works were successful only to the degree that they gave audiences a glimpse of the real lodged behind “the little daily doings” (Grierson 84).

The aesthetics of actuality Grierson develops into cinematic method are equally apparent in the late modernist texts I take up in the following chapters. While each chapter stages a revision of the realism/modernism opposition as it pertains to a particular text or set of texts, late modernism itself contests the stylistic and periodizing logics of these categories. What makes late modernism’s confrontation with the everyday so compelling, and indeed so perplexing, is its unlikely combination of modernist formal techniques—montage, fragmentation, defamiliarization—with a scrupulous attention to the details of daily life. Tyrus Miller has attempted to take account of this dynamic in the literary and visual culture of the 1930s. Miller stakes out the trajectories of thought on modernism and documentary that have placed them in opposite camps for so long. On the one hand, “modernists interrogated the ways in which subjective perception and thought mediated any possible apprehension of the world” (Miller “Documentary” 225); on the other hand, the documentary “seemed to draw its energy and inspiration from the antithetical realm of the everyday” (Miller “Documentary” 225). If taken to their full extremes, Miller argues, documentary appears to be the peak of nineteenth-century naturalism (and realism I would add) and modernism gravitates violently and antagonistically away from actuality and the everyday. However, the work of film-makers like John Grierson and Len Lye, prose poets David Gascoyne and Humphrey Jennings, and, the group I take up in Chapter 2, the auto-ethnographies of Mass-Observation do not fit easily into these categories. For Miller, these works clearly demonstrate that “formally innovative experimentalism and naturalistic explorations of everyday life were not so much opposed as instead complementary moments of a broader modernist poetics” (“Documentary” 226). Miller’s argument takes us a long
way towards rethinking how realist and modernist aesthetics operate in the 1930s, but I believe we can more precisely approximate late modernism’s outward turn to the everyday by making a slight modification. The conjuncture of realism and modernism is, as Miller persuasively demonstrates, complementary, but, as these chapters will bear out, there is also an antagonistic relation between the two and that antagonism is constitutive of so many late modernist works. This volatile realignment of realist epistemology and modernist aesthetics underwrites the use and decomposition of the realist family chronicle in Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*; it is articulated in the paradoxical desire for totality and the insistence on the fragment of quotidian experience in Mass-Observation; it surfaces in the disfiguration of travel book in George Orwell and W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood; and, finally, it gains form in the tension between Isherwood and Elizabeth Bowen’s short stories that are at once discrete, fragmentary fictions but also components of a larger, integrated work that has not yet taken shape (a book to come as Maurice Blanchot might say).

The complementary and antagonistic relation between modernism and realism, aesthetics and epistemology, that animates, and at times disables, these works is a particularly late modernist tendency that I will refer to as “documentary modernism.” This term serves to highlight a number of themes; the possible points of connection between literary and visual culture; the preoccupation with everyday life in late modernism and the extraordinary aesthetic experiments that accompany that preoccupation; a series of productive antagonisms between a host of traditional oppositions in modernist studies that have long since called for revision: realism and modernism, epistemology and aesthetics, fragment and totality. Each chapter charts the multiple ways these oppositions are realigned, contested, or restaged by writers of varying political stripes and aesthetic affinities. While the chapters follow only a loose chronology (some of them overlap in years), the primary goal is to illustrate the extent to which an examination of everyday life stimulated new aesthetic responses, new forms for
interrogating reality and conceptualizing history. In a similar fashion, any study that proposes to historicize the everyday as a cultural and aesthetic priority is also faced with methodological challenges.

**Prioritizing the Everyday (II): Theory, Method, and the New Modernist Studies**

By prioritizing everyday life in the study of late modernism, *Distressed Histories* aims first and foremost to recast the debates about politics and aesthetics in this under-examined and often misunderstood period of literary history. Much of the scholarly work on the literature of the 1930s and 1940s provides in-depth examinations of the politics of the key figures of these decades, noting everything from their collusions with left or right-wing groups, to their participation in the Spanish Civil War, to their work for the state during the Second World War, and so on. Rather than revisit the degree to which a writer’s politics (or political indifference) seeps into her written works, my approach here has been to treat literary texts as mediated aesthetic objects. The governing idea is that the politics of literature is not reducible to the politics of the writer. As Fredric Jameson, Theodor W. Adorno, and Jacques Rancière have formulated in different ways, literature “does” politics through its formal operations. In what remains one of the most difficult but critically important statements on modernism, Theodor W. Adorno rightly insisted that “the unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of

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5 Virtually any study of this period performs this kind of work. The most well known and oft-cited books that arguably shaped the study of the 1930s and 1940s are Samuel Hynes *The Auden Generation*; Valentine Cunningham *British Writers of the Thirties*; Bernard Bergonzi *Reading the Thirties*; Phyllis Lassner *British Women Writers of World War II*; Mark Rawlinson *British Writing of the Second World War*; Sebastian Knowles *A Purgatorial Flame: Seven British Writers in the Second World War*; Janet Montefiore *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: the Dangerous Flood of History* is worth singling out for its twin ambitions to recover the 1930s and to do so by reasserting the importance of gender and women writers. Montefiore’s book is successful in both efforts.
form” (*AT* 6). In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson would go on to expand Adorno’s maxim, extending it as a method for understanding narratives of varying styles and periods. For Jameson, the very “production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal “solutions” to unresolvable social contradictions” (*PU* 79). And, more recently, Rancière has argued for a politics of literature that is based on its unauthorized mode of expression and its varying, sometimes experimental and fugitive, perceptual configurations. What I derive and adopt from these approaches is a method that focuses on literary texts as objects, not vehicles for subjective expression. The implication here is that the nexus of politics and aesthetics resides in the formal operations of the text, not in authorial intention or the author’s expressed political leanings. Understanding literary texts as objective mediations and not subjective expression allows us to reset the terms of debate about the politics and aesthetics of late modernism and, to be sure, the stakes of this literature’s investment in everyday life.

Part of what this project hopes to accomplish, then, is to stage a missed encounter in modernist studies between late modernism and everyday life, two fields of inquiry that have for a long time appeared to be without merit. There have been strides in literary studies to reprise the role of those modernists whose development began after the 1920s. Samuel Hynes, Bernard Bergonzi, and Valentine Cunningham all worked vigorously to thicken our knowledge about the decades between the long shadows of high modernism.

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6 See his essay “The Politics of Literature” and *The Politics of Aesthetics.*

7 Particularly interesting as evidence of critical and scholarly neglect is Tyrus Miller’s observation that so many late modernist works never make their way into university courses. Where, he asks, do figures like Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, the early Samuel Beckett, and post-1920s Wyndham Lewis fit into a survey of twentieth-century literature? See his *Late Modernism* for more on this and for his own analyses of these particular late modernists.
in the 1920s and the purported rise of postmodernism following the Second World War. Still, most readers and critics of twentieth-century literature tag the years after 1930 as the long twilight of high modernist formal innovation. More often than not, the decrease of aesthetic energies is assumed to accompany a sharp increase in political ones. Bracketed by the Great Depression on one end, the Second World War on the other, this period of literary history appears intractably bound to its historical moment, too invested in political commitments, and, by extension, imaginatively stalled. It is only recently that the “new modernist studies” has returned to this period of literary history, rightly arguing that late modernism is in fact highly innovative because of its historical moment. Tyrus Miller’s *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, Politics, and Fiction in the Interwar Years* spends a good deal of time and effort to enumerate distinctively late modernist aesthetic practices while Jed Esty and Marina MacKay seriously complicate the relations of politics and aesthetics during this period. The true indicator of the energy of these debates and their importance is the highly contestable nature of the term “late modernism” itself.

The second part of this missed encounter is everyday life. Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* laid the initial foundation not only for splitting the difference between “modernisms” of different stripes and the “avant-garde,” but it also provided a possible point of entry into discussing modernism and everyday life. Relying heavily on the

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8 This is implied in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s still much-heralded (and much taught) *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1880-1930* as well as Hugh Kenner’s *A Sinking Island*.

9 A wave of new work on late modernism is making welcome interventions into this long held narrative of literary history. In addition to Miller’s *Late Modernism: Arts, Culture, Politics, and Fiction in the Interwar Years* see Jed Esty *A Shrinking Island: English Modernism and National Culture* and Marina MacKay *Modernism and the Second World War*.  12
Frankfurt School, Bürger explored modern art’s categorical separation from everyday life and the strained efforts of the avant-garde to end that separation. Yet, this not the legacy of Bürger’s book. Perhaps the most famous engagement with Bürger’s work is Andreas Huyssen’s equally influential *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Huyssen’s book defined modernism in terms of its “anxiety of contamination” (vii) by mass culture. From Huyssen forward, much of modernist studies set about surveying that divide, showing us how the chasm between high and low cultures may have been smaller than earlier estimations. The shift, then, from everyday life to mass culture inaugurated a new field of debate that still remains at the fore of the “new modernist studies.” Everyday life, though, is not synonymous with mass culture. When held against the impassioned and lengthy debates following Huyssen’s work, the inquiry into modernism’s relationship to everyday life has, at best, developed slowly and unevenly.

If studies of modernism and the everyday are lacking, the currency of everyday life in the field of cultural theory could not be greater. Special issues of *New Literary History*, *Cultural Critique*, and *Cultural Studies* have all centered on the question of everyday life and a new spate of monographs have worked to establish something of a canon for thinking the everyday. Additionally, translations of works by Henri

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10 Among many others see Maria Dibattista *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture 1889-1939*; Lawrence Rainey *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*; Mark S. Morrisson *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905-1920*; Rita Felski *The Gender of Modernity*; David Chinitz *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*; Michael North *Reading 1922*;

11 See Ben Highmore *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*; Michael Sheringham *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*; Harry Harootunian *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday*
Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and Michel de Certeau among others have widened the source materials in the Anglophone world for thinking through the everyday. What cultural theory has deduced from these philosophical accounts of the everyday is that the quotidian is recalcitrant and elusive, extraordinary and strange. Highmore’s work has been especially forceful in this regard. He fashions a critical tradition from Georg Simmel to Michel de Certeau that “in attending to everyday life as a lived experience, embrace[s] more directly the ability to “make strange” (16). Highmore’s study goes on to elevate the modernist aesthetic of defamiliarization into a methodology for contemporary cultural theory. Highmore’s modernist visions for cultural theory have not been without their skeptics and detractors.  

Even though they reach different conclusions, these survey-style books by Highmore, John Gardiner, Michael Sheringham, and John Roberts all make clear that everyday life’s evolution as a critical and philosophical category and the development of modernist aesthetics are coincident phenomena. The interpretive and theoretical categories and the phenomena under analysis are not separate entities. As John Roberts has argued, cultural theories of everyday life have somehow erected a history of ideas model and altogether failed to historicize the emergence of the everyday as a conceptual category. Roberts has attempted this in his own way, but his arguments

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13 I have tried to demonstrate the debt Henri Lefebvre’s critique of the everyday owes to modernist aesthetics in “‘What True Project Has Been Lost?’: Modern Art and Henri Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life” in *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate.*
are geared primarily at revising the field of cultural theory. Moving from cultural theory to literary studies entails its own set of complications.

In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* Henri Lefebvre tells us “the momentous eruption of everyday life into literature should not be overlooked. It might, however, be more exact to say that readers were suddenly made aware of everyday life through the medium of literature or the written word” (2). Lefebvre cedes to literature the singular power to defamiliarize the everyday, to make people aware of it. One of his examples of this is James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, but he will have recourse to other modernist projects throughout the many years he spent on examining everyday life. There are many lessons to be drawn from Lefebvre’s lengthy oeuvre on the everyday; however, the fact that he derives so much of his thought from artworks in general and from modernism in particular suggests to me one manner of proceeding. Rather than arrest Lefebvre’s constantly mobile and constantly re-historicized idea of the everyday in order to graft it onto this or that set of literary phenomena, we might instead heed his lessons on art’s mode of registering the everyday.\(^\text{14}\) While cultural theory wrangles with ways of constructing sociological or theoretical models out of the work of Lefebvre and others, these writers are highly sensitive to the everyday as historically contingent and of their own thought as part of their historical moment (this is why Lefebvre’s volumes of *The Critique of Everyday Life* often take stock of what has happened since the last book, revisit earlier claims and often modify them). If we listen closely to Lefebvre or patiently

\(^{14}\) Laurie Langbauer’s *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction 1850-1945* expressly deals with the everyday, repetition, and the serial form. On a methodological level I depart from the manner in which she grapples with and applies theories of everyday life to literary texts. While many of Langbauer’s analyses are provocative and provide valuable insight, her method works in reverse of what I am advocating here and, I think, might hypostatize “theory” as a model of analysis.
attend to the project of Guy Debord’s Situationist International or venture further afield into the meditations on everyday life from Maurice Blanchot and Michel de Certeau, we find that modern art (often modernist writing) returns again and again as valuable resource for thinking the everyday. The study of philosophical approaches to the everyday, then, should point literary critics to ask how literary texts themselves make philosophical claims about the everyday as they generate new ways of looking at it. What I am suggesting here is that as literary criticism takes up everyday life as a worthy object of study, it must recognize the difference between the projects proposed by cultural theory and the demands of literary study. Highmore, Gardiner, Sheringham, and Felski all look to forge critical traditions from certain writers in order to construct models for investigating the everyday, be they post-structuralist, Marxist, or a weird Habermasian/phenomenological hybrid. For literary critics looking back over the last hundred years or beyond, the historical character of everyday life must take priority, something Lefebvre very well understood.

The lesson of theories of everyday life, then, is not to apply it to literary criticism at all, but to patiently think through the ways in which modernist experimentation may relate to the changes of everyday life in the early twentieth century. Whereas cultural theory draws connections between ideas across history, my approach here has been to show how the everyday emerged as a question for late modernists in the 1930s and 1940s. Historicizing the everyday in late modernism suggests that these literary works themselves make philosophical and political claims about everyday life; the same suggestion might apply equally to the dominant figures in everyday life theory. Lefebvre, for instance, developed his initial ideas of the everyday in collusion with the
Surrealists, only later to take a hard stance against their mysticism after Surrealism had lost its allure in post-World War II France (his later work shows the massive influence of Guy Debord and the Situationist International). Some of his work appears simultaneously with the texts under discussion here. To put this all quite simply, the injunction to think through everyday life and to configure it as a political or philosophical category extends throughout all facets of modern culture, be it in modernist aesthetics, early sociology (Simmel and Weber), phenomenology (Heidegger), avant-gardism (Dada, Surrealism, and, later, the Situationist International), economics (marketing studies of consumer behavior), and so on. Properly understood, the everyday is a persistent question of enormous importance for our understanding of modernist culture, but it is naïve, even reckless, to use certain texts as dehistoricized models for explaining others.

The individual chapters explore the ways in which four genres mediate four interrelated situations: the family chronicle (History), autoethnography (democracy), the travel book (war and political sovereignty), and the short story (the City). The first chapter takes up Virginia Woolf’s late novel *The Years* and focuses on the frisson between its form and content. Largely dismissed by Woolf scholars for its “modernist realist” tendencies or for being “too life-like,” *The Years*, I claim, is her most sustained and complex engagement with everyday life. Woolf’s novel filters the history of a single family through the “now” of the turbulent 1930s. Following the Pargiter family from 1880 to a conspicuously undated “Present Day,” *The Years* holds the major events of history—the 1857 Mutiny, Parnell’s death, militant suffragism, world war—on the margins of the text, turning instead to the daydreams, fantasies, gestures, and habits they engender: it is here, the novel suggests, that we might detect the ghostly afterlives of historical events. Most compelling of
all is Woolf’s use of the family chronicle genre to organize the time of her narrative. Against
the sovereignty of linear, historical time Woolf poses the alternative temporality of the
everyday, a temporality rendered through narrative repetition and ellipsis. The antagonism
between these two temporalities casts the everyday as the scene of private catastrophe,
formed and haunted by the violence of English history.

Shifting from the Bloomsbury milieu to a specifically late modernist conjuncture, the
second chapter takes up the Mass-Observation project. An unlikely collaboration between
British writers and film-makers dually influenced by British Surrealism and documentary
film (Charles Madge, Kathleen Raine, and Humphrey Jennings) and an anthropologist with a
deep distrust of poetry (Tom Harrisson), Mass-Observation presented itself as an avant-garde
sociological experiment, as a form of mass science that would allow the masses to do the
observing. Departing from the recent debates over Mass-Observation’s status as an historical
or artistic group, I recast Mass-Observation as a political project. By reading closely both
May the Twelfth and War Begins at Home I show how the formal dexterity of these works
holds together multiple, competing voices, modeling a functional parliamentary democracy at
a moment when such governments were collapsing under domestic and international strain.
From the Munich Crisis until the declaration of war in September 1939, everyday life takes
on a different shape: it is no longer the source of England’s democratic vitality. At odds with
government policy and emergency legislation, daily life practices appear in Mass-
Observation’s works as anarchic, disobedient, and often out of line with Britain’s war effort.
The formal transitions between Mass-Observation’s early and late works encode the passage
of a liberal state founded on democratic procedures into a war state predicated on the
suspension of those procedures.

The third chapter examines the war travel books of George Orwell and W.H. Auden
and Christopher Isherwood. I suggest that these books not only force a new
conceptualization of late modernist internationalism, but they actively participate in a recoding of war as the primary *techne* of political sovereignty. By turning to the everyday, these books attest to the radical changes in warfare that are remaking geopolitics. I read the fluctuations between the particularities of the everyday and the general ethical claims of these books as encryptions between the stark political realities witnessed in Spain and China and the failure to imagine any political alternatives to forestall the proliferation of war.

The final chapter refigures the relationship between the city and fiction in late modernism by examining the relation between the war metropolis and the short story. Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* and Elizabeth Bowen’s *Ivy Gripped the Steps* offer two kinds of cities at war: the silent war of a failed republic (Berlin) and the open war of the blitzed city (London). What makes these fictions of very different war cities comparable is their insistence on a loose, vague cohesion among the stories. Neither author conceived of their collections as novels or anything with an identifiable form, but rather simply as “books.” With Isherwood we see a collection of stories of everyday life at the twilight of the Weimar Republic whose formal organization acts as an allegory of a lost republic; Bowen gives us a loosely connected series of “disjected snapshots” of everyday life, showing us the gothic and, in her words, “hallucinatory” dimension of the everyday in a suspended city.

By attending to the particular relationships between aesthetics and politics in each chapter, I hope to have modeled one way of considering modernism’s relation to everyday life, a way that moves us out of the culturalist and sometimes anachronistic uses of cultural theory’s domestication (and de-historicization) of the everyday. Indeed what I hope to have shown here is precisely what I learned while wrestling with these chapters: that is, taking up the question of everyday life in late modernism operates also as a
question to the confines and limits of modernist studies, but also to its new possibilities.

In this way, then, this study takes up many of the challenges of the “new modernist studies” as they have recently been consolidated and articulated in a quite eloquent way by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz.\(^\text{15}\) In their recent report on the field of modernist studies, they delineate three axes—spatial, temporal, vertical—along which the study of twentieth century literature has progressed over the last decade or so. While this dissertation does very little with the “vertical” axis, or, the continued revisions of the high/low dichotomy, it does attempt to enter into and expand some of the key temporal and spatial problems that have long plagued modernist studies: periodization; the limitations of stylistic categories like modernism and realism; expanding the field of reading by focusing on texts that are not always read or attending to writers who seem to escape the purview of mainstream modernism; thinking of modernism’s international or global dimension; and, finally, taking seriously the question of art’s role in history and the political and philosophical claims it makes. By taking up the question of everyday life, the late modernists I study here found it imperative to push narrative boundaries, to experiment with different forms, and, very often, to question the very possibility of comprehending their own subject matter. This task is still very much our own and to address the question of everyday life in late modernism is also to question the motives and methods of modernist studies in the early twenty first century.

\(^{15}\) See Mao and Walkowitz’s “The New Modernist Studies” in *PMLA* 123: 3: May 2008. This is something of a companion piece to their introduction in *Bad Modernisms*. 
CHAPTER I:

OPENING THE EVERYDAY ONTO HISTORY: VIRGINIA WOOLF’S

*THE YEARS*

“Well, we’re about as bad as we can be. Never been so bad. We may go over the edge—but it has never been like this, so nobody knows.”

J.M. Keynes to G.B. Shaw, 1932


Evelyn Waugh, 1935

“It seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition.”

Virginia Woolf, 1938

In a letter to Stephen Spender in 1937, Woolf wrote that she hoped *The Years* would “give a picture of society as a whole…[and] envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere” (*L6* 116). Composed amidst the Great Depression, the spread of European fascism, and the onset of the Spanish Civil War, Woolf’s novel is equally symptomatic of the “changing temporal atmosphere” of the 1930s.16 Writers and intellectuals of all stripes worried over the political and economic troubles that compounded throughout the “disintegrating years” (Gascoyne 126) of the “grim ‘thirties” (Gascoyne 126).17 Surveying the early part of the decade, Beatrice Webb (of whom

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16 Woolf worked on *The Years* from January 20, 1931 to December 30, 1936 when she sent the proofs to the printer. For more on the manuscript history see Mitchell Leaska’s edition of *The Pargiters*.
Woolf drew more than a few unflattering sketches) assessed the fragile and potentially explosive geopolitical situation in light of global economic decline:

The U.S.A., with its cancerous growth of crime and uncounted but destitute unemployed; Germany hanging over the precipice of a nationalist dictatorship; Italy boasting of its military preparedness; France, in dread of a new combination of Italy, Germany and Austria against her; Spain on the brink of revolution; the Balkan states snarling at each other; the Far East in a state of anarchic ferment; the African continent uncertain whether its paramount interest and cultural power will be black or white; South American states forcibly replacing pseudo-democracies by military dictatorships; and finally—acutely hostile to the rest of the world, engulfed in a fabulous effort, the success of which would shake capitalist civilization to its very foundations—Soviet Russia.

(DBW 232).

Webb’s sentiments echoed throughout the Bloomsbury milieu as well. 18 Spender, Leonard Woolf, and J.M. Keynes were all convinced of the inevitability of another war

17 On the way the literary scene interpreted this crisis see Chapter Three of Valentine Cunningham’s British Writers of the Thirties.

18 Woolf records these two bits of conversation in her diary, the first overheard from Keynes, from which my epigraph comes, and the second recollected by Spender.

Well, we’re about as bad as we can be. Never been so bad. We may go over the edge—but as its never been like this, nobody knows. One would say we must’—which was uttered in the low tone of a doctor saying a man was dying in the next room; but didn’t want to disturb the company. This referred to the state of Europe, while we lunched—very well too”(Diary IV, 1932).

And from two years later:

Stephen Spender recalls asking Leonard Woolf in 1934 if there would be another war; “he replied; ‘Yes, of course. Because when the nations enter into an armaments race, as they are doing at present, no other end is possible.’” (Diary IV, 1935)
by the early 1930s; the failure of Collective Security in the League of Nations, Britain’s rearmament policy, and German expansionism were signposts on a path to what David Gascoyne thought of as “the Last War” (CJ 239). As the decade wore on, those geopolitical and economic challenges to the British centered world-system appeared to be “genuinely system endangering” (Hobsbawm 87).

19 The literary output of Woolf’s leftist contemporaries—W.H. Auden, Christopher Caudwell, C. Day Lewis—held tight to the Marxist dream of a more equitable world order that would follow capitalism’s collapse. Woolf’s late works, however, harbor no such utopic visions for a postwar world. In Three Guineas she proposed feminist and pacifist actions that would disable any British war effort; completed after the declaration of war in September 1939, Between the Acts retreats into an English nativism, seeking the security of an enclosed national culture.

For Spender’s thoughts on rearmament and the economic “boom” following the Depression, see his Forward from Liberalism.

20 On the day Britain and France issued formal declarations of war against Germany, Gascoyne wrote “Today, which is the day on which the outbreak of the Last War has occurred, is a day of such immeasurable historical significance, that it seems that to write anything more than “Today is the 3rd of September, 1939—the day Great Britain and France declared war on Hitler,” would only be irrelevant and unnecessary. Today, the individual is transcended…” (CJ 236). Gascoyne, like many others, had long felt the imminence of this war. September 3, 1939 merely gave it a date. Three years earlier, less than a week after Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists initiated the “Cable Street Battle” and the “Mile End Pogrom,” their own versions of Kristallnacht, Gascoyne looked down at London from Hampstead Heath and saw the city not as the happy, vibrant metropole, but as a future target: “London spread out under mist and smoke, grey-blue, immense, mysterious. What a heart-shaking spectacle it will be from this height some night soon to come, when the enemy squadrons blackening the sky rain down destroying fire upon those roofs! I turned away” (CJ 25).

20 On the decline of British economic power, Giovanni Arrighi writes that even “before the empire was dismantled, the collapse of the British pound’s gold standard in 1931 marked the terminal crisis of British rule over the world’s money” (174). The Great Depression significantly undermined Britain’s hold on the global economy and the financial, political, and social costs of the Second World War only accelerated the emergence of an American driven cycle of capital accumulation. See Chapter Three of his The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times.
against the encroachment of German bombers.\textsuperscript{21} \textit{The Years}, however, has little faith in preventing “the Last War” and even less faith in the warm aura of English culture. The novel approaches the “now” of the 1930s through the everyday lives of the Pargiter family from 1880 to the present, marshaling and disfiguring a host of formal conventions along the way. By addressing these peculiar turns of style, genre, and plot, I suggest that \textit{The Years} formally entwines the liberal notion of history as perpetual progress with the perpetual violence of English history. Reading \textit{The Years} in this way shows how the novel renders the crisis of a British centered world-system as a crisis of historical consciousness.

\textbf{The Law of Time}

Surveying Woolf’s career, Alex Zwerdling accounts for the late works in this way: “The work of her final decade is almost entirely constructed of elements \textit{The Waves} intentionally excludes: the parodic spirit in \textit{Flush}; historical specificity in \textit{The Years}; intense political commitment in \textit{Three Guineas}; the detailed factual record of an individual life in \textit{Roger Fry}; the deliberate interlarding of the exalted with the sordid in \textit{Between the Acts}” (12). Grace Radin also notes a decisive turn in Woolf’s work in the 1930s: “[After \textit{The Waves}] Woolf was drawn swiftly back to the outside world, to facts and arguments, politics, and the concerns of daily life” (1). The “historical specificity” of \textit{The Years} entailed significant changes in the way Woolf’s fiction deals with two

\footnote{For more on \textit{Three Guineas} see Merry M. Pawlowski’s edited collection \textit{Virginia Woolf and Fascism: Resisting the Dictators’ Seduction}. The two sharpest readings of \textit{Between the Acts} are contained in Jed Esty’s \textit{A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England} and Marina MacKay’s \textit{Modernism and the Second World War}.}
problems that are arguably central to all of her novels: temporality and everyday life.\textsuperscript{22} If *The Years* marks a drastically different approach to both of these, it is not one that Woolf looked upon kindly. While *The Years* was her best commercial success, Woolf never tired of pointing out its shortcomings.\textsuperscript{23} In an oft-quoted diary entry, she declared the novel “a failure” (Woolf *WD* 277) and characterized that failure as “deliberate” (Woolf *WD* 277). Literary critics have taken her judgment as axiomatic. More often than not, *The Years* is cast as the stray, ugly duckling of her oeuvre, an unfortunate blemish on an otherwise handsome career. To be sure, *The Years* resembles neither the svelte, introverted novels that preceded it nor the acclaimed posthumous novel that followed; it lacks the poetic rapture of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* and gone too are those radical experiments with character in *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. *The Years*, we are told, heralds a “turn to realism” (Delgarno 129); it is a fraught “modernist-realist” (Froula 240) experiment, simply “too much like life itself” (Bennett 98) to be numbered among Woolf’s major novels.\textsuperscript{24} As descriptions of the novel’s style, these observations

\textsuperscript{22} For an argument on the importance of everyday life to Woolf’s oeuvre, see Liesl M. Olson’s “Virginia Woolf’s “the cotton wool of daily life.””

\textsuperscript{23} Mark Hussey attributes the initial success of *The Years* to a “vogue for family chronicles” (*AZ* 391), but also notes how quickly its star fell, especially among literary critics. Nonetheless, this is the novel that got Woolf on the cover of *Time*.

\textsuperscript{24} Woolf’s novel figures scarcely in Valentine Cunningham’s encyclopedic *British Writers of the Thirties* and is mentioned even less in Maria Dibattista’s *Virginia Woolf’s Major Novels: The Fable of Anon*. Christine Froula’s *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War. Civilization. Modernity.* contains a chapter on *The Years* but then proceeds to analyze the diary entries, speeches, and manuscript versions surrounding the production of the novel. The final published work is jettisoned in favor of its failed earlier version *The Pargiters*. See Gloria G. Fromm’s “Re-inscribing *The Years*: Virginia Woolf, Rose Macaulay, and the Critics” for an entertaining and incisive polemic on Woolf scholars’ preference for *The Pargiters* over the finished novel. Fromm’s central point is that the desire to recover Woolf as a paragon of late twentieth/early twenty-first century progressive politics has skewed what we read from her and how we read it. Hence, the preference for the more openly feminist *The Pargiters* and the disdain for the less antagonistic and politically uncertain text that was published. That Fromm’s essay
are not too far off the mark. *The Years* is incredibly attentive to the minutiae of daily life and it bears strong resemblances to realist family chronicles like Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, and Galsworthy’s *Forsyte Saga*. While most modernist critics rush to equate the novel’s failure with its turn to realism, I suggest its amplified interest in “externality” (Woolf *D IV* 133) and its “modernist-realism” is what makes it so peculiar and compelling. If the everyday is the “particular property of realism” (2) as Laurie Langbauer claims, then the modernist-realism of *The Years* signals a heightened attunement to the quotidian as it changes over time and the adaptation of the family chronicle genre measures provides a way of measuring those changes. By returning to the formal operations of the novel, we can read more productively its dual preoccupation with historical time and everyday life. To that end, I examine first how the novel’s form addresses the passage of time and then turn to its way of looking at the everyday.

While discussions of the form of *The Years* are not in short supply, it is worth remarking that they generally occur with an eye towards the form it might have had if Woolf carried out her initial vision for the novel. Mitchell Leaska’s edition of *The Pargiters*, the project that later developed into *The Years*, clearly shows the final work to have appeared twenty years ago and still presents a formidable challenge to even the most recent readings of *The Years* attests to the veracity and force of her argument. Marina MacKay’s chapter on Woolf in her recent *Modernism and World War II* departs from the iconic presentation of Woolf “as a leftwing radical” (23) and historicizes Woolf’s writing; her analysis locates a more complex and historically rooted relation of politics and aesthetics in the late works, particularly *Between the Acts*.

25 In her diary entry of December 19, 1932 Woolf exuberantly recounts her attraction to the external world: “This one, however, releases such a torrent of fact as I did not know I had in me. I must have been observing & collecting these 20 years—since Jacob’s Room anyhow. Such a wealth of things seen present themselves that I can’t choose even—hence 60,000 words all about one paragraph. Of course this is external: but there’s a good deal of gold—more than I’d thought—in externality.”

26 Interestingly, Henri Lefebvre attributes the everyday to literary modernism. See his discussion of James Joyce in the first chapter of *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. 
be the culmination of an extended process of experimentation, retraction, and difficult textual decisions. The most noticeable difference between *The Years* and its unfinished counterpart is the omission of a series of non-fictional interchapters, a decision Woolf records in her diary of February 2, 1933.  

Composed in a more discursive tone, these essays explicate the historical tensions ciphered within the fictional episodes. Along with Leaska, Charles G. Hoffmann and Radin have assiduously traced the complex revisions leading up to *The Years*. For Leaska and Hoffmann, the removal of the interchapters indicates the failure and the unfortunate end of an ambitious project. Radin’s reading of *The Years* is more generous, but she finds the final work to be incomplete, fragmented, and without the clean, balanced design of other “successful” works like *To the Lighthouse*.

More recently, Christine Froula and Anna Snaith have moved away from aesthetic judgments based on manuscript research to questions of genre and politics. For Froula, the move from *The Pargiters* to *The Years* carries political as well as aesthetic consequences. Woolf should not be judged for her conscious deletions of the more openly feminist essay chapters of *The Pargiters*; according to Froula, the culprit behind these deletions is social repression and it is evident in the novel’s repression of its initial feminist political vocation: “She [Woolf] ultimately transformed *The Pargiters* collective “talking cure” into *The Years*’ “talking symptom” (Froula 214). While Froula’s evaluation of *The Years* opens towards more provocative questions of politics and aesthetics, it focuses less on *The Years* as such, and more on “a book that does not exist”  

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27 From her diary on February 2, 1933: “I am going however to work largely, spaciously, fruitfully on that book. Today I finished—rather more completely than usual—revising the first chapter. I’m leaving out the interchapters—compacting them into the text; & project an appendix of dates. A good idea?” (Woolf *WD* 189).
(214): that is, the essays, speeches, and drafts of a work that never came to be. Snaith perhaps does the most to rewrite the script on these critical debates by actually focusing on *The Years*. She models a way of reading that uses archival work to move further into the novel. Snaith argues convincingly that the excision of the interchapters does not mean “*The Years* ceases to be a novel based on fact” (101). Far from being casualties of Woolf’s revisions, facts and history remain central to *The Years*. As Snaith demonstrates, all of the research, newspaper clippings, and observations Woolf collected into her reading notebooks still turn up in the novel.

Still, we might say that Snaith takes a right step in the wrong direction. The right step is to suggest that Woolf’s novel is indeed a hybrid of documentary and fiction, of actuality and its poetic treatment. However, while Snaith resets the relation of archive to text, her analysis is concerned primarily with the way the plot of the novel reflects the social and political matter collected in the notebooks. What I am arguing for here is not a reflective reading, but a symptomatic one that addresses precisely what this history of reading forgets—the very question of history itself. The inclusion of historical material, if anything, constitutes a sharp interrogation of how quotidian reality is animated, stunted, or catastrophically propelled forward by what Woolf later designates “invisible presences” (*MB* 80), the unseen operations of social and political power throughout history. The most pressing questions that emerge from the treatment of history in *The Years* fall under two categories: how to narrate an historical event and how to measure the impact of that event on daily life. To begin opening out these interrelated problems of temporality, form, and event within *The Years*, I want to take a slight detour through another mode of writing defined by this same constellation—the diary. In a diary entry
for July 21, 1933, Woolf includes a crude sketch of a passage from *The Pargiters*: “He’s not a poet, no; so what is he to do “…That is poetry Maggie in its pre-natal; before it has taken wings to itself & flown to the –“ She paused at the bookcase, & took down, the Antigone, translated by Edward Pargiter. to the utmost” (*D IV* 169). Adjacent to this entry is a marginal note: “written here by mistake—damn.” (*Woolf D IV* 169). Woolf’s slip of the pen raises the question of what might, or might not, belong in a diary, a form that seems capacious enough to accommodate just about anything. Are there rules that govern the diary form that differ from other chronological forms of writing? Why might the diary exclude fictional material? Do these rules specify a mode for treating everyday life particular to the diary? If there is to be a division between the space of the diary and the space of the novel, is there also a corresponding division between how each registers event and non-event? To answer these questions, we need another way of reading the diary, one that sees it less as a skeleton key to fictional or biographical riddles. Rather than focus on “what” the diary archives, I want to turn attention more to “how” it archives material.

What strict division exists between the diary and the novel that would banish fictional material? Maurice Blanchot splits the difference between the two in spatio-temporal terms. For the writer who confronts the incessant demand of literature, the journal provides a space of escape; it allows the writer to remember “who he is when he isn’t writing, when he lives daily life” (*SL* 29). For Blanchot, the writer finds security and certainty in the space of the journal. Event and non-event are free to merge in the same entry with little evaluative division. An entry on the death of a friend, for example, may precede travel notes, friendly encounters, and a list of things done throughout the
day. Temporally, the diary offers the “protection of everyday time” (Blanchot BC 184), the idea that recording something alongside the date specifies when and where it happened. Recall the moment from “A Sketch of the Past” when Woolf openly decides on the diary form as a means of ordering her notes for a future memoir: “2nd May… I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present” (MB 75). The protective space of the diary is built around a single law: the law of the date. Inscribing a date above each entry, announcing when and where something occurred, grounds the transcription of the present. As Woolf writes in her entry of May 9, 1933 “It’s a queer thing that I write a date. Perhaps in this disoriented life one thinks, if I can say what day it is, then… Three dots to signify I don’t know what I mean” (D IV 158). The date, for all else it does not do, allows the inclusion of any number of phenomena that otherwise might seem disparate and formless. Anything, that is, except a fragment from her embryonic family chronicle.

In the same entry from “A Sketch of the Past” Woolf further demarcates the difference between the space of the diary and the space of literature: “I have no energy at the moment to spend upon the horrid labour that it needs to make an orderly and expressed work of art; where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole” (MB 75). The “mistake,” then, might not only be the friction between fictional material and actuality; rather, the accidental inclusion of this fragment does not abide by the law of the day, but is a part of an “orderly” artwork, where each bit gains significance by its

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28 See The Space of Literature for Blanchot’s meditations on the journal and its relation to the dissolution of the writer; “Diary and Story” in The Book to Come offers another articulation with a focus specifically on Woolf. There is a notable change in Blanchot’s idea of the everyday, one likely prompted by his reading of Lefebvre and post-1968 Paris. See Kristin Ross’ “Two Versions of the Everyday” for a full consideration.
reference to the whole work. Under the sovereignty of linear time, the diary records when and where something happens without assuming any clear relationship between the events. For Woolf, the fictional work aspires to a larger design, a thicker web of explicit and implicit connections.

Now, we can recast Woolf’s “mistake” as well as the form of *The Years* in clearer terms. On the one hand, the mistake is the intrusion of the fictive into the space of the actual. But more than that, this fragment’s trespass into the diary is an error in another sense; it enters the space where order and form are not prerequisites for what is included. The necessity of the family chronicle genre allows Woolf to place fiction under a similar chronology as the diary and to borrow its laws of accounting for the “where” and “when” of events. However, the novel’s distrust and eventual disfiguration of that genre questions its capacity to narrate historical events and to fully account for them. The “where” and “when” of the diary, its spatial and temporal affirmations of events, is less affirmative in *The Years*: the “where” of an historical event rarely finds its way into the narrative discourse and the “when,” its exact moment of occurrence, is far less important than its long, indistinct afterlife. Put another way, the sovereignty of linear, chronological time does not ground *The Years*; rather, the novel inhabits the genre only to show what it fails to do. The novel’s form internalizes what Paul Ricoeur calls a split between chronology and temporality, between the forward, linear movement of time and the fragmented, amorphous experience of time.  

Like the diary’s reliance on the date and chronology, the year functions as the primary organizing temporal unit for most of the novel. As Joanna Lipking and

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29 See Time and Narrative Volume 1: “Chronology—or chronography—does not have just on contrary, the a-chronology of laws and models. Its true contrary is temporality itself” (Ricoeur 30).
Hoffmann noted nearly thirty years ago, because *The Years* is a family chronicle, it initially maintains some fidelity to the genre’s common pairing of linear time and character development, of the perpetual progress of history and the development of the subjects of that history. The chapters and dates in Woolf’s novel move in a linear fashion, bearing more resemblance to works in the same genre by the Russian writers she revered like Tolstoy as well as contemporaries Thomas Mann, John Galsworthy, and Hugh Walpole. Yet Woolf’s adaptation of this form was not without skepticism. She was careful about keeping company with Galsworthy and Walpole’s works. In a conscious departure from Galsworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga* and Walpole’s *The Herries Chronicle*, she decided against naming the book after the Pargiter family, opting instead in 1933 for *Here & Now* and then, eventually, *The Years*. The focus, then, shifts from the family or the agents of history, to the question of how time passes. Woolf’s family chronicle, then, mediates between what Gilles Deleuze calls historical-time and event-time. For Deleuze, historical-time records the event in its actualization, mobilizing any number of discursive, technological, aesthetic, and other expressive means to do so. But what history records is not the time of the event per se. The historical-time of the event imposes a chronological sequence and a temporal consciousness that brackets off the past and the future. Event-time, however, exceeds the descriptive or expressive records of the event and disables any consciousness of history as linear or progressive. In Woolf’s account, the signature events of history exceed any narrative conventions that might fix

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30 Other critics have called *The Years* a family saga, but I insist on Lipking and Hoffmann’s designation precisely because “family chronicle” foregrounds the relation between the subject and time of the narrative.
them in time; while these events emerge from particular historical situations, they are irreducible to those situations.  

Because *The Years* treats events in this way, it deploys a specific chronotope for narrating the time and space of the event.  

The opening of the novel sets out the spatio-temporal coordinates that give form to the troubled historical consciousness of *The Years*. Like all the ones to follow, the “1880” chapter opens by presenting conflicting temporalities. First, like the diary, the date atop the page signals chronology, and the linear movement of time. A vivid description of the season and weather introduces cyclical and natural time. The narrative then focuses onto the goings on below where the two temporalities converge and conflict at the level of daily life:

> It was an uncertain spring. The weather, perpetually changing, sent clouds of blue and of purple flying over the land. In the country farmers, looking at the fields were apprehensive; in London umbrellas were opened and then shut by people looking up at the sky. But in April such weather was to be expected. Thousands of shop assistants made that remark, as they handed neat parcels to ladies in flounced dresses standing on the other side of the counter at Whiteley’s and the Army and Navy Stores. (3)

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31 Dominick LaCapra’s reading of *To the Lighthouse* provides interesting parallels and, quite possibly, begins to make a case along with my reading here that Woolf’s aesthetic techniques, their development and alterations, center around the treatment of event and non-event. Also see Chapter One of Hayden White’s *The Content of the Form* for more on writing history, the chronicle, and “deep temporality.”

32 I borrow chronotope from Bakhtin’s lexicon: “We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature…What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time” (84).
The friction between linear and repetitive temporalities frames our introduction to Colonel Abel Pargiter that immediately follows this descriptive opening passage. Sitting alongside men “who had been soldiers, civil servants” (Y 4) of empire, Abel trades “old jokes and stories now their past in India, Africa, Egypt, and then, by a natural transition, they turned to the present” (Y 4). But the temporal logic of The Years allows for no “natural” transitions between past and present. When the men “turned to the present” (Y 4), their conversations fall into ellipses: “yesterday he had lunched with…” (Y 4). There are inescapable connections between the past and the present, but The Years indicates early on that these connections are not reducible to a fluid succession of events, progressing from past to present.

It is also no accident that the novel threads the imperial past that occurred outside of England with the present that unfolds in the most private, enclosed interiors of the metropole. In the words of Hannah Arendt, empire is figured here as “a preparatory stage for the coming catastrophe” (OT 123). It is in this light that we should also consider the juxtaposition of the street and club scenes. The implication here, I think, is that the bustling metropole outside depends on the hidden violence and imperial wars waged by these men in the old club. The spatial logic positions these men and their participation in colonial rule as a kind of historical unconscious; deep within the heart of the metropolis is, to recall Peggy Pargiter’s allusion to Conrad, “the heart of darkness” (Y 388). The liberal notion of perpetual progress is made possible (and makes possible) by the operation and sustenance of a particular world-system; an economic spatial order

33 Arendt is writing from the other side of the Second World War, witnessing the emergence of another world in place of destroyed Europe. Where Woolf could not and would not have Arendt’s benefit of hindsight, the narrative logic of The Years bears an uncanny resemblance to Arendt’s arguments on imperialism and totalitarianism.
naturalizes its own ideologies of time, its own conceptions of progress. If the novel gradually denaturalizes these notions of historical progress, it does so by turning to everyday life to open out the highly mediated ways the past lives on in the present. These less visible, less transparent points of connection between past historical events and the now of everyday life opens another way of conceiving history.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Modernist-Realism?}

It is the novel’s scrupulous attention to everyday life that I think warrants using Christine Froula’s designation of \textit{The Years} as “modernist-realism” (240), even if she gives us very little by way of a definition for this odd term. What could this strange conjunction possibly signify and what about \textit{The Years} does it illuminate? To get at this question, I want to proceed by way of an admittedly more naïve one: why does “modernist-realism” simply sound so odd? At first blush, it has quite a bit to do with stylistic categories serving as periodizing terms. As literary history tells us, certain stylistic features emerge, peak, and decline over a period of years: romanticism gives way to realism which then develops into naturalism. At the summit of these nineteenth century literary innovations stands modernism, canceling out its predecessors and offering something “new” and “radical.” A twice-told tale, to be sure, but this story forgets as much as it preserves for cultural memory. The problem of accounting for the prolonged existence of styles and genres after their purported demise is in many ways the embarrassment of literary history’s fidelity to periodization. While modernist studies has admirably flexed the dates of modernism to include more variegated aesthetic practices, it

\textsuperscript{34} For a sustained and thoughtful argument on history and everyday life, see Harry Harootunian’s \textit{History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life}. 35
might be more productive to question periodization itself.\textsuperscript{35} How do terms like modernism and realism acquire such descriptive and evaluative force? How might we think of the aesthetic techniques they designate separately from the periods they denote? These questions are in part what Fredric Jameson asks in \textit{A Singular Modernity}. While acknowledging the ineluctability of periodization, Jameson also criticizes such gestures and, along the way, undercuts the pat narrative of modernism’s supersession of realism:

Modernism is an aesthetic category and realism is an epistemological one; the truth claim of the latter is irreconcilable with the formal dynamic of the former. The attempt to combine the two into a single master narrative must therefore necessarily fail. (\textit{SM} 124)

Splitting the difference between modernism and realism into aesthetics and epistemology certainly renders useless any “single master narrative” (Jameson \textit{SM} 124) of literary history. But we should ask if Jameson’s argument against these reductive truisms is itself a bit reductive. Is it the case that modernism and realism, aesthetics and epistemology, are derived from “two unrelated systems” (Jameson \textit{SM} 124)? Aesthetic theory since Kant has attempted to refigure the relation of art to both pure (epistemology) and practical reason (ethics and politics). One may uncover a different form of relation between art and knowledge across modern aesthetic theory—the Jena Romantics’ literary absolute, Hegel’s supersession of art by philosophy, Nietzsche’s positioning of art against knowledge, and so on. Marxist aesthetics itself is caught in these very dynamics, particularly those key debates on modernism and realism. For everything else that sets

\textsuperscript{35} Among others, see Marshall Berman’s \textit{All that is Solid Melts Into Air}, Richard Sheppard’s \textit{Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism}, Marjorie Perloff’s \textit{The Futurist Moment}, Tyrus Miller’s \textit{Late Modernism: Art, Politics, Fiction, and Culture Between the Wars}, and Ann Ardis’s \textit{Modernism and Cultural Conflict: 1880-1920}. 
them apart, Gyorg Lukacs’s harangues against modernism and Adorno’s unflinching defense of it both address the question of art’s relationship to knowledge, whether it functions as a way to cast class structures into relief or as an absolute refusal of instrumental rationality. Even if we maintain Jameson’s critique of periodization, it makes little sense to say that aesthetic and epistemological claims are irreconcilable because they are derived from unrelated philosophical systems. The problem art poses for philosophical aesthetics is precisely how it relates to knowledge. With *The Years*, formal operations are inseparable from its epistemological claims about historical time.

My point of departure here is a review of Ivan Turgenev that Woolf published in 1933, a year when she was fast at work on *The Years*. Despite its memorable anecdotes and pithy statements on the Russian writer’s technique, the essay is perhaps most valuable for what it discloses about the situation of art in the 1930s and Woolf’s efforts to find her place within that situation. In a particularly revealing passage from “The Novels of Turgenev” she writes:

> For he is asking the novelist not only to do many things but some that seem incompatible. He has to observe facts impartially, yet he must also interpret them. Many novelists do the one; many do the other—we have the photograph and the

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36 Of course, Jameson does acknowledge the simultaneous existence of modernisms and realisms, and even the proliferation of new realisms at different historical moments. While I am sympathetic and in agreement with most of Jameson’s charges against periodization and the ideology of modernism, my main departure from him here is on the key point of the categorical irreconcilability of aesthetics and epistemology. It strikes me as extraordinarily limiting to argue that either realism or modernism can be compartmentalized as primarily epistemological or primarily aesthetic. One feels that Jameson’s polemic gets the best of his analysis on this point. He addresses the question of art and knowledge in truly provocative fashion in both *Marxism and Form* and *The Political Unconscious* among other places.
poem. But few combine the fact and the vision; and the rare quality that we find in Turgenev is the result of this double process (Woolf 249).

This “double process” animating Turgenev’s novels offers one way to resolve a gritty realism with all its claims to objectivity with a modernist aesthetic seemingly antagonistic to such objectivity. Woolf’s description of Turgenev’s style echoes John Grierson’s elastic conception of documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality,” putting Woolf in the company of late modernist works that we saw in Chapter One and will see in the chapters to follow: the unconventional travelogues (Auden’s *Letters from Iceland* with MacNeice and his *Journey to a War* with Isherwood, and Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*), peculiar auto-ethnographies (Mass-Observation’s *May the Twelfth* and George Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier*), and the hybrid autobiographical fictions (Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin*) that proliferated throughout the 1930s. But the strain of the aesthetic demand Woolf finds in Turgenev is not simply the “double process” as such, but the novel’s ability to respond to it. Holding Turgenev as exemplary, she figures his response in decisively visual terms: “photograph,” “observe,” and, a term that carries several meanings in Woolf’s lexicon, “vision.” For critics like Nancy Armstrong and Peter Brooks, the specifics of nineteenth century realism have everything to do with sight and with looking.  

In *Realist Vision*, Brooks describes realism as “attached to the visual,

[^37]: This is a good time to acknowledge a debt to Jay Bernstein’s comments on realism in his chapter on Pieter de Hooch in *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*. Rethinking the philosophical claims of Dutch realism, Bernstein also casts de Hooch’s particular form of realism in visual terms. Against the mathematical science of Descartes, Bernstein places de Hooch in an altogether different sphere—that of Baconian observation: “Rather than claim that Dutch art is an unrecognized form or an extension of observational science, we might try the thesis that Dutch art, painting, is a mode of viewing (encountering and responding to) reality that is not further translatable into science, hence that it is art or painting that is a model for knowing that expresses, if anything does, what was meant (desired and hoped for) by “observation.” Realist painting must be seen as legitimating the hope
to looking at things, registering their presence in the world through sight” (3). And what is most often the object of realism’s searching eye? The everyday, the unexceptional, and the negligible prose of the world.

Like Jameson, Brooks disavows the hypothesis of a radical break between realism and modernism. His conclusion on the relation between these two styles is worth quoting at length:

That seems to me irreducible in the realist project: to register the importance of the things—objects, inhabitations, accessories—amid which people live, believe they can’t live without. The realist believes you must do an elementary phenomenology of the world in order to speak of how humans inhabit it, and this phenomenology will necessarily mean description, detailing, an attempt to say what the world is like in a way that makes its constraints recognizable by the reader. Note that Woolf—and also James, and Joyce, and Proust—don’t really reject this premise: their work is full of significant things…What is different in the modernists is most of all the selectivity of consciousness applied to the phenomenal world, and the establishment of a perspective resolutely within consciousness as it deals with the objects of the world. (211)

Things, objects, gestures: the clutter of daily life. These are the obsessions of realism, be it in Balzac, Dickens, or Courbet; they are equally the obsessions, so says Brooks, of

of Baconian science, rather than Baconian science being the grounds for legitimating Dutch painting…we might vindicate Dutch realist painting as, in certain moments, an achievement of “observation,” as offering another telling of the world as a wholly secular, finite, material place” (28-9). Arguably, Dutch art, Vermeer as well as de Hooch, looks at the everyday with the most sensitive of eyes and Bernstein’s analysis opens up just how powerful, and contemporary, these paintings are. It is the insistence on the “fitness” of technique to a world, or a form of life, that makes Bernstein’s argument (and his rendition of de Hooch) so compelling and, indeed, far more mature than much of the debate on realism and modernism.
Woolf and her modernist contemporaries. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf explains the relation between her fiction and the quotidian with specific reference to nineteenth-century realists:

Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand—“non-being”…A great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking dinner; bookbinding…The real novelists can somehow convey both sorts of being. I think Jane Austen can; and Trollope; perhaps Thackeray and Dickens and Tolstoy. I have never been able to do both. I tried—in Night and Day; and in The Years. (MB 70)

Woolf’s “private shorthand” refers to the insignificant activities of daily life—cleaning, walking, eating—and she ontologizes them. How does one capture and decode the “non-being” of these oblique, quotidian worlds? In Woolf’s account, The Years attempts to grasp the totality of experience, to coordinate the relation between being and non-being. Part of that effort requires what Brooks might designate as a different attunement to the everyday rather than a fundamental break with the earlier works.

If Brooks is right to de-emphasize the supposed stylistic and epochal rupture between realism and modernism, then we might recast the distinction between realism and modernism as a modal shift, one that has everything to do with the relation of subjective consciousness to the objective world. This becomes a useful way to read The Years because it allows us to see Woolf’s “modernist-realism” as a modal shift within her own oeuvre, a shift that indicates another way of looking at the everyday. This becomes
most evident by juxtaposition. In *To the Lighthouse*, for example, there is a good deal about objects and everyday things. The novel mediates the everyday world through individual consciousness, detailing the varieties of subjective experience. Neatly separating aesthetics and epistemology, the novel gives us Lily Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay, the artist figure and the philosopher; we have two modes of addressing the world—the poetic and the realistic. Aesthetic experience is redemptive and feminine; analytic, rational knowledge is tyrannical and masculine. Mr. Ramsay’s analysis of objects and systems reduces them to base formulas while Lily’s observations of tables, trees, and shapes imbues them poetically, multiplying their possible meanings. This stark, antagonistic division loosens considerably by the early 1930s when Woolf begins *The Years* (and the review of Turgenev). The treatment of everyday things has far less to do with hard rationality and “angular essences” (*TTL* 29), or even abstract, poetic qualities. Instead, the dialectic of art and knowledge in *The Years* proceeds by transfiguring “any scrap of everyday life into a sign of history” (Rancière 23). In a marked departure from the novels that preceded it, *The Years* seems far less interested in the psychic life of individual characters than in the histories they live (perhaps this goes some way towards explaining why *The Years* lacks a main character).

In the “1880” chapter, Woolf’s free indirect discourse turns ordinary objects into signs of history. She gives us the servant’s eyes and catalogues the objects of Abercorn Terrace: “The whole room, with its carved chairs, oil paintings, the two daggers on the mantelpiece, and the handsome sideboard—all the solid objects that Crosby dusted and

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38 The realignment of art and knowledge also entails an alternate way of examining gender relations. I deal with this only in part as a full consideration requires much more space than I have here. I have found Snaith’s and Froula’s analyses of gender politics in *The Years* to be among the most insightful and helpful. See also Jane Goldman’s *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism, and the Politics of the Visual.*
polished every day—looked at its best in the evening” (Y 35). Crosby’s labor gives her an intimate knowledge of the “solid objects” of the Pargiter house, objects that tell the family history and identify the Pargiters with a specific class. But if these objects function as markers of class for the Pargiter family, they compose and ground an entire world for Crosby. When the family sells Abercorn Terrace in 1913, Crosby takes a final inventory of the house and its objects. Leaving Abercorn Terrace is simply world-destroying:

Crosby was crying. The mixture of emotion was positively painful; she [Eleanor] was so glad to be quit of it all, but for Crosby it was the end of everything.

She had known every cupboard, flagstone, chair and table in that large rambling house, not from five or six feet of distance as they had known it; but from her knees, as she scrubbed and polished; she had known every groove, stain, fork, knife, napkin and cupboard. They and their doings had made her entire world. And now she was going off, alone, to a single room at Richmond.

(Y 216)

Eleanor and Crosby’s opposite reactions to the sale of Abercorn Terrace multiply the perspectives on this slice of daily life, but they do so in order to draw attention to the long history of class divisions. This mode of narrating history through the everyday is precisely what animates The Years and distinguishes it from Woolf’s introverted fictions.

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39 Crosby’s collection and random arrangement of objects she salvages from Abercorn Terrace after it is sold recalls John, the protagonist from Woolf’s post-WWI short story “Solid Objects.” To be sure, the repeated use of “solid objects” in The Years references this earlier story and the world-making power of objects. I can do no more here than gesture towards this connection; a sharp comparative analysis of these two texts still remains to be done.
The guiding question for *The Years*, then, is this: how does such fixed attention on the everyday relate to the novel’s conception of history? To start, I would like to recall that although the novel indexes a number of historical events—the 1857 Indian Mutiny, the death of Parnell, suffrage militancy, the First World War, the rise of fascism—it never actually draws them into the narrative; we never see history as Jameson would say. Instead, the novel trains its eye on the traces such events leave on everyday life and, indeed, detects the ways these past histories give form and shape to the everyday in the present. In this way, Janet Montefiore is right to call *The Years* “a historical novel” (62), but it does not use history as the ground of experience; rather, it figures history as something to be interrogated. With the exception of the First World War, historical events come to us indirectly and they hover over the entire novel. In Gerard Genette’s terms, they form part of the story, but not the narrative discourse. Because the Pargiter family represents English history in miniature, the characters function as metonyms for the perpetual violence underwriting English history: Abel, Delia, Martin, and North denote England’s imperial power over India, Ireland, and Africa; suffragette Rose and the gainfully employed Peggy point us to women’s struggles for economic and social equality; North, Charles, and Renny are partial references to the tragic and dislocating

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40 Hayden White distinguishes between modernism and realism according to their treatment of the event. For him, modernism blurs the distinction between fact and fiction that was so important to nineteenth-century realism and its mode of treating and indexing historical events. Modernism, on the other hand, dissolves the reality of the event. This gives another layer to the modernist-realism of *The Years*. It certainly does not deny the reality of the event, but it understands the impact of an event as truly excessive of any narrative or historical chronicle that would attempt to bracket it in a mere history of events. The vocation of the novel, or at least her novel, is to interrogate how these events impact our lives and how we go about living history, even if we do so unconsciously. See White’s “The Modernist Event” in *Figural Realism*. Also, for a philosophical conception of the event close to what I am outlining here, see Alain Badiou’s *Ethics* and *Metapolitics*.

41 See Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. 

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effects of the First World War. While the family chronicle genre carries the narrative in a linear fashion, it holds the punctual events of history to the side, turning instead to the diverse ways history lives on in the everyday existence of the Pargiter family.

The “1917” chapter dramatizes in exemplary fashion how one lives an historical event, but never sees history. The historic event here is a Zeppelin raid on London, an event that lived all the more intensely in public memory as aerial bombing became a featured part of military strategy in the 1930s. This chapter opens innocently enough with Eleanor Pargiter stumbling through blacked-out London, using the dim light of her hand torch and the air raid searchlight overhead to find Renny and Maggie’s house. Air raid sirens interrupt the family’s dinner and conversation, setting into motion one of the strangest war scenes in literary modernism. As Eleanor and company descend into the cellar, Nicholas, their Polish friend, charts the location of German bombers by timing the bursts of gunfire on his pocket watch. Eleanor tries to witness the event as well; she gazes up at the ceiling and figures “the Germans must be overhead by now” (Y 291). The crackling of anti-aircraft guns shakes a spider-web suspended in the corner of the ceiling and Eleanor monitors its movement, using it as a metronome to measure the rhythms of the air raid. This scene catalogues a number of ways these characters experience the air raid, but none of them actually see the planes or the war outside. Rather, this event becomes legible through the faint impressions it makes on cellar ceilings or through noises or, even more suggestively, through the very impossibility of seeing which Woolf represents literally and figuratively with the blacked-out city. Leaving Maggie and

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42 I am thinking here of Fredric Jameson’s key claim in The Political Unconscious on history and the narration of history: “history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (35).
Renny after the all-clear siren, Eleanor observes passengers in an omnibus; they “looked cadaverous and unreal in the blue light” (Y 300), as if the event was de-realizing the quotidian world before her very eyes.

At first blush, this preoccupation with grasping totality of history seems to put Woolf’s novel in the company of “the great realists” (Lukacs 145). Yet what those predecessors lack, and this is precisely why we should care about the aesthetic claims of Woolf’s “failed” novel, is the historicity of Woolf’s realism, of the turn to such techniques in the 1930s. In their accounts of Balzac, Dickens, Carroll, and others, Brooks and Armstrong provide the reasons for these techniques (and their subversions)—they tell us how they correspond with the world from which they emerge, or what Jay Bernstein would call the “fitness” between technique and a form of life (37). What is important about Woolf’s modernist realism is that, like the term, it doesn’t fit.

Everywhere in The Years we see this tendency to catalog, describe, detail, or index everything that appears extraneous to the story. But what this novel tells us is that nothing is extraneous; all signs, regardless of how minor they are to the characters or how quickly they are introduced and passed over in the narrative, they all have something to tell us. Newspaper stories about the political frailty of the Balkans in 1913 may indeed seem like stray details to Martin Pargiter at the moment; such unrest, however, is the most obvious foreshadowing to any reader after the First World War. Is this how Woolf hopes we will read Eleanor’s outbursts about dictators? What importance are we to lend to Mosley’s fascist insignia that North finds scrawled on a London wall? Is it significant that the novel describes this insignia, but does not name it? Is the novel training its contemporary readers to look, observe, see, and read everything with the same intensity
before the event of war as one would do in retrospect? Are the newspaper stories about fascist dictators and warmongering abroad supposed to chill and terrify with the same certainty (and induce the same foresight) as those reports from the Balkans?

Woolf’s protagonists can direct attention to all the seemingly unexceptional facets of daily life, but their historical antecedents and the possible futures they portend are all but unintelligible to them; even if the protagonists are able to listen in on these mute forecasts, the novel suggests, there is little chance of affecting the course of history. That Woolf simultaneously deploys and disfigures these realist techniques attests to an historical, indeed geopolitical, transformation whose definitive events have everything to do with the structures of daily life (it is fitting that so many events in the novel are discovered on the front page of daily newspapers). The breach between technique and world in The Years signals a demand to rethink the relation of historical events to the minutiae of everyday life and, perhaps, serves as a tacit acknowledgment that we are beholden to the machinations of history; we are its objects, not its primary actors. It is with this in mind that I turn to the primary actors of Woolf’s novel, in particular three of its female protagonists whose daily doings and dreams make manifest the long afterlives of history.

**Flowers, Stones, and Liberty: How Delia and Rose Dream**

Preoccupied as it is with distinguishing characters, plotting Mrs. Pargiter’s death, and introducing the complex dynamics of the Pargiter family, the “1880” chapter is also concerned with dreams and fantasies: Delia’s Parnell daydreams, Rose’s imaginative adventure games, Kitty’s erotic fantasies, and Edward’s fantasies of Kitty. I want to suggest that Delia and Rose’s early daydreams and fantasies, and their extension into
their adult lives, chart the migration of historical events into everyday life. At first blush, the presentation of Delia and Rose’s fantasies appears symmetrical enough. Delia dreams of Irish Home Rule icon Charles Parnell while Rose fancies herself as a soldier from Pargiter’s Horse: one is plucked from the imperial scene and the other from the domestic, but both have their origins in the imperial history of the Pargiter family. Delia’s anti-imperial fantasies eventually land her in a marriage with an Irishman and Rose’s imagined domestic warfare matures into actual militant activity with the suffragettes. If *The Years* turns a skeptical eye towards historical development, character development here is viewed with the same skepticism. As we see with Delia and Rose, Woolf’s characters do not progress, but live out and repeat their family histories with disastrous consequences.

When we first see Abel Pargiter take his place at the dinner table he transforms from erstwhile imperialist and adventurer into storyteller and patriarch, further twining the Pargiter family’s imperial past with its present. Delia especially falls under the enchantment of Abel’s exotic tales. “Delia liked listening to her father’s stories about India. They were crisp, and at the same time romantic. They conveyed an atmosphere of officers dining together in mess jackets on a very hot night with a huge silver trophy in the middle of the table” (*Y* 36). Unmoored from their specific context, these stories take a particularly telling form in Delia’s imagination. Her repeating fantasy in 1880 pits her at the side of Charles Parnell.43 “Somewhere there’s beauty, Delia thought, somewhere there’s freedom, and somewhere, she thought, *he* is—wearing his white flower…But a

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43 The figurations of Ireland in Woolf’s texts have yet to be analyzed in any comprehensive way. We know Woolf visited Ireland in 1934 and even stayed at Elizabeth Bowen’s house. She saw *The Man of Aran* that same year and had quite a bit to say about Irish politics. I have found Lisa Weihman’s recent article “Virginia Woolf’s “Harum-Scarum Irish Wife”: Gender and National Identity in *The Years*” to be especially provocative on this issue.
stick grated in the hall. “It’s Papa!” Milly exclaimed warningly” (Y 12). A metonym for Parnell and his contestation of British rule, the white flower is bound in Delia’s daydream sequence with “beauty” and “freedom,” all of which exist “somewhere” beyond the confines of Abercorn Terrace. The novel seems to imply a symmetrical relation between Delia’s fantasies, coded as they are in blatantly anti-imperial terms, and the imperial past that lives on in the Pargiter home through Abel’s stories and his authority over the family. Of course, there is something to this. As The Pargiters manuscript makes more explicit than does The Years, Abel invests heavily in his sons’ futures, impeding Delia’s wish to study music in Germany. As Woolf would argue later in Three Guineas, in the late Victorian home such education was open only to men, not to their sisters or daughters.\footnote{For a comprehensive study of education in The Pargiters and The Years, see Anna Snaith’s Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations.} Still, the timing and repetition of Delia’s daydream points elsewhere.

At her mother’s bedside, Delia lapses into her private dream world and names Parnell for the first time. Delia “longed for her [mother] to die” (Y 22), but she attempts nonetheless to excavate a simple memory of affection for her. When Delia conjures such a memory it dissolves and gives way to “the other scene” (Y 22): “The man in the frock coat with the white flower in his button-hole. But she had sworn not to think of that till bedtime” (Y 22). She skirts across other memories to stave off “the other scene,” but it manifests itself fully and sweeps Delia away with it. Setting the scene just right with the “hall; banks of palms; a floor beneath them crowded with people’s heads” (Y 22), Delia imagines Parnell at her side. “I am speaking in the cause of Liberty,” she began, throwing out her hands, “in the cause of Justice….’ They were standing side by side” (Y 23). The “other scene” appears twice more at her mother’s funeral and Delia again
struggles to hold it at bay. Why do these daydreams manifest so powerfully at these specific moments? For Delia, it is not her father, whom she admires and looks upon lovingly, but her mother who constrains her, keeping her bound to late Victorian feminine roles. When the elder Rose Pargiter’s health slides for the final time, Delia presumes it is another false alarm. “But it’s all for nothing, Delia said silently, looking at her father. She felt that they must both check their rising excitement. ‘Nothing’s going to happen—nothing whatever,’ she said, looking at him” (Y 45-6). But something does happen and her mother’s death provides Delia the opportunity to achieve her dreams of justice and liberty: “She was possessed by a sense of something everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becoming life…life came closer and closer” (Y 87). For Delia, this much anticipated death extends her horizon of possibilities beyond the domestic strictures of the late Victorian household. As we learn from later chapters, Delia flees Abercorn Terrace after her mother’s passing, seeking the justice and liberty of her fantasies. Even in those chapters where Delia does not appear, she remains connected to the family’s history through Parnell and Ireland; Eleanor and Abel immediately think of her when Parnell’s death is announced in “1891” and Rose reports to Maggie in “1910” that Delia “married an Irishman” (Y 168) as Maggie “took a blue flower and placed it beside a white flower” (Y 168), again pairing the metonym for Parnell with Delia.

In the “Present Day” chapter, we see Delia some fifty years older. Her daydreams and political aspirations have merged completely with her daily life, right down to her mannerisms and gestures. She greets Peggy with “her imitation Irish flattery” (Y 362) and assists North while “assuming the manner of a harum-scarum Irish
hostess” (Y 365). More than Delia’s superficial “Irishness,” her marriage stands as a tragic and ironic reminder of how past histories permeate the present. For all of Delia’s daydreams of liberty, justice, and “the Cause,” she weds Patrick, an older Irishman who repeatedly laments Ireland’s new freedom and longs instead for the old Empire: “It seems to me,” says Patrick of the Irish Free State, “that our new freedom is a good deal worse than our old slavery” (Y 399). Delia’s political fervor leads to neither justice nor liberty. The novel treats her as something of a caricature, undermining whatever lofty ideals fueled her antagonism towards late Victorian domesticity and Abercorn Terrace:

“Thinking to marry a wild rebel, she had married the most King respecting, Empire-admitting of country gentleman” (Y 398). Delia’s borrowed Irish mannerisms and her ironic marriage are cast as aberrations by the novel; her daydreams have become her waking life and she is none the better for it. Seeking a way out of the imperial domesticity at Abercorn Terrace, Delia’s adversarial daydreams land her aside an Irishman mourning the loss of empire, decrying the gains of suffrage for women, and wishing for the return of the very time and life Delia so longed to escape.

Like Delia, Rose Pargiter’s adult life can be traced back to those early days in Abercorn Terrace. On the surface, Rose appears the most political, or politicized, character in the novel. She joins and leads a militant wing of the suffrage movement. Through the conversations of other family members, we learn that Rose throws a brick through a shop window during a suffrage march, is imprisoned and force-fed, and, like many suffragettes, works for the British war state during the First World War. Froula rightly assesses Rose’s situation in the novel: “As Rose grows up, unconscious guilt, shame, rage, and fear fuel her distinguished career as a militant suffragette” (238). Still,
it is important to remember that Rose’s earliest fantasies were military ones whose vocabulary and imagery undoubtedly came from Abel’s stories. More than that, the novel’s portrait of Rose is painted in an unforgiving light. One need not recall Woolf’s own vexed relationship to political action (one hears Woolf behind Kitty Lasswade’s repeated statement “force is always wrong” \((Y 179)\)) and the militant suffragettes to feel that \textit{The Years} hardly commends Rose. Leaving biographical speculation aside, we might focus instead on the ways in which the narrative economy of \textit{The Years} situates Rose’s political life. I want to begin here by returning to the original scene of Rose’s childhood fantasies and those curious evening adventures that take her on missions beyond Abercorn Terrace.

Unable to leave the house without her brother or any other male escort, Rose sneaks away alone to Mrs. Lamley’s shop. Her “mission” is dressed with all the details of military espionage: she is on a “desperate mission to a besieged garrison” \((Y 27)\), delivering a “secret message” \((Y 27)\) in “enemy country” \((Y 27)\). She imagines herself as a secret agent, as “Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse” \((Y 27)\). Rose runs past a man leaning against a pillar box and “shoots” him, but something else happens. The man reaches out for Rose, nearly grabbing her: “The game was over. She was herself again, a little girl who had disobeyed her sister” \((Y 28)\). As she leaves the shop, she tries again to conjure the fantasy “but the story no longer worked" \((Y 29)\). The man by the pillar box appears again and exposes himself to Rose. The scene replays itself in Rose’s ghostly nightmares, but, having disobeyed Eleanor, Rose cannot explain what happened. There is more, however, behind Rose’s militancy than this single event. In the “1908” chapter we learn that Rose took the blame for a broken microscope in elementary school and she cut
her wrist with a butter knife in the bathroom: “And I dashed into the bathroom and cut this gash”—she held out her wrist. Eleanor looked at it. There was a thin white scar just above the wrist joint” (Y 158). That Woolf’s narrative might be replaying some Freudian scene of trauma and repetition seems obvious enough; what is less obvious, and indeed more crucial, is the narrative sequencing of these events and their recollection. Rose joins Eleanor and Martin after giving a speech in Northumberland on women’s suffrage. “A stone had been thrown at her; she put her hand to her chin. But she had enjoyed it” (Y 157). The narrative juxtaposes this scene with Rose’s childhood traumas, coding Rose’s political life as an unfortunate, even masochistic, repetition of family history.

The “Present Day” chapter subjects Rose to the same searing irony as her “Irish” sister. Like many of the suffragettes, Rose assisted the British war effort after 1914, recruiting men for the war, performing industrial work, and so on. Rose was given a “decoration” (Y 359), a red ribbon, for her work for the war state. As we know, women at last acquired the vote, or at least part of it, after the war due in part to their cooperation.45 During a toast at Delia’s party, Kitty drinks to Rose but echoes her sentiment from two decades earlier, crying “force is always wrong” (Y 420). Martin acknowledges the irony between Rose’s prewar political antagonism to the state and her reward for trading revolutionary politics for cooperation and reform: “’She smashed his window,’ Martin jeered at her, “and then she helped him to smash other people’s windows” (Y 420). But more importantly than the validity of Rose’s political investments are the fantasies and possibilities that shape her life. From her earliest years,

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45 Women would not gain complete suffrage until 1928, leading some historians such as A.J.P. Taylor to ask, and rightly so, if one could consider England a proper democracy before that year.
the vocabulary and the imagery are extensions, repetitions, and revisions of her family history; the Pargiter’s past is inescapably the “now” of Rose’s everyday life.

For whatever else we might think of them, Delia and Rose’s daydreams indicate the enormous impact and the sustained afterlives of historical events—Parnell and the Irish Question for Delia, suffrage and political violence for Rose. Extending far beyond their own moments of occurrence, these histories inaugurate situations and possibilities (and impossibilities) for imagining other lives and other worlds. For Rose and Delia, historical events give form and content to their frustrations, their hopes, and their disappointments.

Unbracketed War

Thus far I have been arguing that The Years holds the “punctual events” (Jameson PU 62) of history on the margins: the 1857 Indian Mutiny is never discussed in the narrative, but the finger Abel lost during the rebellion attests to the traces it leaves behind on the family’s history; Parnell’s death, like the speeches of dictators and the rumblings in the Balkans, comes to us by way of a newspaper headline; King Edward VII’s death is announced through the drunken shouts from a pub at the corner of Sara and Maggie’s slum apartment. Because the “1917” chapter depicts an air raid, we might ask how it holds to this narrative structure or if it departs in any significant way. I previously discussed the way this chapter dramatizes the impossibility of seeing the historical event; now, I want to examine what status The Years lends that event. To be sure, Woolf’s fiction is rife with allusions to war. Woolf scholars have long noted the way the war zone haunts the metropolis in her novels, often pointing to the parallel in Mrs. Dalloway between Clarissa Dalloway and the damaged soldier Septimus Smith. Even in novels set
outside the city like *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, war remains the definitive event. Dominick LaCapra’s smart reading of *To the Lighthouse* attends closely to the syntactic and formal distortions that accompany Woolf’s representation of war. Focusing on the compressed middle chapter “Time Passes,” LaCapra interprets the novel’s style as a way of managing history:

> As explicit marks of punctuation, brackets represent the way in which major and often negative forces of ordinary time and history are self-consciously contained, In a sense suppressed…On page 201 of the novel, World War I and the death of Andrew Ramsay from the explosion of a shell take place in brackets (here one has a book in which the First World War occurs in brackets!), as does the death of Mrs. Ramsay on page 194.” (LaCapra 139-40)

*To the Lighthouse* strives to contain war, quite literally to hold it in brackets. But it also wants to give the war a place in time where it can be contained and narrated in a clear sequence: “The Window” (pre-war), “Time Passes” (war), and “The Lighthouse” (post-war). Lily Briscoe’s final brushstroke across her canvas at last connects the other two parts; if history has been fragmented by war, the artwork sutures the broken halves and, in this way, Lily’s painting symbolizes the formal operations of the novel. *To the Lighthouse* presents war as a rupture in historical time, but the narrative finds a way, like Lily’s painting, to connect the two periods of time before and after the war. Because the novel can formally bracket the war, it can assume the war has ended and a period without war follows.

In *The Years*, however, there is no bracketing of war and certainly no formal acrobatics to contain it. The war does not constitute a rupture in history; it is an event that
inaugurates another historical situation altogether. In the words of Carl Schmitt, these chapters reveal an historical sense of total war as “an ever present possibility” (CP 34). Thus, it is not a break in the movement of history, but the “leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking” (Schmitt CP 34). As Woolf composed and revised these chapters, the “ever present possibility” of war seemed all the more imminent: Collective Security among the global powers faltered; Germany’s rearmament and expansionist agenda moved ahead virtually unhindered; Japan and Italy pursued their own imperial schemes as the League of Nations admonished their actions but revealed their own powerlessness to intervene in global affairs. And, moreover, Britain pursued its own rearmament policies to safeguard its imperial trade markets, all of which were under threat from regional competition, colonial unrest, and the wars spreading across Europe and Asia.46 With Britain’s influence over the world-system waning, open war as a technique of governance became more commonplace, and, to nervous observers like Gascoyne and Leonard Woolf, the “last war” was not an ever present possibility, but the only possibility. 47

The stark future that these geopolitical maneuverings forecast underwrites Woolf’s reconstruction of the Zeppelin raids from 1917. I want to turn to what this chapter allows us to see, which is not the event itself, but the beginnings of the world that this event brings into being. Perhaps Eleanor, warm with wine, best characterizes how this event inaugurates a new historical situation: “the war, perhaps, removing barriers” (Y 284) collapses those distinctions like public/private and peaceful metropole/war zone that

46 See Steven E. Lobell’s The Challenge of Hegemony: Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics, especially Chapter Four.

47 See Leonard Woolf’s “From Geneva to the Next War” in The Political Quarterly 4:1, 1933.
ground the daily life of the Londoners. The war, says Eleanor, places “a little blur…round the edge of things” (Y 287). And, indeed, we can again paradoxically see these blurred barriers in the blacked-out city. The state mandated a citywide blackout to protect the civilian population against bombers. Of course, this was not the only area of everyday life that fell under the cold light of state power. On August 8, 1914, the British Parliament passed the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), giving all manner of emergency powers to the state.48 It now wielded significantly more authority over the dissemination of information through the press; all land, public and private, could be appropriated for the war effort; businesses and industries were also susceptible to requisition if their materials were deemed useful for the prosecution of the war; and, on a less serious note, this legislation also regulated the amount of cocaine actresses were permitted to use and banned the flying of kites. The long reach of state power into everyday life blurred the boundaries between public policy and private life as well as the contract between the citizens and the limited powers of the liberal state.

Miming the breach of these boundaries, the “1917” chapter firmly establishes its own set of distinctions and then charts the moment they become inoperative. Fumbling about in the darkness where the lack of any lighting “seemed to muffle sound as well as sight” (Y 279), Eleanor enters Renny and Maggie’s house and notes with exceptional sensitivity the solidity and distinction of objects. “It looked strange after the streets—the perambulator in the hall; the umbrellas in the stand; the carpet, the pictures: they all seemed intensified” (Y 280). The cataloging and differentiation of these objects draws a firm line between the muffled dark outside and the clear visibility of the inside. Street

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48 See A.J.P. Taylor’s English History 1914-1945 on the use of emergency legislation as well as Tony Bunyan’s The Political Police in Britain.
and home, public and private, exterior and interior—these are the divisions of everyday life the chapter maps out in its initial pages. These are also the very ones unsettled by the air raid. If one cannot see the air raid, the impact of the war outside is made perfectly legible on the private family gathering on the inside. The trembling spider-web and the cracking of the guns invade the interior of Renny and Maggie’s house. After the planes pass and the raid ends, the barriers remain blurred. Turning to Nicholas to pick up their conversation, Eleanor asks “And what were we talking about before the raid?” (Y 292).

The conversation between Eleanor, Renny, and Nicholas had been on “the psychology of great men” (Y 281). When they resume, they turn instead to “the New World” (Y 292) to come after the war. Sarah, Eleanor, and Nicholas jovially toast to the new world and, in a scene that will echo in the final chapter, Nicholas launches into a speech, but only to be interrupted by gunfire and Renny’s sober remark: “They’re only killing other people” (Y 293). Eleanor wonders aloud if “we’re going to improve” (Y 295) in the new world and Nicholas answers affirmatively and “quietly as if he did not wish to rouse Renny who was reading” (Y 295). Interrupted once more by both Sara and Renny, Eleanor thinks “talk in private is impossible” (Y 296). That peaceful and private conversation is constantly interrupted by gunfire and killing models the increasing impossibility of separating peaceful, liberal society from the violence exerted elsewhere that allows the metropole thrive.49

49 Of course, Fredric Jameson makes this argument in terms of economics and space in his classic essay “Modernism and Imperialism” in Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature. Carl Schmitt’s The Nomos of the Earth in the Jus Publicum Europaeum also argues that “unbracketed war” honed and perfected itself in the colonies before returning to destroy Europe in the early twentieth-century. The wealth and power concentrated in England during what Arrighi calls the British cycle of accumulation came through the perpetual warfare in the colonies and, to borrow Foucault’s formulation, “the silent war” (SMBD 16) waged against the population to maintain its economic and political dominance.
The air raid on London dissolves those barriers that England’s imperial control erected and maintained in the “1880” chapter. The distinctions between exterior and interior, peaceful metropole and embattled war zone dissolve; the imperial warfare of the nineteenth century returns as open, unbracketed war in the twentieth century and the war zone and the metropolis are indistinguishable locations. Writing in the decade following the Second World War, both Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt read Europe’s imperial past as an incubation period for the total wars that erupted in the twentieth century. Schmitt describes how the use of force in the colonies was unhindered by legal restrictions, making open violence a legitimate technique of imperial governance. What sustained European interstate law (jus publicum Europaeum) in his account was the ability of European sovereign states to bracket war within Europe. This bracketed war he defines as the “rationalization, humanization, and legalization” (Schmitt Nomos 100) of a form of warfare that applied only to European states. Schmitt’s point is akin to what many scholars have contended for quite some time: the West’s total wars are a return of colonial violence from the imperial periphery to the metropole. But just as Rose Pargiter’s death dissolved the lines between dream and reality for Delia, the war also opens a threshold to the new world. Of course, Woolf renders the hopes of the postwar world from the vantage point of twenty years later when utopic dreams of enduring peace and Collective Security are as fraught as Delia’s own desires for freedom and justice. Where To the Lighthouse yearns for a world of redemption after the war and formally brackets the war in its narrative structure, The Years holds out a future of unbracketed war. The novel’s form can neither contain war nor imagine a world beyond it; The Years encodes this lawless, perpetual war by departing from the laws of the family chronicle
genre, ultimately dissolving into a conspicuously undated “Present Day” chapter where


time endures but does not progress forward. Before we move to that chapter, it is worth

turning to the way the narrative carefully narrates the war’s end so as to suggest war


never ends, but only assumes other forms.

The curiously brief “1918” chapter reinforces in a less direct way the collapse of boundaries in the previous chapter. Crosby walks through London on errands for her new employer, Mrs. Burt. The siren sounds to a “dull explosion” (Y 304) and Crosby only mutters “them guns again” (Y 304); everyday routines and war are absolutely intertwined in the metropolis. Another explosion elicits a momentary pause in the daily doings of the city:

A man on a ladder who was painting the windows of one of the houses paused with his brush in his hand and looked round. A woman who was walking along carrying a loaf of bread that stuck half out of its paper wrapping stopped too. They both waited as if for something to happen. A topple of smoke drifted over and flopped down from the chimneys. The guns boomed again. The man on the ladder said something to the woman on the pavement. She nodded her head. Then he dipped his brush in the pot and went on painting. The woman walked on. Crosby pulled herself together and tottered across the road into the High Street. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. The war was over—so somebody told her as she took her place at the counter of the grocer’s shop. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. (Y 304-5)

The incessant noises of war (again no one sees the actual war) give pause to otherwise ordinary actions: a servant running errands, a man painting, and a woman returning from
a store. Though they wait for something to happen, nothing ever does. Like the nothing that happens for Delia when Rose Pargiter dies, the war and its apparent end have little meaning. The final two lines in the above passage encapsulate the “New World” opened by the war. While the Treaty of Versailles would end hostilities along the front, Woolf’s closing passage here shows a war that goes on alongside or underneath the surface of everyday life. The “New World” is no more the realization of the dream of Kantian perpetual peace than Delia’s new world was the realization of her hopes for justice and liberty.

And Now?: “Nox est una perptua dormienda.”

The only chapter after the First World War in The Years is also the only undated one. Simply called “Present Day,” it notably departs from the way the novel has thus far used the family chronicle genre to chart history. Where an individual year constitutes a measurable unit of time, the open ended present endures without measure and without limit. If the chapter starts with this disjunction with the novel’s form, it concludes with another wrinkle in its formal design. The closing line echoes the opening passages for the previous years, focusing on the seasons and weather: “The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace” (Y 435). The suggestion is, I think, that the time of the present in the postwar world cannot be measured or understood by calculation because time is not progressing forward. The arrow of time is broken and there is no numerical form of measurement to calibrate the relation of the past to the present. In a way, this chapter continues that moment from “1918” where war and everyday life have become inseparable. The final chapter of The Years finds the “ever present possibility” of war embedded within the everyday. The
novel’s question in this chapter is the very one Eleanor utters twice without answer: “And now?” (Y 435). In what follows, I want to investigate how the novel figures the “now” of the 1930s and what its failed “New Worlds” and utopias indicate about the historical consciousness of that decade.

Focused primarily on the younger generation of the Pargiter family, this chapter shows us the present through the eyes of Peggy and North Pargiter, the two children who have inherited the Pargiters’s family history and will map out a course for history in the “New World.” Peggy has reaped the rewards of Rose and the militant suffragettes; she works as a doctor in London and has earned all the praise and esteem of her male colleagues. Like the other males in his family, North was a member of the British military and spent the last several years in Africa. Peggy and North hold all the promise for the family’s future, but the “now” of the 1930s is a time without any future. Memories of the past war and murmurings of the coming war freeze the present as an interlude, as what Robert Graves would call the long weekend between the two world wars. Positioned between the inescapable past and the inevitable future, the novel yearns for another way of aligning the past with the present, one that might restore historical progress without its attendant violence.

For Peggy, the sights and sounds of present day London are all signs of English history. The first of many examples comes to us by way of a statue of the British nurse Edith Cavell. Prior to her execution at the hands of the Germans, Cavell declared “Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone” (qtd. in Hussey, 53). With an irony that parallels the novel’s handling of Rose and Delia, the British state created a statue of Cavell with her words inscribed on the base, but this
phrase was added above it: “For God, King, and Country.” Cavell’s pacifist and cosmopolitan remarks are recoded so that she is made a British martyr. Eleanor remarks that Cavell’s final words were “the only fine thing that was said in the war” (Y 336) and Peggy only murmurs “it didn’t come to much” (Y 336). Cavell’s anti-war and anti-nationalist sentiments might have offered a way to defuse the antagonistic relations that lead to war, but that is not what the monument narrates. Peggy turns to Eleanor for other versions of the past, but Eleanor says she only wishes to be “happy in this world” (Y 388). For Peggy, “this world” is on the verge of apocalypse:

Far away she heard the sounds of the London night; a horn hooted; a siren wailed on the river. The far-away sounds, the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, different to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depths of night, made her say over Eleanor’s words, Happy in this world, happy with living people. But how can one be “happy,” she asked herself, in a world bursting with misery? On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed.  

(Y 388)

Peggy’s litany of miseries names all the fears attending the nightmare of another global war, but it also maps two different versions of “this world.” Eleanor’s “this world” is the immediate present, a place full of hopeful young people, pretty dresses, and interesting conversations. For Peggy, “this world” verges on a collision with “other worlds,” with the imperial past whose horrors reverberate through the allusion to Conrad’s “heart of darkness.” The very language of this passage grafts the past war onto the present: the
“siren wailed” is a repetition from the “1917” (Y 288, 289) and “1918” chapters (Y 304). The lulls and silences too are repetitions from the lulls and silences in conversation during the air raids. In the same way that Abel’s imperial stories filtered into Delia’s imagination, the war and its legacy filter into Peggy’s, coding her thoughts in the same language used to describe the previous war. It is perhaps the unrealized possibility Cavell’s statue silently memorializes and these signs of war that prompt Peggy’s desire for another relation between the past and the present.

Peggy interrogates Eleanor about “that past of the ‘eighties” (Y 333) which seems “so interesting; so safe” (Y 333). To Peggy, Eleanor represents the last generation of “believers” (Y 331): “It was as if she still believed with passion—she, old Eleanor—in the things that man had destroyed. A wonderful generation, she thought” (Y 331). Peggy wants to excavate this past, to bind all that is lost from that world to her own present.

“Where does she begin, and where do I end?” (Y 334) Peggy asks herself. She arrives at no conclusions, but the insistence on demarcating beginnings and endings, of establishing the past’s relation to the present signals Peggy desire to apply some narrative structure to history. Peggy, of course, gets very little from Eleanor. A few scattered musings and constant interruptions fragment Eleanor’s recollections. Eleanor, instead, wants to hear about Peggy, to comment on contemporary dress and fashion, and dissolve herself into the trivialities of the present. Of course, the past for Eleanor is neither safe nor

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50 One thinks here of Clarissa Dalloway: “What she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitable cease completely; all this must go on without her” (MD 9).

51 Froula’s recent study *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization. Modernity* makes this case most directly and sustains it throughout with careful and illuminating readings of Woolf’s oeuvre. Froula wants to reclaim Bloomsbury’s liberal
beautiful nor peaceful; it is full of family conflicts, missed opportunities, and, to be sure, the memory of the air raid. When Eleanor recounts her first sighting of an airplane, she turns and fumbles with her papers. Peggy misreads her behavior as a sign of old age, but Eleanor’s story recalls the war she experienced but never saw: “She had seen the sky; and that sky was laid with pictures—she had seen it so often; any one of which might come uppermost when she looked at it. Now, because she had been talking to North, it brought back the war” (Y 329). Eleanor quickly changes the subject. Unable to recover the ‘eighties, to redeem them and restore the continuum of history, Peggy’s vision for a new world falters. She begins a speech at Delia’s party that should give form to her vision, but she ultimately fails; “there was the vision still but she had not grasped it. She had broken off only a little fragment of what she meant to say…Yet there it hung before her, the thing she had seen, the thing she had not said. But as she fell back with a jerk against the wall, she felt relieved of some oppression…Now she could rest” (Y 391). Peggy’s vision and exhaustion recalls Lily Briscoe’s final effort in To the Lighthouse. Yet Lily completes her painting; her vision becomes material in due time. For Peggy, the vision fails, but the exhaustion, at least, offers some reprieve.

The novel longs for those promises of history as unimpeded progress, but, as it does with Peggy, it can only demonstrate both the desire for a world beyond war and impossibility of ever realizing that desire. The novel closes with the same impossible

inheritance and read it as their highest priority as an English avant-garde movement (how avant-garde and liberal ideologies could ever coexist is up for debate). In this regard, she writes: “Along with Freud and Keynes, Virginia Woolf is as powerfully analytic, critical, and imaginative a proponent of the Enlightenment project has had in the last century” (xii). “More often considered a rearguard action in defense of liberal modernity’s pre-1914 gains, Bloomsbury’s claims as a modernist avant-garde rest on the extent to which it managed to translate the energies of the “hopeful and exciting” prewar European political and social movement into the postwar battle for Europe’s future” (3).
hope. Eleanor and Delia stare out of the window, repeating a similar moment from “1880.” In the earlier chapter, Delia twice gazes out of the window at a hansom cab, waiting and wishing for her mother’s death. The novel gestures towards a parallel between the arrival of the hansom cab and Mrs. Pargiter’s death, but then quickly disrupts it. The arrival of the cab does not coincide with any death and it does not usher in the arrival of “justice and liberty” for Delia. If the final scene repeats these early ones, it maintains the disjoined parallel of the cab’s arrival and the arrival of a new world.

Eleanor watches the taxi pass and excitedly says “There…There!” (Y 434). She turns to Morris with hands outstretched and asks “And now?” (Y 434-5). Eleanor’s memory of the past returns here and her gesture towards Morris symbolizes a desire to bring the family’s past in line with their present. Eleanor’s question and gesture go unanswered. The only form of response the novel gives is the very line that sounds like the beginning of every chapter: “the sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace” (Y 435). Of course, there is no new year—only the undated, disjunctive now of the present. The everyday goes on.

“We Were Among the Last of the Utopians”

Reading to the Bloomsbury memoir club on September 9, 1938, J.M. Keynes sketched this portrait of his generation’s understanding of the world and what it meant to be an historical agent in that world:

We were among the last of the Utopians, or meliorists as they are sometimes called, who believe in a continuing moral progress by virtue of which the human race already consists of reliable, rational, decent people, influenced by truth and
objective standards… It was not only that intellectually we were pre-Freudian, but we had lost something which our predecessors had without replacing it.”

(qtd. in Zwerdling 295)

By 1938, the increasingly metastatic movement of war threatened to engulf much of the globe and hope and optimism were certainly in short supply. The month would not pass before Chamberlain would wrongly prophesy that the Munich Agreement signified peace in our time. Of course, much of this could not have been a total surprise to Keynes; he foresaw this situation from its very origins in Versailles in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. The sheer gravity of Keynes’s statement is astounding nonetheless. The liberal project of enlightened modernity was incapable of addressing the economic and political problems of the postwar world. Woolf heard Keynes read from this memoir and judged it “profound & impressive” (*D V*, 168). What Keynes states so candidly, and indeed regrettably, remained a perpetual question in Woolf’s novels throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The “deliberate failure” (*WD* 277) of *The Years*, then, is the failure of its narrative form to tell the kinds of stories in the 1930s that it told so well just decades before; the sense of history and the epistemological certainty of her realist predecessors has little purchase on the “now” of the 1930s. To echo Keynes, something has been lost and there is nothing to replace it. Through its deployment and disfiguration of literary realism and the family chronicle, *The Years* encodes the waning of a world-system and its concomitant ideologies of history and progress. Like Keynes’s memoir, *The Years* is a pained eulogy for the liberal narrative of civilization and the promises of human emancipation and historical progress it could not keep. It is this bleak note that resounds
through the novel’s formal dissolution and the unanswered questions, empty hands, and exhausted, unspoken visions for other futures that linger beyond its end.
CHAPTER II:

MASS-OBSERVATION: LAST SNAPSHOT OF THE BRITISH INTELLIGENTSIA

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war,
he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of
his generation.
And our teachers report that he never interfered with
their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

W.H. Auden “The Unknown Citizen”

Proper Names (I)

W.H. Auden’s 1939 poem “The Unknown Citizen” offers any number of facts
about a man who has recently passed, but we never get his proper name. In fact, the only
proper names—Bureau of Statistics, Public Opinion, Social Psychology, Producers
Research—belong to state institutions, bureaus, employers, and any number of fact-
finding organizations. Their sole task is to accumulate knowledge and grease the gears of
the state, to make everything run as efficiently as possible. Each institution carries out its
specialized practice and, at the end of the day, we should be able to assemble a clear
picture of this citizen from all of the facts gathered about his everyday life. Yet the ironic
couplet that closes the poem draws our attention to all that falls beyond the frame of the
picture. The poem’s primary act is to question the relation between a vast body of knowledge and the manner in which that knowledge frames its object. It makes a claim on knowledge, perhaps even disclaims the possibility of a certain kind of knowledge: that of everyday life. But more than an ironic meditation on the state administration of daily life, the title’s allusion to “the unknown soldier” lends the poem a decidedly political dimension, suggesting everyday life itself may be a kind muted war and that these unknown citizens are among its casualties.

By the time Auden’s poem was published, “the unknown citizen” was the focal point of Mass-Observation’s anthropologies of everyday life. Mass-Observation conceived itself as a revolutionary group that would not produce facts about the masses, but allow the masses to produce facts about their everyday lives by submitting diaries, answering questionnaires and surveys, and bearing witness to the daily doings of English life. Mass-Observation would make the unknown citizen known and thereby close the gap between the state and its citizens. The group’s auspicious beginnings date from December 1936. A curious mélange of poets (Charles Madge, William Empson and Kathleen Raine), documentary film-makers (Humphrey Jennings and Stuart Legg), and British surrealists (David Gascoyne, Sheila Legg, and Jennings) gathered in a Blackheath apartment to develop a method for decoding the political and social import ciphered within the minutiae of everyday life. Madge announced the existence of Mass-Observation in a letter to the New Statesman and Nation on January 2, 1937. That letter was a response to one penned earlier by Sir Geoffrey Pyke who cited the need for an anthropology of English life to make sense of the social hysteria following King Edward VIII’s abdication. Echoing Pyke’s desire for a home anthropology, Madge invited
volunteers to participate in what would later be called the “observation of everyone by everyone” (M-O 10).

By coincidence alone, Tom Harrisson’s only published poem appeared on the same page as Madge’s letter. Harrisson had settled in Bolton with the intention of studying the working classes with the same participant observer method he used during his three-year stay among the cannibals of Malekula. Harrisson and Madge agreed to coordinate their projects under the Mass-Observation banner and, with Jennings, they co-authored another letter to the *New Statesman and Nation* on January 30, 1937. Their project was to be the “anthropology of our own people” (“Anthropology at Home”), a populist ethnography that would excavate the myriad life practices throughout England. Harrisson’s arrival brought a heavier emphasis on the sociological side of the project, one that arguably re-rerouted its initial aesthetic aspirations. Kathleen Raine recalls these early days of Mass-Observation as a “strange half-poetic half-sociological expression of the prewar years” (81). These two halves would never sit easily with one another. Harrisson’s imperious personality, his insistence on the empirical fact, and his distrust of poetry sparked a bitter conflict, precipitating insoluble problems for Mass-Observation’s aesthetico-anthropological aspirations. Jennings departed in 1937 and Madge’s turbulent relationship with Harrisson continued until he left in 1940 to work on wartime economics with J.M. Keynes. 51

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51 From his unpublished autobiographical manuscript, Madge recalls the problems with M-O that resulted in Jennings’ departure in this way:

I think, because he was out of sympathy with the direction taken by Mass-Observation as a result of Tom’s own initiatives or those which I took in an attempt to adapt my own initial approach to that of Tom. Collaboration of a sort between Tom and myself, sometimes close and sometimes rather distant, continued for three years,
The fact that most accounts of the group proceed along either an aesthetic or an anthropological axis indicates the considerable impact these competing visions have had on Mass-Observation’s critical reception. More often than not, we either receive a condemnation of Mass-Observation for reproducing the “colonial gaze” in their working-class ethnographies, or an endorsement of their “avant-garde sociology” and its radical democratic politics. As evidenced by the critical literature, there are arguments to be made on both sides and, given the cast of characters that passed in and out of the organization, plenty of ways to skew Mass-Observation. Recent work by Jed Esty, James Buzard, and others have greatly expanded our knowledge of Mass-Observation and have rightly implicated them within a vibrant and mostly unexamined period of cultural production. Although motivated by different interests, these debates are oriented

until mid-1940. There was an underlying contradiction in this collaboration: Tom’s version was that he was the scientist, concerned with the objective, while I was the poet concerned with the subjective. I did not see things that way—however inadequate my starting point, my aim throughout was to move towards a more objective, scientific methodology, and, much as I admitted Tom’s enterprise in seeking to be observe, and where possible measure, the whole range of social behaviour in Bolton, I suspect his too sweeping claims for what he had done and was trying to do, as not really and truly scientific.

Madge moves on to work with Keynes on surveys of spending and saving after he quits M-O and then on to a professorship in Sociology; his recollection is refracted in such a way so as to fashion a teleology that begins with the poetic and scientific tensions in Mass-Observation’s beginnings and ultimately ends with a conception of objectivity that exists nowhere in the initial phase of Mass-Observation.

52 See Jessica Evans “Introduction to ‘Nation, Mandate, Memory’”, in Jessica Evans ed. The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997) and Stephen Edwards “Disastrous Documents” Ten-8 15. Also, see eremy MacClancey’s “Brief Encounters: The Meeting, in Mass-Observation, of British Surrealism and Popular Anthropology” for an exploration of surrealism’s impact on ethnography. James Buzard’s “Mass-Observation, Modernism and Autoethnography” reads M-O back into a line of autoethnographic projects of the 19th century. The problem with Buzard’s interpretation, as brilliant as it is, lies in his dismissal of a number of contemporary movements in the 1930s that impacted M-O, documentary film and surrealism being two of the most obvious.
primarily towards questions of national culture and national identity.\textsuperscript{53} But this is not the whole story of Mass-Observation nor a full measure of its implications during the last years of the 1930s. Despite the very different portraits of Mass-Observation offered by contemporary criticism, these readings all operate within a culturalist paradigm that has not, perhaps cannot, consider the political as Mass-Observation’s condition of possibility. This chapter, then, does not address the political dimension of their project, but rather inquires into the very possibility of addressing Mass-Observation as a political project first and foremost. After all, Harrisson would go on to list Munich and the war years as the events that brought Mass-Observation “into its sort of own” (Harrison qtd. in ). Similarly, in their inaugural pamphlet published in 1937, they argue that the “science of ourselves is a crying necessity of to-day” (\textit{M-O} 11), a political necessity very much rooted in its historical moment:

The bringing of civilization to Abyssinia, the coming of civil war to Spain, the atavism of the new Germany and the revival of racial superstition have forced the issue home to many. We are all in danger of extinction from such outbursts of atavism. (\textit{M-O} 11)

\textsuperscript{53} Extending Buzard’s “Mass-Observation, Modernism, and Auto-Ethnography,” Esty folds Mass-Observation’s project within an expanded field of late modernist writing and cultural activity that participated in the renewal of English particularity. In my “Introduction” I carve out the differences between his equation of the anthropological turn and cultural insularity and my equation of documentary aesthetics and liberal democratic dissolution. What our different uses of Mass-Observation makes evident, I think, is a different point of emphasis: Esty beautifully redraws the parameters of late modernism in cultural terms, but as I have suggested in the introduction and through all of these chapters, aesthetic innovation also has political conditions of possibility. In this case, Mass-Observation’s interest in the everyday has just as much, if not more so, to do with multiple threats to the liberal democratic order as it does with a widespread sense of England as a shrinking island.
In his afterword to *First Year’s Work*, Bronislaw Malinowski echoes Mass-Observation’s political necessity in equally dire, if not grandiose, terms: “Mass-Observation, alas!, is inconceivable in any of the totalitarian communities. Yet, in countries where democracy is still at work, Mass-Observation may not only be a useful instrument of scientific research, but it may become an extremely important practical contribution towards the maintenance of human civilization where it still survives” (121). Similar presentiments reverberate across all publications between 1937 and 1940. These writings prop up Mass-Observation as a political project, as a counterforce to the rise of fascism on the continent and the burgeoning threats to liberal democracy at home. Accordingly, Mass-Observation’s narratives of everyday life address those areas where state institutions and the everyday citizen seem most at odds. In *First Years Work* they express the aim of their investigations in this way: “In all researches on the older institutions, we are continually impressed by the discrepancy between what is supposed to happen and what does happen, between the law and the fact, the institution and the individual, what people say they do and what they actually do, what leaders think people want and what people do want” (*FYW* 32). Of course, Mass-Observation’s merger with the Ministry of Information during the war gives a different look to these democratic goals of aligning the people with the desires of the state.

Tracing the narrative arc of Mass-Observation’s initial phase from 1936 to 1940, Esty reminds us that “Mass-Observation’s attempt at a radically democratic and decentralized representational apparatus...ended up becoming normative and even statist in its effects. The centralizing effect of Mass-Observation, particularly with the onset of World War II, took the litany of shared Englishness on a short trip from radical intentions
to conservative organicism” (45). Esty’s sketch of Mass-Observation is indeed correct, but this transition deserve far more attention than it has received. Mass-Observation’s collusion with the Ministry of Information during the Second World War coincides with a declared state of emergency that granted Churchill and company specific extra-legal powers set forth in the Emergency Powers Act. This transition from democratic to statist coincides with a state of exception: the work Mass-Observation conducts during this period is hardly normative. I view Mass-Observation’s turn from a liberal democratic (not radical!) orientation to a “nakedly authoritarian” (Hubble 14) one less as a dramatic volte-face; rather, as I will demonstrate in greater detail below, this change discloses a conflict within England’s parliamentary democracy and its exercise of power. As we follow the plot of Mass-Observation’s transformation from an independent organization to a state apparatus, the shifts in narrative form that accompany this transition make legible a deeper crisis of liberal democracy.

What will become clear, I think, and why we must reset the parameters of debate, is that Mass-Observation has more to do with a form of rule. The geopolitical crises they enumerate in the quote above are far more than contextual details. As threats to England’s liberal democratic order, these political events underwrite Mass-Observation’s turn to the everyday lives of the people. Their project figures the everyday as the locus of England’s democratic energies, and, if properly recovered and narrated, these energies might be enough to shore up the demos and to realign the desires of the state with its unknown citizens. What follows below is a demonstration of how these political problems underwrite the production, arrangement, and use of these minor knowledges. Coinciding with the passage from domestic to international crisis, these formal changes
between *May the Twelfth* (1937) and *War Begins at Home* (1940) signal a more profound change in the paradigm and execution of state power and its hold over everyday life. The political, then, is made legible through formal mediation, and has far less to do with any directly expressed political or institutional affiliation, (i.e., Mass-Observation’s tagline as either an independent research organization or a mechanism of the MOI). First, however, I would like to say a bit about origins, and then discuss aesthetics and method. If the former inspired Mass-Observation’s desire to look at the everyday, the latter gave them a way of looking at it.

**Ashes and Kings, Montage and Document.**

“This is the end of an age.” Winston Churchill, 1936.

Two events open the way for Mass-Observation: the abdication of King Edward VIII and the burning of the Crystal Palace. King Edward VIII’s plans to marry the twice-divorced American Mrs. Simpson sparked outrage on legal, religious, and political fronts. In the end, he opted to continue his love affair and left the throne. Although suppressed by heavy censorship and a surprisingly mum Stanley Baldwin, news of the abdication broke, inspiring a public scandal that caused particular shame for British royalty. Not long after the Crystal Palace, monument to Victorian imperial power and host to all sorts of cultural events, burned to ash on November 30, 1936, lighting the sky around it and prompting Churchill to imbue the event with epochal significance. Churchill’s apocalyptic remarks lend a certain gravity to the event, but, as Valentine Cunningham says, the Palace’s incineration had less to do with a bygone era; it fits more with the cadence of destructive events in the present: “When the Crystal Palace went up in flames at the end of November, 1936 it was widely taken as an apt emblem for the times: a sort
of Reichstag Fire for Britain, mirror image of what was happening to Madrid. It would be looked back on as an accurate augury of many blazing cities to come: Warsaw, Coventry, Plymouth, Dresden” (*BW* 42). The symbolic charge of the Abdication and the Crystal Palace was not lost on Jennings and Madge. Madge’s reflections on these originary events are worth quoting at length:

Humphrey Jennings and I had been noticing the way in which the items on a newspaper page, especially the front page, added up to make a kind of “poem”—or so we interpreted it. There was an affinity between the items at a symbolic level, which must have been due partly to the news editor’s assessment of what made front-page news on that particular day, partly to the layout men, partly to the current and shifting concerns of the popular readership, partly no doubt to chance or what is called coincidence. Neither Humphrey nor I were inclined toward Jungian ideas of a collective unconscious, but we had read Freud’s essay on coincidence, which had led to an interest among certain French surrealists, especially André Breton, in coincidental happenings of various kinds. So when the papers were full of Edward and Mrs. Simpson we saw them as in part an expression of mass wishes and fantasies, and were on the look out for other symbolic news-material that might be related to them. At the end of November the Crystal Palace was burned down, and the flames were visible from 6 Grotes Buildings as a distant glow in the sky: the shock that this seemed to evoke at a symbolic level was perhaps akin to the shock that the abdication crisis brought to our stable monarchy. (Madge *AB* 64-5).
Reading the newspaper as a poetic, even surrealist, document meant attending to the ways in which the “facts” of everyday life were arranged on the page. Of course, Mass-Observation habitually pilloried the press for their manipulation of public opinion, but studying the formal qualities of the newspaper sparked another way of thinking about and reading the press. If the assemblage of items on a newspaper front conveyed symbolic meanings, meanings more revelatory than any information in a given report, then perhaps the use of montage and juxtaposition might document the public’s reception and response to these events with greater accuracy. Looking at the everyday required a method of observation and way of narrating those findings into a more realistic account of the masses. The production of knowledge about the everyday would share, at least in spirit if not to the letter, John Grierson’s oft-quoted definition of documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality.”

These tensions between aesthetic experimentation and epistemological precision exist from Mass-Observation’s very beginning. Harrisson’s arrival may have exacerbated this tension, but he is not responsible for introducing it; to be sure, the organization gained its particular character and a good deal of its notoriety from such a method. It is, however, a curious method and one that has preoccupied Mass-Observation’s readers of the last fifteen or so years. Those focusing on Mass-Observation’s anthropological aspirations have levied familiar and, by now, predictable charges on these endeavors: the organization reproduces the colonial gaze, turning it on the working classes; observation is not empowering, but an act of scopic power. More recent assessments of Mass-Observation’s methodology have done much to rescue them

54 See especially Jessica Evans’s’ introduction in *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography*. 

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from the damning and, as Ben Highmore points out, anachronistic postcolonial critiques of the 1990s. Turning away from predictable criticisms of anthropology, the emphasis has recently fallen onto the relation between surrealism and the knowledge of everyday life. The change of emphasis from colonialist epistemology to avant-garde aesthetics produces a very different version of Mass-Observation’s politics. Jeremy MacClancey’s classic reading of Mass-Observation lauds them for pursuing a “postmodern” critique of anthropology avant la lettre, evincing the same sensibility popularized later by James Clifford and Clifford Geertz. He characterizes Mass-Observation as a “democratic surrealism” (MacClancey 501), but his interest in Mass-Observation is coterminous with its brief flirtation with surrealism, one that is more or less over after Jennings leaves the organization in 1937. Highmore’s intervention is admirable in the way it steers between earlier accounts that focus solely on the ethnographic or the aesthetic component. He sets Mass-Observation in the fault lines between art and science, taking Clifford’s earlier note on Mass-Observation as a possible example of surrealist ethnography to its logical end. 55 Although his essay notes some of the contradictions and discontinuities with any story of Mass-Observation as either an avant-garde project or a hard science, he nonetheless upholds Mass-Observation as an effort in “direct democracy” (Highmore 111), as a “radically democratic project” (Highmore 87) because their texts deploy the “destabilizing effects of collage” (Highmore 107). Despite the differences between the two, MacClancey and Highmore’s critical narratives follow the same plot: radical aesthetics equals radical politics. The problem here is two-fold: the first is the equation of radical aesthetics and radical politics; the other is the overemphasis on Mass-

Observation’s investment in surrealism. The latter problem, I suggest, generates the former. With this in mind, I want to revisit the influence of Surrealism over Mass-Observation and complicate it by reconstructing another aesthetic genealogy.

Mass-Observation historian Nick Hubble smartly observes that when Madge and Jennings begin exploring the relations of poetry and science “they had foreseen that their literary and surrealistic activities were becoming increasingly inseparable from a cultural racket—and M[ass]-O[bservation] was their attempt to move beyond that” (78). Jennings, of course, helped curate the immensely popular International Surrealist Exhibition at the Grafton Gallery in 1936. He also penned those wonderful exercises in Surrealist reportage published in *Contemporary Prose and Poetry* and, less remarkably, painted “radical” juxtapositions of mountain ranges and chocolate swiss-cake rolls. Jennings’s attraction to Surrealism changes not long after the exhibit. In his review of Herbert Read’s *Surrealism* he laments the translation of surrealism from its radical, anarchic beginnings in Paris to its declawed English version as a revived “romanticism,” “aestheticism,” or “style.” Jennings recalls the Surrealist Exhibition in these brackish lines:

> How can one open this book…and compare it even for a moment with the passion terror and excitement, dictated by absolute integrity and produced with all the poetry of

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56 There are, to my knowledge, only two full length studies of British Surrealism: Paul C. Ray’s *The Surrealist Movement in England* and Michel Remy’s *Surrealism in England*. Although the movement acquired its largest audience in the mid 1930s, little magazines like Ford Maddox Ford’s *The Transatlantic Review* employed Philippe Soupault to report on continental aesthetics, although surrealism at this time receives scant attention. Eugene Jolas’ *transition*, picking up where Ford’s review ends, devoted more substantial attention to Surrealism. A less known and short-lived magazine entitled *Experiment* edited by Julius Bronowski committed itself to anarchic aesthetics and counted British surrealists and future Mass-Observers Jennings and Julian Trevelyan among its members. Perhaps the *Experiment* group is best known for their appearance in an issue of *transition* Jolas devoted to them in 1930.
bare necessity, which emanated from *La Révolution Surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au Service du Révolution*, without facing a great wave of nostalgia, and bringing up a nauseating memory of the mixed atmosphere of cultural hysteria and amateur-theatricality which combined to make the Surrealist Exhibition of June so peculiar a “success” “(167). His optimism for Surrealism in England seems exhausted by December 1936, just six months after the International Surrealist Exhibition and, coincidentally, the moment of Mass-Observation’s genesis. He expresses “nostalgia,” not hope, for the possible transmission of the “passion terror and excitement” that prompted his own interest in French surrealism—this nostalgia can only indicate the dwindling of French surrealism’s revolutionary promise for the English. For Jennings, it seems, this potentially explosive event misfired and British surrealism ended abortively.

Considerably less influenced by surrealism than Jennings, Madge also authored reviews and articles on surrealism for Geoffrey Grigson’s *New Verse* as early as 1933. In “Surrealism for the English” (1933) Madge isolates surrealism’s potential as historically and culturally contingent. Compared to Read’s portrait of Surrealism as a re-energized English “romanticism,” Madge’s article hardly bears the nationalist tones to it that we might hear upon a quick read. Instead, Madge’s list of British writers who might function as Surrealist predecessors seems to mime Breton’s own curious lineage for surrealism laid out in *The First Manifesto of Surrealism*. Madge establishes a similar

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57 One can arguably divide the interpretation of Surrealism for England along two lines: the first is from Hugh Sykes Davies and Herbert Read who desperately wanted to make Surrealism a part of the English tradition; the second line is that pursued by Madge and Jennings who refused to reduce Surrealism to easily packaged formulas and sought instead to stress its “scientific” aspect.

genealogy through a number of British writers, mirroring Breton’s rhetorical moves. Madge states rather explicitly how the English should treat Surrealism: “We should rather imitate their example in the motives and fundamental methods of their working, than the works themselves” (18). The important point was for Surrealism to respond to particular historical conditions and to invest its revolutionary energies in the contemporary social and political realities in Britain in the 1930s, just as Breton, Eluard, and Aragon sought to do in France since the mid 1920s. Like Jennings, Madge fears the aestheticization of Surrealism, something that in hindsight appears inevitable, or irreversible at any rate. A year later in a review of Georges Hugnet’s Petite Anthologies Poetique du Surrealisme, Madge insists on surrealism “as a science” (13): “One cannot treat surrealist poetry separately from the other activities of the surrealist laboratory” (13). He goes on to tell the familiar story of surrealism developing out of the failure of Dada. Perhaps the story we should reconstruct here is the one that holds closer to this logic and sees Mass-Observation more as a response to Surrealism’s failure and less as its belated apogee.

Extending Hubble and Tom Jeffery’s arguments that Mass-Observation moves from surrealist to “something much closer to documentary” (Jeffery 23), I redress the constellation of art and science, aesthetics and epistemology, beyond the optics of “surrealist ethnography.” Reducing the prominence of the Surrealist influence does not mean reducing the importance of aesthetics. Defrocking the Surrealist orthodoxy opens a space to consider the more curious and more abundant references to a kind of “realistic” art and literature which includes Tolstoy, Courbet, and, oddly, Duchamp. Still wedded to a number of artists who were “not always Surrealists” (27), but displays certain aspects of Surrealism that, of course, come to full fruition in his group. The artists listed include Swift, Sade, Chateaubriand, Poe, Rimbaud, Hugo who is “Surrealist when he isn’t stupid” (27) and others.
to techniques of defamiliarization and montage, Mass-Observation’s documentary style aims to produce a “collective expression” of the everyday. But what sort of articulation of the masses (the ones being observed and the ones doing the observing) does it enable? My re-reading of Mass-Observation’s methodology begins with one of the most productive misreadings of the group by renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski contributed an essay entitled “A Nation-Wide Intelligence Service” to conclude *First Year’s Work* (1938) and he leant public support to Mass-Observation early on. He soon invited Madge to join his graduate seminar at the London School of Economics in the fall of 1937. While attending Malinowski’s lectures on economic anthropology Madge came into contact with, among others, Jomo Kenyatta and the work of Karl Mannheim who would later support Mass-Observation. Madge and Harrisson attributed such great value to Malinowski’s essay for *First Year’s Work* that they delayed publication to give him adequate time to write. Madge collaborated with Malinowski on the revisions: “his first draft,” Madge recalls, “far too long and discursive, was shortened and tightened at long sessions which I had with him at his home in Chalk Farm” (*AB* 76). Surely the idea was to acquire some measure of scientific legitimacy from Malinowski’s support while remaining autonomous from those political, economic, and academic institutions that normally confer such legitimacy.

Malinowski’s essay confirmed Mass-Observation as a “scientific undertaking” (*FYW* 84), but what followed was not an enthusiastic endorsement. “The basic idea of the movement is 100 per cent right” (*FYW* 84), but, at the end of the day, Mass-Observation required a “long overhaul of principle and method” (*FYW* 87). Malinowski refracts Mass-Observation through the lens of his own anthropology. Echoing his
remarks on method from *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*,\(^{59}\) Malinowski conceives of Mass-Observation’s primary activity as sifting “from the chaotic raw material of everyday experience the fundamental laws which are the intimate aim of science” (*FYW* 93). While this may underwrite the anthropological enterprise for Malinowski, the opening pages of *First Year’s Work* declare a very different purpose:

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\text{The function of Mass-Observation is to get written down the unwritten laws and to make the invisible forces visible. One part of social behaviour is already written down and codified, but this part only concerns Mass-Observation in so far as a knowledge and understanding of it is necessary for the study of the unwritten and the uncodified. (FYW 8)}
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Malinowski wants the organization to synthesize a series of objective facts that will refine our understanding of the “fundamental laws” and deep structures of everyday life. Mass-Observation works from the opposite direction; the idea is to render visible how

\[\text{59 I am thinking specifically of the following passage:}\]

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\text{The Ethnographer has in the field, according to what has just been said, the duty before him of drawing up all the rules and regularities of tribal life; all that is permanent and fixed; of giving an anatomy of their culture, of depicting the constitution of their society. But these things, though crystallized and set, are nowhere formulated. There is no written or explicitly expressed code of laws, and their whole tribal tradition, the whole structure of their society, are embodied in the most elusive of all materials; the human being…The natives obey the forces and commands of the tribal code, but they do not comprehend them; exactly as they obey their instincts and their impulses, but could not lay down a single law of psychology} \text{ (AWP 11-12).}
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Here Malinowski writes down the unwritten laws that govern a social formation or a type of social behavior. The natives, he claims, are obedient to such laws although they are not yet codified. For Mass-Observation, the project works in reverse. The idea is to find the ways in which life practices are disobedient or operate differently than these recorded laws. Furthermore, if Malinowski wants to find what is “permanent and fixed,” Mass-Observation wants to open out the multiple and fluid, sometimes erratic, patterns of behavior that may or may not line up with social laws and codes.
life praxis may or may not be obedient to the laws, codes, and rituals that structure everyday life. That the discourse of visibility and invisibility is one firmly rooted in aesthetics needs little elaboration. What is less certain is how this particular aesthetic operation works in conjunction with Mass-Observation’s scientific aims. Malinowski, for one, saw such traffic between art and science in Mass-Observation as problematic at best, absolutely contrary to scientific objectivity at worst. “Genuinely scientific work,” he writes, “must remain above the low water mark of literary competence. It cannot rise to the level of poetry or fiction, for then it ceases to be science” (FYW 89). Apart from the confused metaphorics of his phrasing, Malinowski’s point is clear: objectivity rests solely in the domain of science. Yet, for Mass-Observation, objectivity requires not an exclusion of the aesthetic, but a use of the aesthetic to redeem what science excludes from the field of knowledge.

Madge, for example, was already working towards a conception of art in 1933 that would press art’s interrogative value and capitalize on aesthetic modalities of disclosure that are alien to science. But that isn’t to say that Madge hearkens back to any brand of aestheticism he attributed to his modernist predecessors. In one of his essays for the fledgling New Verse in May 1933 Madge writes “the mind is a poetic instrument and so is poetic despite itself even when it sets out to be scientific, as any text-book proves” (NV #3 2). Madge’s contact with surrealism pushed his thinking further along these lines. In 1934 he weighs art and science more carefully, permitting some objectivity to art and questioning the truth claims of pure science:

Surrealism is science by virtue of its capacity for development and discovery and by virtue of the anonymity of its researches. Like science, it is an apparatus
which, in human hands, remains fallible—it has its own margin of error, and its own type of superstition. (NV #10 14).

For Madge, then, art and science cross at two points: discovery and anonymity. If there is any afterlife of surrealism in Mass-Observation, it occurs along these two lines. As Breton does in the first Manifesto of Surrealism, Mass-Observation disarticulates art from all the tenets of Kantian aesthetics—beauty, individual genius, aesthetic autonomy, and sensus communis. Any tendency towards a transcendental art is traded for an aesthetic of interrogation. But if neither Surrealist nor avant-garde, what modality of disclosure do they allocate to art and how is it aligned with science?

The 1937 pamphlet holds the most sustained and explicit engagement with aesthetics. As a kind of manifesto, the pamphlet does what most manifestoes do: it articulates its relation and break from its predecessors; it declares its urgency and necessity; it adumbrates a method and lists a series of objectives. The first brief section evokes domestic crisis (the Abdication) and global war to demonstrate the need for an “anthropology of ourselves” (M-O 10). The narrative then cuts along two lines: the first is a narrative about the modernity of the “masses” and the second about Mass-Observation’s singular capability for understanding the masses. From the beginning, they articulate a dialectic of superstition and scientific knowledge that shows the perseverance of the archaic within the modern. Not unlike the more renowned dialectical relation from Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s The Dialectic of Enlightenment, Mass-Observation shows how the advance of science and rationality does not liquidate the existence of magic and superstition, but consigns them to the realm of
the irrational.\footnote{It is also worth noting that Mass-Observation links the Institute for Social Research and its London branch headed by Jay Rumney as a like-minded organization at the pamphlet’s end. Rumney ran the London institute until 1936. He was also responsible for a monograph on Herbert Spencer and sociology. His institute also assisted with a series entitled “Modern Sociologists” by Chapham and Hill Ltd. which produced a series of volumes on Comte, Marx, and Veblen, the latter being written by J.A. Hobson, the early critic of empire. Adorno was living at Oxford in 1937, but it is unclear how much contact he had with Rumney or the London intelligentsia. All that is really known is a letter to Erich Fromm on ‘the feminine character’ and its relation to late capitalism. He moved to New York in the spring of 1938.} But superstitions, they argue, play important roles in everyday life. While anyone can clearly point out the difference between the fields of magic and science, for Mass-Observation, it doesn’t follow that even the most sophisticated scientific methodologies can detect those areas of everyday life where magic and superstition still persist: “there are others [superstitions] which have assumed modern disguises and escape recognition” (M-O 14). If science is infinitely capable of describing the laws governing phenomena, “superstition is infinitely adaptable” (M-O 14). This becomes especially evident in Britain by Mass-Observation where Madge and Harrisson examine the horoscope to uncover a national ethos, a larger encryption of public feeling on war, rumor, scandal, and a shared skepticism of news and information. Science, then, does not completely negate superstition, but reproduces it as the grey, inner lining of rational knowledge: “Although the process of adaptation has been continuous, it has never been more striking than during the last hundred years—a century notable for vast social and mechanical changes, and an unprecedented increase in population” (M-O 15). Mass-Observation turn their attention to “the more recent acquisitions—electricity, the aeroplane radio—[…so new that the process of adaptation to them is still going on” (M-O 16). As if examining a collection of dialectical images, Mass-Observation indicates, on the one hand, the promise of these innovations for the advance of civilization, but, on the other hand, they isolate the forms of superstition and mass fear attached to these
innovations. There is a “fatalism” attached to the increasing technicization of society that “reaches its extreme in the general attitude to war and scientific methods of destruction. The fear of air-raids and gas is part of the general fear of what science may do next—exemplified in popular myths about a death-ray” (M-O 16). Technology, for whatever else it symbolized, did not always indicate unhindered progress in the minds of the masses.

As the march of the dialectic of Enlightenment explains away the mysteries and problems of everyday life, there exist gestures, beliefs, and life practices cathedected with the superstitious and the irrational: the irrational is not replaced, but displaced. These myths and superstitions are negative indications of the increasing rationalization of the world. Magic and superstition, then, act as ciphers in the social field and any mass science must decode, not dismiss them. Listen to this passage Mass-Observation quotes from the Encyclopaedia Britannica on magic and science in “primitive” societies: “The two [real science and magic] are closely bound together in practical application, the body of rational knowledge being utilized to deal with the mechanical efficiency of the undertaking, while the ritual of magic deals with the incalculable elements therein” (M-O 24). Magic, then, is a “second line of attack…A magical prescription in this view precedes a scientific prescription” (M-O 25). It gives expression to the inexplicable, form to what exceeds scientific reason. This “second line of attack” is also the function of art: “Art can be considered in this light. An age of great scientific discoveries is favourable to art, because it is continually raising new questions, and art attempts to answer these questions in its own way, before science is ready to answer them in a scientific way” (M-O 26). As Madge framed it as early as his 1933 article from New
Verse, art performs a kind of scientific operation, but it investigates either what knowledge expels as irrational or those phenomena for which we have no method or system as yet. Art has a scientific function; it discovers and interrogates the composition of the social field, but it is not science. Yet, for any nascent sociological group undertaking an exploration of the “unwritten” and “uncodified” laws of everyday life, art and science, these two lines of attack, must be thought together.

Mass-Observation turns to the nineteenth century for a model of the productive tensions of art and science. The acceleration of industrial development and all the social changes it engendered migrated into artworks to “lay bare the inmost secrets of human nature” (*M-O* 26). Their exemplar of this dynamic is not Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Victor Hugo, or Émile Zola, but Arthur Rimbaud. They quote from *Illuminations*: “J’ai seul la clé de cette parade sauvage” (*M-O* 26). Rimbaud’s poetics prefigure Freud’s later “scientific” discovery of the unconscious and the human divided against itself. “Because Rimbaud precedes Freud, his works have an historical significance far beyond those of the post-Freudian surrealist writers and painters” (*M-O* 26). One gets the sense that the surrealists, like the modernists absorbed with psychic interiority, have abdicated social responsibility and even significance for Mass-Observation. Other figures who model the dialectical tensions between art and science are Tolstoy, Courbet, Shakespeare, Hardy, Homer, and, possibly the only avant-garde artist named in their works, Marcel Duchamp who “has taken the logical step of continuing his work as a scientist, instead of using science as material for art” (*M-O* 26). Art must be forward thinking and recuperative; above all, it must yield new material for scientific explication and recover what academic science has overlooked.
Following the Hegelian plot of their narrative, it clearly is not enough to resurrect realism or to mime Breton or Duchamp: historical conditions, technological innovations, and aesthetic progress simply won’t allow either option. The kind of “realism” they are after is one divorced from any naïve presupposition of art as mimesis; they distance themselves from the “socialist realists” and proletarian novelists who had their heyday in the 1930s.\footnote{Socialist realism and proletarian literature did not have the same force in England as they did on the continent. Cecil Day Lewis, for instance, defended formal experimentation such as one sees in T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land.*}

In an article from *Life and Letters*, Mass-Observation notes that even these politically committed writers who take everyday life for their aesthetic material “find it difficult if not impossible to describe the texture of this world” (*TSFT* 37). The dialectical turn here moves the masses and everyday life out of the purview of the artist and into the *place* of the artist; that is, the masses write about the masses and “taking up the role of the observer, each person becomes like Courbet at his easel, Cuvier with his cadaver, and Humboldt with his continent” (*NV* 24 #3). These suggestive comparisons are from Madge and Jennings’ “Poetic Description and Mass-Observation”, an essay which functions as an early sketch of what this aesthetic from below might look like.

As they do in many of these early publications, Madge and Jennings (re)define Mass-Observation as “a technique for obtaining objective statements about human behaviour. The primary *use* of these statements is to the other observers: an interchange of observations being the foundation of social consciousness” (*NV* #24 3). The kind of *poiesis* they have in mind is a bringing-forth of all the material concealed in daily life that falls beyond the pale of common sense or scientific knowledge.\footnote{Socialist realism and proletarian literature did not have the same force in England as they did on the continent. Cecil Day Lewis, for instance, defended formal experimentation such as one sees in T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land.*} Moreover, the excavation of these minor knowledges should increase social consciousness and cast into
relief the most taken for granted of social relations. The piece opens with the juxtaposition of three paragraphs from different literary genres. The first passage is excerpted from a contemporary novel, the second from an historical narrative, and the third, quoted in full below, from a report by an observer:

Coming home on a Midland red ‘Bus from Birmingham (a distance of approx. 6 miles) I was sitting on the front seat, near the large sliding door. There was a cold easterly wind blowing through the door, and after having some cigarette ash blown in my eyes, I touched the Conductor on the sleeve to attract his attention, and said ‘May we have the door closed, Conductor?’ He turned round and leant towards me in a confidential way, and then said in a most insolent manner ‘Yes, when I’m ready to shut it!’ I was too surprised to make any reply. The door remained open until I left the ‘bus. (NV #24 2)63

For Madge and Jennings, the observer’s account avoids the fictionalizing of experience endemic to the novel and, unlike historical narratives, the observer experiences the events she records. The poetics of her account reside in what she reveals about the social circumstances of this particular event. The observer’s report carries the authority of first-hand experience and, so the theory goes, the anonymity focuses the report on the objectivity of the event, rescuing it from subjective distortion. Ostensibly, what is revealed comes to the fore and to whom it is revealed recedes into the background. But what kind of objectivity can we attribute to such a report? Is this theory of anonymity enough to relieve the account of its individual particularity? Are subjective experience and objective expression incompatible? Madge and Jennings answer the problem in this

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63 It is worth nothing that this same passage was thought exemplary enough to be reprinted in the 1937 pamphlet.
way: the subjective statements such as ‘I was too surprised to make any reply’ “become objective because the subjectivity of the observer is one of the facts under observation. The process of observing raises him [any observer] from subjectivity to objectivity. What has become unnoticed through familiarity is raised into consciousness again” (NV #24 3). The reaction to the driver’s brazen reproach is itself a fact, another constitutive element of the recorded incident. If the observer’s astonishment describes anything about the observer herself, it is of little importance; the function of description lies elsewhere. What demands our attention is the structure at play—subordinate/insubordinate, public servant/the general public—and the event itself. For Mass-Observation, the passage focuses on what the objectively recorded event reveals about the matrix of social relations.

Madge and Jennings attempted this again with the “Oxford Collective Poem” experiment. The Oxford poem extends the emphasis on anonymity from the single observer to the collective. Madge hoped that the Oxford Collective Poem would draw together the observations of twelve student volunteers into an authoritative image of the “social landscape.” The students were to collect images “indicated by external rather than internal evidence” (NV #25 17). Six recurring images were selected and each participant wrote a pentameter line for each image. All lines were “printed in block capitals to ensure anonymity” (NV #25 17). Selecting from these lines, the group assembled a single poem that was later submitted to the collective for a final series of anonymous “corrections.” For all the emphasis on anonymity and alteration, the experiment failed, but it failed in an instructive way. Madge admits that the palimpsestic text “proved insufficiently radical…The original was still too visible under the
corrections” (*NV* #25 18). To be sure, the collective’s archive of images does register something of the “contested and opaque terrain” (*Highmore EDR* 1) of everyday life; still, the poem lacks the connective tissue needed to string together the images into an objective rendering of the social landscape.

The anthropologists and sociologists of the day did not look kindly upon these techniques of social research. Malinowski sums up the barrage of criticisms in this way:

Now, on the face of it, Mass-Observation bids us to rely, in this most difficult type of research, upon the voice of those who are the most entangled, who are actually involved in the fray, who are object to all the passions and animosities. *This is the paradox of Mass-Observation*, round which most of the criticisms are pivoting and from which many of the mistakes of the Authors themselves seem to flow. (*FYW* 93: my italics)

In one sense, Malinowski is correct; many within the newly institutionalized discipline of anthropology thought the crucial question for Mass-Observation was how one collects objective facts while “entangled” in the circumstances they record. Yet Mass-Observation thought it absolutely necessary for observers to be entangled if they were to make any objective observations at all. Thus, they posed a very different question: how does one form a number of facts, perceptions, and observations into an objective collective expression that retains all the multiplicity of the everyday? A different

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64 There is little room to explore the intricacies of the disciplinary and institutional anxieties that certainly motivated much of the harsher criticism of M-O. Henrika Kuklick’s *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* charts the relations between anthropology, colonial power, and social institutions. While many universities in Britain had readerships in anthropology, it was not until 1932 that Cambridge created a professorship for it; Oxford’s first endowed professorship comes as late as 1937 for Radcliffe-Brown. In this particular historical context, one can sense something of the insurgent nature of M-O and its initial demands for scientific legitimacy and autonomy from such institutions.
question, then, generates a different paradox. Mass-Observation insists on what occurs beyond the scope of fundamental laws and the question becomes one of arranging and presenting all that their dialectical optics of art and science might be capable of uncovering. This aberrant science of the quotidian amplifies the plurality within the mass. The mass, then, in Mass-Observation is a many-headed hydra as opposed to the acephalic crowds of Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud.\textsuperscript{65} Given the mobilization of the masses into crowds in Mussolini’s March on Rome, Hitler’s Nuremberg rally, Kristallnacht, and other horrific populist manifestations, Mass-Observation’s articulation of the masses attends to infinite variation, the disjunctures in experience, and the objectivity of mass-wishes and mass fears. The mass is a singular and plural entity. Yet, if Mass-Observation’s dialectical optics could retrieve so many vestiges of superstition, so many disobedient life practices, and other phenomena that psychology, anthropology and sociology simply could not account for, it doesn’t follow that any easy reconstruction of an entire social physiognomy from their archive of “sound, smell, foods, clothes, domestic objects, advertisements, newspapers” (M-O 35). Like Madge and Jennings’s ruminations on the aesthetics of a newspaper page, the form their own narratives assume, the way they build their textual museum of quotidian artifacts, discloses far more about their efforts to realign the state with its unknown citizens than with any individual objects that might be on display.

“\textit{The collapse of belief in any future}”

In \textit{May the Twelfth} Mass-Observation declared this first book to be an exception to the rule. As a sort of disclaimer, they write that their organization will generally focus

\textsuperscript{65} See also Elias Canetti’s \textit{Crowds and Power} and, more recently, Ernesto Laclau’s \textit{On Populist Reason}. 

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on “everyday things rather than special occasions” (MT iv). However, Mass-Observation never had the opportunity to examine the everyday apart from such “special occasions.” Published between 1937-1940, these books work alongside one or another political crisis, be it the Abdication Crisis, Munich, or the formal declaration of war. Malinowski, for one, queried the value of a study of the everyday under such exceptional circumstances: “The normal is far more difficult to penetrate than the exceptional, but it is equally important. The close study of such exceptional situations, however, may give the clue to much that is baffling in the uniform and impassive surface of everyday things” (FYW 108). Coming on the heels of Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler, Britain by Mass-Observation gives a specific definition to the crisis these special occasions portend: The “democratic system has broken down in other countries,” write Madge and Harrisson, “and may break down in our own, because the 45,000,000 do not feel sufficiently strongly that they are able to speak through Parliament” (9). Mass-Observation attributed part of this crisis to the media’s monopoly on the production and distribution of information, but, above all, the primary obstacle was the widening breach between the everyday lives of the population and the activities of the state. This, they believed, was as great a threat to English democracy as any potential war. For Mass-Observation, if enough facts about the everyday lives of the masses could be collected, they could gauge the divide between the population and the state during these moments of crisis, and find ways to bridge that divide and secure England’s democratic future against these domestic and international challenges.

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66 See Eric Hobsbawm’s The Age of Extremes. He writes “in 1918-20 legislative assemblies were dissolved or became ineffective in two European states, in the 1920s in six, in the 1930s in nine, while German occupation destroyed constitutional power in another five during the Second World War” (111).
Whatever one may say about their avant-gardism or the empirical nature of their studies, these narratives—in form, content, and the antagonism between the two—demonstrate the precarious relations between an escalating political crisis and a nation’s democratic vitality, between an endangered form of democratic governance and the narrative forms which internalize this structural crisis. For the last section of this chapter, I argue that the narration of everyday life is much more than an ethical injunction to let the silenced speak. Mass-Observation’s works formally stage alternative models (or, alternatives to models) of democratic governance. It doesn’t follow, however, that each text operates the same. The form of open discussion and multiple voices underwriting the narrative forms in both *May the Twelfth* and *First Year’s Work* does not resemble at all the transitional status of *Britain by Mass-Observation* nor does it even come close to approximating the formal operations of *War Begins at Home*. As war migrates from the peripheries of England into the center of national life, the formal configurations of these works alter drastically, indirectly naming a deeper structural crisis for the liberal democratic order. In what follows I deal primarily with *May the Twelfth* and *War Begins at Home*, the two works which stand as bookends to this first phase of Mass-Observation; however, it is necessary to pass through *Britain by Mass-Observation*, which, published after Munich, figures as a threshold text for both the changing political order and for Mass-Observation’s politics of everyday life.

In their first book which follows King George VI’s Coronation, Madge and Jennings elaborate on Mass-Observation’s attention to the everyday in this way: “One aim of Mass-Observation is to see how, and how far, the individual is linked up with society and its institutions” (*MT* v). Coronation Day offered an exemplary occasion for
such work. Mass-Observation solicited a number of surveys, diaries, and reports
documenting the day of the Coronation and the months of preparation preceding it.
According to their findings, enthusiasm for the day was not due to any collective feeling
for the new King or for the event itself; many observers simply welcomed it as an
interruption to the humdrum of daily life. In this regard, Mass-Observation was able to
conclude that “any break-up of the routine of life is satisfactory to most people” (MT 91).

The heterogeneous, carnivalesque atmosphere *May the Twelfth* documents is
inscribed into its very form: “official” newspaper reports of the day sit alongside
speeches of politicians, accounts from lower and middle class citizens, and from the
Mass-Observers themselves. As several readers have remarked, this is the most “literary”
and “radical” book Mass-Observation would produce. Samuel Hynes, for example, likens
it to the “Wandering Rocks” episode from *Ulysses* and others place it alongside *Mrs.
Dalloway*. To the delight of other modernist critics, this daybook flashes with moments
of simultaneity and montage, establishing a loose, but dynamic relation among all the
fragmentary reports. The book marshals these aesthetic techniques to produce jarring
contrasts between the mass media’s representation of the day and the day as it is refracted
through the eyes of the masses. One clipping from the *Daily Mirror* emphasizes the
theatricality of the event and the mechanisms shaping it into a proper piece of political
theater:

After crowning King George VI at Westminster Abbey on May 12, Dr.
Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, will go to a dark room in the West End to play
a new role—film censor. His Grace, ever vigilant of public interest and good
taste, will carefully scan the films of the Coronation made by the news reels. With
him will be the Earl Marshal the Duke of Norfolk. The Primate and the Duke will have a free hand to cut from the film records anything which may be considered unsuitable for the public at large to see. (*MT 16*).

The recording and the production of the event coincide absolutely. As Roland Barthes writes in a different context, the technological apparatus delivering the event to the homes of millions by way of mass media severely reduces “the age-old distance between act and discourse, event and testimony” (*RL 150*). Mass-Observation counters the production of the event and the masses reaction to it on several levels: first, the masses convey the event themselves; second, the extraction of quotes and articles from newspapers imbues them with another layer of meaning achieved primarily through juxtaposition; and, finally, Mass-Observation not only records the day, a day that looks very differently than the “official record”, but they also document the modes of documentation.

While Buzard and others note the simultaneity of different reports during the procession between 2:40 and 4:30, what has gone unnoticed is the bit that immediately follows these simultaneous accounts.

(CM.1.) (Apsley Gate.) 3.14. A huge burst of cheers. G.B. camera man focuses—turns over the lens-turret—gets his eye to the viewfinder, and his left hand on the panning handle. Shoots. He turns the turret over again, looks through, turns back. Shoots. Next unscrews telephoto lens. A band in the procession comes playing down the drive. He turns over again, has a look, pans to a new position. There is a rush of people forward and cheering. 3.20. He turns

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67 Roland Barthes’ “Writing the Event” deals specifically with May ’68. See *The Rustle of Language*.

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back, comes back to viewfinder and shoots. 3.21. He opens the camera door to see
the film is not jamming, shuts it, shoots again. Loud hand-clapping. He turns
over, tilts right down, has a look, turns back. Shoots. He swings the camera right
round to have a look at the front of the lenses, and back again, the umbrella
revolving with the camera. He turns over, looks, back—shoots. (MT 142).

If the media records and produces the event in the same instance, Mass-Observation’s
documentation calls this all into question. In the selection above, the documentation of
the event becomes an event itself; the prose mimes the cameraman’s action and also
imitates photographic snapshots through the staccato of the prose, ironically reducing the
distance between documented content and the technique of documentation. Discursively
rendered as a kind of sniper, the cameraman “shoots” different scenes, positioning and re-
positioning the camera to capture the event from different angles and perspectives. It is
not that this particular cameraman consciously manipulates the event; rather, by simply
acknowledging the construction of the event and its technological mediation, the text
calls into question how events are rendered for public consumption. If the mass media
exist on the one hand to inform the people of state activities and governmental policies
and, on the other, to inform the state of popular opinion, then this report casts into relief
how highly mediated these reports actually are. The fate, and indeed central problem, for
mass democracy relied heavily on these mechanisms. Writing about this very problem in
1923, Carl Schmitt noted the importance of “who has control over the means with which
the will of the people is to be constructed: military and political force, propaganda,
control of public opinion through the press, party organizations, assemblies, popular
education, and schools” (CPD 29). The production and circulation of information was
vital to the success of any mass democracy. Like their frères ennemis the mass media, Mass-Observation record and produce simultaneously; the multiple and differing accounts in the four hundred plus pages of May the Twelfth, however, make impossible any authoritative rendering of a collective national feeling. Mass-Observation’s document of this particular day, rendered through a kind of textual montage, functions as a metacritique of the production of mass public consciousness just as it reinstates the centrality of that production for democratic governance.68

Highmore and other critics often extol these instances of textual antagonism for their subversive tendencies, alerting us to the political freight these aesthetic techniques bear with them. For Highmore, Mass-Observation deploys these “destabilizing effects of collage” (107) as part of a wider experiment in radical democracy. But there is little in Mass-Observation that one might term radical or revolutionary or antagonistic; we might instead see the book’s form not as destabilizing, but rather as an effort to stabilize parliamentary democracy. It stages a more perfect, or more representative, democracy, excavating multiple publics and placing all of these voices from below alongside quotes and speeches from MPs, the royal family, and so on. The intent here is clear enough: more voices in a more dynamic public sphere means a more vital and sustainable democracy. May the Twelfth documents the reach of power into the greyest and most private areas of everyday life. As the observer’s reports and the newspaper clippings tell us, the political pageantry of the Coronation leaves its markings on the décor of the buildings, it surfaces in idle talk, and it lingers in the collective unconscious of the citizenry, many of whom submit accounts of their dreams replete with references to the

68 See also James Chapman The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-1945 and, for a study of this proble during the Munich Crisis, see Benny Morris The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During the 1930s.
Coronation. Against this totalizing, all pervasive form of power, *May the Twelfth* juxtaposes a multiplicity of responses, a collection of voices and experiences that reform the liberal democratic order, ensuring a genuine public sphere. *May the Twelfth* critiques the various mechanisms that produce a single, collective image of both the Coronation and the masses reception of it. By uncovering multiple publics and arranging them in a kind of textual collage, the text averts any kind of closure, a strategy bound to a utopic projection of liberal democracy thriving on some kind of openness without end.69 But for Harrisson, who did not collaborate with Madge and Jennings on *May the Twelfth*, the book was only “a detailed piece of documentation” (qtd. MT 418). That is to say, it was not scientific. It lacked formal synthesis, he said; it lacked interpretation of social phenomena, and it ultimately lacked any coherence. Despite occasions of formal brilliance, searing irony or low-grade humor, we can concede to Harrisson that the text lingers as so much white noise; but, at least in this text, it is a white noise significant enough to drown out any grand declarations of national unity. To be sure, no other Mass-Observation text bears the formal dexterity of *May the Twelfth*, nor are the utopic yearnings for a seamless identification of the population and the state pitched in the same key in any of their other books. The aspiration towards non-closure in *May the Twelfth* begins to fall away; indeed, non-closure signals a problem, not an end, for the books to come.

In light of the detours of form and politics in Mass-Observation between *May the Twelfth* and *War Begins at Home, Britain by Mass-Observation* should be seen as a

69 For a stimulating overview and close analysis of Mass-Observation, including a bit on *May the Twelfth* and narrative form, see Laura Marcus’ “Introduction: The Project of Mass-Observation” for *New Formations* #44.
threshold text. It deals directly with two crises, one national and the other international. The Munich Crisis of 1938 looms over the whole book, but, as Benny Morris shows, that crisis is inseparable from the incredible mishandling of information by the news media. Where Mass-Observation finds an increasing indifference to international crisis after Munich, they also find evidence of a growing crisis at home: “This decreasing interest is highly significant as a reflection of the stage our society has reached. It is partly a defence against nervous strain, partly a kind of fatalism, a mistrust of newspaper information. Broadly speaking, it is a symptom of a serious breakdown in the relation between the individual and society” (BMO 28). The rhetoric of crisis moves ever so slightly away from the analysis forwarded in *May the Twelfth* where the disobedient energies of the everyday were conceived as vital to an open democratic state, provided they are properly managed. The locus of critique here is on the failure of liberal institutions to reflect and to serve the public will, but the solution is not to expand the public sphere so much as to prevent any scission between the public and the State. Arguably, the Munich Crisis truly brought the war home to the British public: gas masks were distributed on a mass scale, barrage balloons crowded the skies over London, and public parks were transformed into trenches. 70 Proceeding from Malinowski’s cue in *First Year’s Work*, Mass-Observation again conceives the political necessity of the project in totalitarian and democratic terms. “Fascism thrives on fantasy, while democracy has grown up with science and recognition of newly noticed facts” (BMO 113). Democracy hinges on the facts, on distributing them to the populace and making the state aware of the facts of everyday life, whether those facts are about living conditions, perception of government policy, or odd phenomena like the Lambeth Walk.

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70 See Chapter One of Angus Calder’s *The People’s War*. 
Where the link between the state and population was one of manipulation and the calculated production of mass feeling in *May the Twelfth*, any distance between the two in a time of crisis endangers popular sovereignty. Mass-Observation presents itself as the potential mechanism to bind popular will with the state: “If democracy as an ideal can function and survive, this great gap between the intellectual leader and the ordinary man has to be bridged” (*BMO* 129). This is precisely the idea that underwrites the organization from its inception and, at first glance, it seems in accord with liberal conceptions of institutions and government policies embodying the desires of the people. But how do we square that with the following prognostication: “In the event of war there would be no room for, no safety in, individual liberty. Uniform national service would be imperative” (*BMO* 234). Does war necessitate a kind of totalitarian political form for the security of the population? Or, is it the case that war, and Mass-Observation’s war book, make manifest what Giorgio Agamben calls “a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism” (*SOE* 3)?

Like *May the Twelfth*, *War Begins at Home* detects a crisis for liberal democracy and mediates it formally. In the former text, part of that crisis resides within Britain and, as we have seen, the problem of acquiring and distributing information. In the latter text, the threat is perceived as coming from without, but it has the paradoxical effect of casting into relief a problem internal to the juridical form of the liberal state. The onset of war and emergency politics, however, bring their own set of demands and require different forms of mediation. After the passage of the Emergency Powers Act in August, 1939, politics became a matter of ensuring, in Chamberlain’s words, “the maintenance of the life of the people” (*WBH* 37), of defending the population and using exceptional powers
to do so. The lack of synthesis in *May the Twelfth* which so incensed Harrisson was not a point of scientific debate or methodological preference; it was a formal problem at the level of governance and, by extension, a formal problem for legal and political narratives that sought to assimilate these new powers with democratic rule. W. Ivor Jennings, British lawyer and founder of the University of Ceylon, published an essay entitled “The Rule of Law in Total War” in *The Yale Law Journal* in January 1941 with the expressed intent to reconcile the extensive powers granted to the state with the British Constitution, whose rights and provisions exist only in a suspended way under the new emergency legislation. Jennings searches for limits, implicit and explicit, on the authority the 1939 Emergency Powers Act granted to the state in terms of compulsory military or industrial service, the conduct of military tribunals, and the acquisition of property. A version of the Act passed a year later extended the powers even further, going so far as to grant the government the capacity to create new legal offenses and punish them if the security of the nation was thought to be at stake:

The Act further enacts that Defense Regulations may provide for amending any enactment, for suspending the operation of any such enactment, and for applying any enactment with or without modification. In other words, the suspending power declared illegal by the Bill of Rights is restored. The Act, as originally

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71 For more on the population as a political problem see the aforementioned texts by Michel Foucault as well as Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Tony Bunyan’s *The Political Police in Britain* traces the life of emergency powers in 20th century Britain following the Great War. He begins with the passage of DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) in 1914, its use to quell labor riots in the 1920s, the reappearance of exceptional powers in The Emergency Powers Act in 1939 and its long, eventful afterlife in the 1970s even after it was repealed. He argues correctly that far from being an exceptional circumstance, these acts provided the groundwork for a new paradigm and new technique of government. For a full discussion of law, emergency, and new paradigms of sovereignty, see Agamben’s *State of Exception*.  

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enacted, was in force for one year only, but it has been extended for another year by the Emergency Powers (Defense) Act, 1940. It may be continued for a further year (and presumably from year to year) by Order in Council made after addresses from both Houses of Parliament, and it may be terminated at any time by Order in Council. (Jennings 376)

Whatever limitations may be prescribed on the extent of such powers, be they implicit or explicit limitations, there is always the provision that such limitations can be transgressed; this is, after all, the intrinsic force of exceptional powers. Jennings attempts to reinscribe emergency powers within the functional order of parliamentary democracy. He grants that the state must have such powers at its disposal in order to protect the population and prosecute the war, but it is also key that such powers not dissolve or displace the rule of law. Jennings concludes his meditations with these insightful and stirring lines:

The conclusion must be, therefore, that while the powers which the emergency legislation has vested in the Government are wide enough to infringe altogether the principles which might reasonably be regarded as those of the rule of law, these principles, reasonably interpreted, are in fact carried out in the actual exercise of those powers. In other words, the law which actually touches the individual citizen through the application of the “children” and the “grandchildren” of the Emergency Powers Acts is not arbitrary or despotic. The Emergency Powers Acts themselves would, in a legal sense, permit of arbitrary government; political conditions, through the control of Parliament, forbids abuses in the exercise of the Acts. The continuing flexibility of the British
Constitution has made it adaptable to total war. The Government has powers almost as vast as those of any dictator, but parliamentary control prevents those abuses which are associated with dictatorship.” (Jennings 386)

With emergency legislation opening the way for absolutism, Jennings turns to liberal rationality as the limiting force. Even though the “children” and “grandchildren” of the Emergency Powers Act grant absolute sovereign power to the state, parliamentary control, despite having its legislative function potentially transferred to the executive, will nevertheless safeguard the “reasonable” use of these powers and, at the end of the day, the British Constitution will be all the stronger for it. Jennings’s dual efforts to highlight the reach of emergency powers and to locate constitutional and political limitations to them alludes to an irresolvable structural crisis: the suspension of democracy for its preservation. This crisis, I argue, becomes most acutely felt in the war of form and content in War Begins at Home.

“In the event of war” from Britain by Mass-Observation becomes the event of war with the instantiation of the Emergency Powers Act in August, 1939 and then its extension the following year. Whereas May the Twelfth drew out the non-events of everyday life to insert the multiple into a moment of purported collective identification, War Begins at Home views the mutability of the everyday with suspicion and anxiety. Daily life falls under the microscope to measure the reach of emergency powers, to find where they have misfired, and to propose correctives that will enable a seamless identification between the population and the state. Still, War Begins at Home opens with a declaration of its conditions of possibility: “This book is possible because we live in a democracy” (1). The very existence of the text testifies to the perseverance of
parliamentary democracy even after its massive reorganization by emergency powers. At this juncture, Mass-Observation reminds us that although war “makes everything different”…the structure of our society is not fundamentally altered” (WBH 1).

Interestingly enough, all that follows suggests otherwise. The writings on mass conscription, air raid fears, evacuations, and mandatory blackouts represent a social structure fracturing from every angle:

`The expectation of enemy aeroplanes had already, before the war started, begun to change the social structure of Britain; the structure of the family, through evacuation; the structure of leisure and sex and shopping through the blackout; the structure of the home, through incendiary bomb and gas preparations; the structure of civil authority, through A.R.P. (WBH 43)

At first glance, this seems to be some sort of confused logic. Mass-Observation recognizes “the very fact of a democracy being at war is in itself a confusion” (WBH 339). But there is more at play than confusion or error; both, after all, denote structural problems and it is here, at the structural level, that Mass-Observation, like Jennings, directs its focus. Popular discontent, widespread confusion over war policies, and the fumbling of information to the public all constitute “a symptom of a wider trouble” (WBH 71). The symptomatology this book develops points to a problem of two disconnected spheres outlined as such: “Statesmen-Diplomacy-Foreign Affairs-War and Workmen-Pub Talk-Home Affairs-Everyday Life” (WBH 71). Indeed, several excerpts from interviews and diaries attest to the enormous distance between the two. The State and the population are at odds and, for Mass-Observation, this jeopardizes “the whole
structure of society by allowing the mass to get more and more on to a different plane of reaction and feeling” (*WBH* 11).

The disarray of everyday life under a state of emergency stimulated more public discontent than patriotic fervor for the war. After the mandatory blackout imposed in September, for example, the number of people killed in road accidents increased 100 percent. Angus Calder explains how scores of others stumbled “into canals, fell down steps, plunged through glass roofs and toppled from railway platforms. A Gallup Poll published in January showed that by that stage about one person in five could claim to have sustained some injury as a result of the blackout—not serious, in most cases, but it was painful enough to walk into trees in the dark, fall over a kerb, crash into a pile of sandbags, or merely cannonade of a fat pedestrian” (63). In addition, “a number of suicides were reported to have resulted from listening to BBC news bulletins. Fellow civilians presented a far more compelling danger than the enemy: the number of automobile accidents nearly doubled with the national ban on the use of headlights. Of the nearly 1800 casualties recorded in the first two months of hostilities, the black-out was responsible for over 1100, the German Army for none” (Knowles, 12). By way of response, *War Begins at Home* critiques state power for its clumsy mismanagement of civilian life. Mass-Observation advances this curative measure: “It is difficult to run a war in which all the civilian population is so concerned unless every part of the administrative machine is focused in one direction, with one idea, with private and public interests fused, military and civil interests fused” (*WBH* 131). *War Begins at Home* aims to refocus “the administrative machine.” The anarchic energies of the everyday in *May the Twelfth* all but disappear. Everyday life is figured not as a site of political
potentiality, but as an impediment to a new paradigm of security. The text details all the micro-practices of daily life—work habits, sleeping schedules, dance, sport—and provides something of a blueprint for a more coordinated, and more totalizing deployment of emergency powers. *War Beings at Home* presents itself as a site of mediation between statesmen/workmen, diplomacy/pub-talk, foreign affairs/home affairs, war/everyday life, posing as the motor for a dangerous dialectical synthesis.

Despite its longings for absolute fusion, the form of *War Begins at Home* accomplishes very little by way of synthesis or closure. The text routinely alerts us to its incomplete or provisional status. The organization, they write, is still collecting information; their work is never done. This is, perhaps, a quality of any investigation of everyday life. To quote Maurice Blanchot, such a project inevitably suffers against “the inexhaustible, irrecusable, constantly unfinished everyday that always escapes forms or structures” (*IC* 239). But more importantly, the political posture of this text encodes something far more inimical: the failed form of *War Begins at Home* registers a political structure losing form in the passage from its condition of possibility in the adherence to democratic procedures to its condition of impossibility in the suspension of those procedures. In many ways, the repeated dichotomy between liberal democracy and totalitarianism underwriting Mass-Observation’s political project is not the proper optics for reading this text. In fact, the work contradicts itself, enacts (tries to enact) formal procedures opposed to its stated political aims, and slips from one political register to another precisely because the two forms of state power are not quite as distinct in practice as they are in the field of political ideology. As so many critiques have already told us, the exercise of political force in totalitarian societies does not represent the photo
negative of liberal democracies; rather, “the liberal state is one in which the amount of force is reduced and the amount of deception and concessions increased” (Wallerstein 66). The role of political power in liberal ideology is to use what Foucault calls a kind of “silent war to reinscribe the relationship of force, and to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals” (SMBD 16).

If we consider what War Begins at Home aims to do and what it fails to do, this political crisis becomes clearer. Mass-Observation both sanctions an absolute fusion of state power and the masses and, in keeping with their democratic raison d’être, it forwards a plan to secure a democratic future for Britain on the other side of the war. These rigid oppositions between liberal democratic and totalitarian forms of power keep Mass-Observation from recognizing the crossing of these two forms in both the deployment of emergency powers, be they efficient or inefficient, and in their own political script. But this is where the failure of War Begins at Home becomes most instructive. The passage of liberal democracy into a state of emergency is not a mere caesura in the political order; in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy, this passage is a sovereign-event. It grounds an emergent paradigm of State power whose inscrutable narrative describes the relation of political form to narrative form that props all of

72 See, for example, writers such as Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Immanuel Wallerstein, all who frame contemporary debates in political theory regarding the crisis of the liberal state.

73 See Nancy’s “War, Right, Sovereignty—Techne” in Being Singular Plural. The section I have in mind here is the parenthetical digression found on page 107: “(This is why War is also the Event par excellence; it is not an event in some “history of events” that consists in reciting, one by one, the dates of wars, victories, and treaties, but the Event that suspends and reopens the course of history, the sovereign-event. Our kings, generals, and philosophers have only ever thought of it in this way).” See Gilles Deleuze’s The Logic of Sense and, with Félix Guattari, What Is Philosophy? for the most provocative structure for thinking the event as more than pure rupture; for Deleuze, the event marks something historically contingent, but irreducible to the writing of history.
Mass-Observations’ work up to this point. The “twilight war”, that phrase coined for the first four months of war without any attack, designates also the twilight of a political order in Britain and, to be sure, another war at home. We can situate *War Begins at Home* in this moment of political twilight and read it as an allegory of emergence; that is to say, the inability of the text to formally enact the model of governance it endorses does not signal any inherent, essential contradictions of liberal democracy and totalitarian state power so much as it demonstrates the possibility of those two logics coexisting. At once a document of ruin and emergence, *War Begins at Home*’s “provisional” status allows these two forms of political power to coexist, just as Britain’s emergency politics need not be reconciled with its imperiled democracy on the grounds that it is only provisional. If *War Begins at Home* can end without being final, then perhaps that is the form this emergent paradigm of state power takes: the declaration of emergency powers may cease after the war, but its repetition in different historical circumstances throughout Britain’s history after 1945 indicates that its end is never final. But this story does find an end of sorts in 1940 when Mass-Observation fuses with the Ministry of Information, giving this story the closure it so desires.

**Proper Names (II)**

I close here with another piece of writing plagued by problems of form: Charles Madge’s unpublished, unfinished autobiography. His editor Andrew Lownie had this to say about Madge’s life-writing: “particularly towards the end, you rely too much on just cataloguing events straight from your diary and, while this “Mass Observation” approach is appropriate, it just doesn’t quite work” (*AB* 1). Lownie is right: anyone who has perused Madge’s hefty typescript finds an illuminating if not fragmented narrative
construed from notes, letters, diary entries, and so forth with little written in-between these selections. Whether it was the demand of the publisher or the demand of the writing itself, Madge’s notes indicate that he tried to arrange his narrative again in a linear, more sequential form. These attempts, however, do not come to us as another typescript: they sit in his diary where they remain an incomplete collection of events and non-events that never quite found a proper form of presentation. If we do not judge Lownie’s comments to be accurate, surely they were prescient: what is appropriate may not work. The right method for assembling an enormous archive does not immediately open out to an appropriate form for presenting it and Mass-Observation contended with this from its earliest days until it joined the Ministry of Information. Methodologically, they wrestled with the “inexhaustible, irrecusable, constantly unfinished everyday” (Blanchot IC 239), bound by an ethico-political obligation to preserve the individual voices of the ordinary citizen and to recreate mass democracy in a more perfect form. And yet in the course of Mass-Observation’s initial phase, the democratic masses transformed from the subject of political power into, an object of political power—the population.74 Under the shadow of total war, in the midst of political turmoil, these techniques of power over the population assume so many proper names—Liberal Democracy, State of Emergency, Security—to designate an emergent politics at war with everyday life.

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74 For a sustained engagement with the rise of the population as an object of liberal governance see Michel Foucault Sécurité, Territoire, Population (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 2004) and Naissance de la biopolitique (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 2004).
CHAPTER III:

“MEANWHILE THE DAILY…”: THE WAR TRAVEL BOOK

“We meanwhile the daily round had to continue.”
W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood
_Journey to a War_ (1939)

“We meanwhile, the daily—more particularly nightly—round, the common task.”
George Orwell, _Homage to Catalonia_ (1938)

“Put in a nutshell, the result is obtained by dislocating their normal life to such a degree that they will prefer the lesser evil of surrendering their policy, and by convincing them that any return to “normalcy”—to use President Harding’s term—is hopeless unless they do so surrender.”
Basil Liddell Hart, _Paris, or the Future of War_ (1925)

Up to this point we have examined two figurations of the everyday in Woolf’s _The Years_ and the early works of Mass-Observation: the first reads the everyday as a barometer of historical crisis and the second turns the quotidian into a symptom of England’s imperiled democracy. As different as their concerns and aesthetic investments are, both Woolf’s _The Years_ and Mass-Observation’s texts display a sense that English domestic politics are and have always been international, whether it is through the long imperial history that hovers over the lives of the Pargiters or the policies of appeasement that Mass-Observation found so ominous. In this chapter, I want to reverse the focus and follow an interwar genre that was explicitly international. That genre is the war travel book. If the 1930s were rife with documentary and autoethnographic practices, it also
witnessed an extraordinary rise in literary travel books, many of them coming from war zones in Spain, China, Abyssinia, and Germany among other places. Far from documents of leisure or occasions for escape, these travel books from the late 1930s grappled with a world on the verge of dissolution. Both the panoply of authors and the gravity of the historical events surrounding these books leads Valentine Cunningham to designate war travel writing as part of a “prevailing ‘30s experience” (431). He goes further to note that those destinations “once claimed by ordinary civilians and tourists, travel brochures and songs, ignited into trouble spots possessed rather by soldiers and bullets” (Cunningham 431). These books are not composed of tantalizing tails of exotic locales or wistful descriptions of faraway places; between the covers of these books a curious reader would find place names for bombed and besieged cities, formerly romantic frontiers that were now frontlines, cultural practices particular to war-making, names of the dead and imprisoned, and, ultimately, stark premonitions of what might lie ahead for England if war with Germany became reality. Such extreme content produced significant alterations in the design and vocation of the travel book and much of what follows attends to those designs.

It is important to recall that the formal dynamism of the interwar travel book was received by an intrigued audience; perhaps no other interwar genre enjoyed such a large, avid reading public as the travel book. As Helen Carr and Paul Fussell both note, the market for travel books increased significantly during the interwar years, attracting respected literary artists whose namesake imbued the travel book with higher cultural value. D.H. Lawrence, W.H. Auden, Vita Sackville-West, Christopher Isherwood, Rebecca West, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and George Orwell among many, many
others documented the everyday lives of the post-1919 world at home and abroad for their readers. These writers also flexed the generic parameters of the travel book to accommodate anything from metaphoric psychological journeys through Africa (Greene) to hybrid reportage and socio-historical accounts of the Balkans (West) and, what will be of primary interest here, the war zones of the late 1930s (Orwell, Isherwood, and Auden).\textsuperscript{75} In his foundational study of modernist travel writing \textit{Abroad}, Fussell traces the narrative arc of the travel book from its rise after 1919 to its ultimate dissolution into war reportage at the end of the 1930s. The two war travel books that I will address in detail, Orwell’s \textit{Homage to Catalonia} and Auden and Isherwood’s \textit{Journey to a War}, get tagged as failures in Fussell’s account because, formally, they “unravel” (Fussell 219) or “dissolve” (Fussell 219). The hybridization of war and travel mutates the genetic code of the travel book for Fussell, initiating what he calls the “decadent stage in the course of the between-the-wars travel book” (219). While I agree with Fussell’s description, his evaluative judgments are a bit myopic; war certainly induces significant generic and formal changes in the interwar travel book, but it is not necessarily the case that these are decadent works. Those features he designates as indicative of the travel book’s unfortunate collapse are in no way direct way related to the destructive character of war writ large, but rather operate as symptoms of specific practices of warfare that emerged after 1919.\textsuperscript{76} What Orwell witnessed in Spain and what Auden and Isherwood could

\textsuperscript{75} See Chapter Six of Janet Montefiore’s \textit{Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: the Dangerous Flood of History} for more on the way West’s mammoth text participates in and undermines the travel book genre.

\textsuperscript{76} It is also curious that Fussell praises very similar formal problems as part and parcel of all modern writing, including the interwar travel book. In “All These Frontiers” he focuses specifically on the changing geographies and frontiers of the postwar world and links that geospatial fragmentation to the formal fragmentation of modern writing and painting. The travel
never quite grasp in China was a form of war that exceeded the definitions and conceptual apparatus that various institutions of international law put in place to give legal form to war; in short, the codes, definitions, and laws for understanding war no longer applied to what was happening in Spain and China. In this chapter I propose to read the disfigurations of form in Orwell, Auden and Isherwood’s travel books as encryptions of a declining world-system caught between the feeble promises of international law and the perpetual war and state-making practices of the late 1930s.

These books, then, are neither exemplars of literary or cultural decadence nor are they mere reflections of a degenerating world order; my argument here is that they formally mediate between two competing world orders and variously attend to those key concepts of international law—combatant/non-combatant (enmity), front/civilian area (territory), just/unjust war (force)—that lost their descriptive and representative power in the wars of the 1930s and after. In this way, these travel books are not just historical symptoms; they are also tactical interventions, fraught endeavors to generate a conceptual and representative apparatus appropriate for the machtpolitik that remade both Spain and China. In what follows I chart the generic features of travel writing in order to establish the relation between aesthetic form and politics in the war travel book; the second section plots this aesthetic dialectic within its historical moment, allowing us to read narrative and aesthetic form as symptoms and imaginative solutions to the political conflicts of the 1930s; and finally, the latter half of this chapter reads closely two war travel books—

*Homage to Catalonia* and *Journey to a War*—in order to pursue in a more focused way

book, it would seem, could only ever internalize these same tensions and present them as formal problems.
how these particular texts engage the larger questions and claims laid out in these earlier sections.

While the war travel book appears to revise some of the basic features of travel writing, we should note that the travel book has always been an extraordinarily loose genre; one can track certain changes in it as the nature of travel itself changed over time. The travel book may not exhibit such easily identifiable and shared features of a more disciplined genre like the bildungsroman; nor does it seem to favor any particular mode. Casey Blanton’s historical and generic overview attributes the modern travel book’s elasticity to its outgrowth from and incorporation of “memoirs, journals and ships’ logs, as well as narratives of adventure, exploration, journey, and escape” (2). Despite this complex genealogy, Blanton argues that travel narratives throughout history are invariably structured around a rather simple “ancient pattern: departure, adventure, and return” (2), which acts as a recoding of Aristotelian plot. But if travel writings from Homer to Orwell and beyond internalize this “ancient pattern,” there are significant distinctions to keep in mind. For Blanton, the modern travel book is distinguished primarily by its heightened self-consciousness and those narrative components—character development, conflict, resolution, action—it borrows from fictional plots. If earlier travel narratives focused on facts and maintained, or tried to maintain, some fidelity to actuality, the modern travel book oscillates between the physical journey and the psychological journey, the literal travel and the metaphors of development and experience the journey affords the traveler/narrator. What Blanton’s bipartite structure of travel writing sets up for us is precisely the same interrelated tensions that have animated

77 See Casey Blanton’s *Travel Writing: the Self and the World*, especially the introduction and his chapter on Graham Greene’s *Journey Without Maps.*
all the works we have looked at thus far: actuality and interiority, the quotidian and the
exceptional, objectivity and subjectivity, realism and modernism, epistemology and
aesthetics. The analytic task here is to track these dialectical tensions and their
aestheticization alongside the wars of the late 1930s.

The war travel book, then, is a highly politicized genre where all aesthetic claims
are also political ones. In a way, this does not separate it so much from other travel
books. The political dimension of travel literature rose to the forefront during the heyday
of postcolonial studies which quickly spawned a hefty body of work on 19th and 20th
century travelogues. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* inaugurated the study of travel writing
as part of widespread, highly diffused colonial discourse. In different ways, this line of
questioning was extended by Mary Louise Pratt, James Clifford, Homi Bhabha and James
Buzard. These studies show how travel writing constitutes a discursive formation that,
like other colonial discourses, legitimates imperial rule while also structuring and
consolidating national identity. While my object of study here is rather different from
these critics, I will maintain the basic claim that there is a close, even originary,
relationship between politics and the travel book. But I also want to emphasize that these
writings are literary objects and not merely discursive acts or screens for projecting
national identity. The political import of these books is sedimented into their very form;
this kind of aesthetic and political analysis, then, must proceed first by historicizing those
formal operations.

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78 See Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* Clifford’s *Routes:
Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* and *The Predicament of Culture:
Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art;* Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture;* Buzard’s
*The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to “Culture,” 1880-1918.*
If Blanton gives us a working knowledge of what anchors the travel book as a genre throughout history, Helen Carr’s survey of the modernist travel book from 1880 to 1940 gives us an itinerary of its aesthetic evolution over a more compressed period of time:

It is possible to see three stages of travel writing within this period. From 1880 to 1900, the long, “realist” (not of course synonymous with reliable), instructive tale of heroic adventure remained dominant. In the years from 1900 to the First World War, the “realist” texts have not disappeared, but much travel writing becomes less didactic, more subjective, more literary. By the inter-war years, which saw a surge in the popularity of travel and travel writing, the literary travel book had become the dominant form: many of the best known examples of the genre were written by writers equally or better known for their fiction or poetry.

Like Blanton, Carr reaffirms the genre’s capability to change and alter over time just as the conditions of travel itself change. Her schema implicates the evolution of the travel book in a traditional literary historical narrative that trumpets modernism’s supersession of realism. The travel book shifts from an “objective,” didactic, and often heroic mode to a “more subjective, more literary” one. Her descriptive terms set up a series of oppositions and also function as markers of value: literariness over didacticism, subjectivity over objectivity. While my own hesitations with the break between realism and modernism have been laid out in detail in Chapter 1, I do think there is something substantial to her claim that the travel book changes significantly after the First World War. To be sure, travel itself had changed with passports, border patrols, and all sorts of
regulations that had been instituted as emergency measures during the war but never relaxed (this exception has indeed become the rule for travelers in the 21st century). After the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the old imperial and territorial orders of the prewar world lost their legitimacy and the victorious powers divvied up those possessions, created new nation-states, and remade frontiers and borders. These arrangements recreated the world and, for observers in England, re-enchanted the world and spurred a new interest in travel. But even more than the 1920s, the 1930s allowed writers to merge the politics of the postwar world and writing in a truly singular way. Unlike the earlier generation of modernists who were largely restricted from travel during the First World War, writers in the 1930s produced a sizable body of travel literature (and travel-themed literature) from various war zones. Many of these writers were convinced that they were living and documenting the march of History: Christopher Isherwood’s Berlin fictions bear witness to the violent collapse of the Weimar Republic; Auden, Orwell, Sylvia Townsend Warner and several others agitated on behalf of Spain throughout the civil war; Auden and Isherwood together published their missives from China in The New Republic, The New Statesman and Nation, and New Masses among other places before releasing their war travel book Journey to a War. The interwar travel book was duly influenced by modernist formal experimentation and the heightened attention to actuality that followed the documentary movement; and like Virginia Woolf, Mass-Observation, 

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79 Paul Fussell has a nice section on the emergence of the passport and the popular reaction to restricted or, perhaps managed, travel following the First World War. See Chapter 4 “The Passport Nuisance” of his Abroad.

80 See Chapter 15 of Edward Mendelson’s Early Auden for an account of his travels through Iceland, Spain, and China. The writings from China published in the journals mentioned above are collected in The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse Volume, 1926-1938, also edited by Mendelson.
J.B. Priestley and others, the aesthetics of everyday life that accompany the interwar travel book have everything to do with their particular historical moment. Still, when Fussell points to the travel book’s long fall into reportage, and, in a way, its detour from the subject’s psychological journey, his criticism reveals an underlying tension between subjective and objective expression and this tension seems to find its analogues in the tension between modernist and realist modes. It also serves to shield the allure of travel writing from the corrosive effects of anything remotely political.

Extending portions of Fussell’s analysis, Bernard Schweizer’s *Radicals on the Road* aims for a more productive way to address politics and travel writing. For Schweizer, the transformations war induces in the travel book might be seen less as a marker of generic decline and more as an opportunity to historicize the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the mid to late 1930s. His analyses of Orwell, West, and Waugh illustrate how their texts reflect their own socialist, liberal, or conservative views. The political dimension of travel writing, it seems, is reducible to the author’s “ideological convictions” (Schweizer 4) and travel writing is but a “vehicle” (Schweizer 5) for expressing those convictions. Schweizer locates value in these texts only insofar as they operate as “expressions of one’s politics” (17), even with someone such as Orwell whose travel books change remarkably from one to the next. Politics, then, is reducible to subjective expression. As it turns out, the key opposition between Fussell and Schweizer is not simply between the relevance or irrelevance of politics and war to the

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81 I will come back to Schweizer’s take on *Homage to Catalonia*, but it is important to note that stylistic variation functions solely as a window onto the author’s politics: “Part of Orwell’s unadorned narrative style in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) and the clarity of his prose are related to that intimate social connection. His participation in the war enabled him to render, instead of strangeness (the ability to record strangeness is in fact caused by separation) a social and political context as if it were his natural milieu. Indeed, Orwell had metamorphosed from an observer into a participant” (Schweizer 31).
A less obvious but more fruitful distinction is the methodological one: that is, the difference between Fussell’s insistence on form and Schweizer’s focus on subjective expression, between the text as a mediated object or a vehicle of the subject.

The project of reasserting the dynamic relationship between the geopolitics of the 1930s and the narrative form of the travel book must proceed from an altogether different method than that of either Fussell or Schweizer. Leaving Fussell’s restrictive conception of the travel book to the side and departing significantly from Schweizer’s reliance on art as subjective expression, I want to argue for a more dialectical relation between the changing generic protocols of travel writing and the new machtpolitik of the late 1930s.

What disfigures these travel books is not so much their descent from high literary travel into the lowly business of war reportage; rather, it is their attempts to generate a representational form for a kind of warfare whose theory and practice exceed all legal terminology and categories that sought to define, categorize, and bracket war in the early twentieth-century. We can replace Fussell’s rise and fall narrative with a more dialectical notion that sees these deformed works as, on the one hand, internalizing the corrosive effects of total war on international law and global peace, while, one the other hand, generating forms to document the resurgence of machtpolitik as a way of managing, even remaking, the world-system. The political, then, is neither an occasion to dismiss a body of work nor is it reducible to the author’s own ideological investments. What I hope to demonstrate here is the way these texts formally capture the slow drift from the post-1919 dream of global peace and collective security into international civil war.
Two Forms of Internationalism: Collective Security and International Civil War

Part of my argument here assumes that these travel books (and much of late modernism) display a high level of attention, interest, and involvement with the international scene in the 1930s. On the surface, this should not be an off-color claim, but scholars old and new have dubbed the literature of this period as that of a “sinking” or “shrinking” island. In these accounts, the much heralded modernist internationalism, or “cosmopolitanism,” of the preceding decades seemingly ends. There is surely no stronger case for revaluing much of English literature after the 1920s than Jed Esty’s *A Shrinking Island*. Leaving aside the tangled debates over political commitment or aesthetic autonomy, Esty advances a more materialist, dialectical reading of this period of literature. His readings of Eliot, Woolf, and Forster undoubtedly make a strong case for what he dubs the “anthropological turn” towards national culture in 1930s: these writers seek to reinvigorate and preserve their own national mythologies in the face of England’s political and economic decline. Esty rightly insists that we historicize the aesthetic forms from this period and read them as mediated representations of imperial decline. On this account, the outward, cosmopolitan feel (if that is in fact the right word) of high modernism retreats into an inward, national culture. “English writing—ranging from Orwell’s urban fiction to the “home anthropology” of the Mass-Observation movement—

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82 In addition to Esty’s book which I discuss in detail, there is Hugh Kenner’s *A Sinking Island* from which Esty’s study takes its name.

83 Like their high modernist predecessors, British writers from the 1930s spent a considerable amount of time outside of England traveling, living abroad, or joining international literary and avant-garde networks (the Ville Seurat poets, Surrealism, and *transition* being only a few of the most well-known). The massive flux of literature from the Spanish Civil War alone should be enough to complicate such a claim.
increasingly made the nation into an object of documentary observation, a knowable unit of cultural and social relations rather than a fractured metropole” (Esty 17). As I demonstrated in the last chapter, this is certainly part of the story of Mass-Observation, but neither is it the whole story nor even the most important part: the imminent threat of global war, not imperial contraction, underwrites Mass-Observation’s turn to the everyday. To be sure, the 1930s had its moments of colonial unrest: IRA bombings, Nehru’s declaration of Indian independence, the onset of apartheid in South Africa, and Britain’s routine colonial policing ventures may have been on the cultural radar. However, it is hard to imagine the suppression of Ghanese radicals in the mid 1930s or the skirmishes in British mandates in the Middle East inducing the same anxiety over British power as Hitler’s quest for Mitteleuropa or Britain’s entry into another arms race with Germany. There was indeed a profound change in England’s status as an island state; if England was shrinking, it had everything to do with its newfound vulnerability to air war and to its previously unchallenged sea power (and in this regard it is no accident that so many war travel books train their eye on the effects of air war on daily life). So, while Esty’s readings of the late works of high modernists—Forster, Eliot, Woolf—works quite well within this framework, much of the literary and cultural phenomena of

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84 Esty’s argument wields its greatest force when discussing modern literature and culture after the Second World War when imperial decline and national reconstruction seem to necessitate a revision of national culture. Steven Lobell’s claim here about the uneven contraction of British imperial power.

85 Virtually no one in the British government considered the geo-strategic consequences of a Franco-led Spain, particularly if he had cooperated with Italy and Germany to close the western Mediterranean sea routes, effectively cutting off Britain’s passageways around Africa. Liddell Hart was an early advocate of intervention on behalf of the Republicans on these geostrategic grounds. For more on Liddell Hart’s writings and views on the politics of containment in the 1930s, see Azar Gat’s A History of Military Thought, Chapter 4, Part II, Book III.
the 1930s risks being reduced to yet another symptom of cultural anxiety or passed over altogether. The war travel books of Orwell and Auden and Isherwood do indeed read the war zones abroad as portents of Britain’s future. But that isn’t all that they do and Esty’s analytic may, in this particular case, occlude more than it reveals.

In order to advance the idea that the war travel book mediates the competing versions of international order at play in the 1930s, we must reintroduce the international into late modernism, but also travel far indeed from prevalent conceptions of modernist internationalism. For a long time, modernist scholars have extolled this literature as the writing of exile, migration, and mobility; the sprawling networks of artists and writers in some of the world’s capital cities made modernism not only a metropolitan art as Raymond Williams would have it, but one with a decidedly international, even cosmopolitan, character. Critics old and new have taken cosmopolitanism as one of the primary conditions of possibility for modernism’s proliferation and diversity. If the new modernist studies set out to contest many of the critical orthodoxies underwriting modernist scholarship for so long, this particular area was revitalized, imbued with energies drawn from political theory, cultural criticism, and postcolonial studies. Cosmopolitics or the “new cosmopolitansim” has offered critics a way of placing modernist movements within a more transnational and globalizing world. Although the

86 What would one make, for instance, of avant-garde magazines like *transition* and *Contemporary Prose and Poetry*, the dynamic international exchange over film and cinema in magazines like *Close-Up*, the Berlin and cabaret experiences of the Auden Group, or even the British Surrealist Movement? And what of Lawrence Durrell’s letter in October 1936 where he asks quite bluntly (and in call capitals) “IS THERE NO ONE WRITING AT ALL IN ENGLAND NOW?” (qtd. Fussell 11).

87 Among many others, see Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*; Raymond Williams *The Politics of Modernism*; Jessica Berman *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community*; Caren Kaplan *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*.
methodologies vary considerably, the motives do not. Among the most formidable critics who have drawn connections between the literatures of the early twentieth-century and theorists of the late twentieth-century, one notices the driving force of the so-called ethical behind these projects. Perhaps it is no surprise to find such heavy investments in moral imperatives; after all, Kant still remains the primary figure for all theories of cosmopolitanism, regardless of significant revisions, departures, and updates. Migrating from political theory into literary studies, the new internationalisms, whether they travel under the names “cosmopolitanism” “transnationalism,” or “geomodernism,” constitute an ethical injunction, one separate from, and perhaps antithetical to, the political.

Rebecca Walkowitz’s recent *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* surveys a host of modernist aesthetic practices and her readings of individual texts elaborate the ethical valences of these practices. Her investigation of modernist fiction focuses on the “tone” or “feel” of the cosmopolitan and she indexes a number of aesthetic techniques that are specifically cosmopolitan: naturalness (Joyce), triviality (Conrad), evasion (Woolf), mix-up (Rushdie), treason (Ishiguro), and vertigo (Sebald). Yet, like the theorists her project leans on, the ethical and the aesthetic erase the political. Her subtle readings of key modernist texts have a similar effect, regardless of the author or historical period in which the text is located: aesthetics discloses either an ethical orientation or ethical obligation.

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88 Among many others, see Bruce Robbins’s *Debating Cosmopolitics* and *Feeling Global*; Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in World of Strangers*; Pheng Cheah *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*; and the special issue of *Public Culture* edited by Dipesh Chakrabarty and Homi Bhabha. For a different, and welcome, approach to internationalism, human rights, and literary culture, see Joseph Slaughter’s *Human Rights, Inc.*
A similar pattern structures the recent work of Susan Stanford Friedman and Melba Cuddy-Keane. Here, however, Walkowitz’s conclusions about literary style resurface as methodological prescriptions for literary criticism. Stanford Friedman’s opening salvo from her essay “Paranoia, Pollution, and Sexuality: Affiliations between E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” lays out a motive and a method for pursuing modernist internationalism. Differentiating her approach from the kinds of international exchange, or more properly appropriation, of modernist primitivism, Stanford Friedman insists that “what is needed now…is a more systematically intercultural, comparative, and transnational framework for modernist studies” (245). If this is the overarching motive, her particular instantiation of it uses what she calls “cultural parataxis, by which I mean a juxtaposition of texts from different times and places for the new light this geopolitical conjuncture sheds on each” (Stanford Friedman, 245). As she openly acknowledges, parataxis is a modernist poetic, one she adopts as a proper mode of critique. Does this cultural parataxis open out for us the political violence of imperial rule or seek the historical and conceptual links between two imperial moments? Or, is it the case that such a method discloses far more about the anxieties and investments of contemporary criticism? That is to say, we have to ask if this aesthetico-cultural juxtaposition of Forster and Roy gives us a clearer sense of the historical or material geopolitical conjuncture at all. The central problem in this figuration of modernist internationalism is that aesthetic objects are not read as forms of mediation; the aesthetic is mined for cultural solutions to political problems that cosmopolitanism, by its very construction, cannot possibly address. With a slight change of focus, Melba Cuddy-Keane’s “Modernism, Geopolitics, Globalization” advocates a
new internationalist approach to modernism that engages theoretical debates on geopolitics and globalization. Her critical maneuvers gradually extract the geopolitical from the global, which is to say the political from the cultural, the economic from the social. Internationalism emerges primarily as a site of cultural exchange where identities can become more fluid and recognition of the other proceeds in a less aggressive way. In her reading of Yoshio Markino’s *A Japanese Artist in London*, she focuses on the author’s transformation of standard English to reflect its integration by a Japanese writer. By highlighting the confrontation between two cultures at the linguistic level, Cuddy-Keane is able to argue for a kind of syncretism that is emancipatory and not oppressive. Cuddy-Keane concludes that those Japanese inflected English words spark some form of cross-cultural sympathy: “His words are formed for “friend-making,” and designed to “win the hearts” (548) of his audience. His dream is “to create a global harmony and a better world, by advancing what I might term “the ethics of a circulating spiritual economy” (Cuddy-Keane 548). Markino’s efforts to win the hearts and minds of his English readership, to transcend material reality and historicity, mirrors Cuddy-Keane’s own critical investments. The literary text does not encode historical antagonisms, but it offers an opportunity to elaborate a more harmonious and ethical approach to what are assuredly contemporary cultural conflicts. Though they offer delicate readings and make provocative forays into political theory, all of these interventions share the widespread tendency of cosmopolitical theories to imagine, in the words of Timothy Brennan, “political utopias in aesthetic or ethical guise, so that they more effectively play what often proves, on inspection, to be ultimately an economic role” (81).  

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89 Also see Brennan’s extraordinary indictment of cosmopolitanism’s cloaked neoliberalism in “Cosmo-Theory” in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:3, Summer 2001: 659-91. For an
If Walkowitz, Stanford Friedman, and Cuddy-Keane all prioritize the ethical over the political, the ideal over the material, then we are left to examine what alternative methods are available for approaching literary modernism internationally. If we are to reframe the dialectic between literary form and international politics in the 1930s and 1940s, the two governing conceptions of modernism and the international—national culturalisms and cosmopolitanism—will not go as far as we need them to. We can, I think, get out of this impasse by forging a more dialectical conception of modernist aesthetics and internationalism that argues for literary texts as highly mediated objects that internalize the political antagonisms of their historical moment. Rather than relying on neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism or an inward national culturalism, I want to relocate these war travel books within a specific, historical moment in global politics that played itself out between two poles: collective security and disarmament (not always the same thing) on the one side and the war-making geopolitics on the other. These two visions of global order can hardly be reduced to this or that instance of cultural or transcultural feeling; instead, we might say what was truly at stake was the very idea of internationalism, and, in many ways, this hinged on multilateral agreements on a redistribution of force that might prevent an arms race like the one that culminated in the equally ambitious critique of the displacement of the political into the ethical, see Wendy Brown’s *Politics Out of History*, especially Chapter 2: “Moralisms as Antipolitics.” Alain Badiou’s *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* launches a more blistering and polemical, but no less challenging, critique of the current taste for ethics.

90 A welcome departure from this critical trajectory comes from Jessica Berman’s essay “Modernism’s Possible Geographies” in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* which is more historically situated and more sensitive to the geopolitical.

91 The traditional opposition puts Italy, Germany, and Japan as the sole aggressor states in this sort of divide, but it must be remembered that Britain openly waged small wars within its colonies. Tactical interventions (or non-interventions in the case of Spain) by several nations outside of the Axis used military force, treaties, or economic advantages to secure geopolitical advantages throughout the interwar years.
First World War. The League of Nations was the primary setting for those nations and powers that sought to frame international relations beyond force. Appended to the Versailles Treaty in 1919, the League of Nations Charter delineated its duties, mode of operation, and how it planned to circumvent war.\footnote{Article 10 of the charter specifically states that a war against any member of the League is a war against every member. Articles 11, 12, and 13 set guidelines for arbitrating conflicts between states, supplanting open war with “judicial settlements.”} From its inception after the First World War to its ultimate disbanding after the Second World War, the League of Nations struggled to redefine three juridical features of international relations: these features were enmity, territory, and the legitimate use (and reduction) of force. These will be integral to our discussion of Orwell and Auden and Isherwood below, but for now I give only a brief sketch of what these terms came to signify after the First World War. If the League could function as a space of deliberation, it could theoretically make enemies into discussants, thereby transforming the irrational antagonisms that erupted into open war into rational differences mediated and ideally resolved through procedure and debate.

Because the League was born with the Treaty of Versailles, its founders foresaw the tense debates over territorial sovereignty that would accompany the distribution of former territories from the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires.\footnote{Article 22 established a hierarchy of mandated territories and these were arranged primarily according to the perceived development of the native populations. Article 23 contains a clause to ensure the “just treatment” of natives by their new administrators.} But different kinds of territory also emerged as the League attempted to build on previous international law by defining what was and was not a legal space for conducting military operations. And, finally, the League set out early on its own stipulations for legal and illegal war.

These three features—enmity, territory, force—were the centerpieces of the League’s struggles to formalize and institutionalize international law. It cannot be
overstated how peculiar the League of Nations and its efforts to redraw the matrix of international politics appeared to onlookers in 1919. Prior to the postwar period, international law was largely informal and treaties were brokered between the most powerful nations when they felt such agreements were needed. Adherence to these agreements was highly arbitrary and under no circumstances could treaties or international laws trump an individual state’s sovereignty. However, the League did have two precursors: the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907. The Russian tsar Nichoals II called the major powers together to discuss disarmament and alternative, peaceful methods for settling future disputes between states. Needless to say, the failure of the conferences to reach any agreement on either front presaged the future shortcomings of the League of Nations decades later, but it was not an entirely fruitless endeavor. F.S. Northedge enumerates three significant achievements at the conference: first, the conference adopted a series of prohibitions on certain forms of warfare (including dropping bombs from aerial balloons); second, it established the groundwork for bringing together a commission to settle international disputes; and finally, it provided the “framework for arbitration in the resolution of international differences” (10). The conference met again in 1907, but there was very little by way of consensus on a host of issues under discussion—the status of private property on the open sea, the use of military force to collect debts, the creation of an international court—and it was expected that another conference would be held in 1914, but the war prevented any such meeting. On the other hand, though, the First World War may have accelerated international collaboration in a way that increasingly formal but highly limited conferences could not. Northedge writes that “the fact that it was a world war, that it was waged on several
fronts and in several countries at the same time and involved the belligerents in efforts to deny the seas all over the globe to the other side, and that it was carried on for a number of years by coalitions of nations which combined all their resources for the struggle, imposed on the war-making nations a degree of confederation unknown to previous history” (11). Such heightened collaboration would pass over into the postwar years as the victorious European powers looked to re-establish a more enduring form of order that would be favorable to economic development and to maintaining the status quo.

The intensity of these efforts reverberated throughout the literary and cultural scene. Leonard Woolf, Rebecca West, Kingsley Amis, Storm Jameson, Vera Brittain, Sylvia Townsend Warner, H.G. Wells, and J.M. Keynes were among the numerous figures preoccupied with the League of Nations and other forms of internationalism. L. Woolf was directly involved with plans for an international body to prevent war as early as 1915. The reports that would eventually become Parts I and III of L. Woolf’s *International Government* were commissioned in 1915 and published by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. His book made a lasting impression on the British Foreign Office and, per his own account, it was “used extensively by the government committee which produced the British proposals for a League of Nations laid before the Peace Conference, and also by the British delegation to the Versailles Conference” (*BA* 188-9). As Janet M. Manson remarks, L. Woolf issued no proposals for supra-state sovereignty and made no gestures towards disarmament. He did, however, retain the use of force for defensive measures. When the League of Nations finally emerged in 1919, war remained the centerpiece of international relations, but it was the prevention, not coordination, of

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military force that preoccupied the League. Despite the influence of L. Woolf’s book on British policy, disarmament, along with collective security, deliberation, and proceduralism, formed a major component of a far-reaching plan to limit the conditions and resources that culminated in the First World War. Such measures enjoyed massive popular support across a war weary Europe and this buoyed the League early on. It appeared to embody all the utopian hopes for a pacifist, demilitarized world.

If L. Woolf’s early work *International Government* proceeded from the conviction that “the alternative to law is war” (*IG* 232), Rebecca West’s version of internationalism suggests that these two may not be oppositions at all. Although West’s investigations of international fragility are best known through her mammoth travel book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, her “The Necessity and Grandeur of the International Ideal” makes a nice counterpoint to Woolf both in its argument and its timing. Written in 1934 for Storm Jameson’s *Challenge to Death*, West’s praise for the international ideal sounds one of the last notes of optimism for the League’s work. In the following year, the League’s utter failure to bracket Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssina betrayed the weakness of international law when confronted with such militarism. In addition to its timing, West’s “The Necessity and Grandeur of the International Ideal” imagines a way of redistributing force among nations in order to maintain peace and to buttress international law. For West, there is no stark division between law and war; instead, the question is how an international body might offer the juridical and moral apparatus for reconstituting the relation between law and war so as to enforce the peace. That is, she asks what makes the use of force ethical and just?
West’s opening line sketches out the two problems her essay addresses in elaborate, if not eccentric, ways: “The public mind is bound to be disconcerted at the notion of placing the decisive weapon of warfare, air power, in the hands of an international body, who is going to use it to suppress nationalist aggressions” (74). The status of national sovereignty under international law, and the use of force to maintain the peace: these are the two original tensions that the League of Nations was never capable of resolving. For West, an international body like the League should consist of mutually sovereign states that voluntarily adhere to a set of principles and strictures; in this way, West’s version of internationalism is contractual, not constitutional. In no way does she advocate a world government in place of national sovereignty nor does she elevate internationalism as a natural progression from nationalism. On the contrary, West extols the values of nationalism, praising the “visceral pull” (75) and the “feeling for his country” (75) that an Englishman should feel as intensely and intimately as he does for his family. Yet, nationalist feeling has its limits, or at least it has rational limits. The public’s reluctance to cede any national power to an international body, West argues, proceeds from popular misconception of internationalism as the polar opposite of nationalism. Rather than opposites, she says, the two are “counterbalances which can keep nations in equilibrium” (West 76); West, then, conceives the international ideal as purely contractual and mutual. Yet, her reconfiguration of internationalism entails more than a shift in terminology. Bearing a remarkable resemblance to the rhetorical maneuverings of T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” West inserts the international ideal into a long English, and indeed European, tradition. “The test of real and valuable nationalism,” she writes, “is to avail oneself of the tradition of one’s
country; and it happens that internationalism is one of the most ancient and firmly established elements in our tradition” (West 76). Rather than focus on the veracity of her claims, I want to turn attention to how she makes those claims and, in particular, her periodization of English and European internationalism.

West’s periodization of the international ideal stretches from the Roman Empire to the “great international body called Christendom” (78) under Charlemagne to the collapse of the Church and, concludes with “the pressure of present-day events” (80). In a somewhat Hegelian manner, West reads the advances and shortcomings of each period, showing how each failure enabled the next progression. She begins with Augustine’s reflections on the Roman Empire. Augustine’s key insight was to acknowledge the positive and negative effects of imperial rule. On the one hand, an empire can secure its people; the gambit, though, is that imperial citizens lived under an “imposed peace” (West 77) that was, in the last instance, aggressive and violent. Thinking beyond these limitations, Augustine “looked around for a system that would tolerate the nationalist spirit and maintain the peace necessary for its development” (West 77). Augustine’s vision was a society of small states, which West sees as a rudimentary predecessor to the League of Nations. Such a society would ameliorate the “standardising influence” (West 77) Augustine disdained in the Roman Empire and preserve the national identities, even destinies, of individual states. Charlemagne’s Holy Roman Empire carries the international ideal to its next stage of development. West commends Charlemagne for rebuilding Europe into a sort of “commonwealth comprising the whole body of Christian people in the world, regardless of their speech and race” (78). West’s focus on theological rule should not be taken as a literal argument for grounding the new
international ideal in theology, but hers is very much a political theology; that is, her vision of the international ideal secularizes theological concepts of sovereignty, justness, and war. While she turns to Christendom and Charlemagne’s Holy Roman Empire, what she extracts is a liberal, pluralist vision where one common principle, religion for Charlemagne and a secular international law for West, unites the society of states without impinging upon the “sacred processes” (West 75) of national destiny. Still, even if West’s dream of a new global order is indeed secular, her vocabulary—sacrality, destiny, spirit—and the periodization of the international indicate that the international ideal may assume a legal form, but must also rely on an extra-legal ethical foundation. This is perhaps most evident in her reflections on enmity and the resuscitation of the just war doctrine.

As with the League of Nations, the First World War emerges here as the primal scene in West’s thinking on a new global order. What occurred in 1914 was the nightmarish fusion of human creativity, technology, and killing. West writes “as the great war went along…it was multiplying the existing forms of death and pain with an obscene creative genius which made life worse than the most melancholic lunatic’s dream about it” (West 80-1). But even more than the scale of the war and the forms of death it introduced was the sobering fact that “no one was going to be able to stop the war, that in spite of the armistice and all the treaties there was going to be no return to the normal constructive life which man hopes to live in peace-time” (West 81). By 1934 there was nothing particularly novel about positioning the First World War as a massive epochal break; West’s concern for the present, and her figuration of it as a continuation of

95 I am expanding a basic claim from Carl Schmitt’s Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty. In Chapter Three “Political Theology” he states “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” (36).
war, echoes in a more forceful way J.M. Keynes’s early criticisms of the Treaty of Versailles and perhaps foresees the interwar years as, in the words of Alan Hodge and Robert Graves, “the long weekend.” What is striking, though, is her belief that the postwar peace is not a peace at all. She refers to the impossibility of reassuming a “normal constructive life” (West 81) and she repeats that same phrase when her language figures the collective population of Europe as an individual, traumatized soldier: “Since the war Europe has displayed all the characteristics of a person shattered by a traumatic experience: capricious, distracted, given to violence towards the self and others, careless of their environment, and incapable of carrying on a normal constructive life” (West 81).

The tragic failure of soldiers to reintegrate into civilian life left its mark in the most memorable works by war poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, painters like Georg Grosz, and Virginia Woolf’s novels as well as West’s own *The Return of the Soldier* and it emerges here as a shared, collective experience. The conceit in all of these works is that Europe has suffered a collective trauma, torn from an irretrievable past and cast into a present without order or direction; like Augustine, like Charlemagne, the First World War operates as a touchstone for the new internationalism.

In West’s logic, international trauma requires an international solution. West points to the dual failure of international law to retard the growth of militarism or to preserve the peace. While the League of Nations proved somewhat capable of adjudicating minor territorial disputes between lesser European powers in the 1920s, the strength of its moral and legal precepts did little to stifle the ambitions of more powerful states.⁹⁶ One can track the events precipitating the Second World War by indexing the

⁹⁶ See F.P. Walters’ two-volume *A History of the League of Nations* as well as George Scott’s historical account *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations.*
failures of the League before and after West’s essay to minimize military conflict: the Manchurian Incident (1932-3), Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia (1935), Hitler’s remilitarization of the Rhineland (1935), the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), the Sino-Japanese War (1937), the Anschluss (1938) and the annexation of the Sudetenland (1938). Withdrawals from the League by Japan, Italy and Germany also severely weakened the force and legitimacy of the institution’s decisions. Hitler ended Germany’s participation in the Disarmament conference on October 4, 1933 and withdrew altogether from the League of Nations a week later. Suddenly, the League’s foundational goal of achieving collective security seemed a weak proposition. the British openly (and sluggishly) embarked upon a policy of rearmament at the end of July, 1934, a policy specifically directed at updating the R.A.F. and putting it on equal footing with the Luftwaffe (or at least what they estimated the Luftwaffe to be), many perceived the new arms race as a dark repetition of the days before the First World War. Britain’s Statement Relating to Defence of March 4, 1935 tacitly acknowledged the failure of collective security and announced the return to an armed, militarized defense. The collapse of disarmament, the rise of machtpolitik as a form of internationalism, and the League’s inability to curb aggressor states undermined the force of international law to supplant war as a revitalized techne of sovereignty. For West, these wars and events are disastrous repetitions of the same conditions that precipitated the first war. If the Hegelian dialectic of national destiny and geist was arrested during the First World War,

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98 I follow Jean-Luc Nancy’s observations here from “War, Right, Sovereignty—Techne” in Being Singular Plural.
then its reanimation depends solely on the instantiation of a new international ideal, of a recalibration of law’s relation to force, and, of utmost importance, war’s relationship to peace.

Unlike L. Woolf’s more optimistic treatise, West could not possibly conceive of war and law as polar opposites by 1934. International order would depend on a redistribution of force in order to ensure the rule of law. But how would it be possible to justify the use of violence and force to extend and preserve peace and order? Like her periodization of internationalism, West grounds the proper relation of war and law in theology, particularly the just war tradition. If it adheres to specific conditions—formal declaration, *justa causa*, right intention—war can function as a vital defensive or offensive mechanism to maintain international order; it also exacts proper punishment on a “Power for threatening the security of the future” (West 83). This sort of war is not only a just and moral way “to avoid evil and pursue good” (West 83), but it is also rational, measured, and must be “waged moderately” (West 83). Yet West acknowledges the instrumentalization of the just war doctrine in the medieval period and she again proposes to allocate all force to an international body to adjudicate such matters. In some way, she believes this will check the greed and self-interest of individual states while also establishing the security and protection for them to realize their own destinies. The curious turn in West’s argument is that the use of force by an international body relies less on law and legal precepts and more on ethical norms. On the one hand, she presses for an evolved internationalism embodied in law and legal institutions; on the other, she defines the legitimacy of war not through legal or juridical principles, but extra-legal moral and ethical categories. In Carl Schmitt’s analysis of modern international law, the
passage from medieval to modern law rests on the division of *justa causa* (just cause) and *justis hostis* (just enemy); that is, war’s legitimacy resides in the equal status of sovereign states before the law and the mutual recognition of both parties as enemies with rights. The enemy combatant is not a felon or criminal beyond the law and the goal of interstate warfare is not annihilation; these wars, argues Schmitt, can be ended with treaties and legal decisions. Ideological wars and so-called just wars require the victor to exterminate the unjust enemy who is often perceived as posing a grave threat not to any particular state, but to humanity in general.99 When the enemy passes into a threat to all humanity, “war ceases to be a matter of international law, even if the killing, plundering, and annihilation continue and intensify with new, modern means of destruction” (Schmitt NE 124). Those who pass beyond the pale of law are exposed to infinite violence.

For West’s post-political, or liberal, form of internationalism, offensive, defensive, or punitive killing is just and morally vindicated. On the surface, West conceives a form of international law that would gather all available force unto itself and act as a global police unit; however, her turn to theology and just war doctrine abandon the legal and political foundations of war and supplant them with an ethical and moral basis. The conclusions of her argument provide no more of a legal basis for the use of force than what the League of Nations could claim for itself. Against the League of Nation’s universal condemnation of armed conflict, West resuscitates war as an ethically viable means for adjudicating international disputes and for maintaining global peace. What West’s essay casts into relief is that the League of Nations, and indeed L. Woolf’s, opposition of law and war, collective security or perpetual warfare, are false oppositions.

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What was really at stake was a conflict over the recoding of war: for the League and many parliamentary democracies, the use of military force was a mechanism for ethically punishing and policing rogue states and for maintaining an international status quo that was favorable to liberal economics; on the other hand, it emerged equally as the just and proper means for totalitarian and militaristic regimes to protect the ruling classes (Spain), expand their territory (Germany, Japan, and Italy), or to ensure the persistence of a regime that perceived itself as the will of the people (USSR). West’s particular recoding of war as a necessary component of law that nonetheless cannot be legally grounded has no other option but to seek recourse to some form of ethics. When war cannot be legal or illegal, it can be considered just or unjust. West’s essay recognizes the interrelation between sovereignty and force, order and war, as integral parts of the international ideal; if she approximates the role of war in establishing, exercising, and maintaining sovereignty, she, like the League of Nations and other commentators on these very issues, cannot think beyond the liberal horizon in which the League was both conceived and eventually concluded with such little success. Homage to Catalonia and Journey to a War enact a similar procedure whereby the formal diagnosis of warfare as the primary techne of sovereignty is met with similar ethical declarations: in short, these works are extraordinarily revelatory in the way they participate in the recoding of war, but their retreat into universal ethical principles, their anachronistic efforts to resuscitate a passé liberal humanism, indicates far more about the foreclosure of political possibility than anything else. In the readings that follow, war appears in both books not as an interruption of the peace or a sign of a world gone awry, but as an increasing, and perhaps governing, force of everyday life.
Necessary Murders and Just Wars: Orwell, Spain, and War Allegory

“Truth on this side of the Pyrenees is error on the other.” Pascal

Turning now to *Homage to Catalonia*, we can read Orwell’s war travel book along the aesthetic and historico-political lines that I’ve described above. Like Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia and Japan’s “incident” in China, the Spanish Civil War directly challenged the efficacy of international law to bracket the small, but seemingly perpetual, wars in the 1930s. But unlike those previous incidents, the Spanish Civil War was a distinctly European affair; it quickly galvanized leftists and liberals from all over the continent (and, indeed, several other parts of the globe). From its opening pages, Orwell’s book plots (and romanticizes) the internationalism of the Spanish Civil War.

After arriving in Barcelona, Orwell encounters an Italian militiaman. Sharing a commitment to fighting fascism, Orwell and the Italian militiamen immediately establish a relationship that “momentarily succeeded in bridging the gulf of language and tradition” (*HC* 4). Orwell and other international volunteers found their way to Spain to stop the march of fascism and many from Italy and Germany saw this as a proxy war against the fascist regimes in their own countries. Orwell’s first days in Barcelona also gave him a glimpse of a socialist utopia. His now famous passages on the worker’s state in Barcelona inventory the shift in language used for personal address, the emphasis on social equality, and the mass collectivization of businesses. Initially lured by this utopic city, Orwell acknowledges that “there was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for” (*HC* 5). Romanticized portraits of revolutionary Spain and the heroism and
camaraderie of the volunteers are everywhere in the literature of the Spanish Civil War. Orwell’s book traffics in some of this imagery, but it is not a tale of heroism nor does it nestle into the ideological divisions of democracy versus fascism that structured much of the literature from the war.

_Homage to Catalonia_ records Orwell’s experiences during the war but it also incorporates a good deal of retrospective narration that glosses his earlier impressions of Spain. After his portrait of revolutionary Barcelona, for example, he writes that he “believed that things were as they appeared, that this was really a workers’ State and that the entire bourgeoisie had either fled, been killed, or voluntarily come over to the workers’ side; I did not realize that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being” (Orwell _HC_ 5); the living socialist utopia of Barcelona is figured retrospectively as “a mixture of hope and camouflage” (_HC_ 113). The movements between his initial impressions and these moments of retrospection make _Homage to Catalonia_ a kind of _bildung_: as much as it is a document of the civil war, it is equally a story of Orwell’s awakening to political consciousness.100 Through his retrospective narration, he maps his development from a benighted, naïve partisan to an experienced and more enlightened, if unwilling, participant in the enormous complexities of the Spanish Civil War. Orwell’s incorporation of the “ancient pattern” (Blanton 2) of departure, adventure, and return in _Homage to Catalonia_ corresponds to a pattern of naiveté, experience, and

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100 Peter Monteath calls _Homage to Catalonia_ a _bildungsreportage_ and maintains that Orwell moves from naivete to a stronger, deeper political conviction. My reading of development departs significantly from his as does my consideration of _Homage to Catalonia_ as a war travel book rather than just reportage. See his _Writing the Good Fight: Political Commitment in the International Literature of the Spanish Civil War_, especially Chapter 6, “Heresies of the Left.”
disillusionment. Both the bildung plot and the retrospective narration deploy and contest the allegorical structure of the Spanish Civil War as a monumental confrontation between democracy (civilization) and fascism (barbarism). Orwell’s eye shifts from the high moral terrain of good and evil to the everyday, local particularities of Spain’s Civil War, the internecine fighting within the Republican ranks, and, the local and international mythologies of the war itself. By confronting the war as allegorical abstraction with the crudities and contradictions of everyday life, Homage to Catalonia tries to erect an alternative representational apparatus for this international civil war.

The Spanish Civil War ascended to high allegory on the international scene with dizzying speed. Its transformation from a local, civil war into a simplistic battle of good versus evil was a complex event with multiple ramifications. Looking back on the Spanish Civil War, Hannah Arendt underscores this transition from a domestic Spanish affair to an ideological one as its disturbing novelty. “Almost as frightening as these new dangers arising from the old trouble spots of Europe,” she writes, “was the entirely new kind of behavior of all European nationals in “ideological” struggles. Not only were people expelled from country and citizenship, but more and more persons of all countries, including the Western democracies, volunteered to fight in civil wars abroad (something which up to then only a few idealists or adventurers had done) even when this meant cutting themselves off from their national communities. This was the lesson of the Spanish Civil War and one of the reasons why the governments were so frightened by the International Brigade” (Arendt OT 280). Paired by ideological conviction rather than any national feeling, the international volunteers were fighting not for territorial integrity, but for what many saw as the survival of civilization itself, the preservation of high terms like
democracy and freedom over fascism and barbarism. Spain’s war quickly transcended its local particularities; for many international volunteers, this national civil war was primarily, and perhaps only ever, a screen on which the “latent” antagonisms festering within Europe would manifest themselves.

Of course, this wasn’t exactly how the Spanish understood the civil war. Most historians now agree that the local particularities of the Spanish Civil War were lost to even the most passionate of international participants. More often than not, the international volunteers were not so concerned with the local conditions of the Spanish war, many of which had a lengthy, complicated history which enabled the rise of fascism rather than resulted from it: the abiding problems of land and agricultural reform, regional versus national unity, and the notorious oppression wrought on the Spanish by the Catholic Church were foremost on the minds of the warring factions. Instead, those who crossed the Pyrenees to join the war imagined themselves as participants in a global struggle against fascism. On the year anniversary of the rebellion against the elected Republican government, former minister and diplomat Salvador de Madariaga wrote of the translation of the Spanish war into one front in wider European struggle: “By a tragic coincidence this war, essentially Spanish, has “caught on” abroad. Lured by somewhat shallow parallelisms, men, institutions, and even Governments outside Spain have been adding fuel to the fire which is consuming our unhappy country. Spain is thus suffering vicariously the latent civil war which Europe is—so far—keeping in check” (Times 19, July 1937). Madariaga casts the Spanish Civil War as a proxy war for an international

101 See Raymond Carr’s The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective; Antony Beevor The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939; for a focused look at Britain’s involvement and perception of the Spanish Civil War see Tom Buchanan’s Britain and the Spanish Civil War.
civil war, or what at the time was a “latent civil war” in Europe. When the Non-Intervention Committee met in September 1936, they were determined precisely to prevent any foreign intervention in Spain out of fear that a local conflict would spark a wider European war.\(^{102}\) Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union flouted the voluntary agreement by arming the warring factions and the Spanish Civil War became an international civil war and those searing domestic issues took a backseat to a global ideological conflict.

Many of the most prominent British writers who cast their lot with the Republican cause generated the poetics that further entrenched this allegory of the war.\(^{103}\) Auden famously declared that Spain was where “the menacing shapes of our fever/Are precise and alive” (\textit{CP} “Spain” 71) while MacNeice wrote that “Spain would soon denote/Our grief, our aspirations;/Not knowing that our blunt/Ideals would find their whetstone, that our spirit/Would find its frontier on the Spanish front” (\textit{AJ} “VI” 97-101).\(^{104}\) The \textit{Left Review} published the results of Nancy Cunard’s “Authors Take Sides on the Civil War” questionnaire, quoting responses from the likes of Samuel Beckett, Evelyn Waugh, T.S.

\(^{102}\) Non-intervention did not necessarily equal neutrality. Steven Lobell remarks that even more than threatening to ignite a full European war, the “Spanish Civil War (1936) posed a threat to Britain’s passage to its Far Eastern empire through the Straits of Gibraltar and the Strategic Balearic islands” (85). See Chapter 4 of his \textit{The Challenge of Hegemony} for more on Britain’s geopolitical maneuverings during the wars of the 1930s.

\(^{103}\) In addition to Buchanan’s book, see also Angela Jackson’s \textit{British Women and the Spanish Civil War} which, in addition to filling an enormous gap in the history of the Spanish Civil War, contains remarkable observations on Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland. James K. Hopkins’s \textit{Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War} is arguably the best and most thorough history of Britain’s involvement in the war. Hopkins casts his net a bit wider than the literary circles that receive so much attention in many cultural histories of the war; he attends equally closely to popular culture, the lower classes, and others who were captivated by Spain.

\(^{104}\) These sort of declarations are numerous. See Valentine Cunningham’s (ed.) \textit{The Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War}; Murray A. Sperber (ed.) \textit{And I Remember Spain: A Spanish Civil War Anthology}; Stephen Spender and John Lehmann’s (eds.) \textit{Poems for Spain}. 

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Eliot, W.H. Auden, Geoffrey Grigson, and others. Cecil Day Lewis’s emphatic response traffics in these standard metaphors of good and evil. Like Auden and MacNeice, Day Lewis perceives the war as part of a potentially larger global conflict, but it is easily reducible to a “battle between light and darkness, of which only a blind man could be unaware” (“Authors Take Sides,” AIRS, 204). If the act of taking sides was not evidence enough of the partisan nature of the war, Cunard insisted that “it is impossible for any longer to take no side” (“Authors Take Sides,” AIRS, 203); there was no grey area. While the poets, the press, and the political parties arguably did a disservice to the war by depicting it in such stark Manichean terms, their allegory of the war also marks the transition from politics to ethics, the very displacement we tracked in L. Woolf and West’s theories of internationalism. This is perhaps stated nowhere more baldly than in a line Stephen Spender poaches from Keats on Peterloo: “No contest between Whig and Tory—but between Right and Wrong” (PS 9).  

To be clear, the underlying structure I am mapping here suggests that the allegory of the Spanish Civil War encodes it in purely ethical terms while, for Orwell at least, attention to the everyday both defamiliarizes the allegory of the war and returns it to its political particularities. The question that follows these narrative movements, though, is if Homage to Catalonia is capable of addressing the Spanish Civil War as a just war after disabling the war allegory.

Orwell may initially have been attracted to this reductive version of Spain. He notes that the resistance to the nationalist rebellion in July, 1936 sent shockwaves throughout anti-fascist Europe. In Spain, one saw “democracy standing up to Fascism” (Orwell HC 48). If such noble impulses led him to Spain, the clean allegory of the

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105 See also by Spender Chapter 4 of his World Within World, which tracks his visits to Spain and “Heroes in Spain” in his The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People 1933-1970.
Spanish Civil War as an international struggle of good versus evil began to lose its hold not long after his arrival. When Malaga fell to the fascists in February, 1937, rumors circulated among Orwell’s militia that some form of betrayal had aided the fascists.\(^{106}\) The rumors gave him his “first vague doubt about this war in which, hitherto, the rights and wrongs had seemed so beautifully simple” (HC 45). The suppression of the POUM, the random imprisonment of anarchists and “Trotskyists” by those loyal to Stalin, and the internecine political struggles introduced several shades of grey into the war for Orwell. Before leaving Spain, he knew he would write on it and part of his aim would be to correct “the most appalling lies” (Orwell CE I 267) circulating in the English press about both the fascists and the Republican factions. Orwell’s reports that the Communist jails were bulging with revolutionaries fell on deaf ears. He tried to recast the struggle as one between “revolution and counter-revolution; between the workers who are vainly trying to hold on to a little of what they won in 1936, and the Liberal-Communist bloc who are so successfully taking it away from them” (Orwell CE I 270). The unpopularity of Orwell’s version of events, especially the infighting in the Republican ranks and the Communists’s suppression of the POUM, prompted the New Statesman to reject his articles and Victor Gollancz, who had recently published The Road to Wigan Pier for the Left Book Club, expressed disinterest in anything Orwell might write about Spain (and against the Communist line on Spain). The unwritten book that would become Homage to Catalonia includes sections dedicated to what Orwell called in an October, 1937 letter to Jack Common, “a blasted complicated story of political intrigue between a lot of cosmopolitan Communists, Anarchists etc.” (CE I 289). Orwell’s exposé on the fractious

\(^{106}\) See T.C. Worsley’s eye-witness account “Malaga Has Fallen,” in John Lehmann’s New Writing, Spring, 1939. Worsley’s essay is republished in full in Sperber’s anthology.
Popular Front drew the ire of those on the left and certainly complicated the easily
digestible allegory of democracy versus fascism. Rather than retread those old debates
about Orwell’s position as a truth-teller, I’d like to return now to my earlier suggestion
that *Homage to Catalonia* both deploys and disables the popularized allegory of the
Spanish Civil War through its formal operations. Orwell assures his reader that they are
at liberty to skip over the political chapters, even though he also maintains that they are
intimately connected to the other sections devoted primarily to the experience of war.
Yet, if *Homage to Catalonia* has anything political about it, it isn’t solely to be found in
Orwell’s reports on party politics. Orwell’s travel narrative acquires its political status as
an effort to keep pace with an ongoing redefinition of war throughout the book.

Of the many things *Homage to Catalonia* contains that fits snugly in the travel
book genre are its descriptions of towns and places. In the midst of civil war, though,
these places, like everything else Orwell records, show the everyday in a state of
exception. Even the utopian atmosphere of revolutionary Barcelona bears the traces of
everyday war. Barcelona has a “gaunt untidy look” (Orwell *HC* 6-7); “the streets at night
were dimly lit for fear of air-raids, the shops were mostly shabby and half-empty”
(Orwell *HC* 7). Orwell records the markings of war on smaller towns like Barbastro and
Alcubierre. An old bullfighting poster reminds Orwell that this Spanish cultural mainstay
has been suspended. The filth and squalor of Alcubierre, according to Orwell, are not
solely the result of war, but, as he observes, “the constant come-and-go of troops had
reduced the village to a state of unspeakable filth” (*HC* 16). At Montflorite, Orwell.
describes the countryside at war, combining the “usual” with the exceptional
circumstances of war: “Montflorite was the usual huddle of mud and stone houses, with
narrow tortuous alleys that had been churned by lorries till they looked like the craters of the moon. The church had been badly knocked about but was used as a military store” (Orwell HC 77); a possible convent, La Granja, is turned into a “store and cook-house” (Orwell HC 78). Huesca, only five miles away, was traditionally the trading point and central marketplace for these villagers, but the war had suspended the weekly trips to Huesca with “an impenetrable barrier of barbed wire and machine-guns had lain between” (Orwell HC 79). The everyday becomes noticeable only in a disrupted or suspended state. If Orwell’s observations of Spanish towns telescope in on these disruptions and suspensions, the weight of the everyday is felt nowhere stronger than at the front itself.

Part of Orwell’s education in warfare consists in accommodating his experiences at the Aragon front and, later, the streetfighting in Barcelona to the “English conception of war” (HC 42), which derives largely from the stories of trench warfare from the First World War. On his arrival at the front, Orwell is dismayed that his “idea of trench warfare” (HC 21) does not match up with the situation in Spain. For one, the enemy is too far away to engage in actual combat. The images of trench warfare that Orwell undoubtedly inherited from the generation preceding his were nowhere to be found. “War, to me,” he writes, “meant projectiles and skipping shards of steel” (HC 18). The great tragedies and heroism of war did not apply to his time in Spain. When he recalls his attack on a Fascist redoubt, Orwell turns a scene of bayonet combat into a comic episode of a half-naked enemy fleeing an inept soldier. In the words of his superior Georges Kopp, Orwell’s version of the war is partially “a comic opera with an occasional death” (HC 32). Orwell’s militia is a rag-tag bunch of volunteers with varying uniforms,
poor training, and very little by way of equipment. Virtually out of sight and range, the fascists were not the primary enemies for the militia. Orwell gradually comes to understand daily life in the trenches as banal and “uneventful as a city clerk’s, and almost as regular” (HC 24). “In trench warfare five things are important: firewood, food tobacco, candles and the enemy. In winter on the Zaragoza front they were important in that order, with the enemy a bad last…Up here, in the hills of Zaragoza, it was simply the mingled boredom and discomfort of stationary warfare” (HC 23-4). Orwell’s depictions of life at the front usually consists of exploring friendships, detailing the scarcity of supplies, the futility of combat, or, quite simply and quite often, recording the empty time of war: “nothing happened” (HC 72), “not much was happening” (HC 85), “nothing was happening” (HC 102), “not much happening at the front” (HC 183). With its emphasis on the eventless, grey everydayness of the war, Homage to Catalonia foregoes both heroic (Malraux, Cornford, Hemingway) and tragic (Owen, Sassoon, Remarque) narratives of war. Antony Shuttleworth suggests that Orwell’s sense of the war is “comic, rather than heroic” (207). In many ways Shuttleworth is right: the scant combat, the fumbling, untrained militiamen, and the stagnation at the front are not the raw materials of war stories. But rather than see the use of the comic mode as a way of resisting the allegorical status of the war, we might ask instead how the deconstruction of the war as allegory effects its billing as a just war. After all, Orwell maintained his belief that “this war was different from ordinary, imperialistic wars (HC 65); he seems reluctant to cede the justness of the war, despite his critique of the predominant black and white versions of the war.

Is it possible to dispel the allegory of the Spanish Civil War as democracy versus
fascism and still retain the ethical justifications for fighting the war? Because of its departure from that allegory and its insistence on the justness of the war, Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* becomes an ideal text for tracing the breakdown of one representational apparatus and the emergence of another that might suit the Spanish war. The questions Orwell’s text poses are perhaps predictable, but no less pressing: How does one identify an enemy? What justifies killing an enemy? What is the proper measure and use of violence? The few scenes in *Homage to Catalonia* where Orwell actually engages in combat usually confirm his participation in the fighting, but also dismiss the likelihood that he ever actually killed anyone. At Monte Oscuro, he tells us that he fired several shots but he is “reasonably certain” (*HC* 41) that his shots never connected; when firing at a Fascist position he admits he is a “very poor shot with a rifle” (*HC* 184) and it is “unlikely” (*HC* 184) that he hit anyone. There are two instances where Orwell suggests that he may have injured or killed an enemy; in one incident he throws a bomb into a trench and immediately feels a “vague sorrow” (*HC* 97) from the screams that follow the explosion. In the second, he acknowledges killing, but only indirectly: “I knelt beside Benjamin, pulled the pin out of my third bomb and flung it. Ah! No doubt about it that time. The bomb crashed inside the parapet, at the corner, just by the machine gun nest. The Fascist fire seemed to have slackened very suddenly” (*HC* 91). There are no bodies, no direct confirmation of any killing. Orwell renders it as a matter of perception: the fascist guns “very suddenly” (*HC* 91) cease and this alone is the only evidence that Orwell’s bomb has killed anyone at all. How do we read these various scenes where Orwell both implicates and absolves himself in the business of killing? Valentine Cunningham interprets the above-mentioned scene as evidence of Orwell’s belief that
killing, while not quite as enjoyable and valiant as it appears, say, in the poetry of John Cornford, was necessary. “The one effective bit of killing he allows himself to have committed,” Cunningham writes, “is narrated as a decent, soldierly scrap. It’s arranged, in fact, as a microcosm of The Just War, an illustration of the necessity of killing Fascists lest they kill you…So when he finally succeeds in potting an enemy with a grenade (‘Ah! No doubt about it that time’), his deliberate act of violence seems only the most justifiable gesture of self-defence, a perfectly proper personal translation of the general need to defend oneself against Fascism” (424). In Cunningham’s reading, killing fascists is necessary and justified and Orwell’s killing of a fascist soldier portrays the justness of the Spanish Civil War, and democracy’s battle against fascism, in miniature. This, however, would place Orwell’s text firmly back in the larger pool of literature that accepted and perpetuated the idea of the Spanish Civil War as a politico-theological allegory.

The necessary killing of fascists points us towards one of the more renowned and controversial poems about the Spanish Civil War—“Spain, 1937” by W.H. Auden. Orwell thought Auden’s poem was “one of the few decent things that have been written about the Spanish war” (CE I 516), but there is one line in Auden’s poem that made Orwell bristle. That line is “the conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder” (???). I quote Orwell’s response at length here:

But notice the phrase “necessary murder.” It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a word.Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder. It so happens that I have seen the bodies of numbers of murdered men—I don’t mean killed in battle, I mean murdered. Therefore I have some conception
of what murder means—the terror, the hatred, the howling relatives, the postmortems, the blood, the smells. To me, murder is something to be avoided. So it is to any ordinary person. The Hitlers and Stalins find murder necessary, but they don’t advertise their callousness, and they don’t speak of it as murder; it is “liquidation,” “elimination” or some other soothing phrase. Mr. Auden’s brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled. (CE I 516)

To be sure, this unforgettable line was not one that Auden looked back upon with fondness; he would later edit it, changing “necessary murder,” to “the fact of murder.” Orwell assails the seemingly flippant use of murder by a poet who was absent from the actual fighting. But more than his personal attack on Auden, Orwell’s essay reduces all manner of killing—liquidation, elimination, murder, “killed in battle”—to murder. In Orwell’s estimation, to insist either on the necessity of murder or to name it something else does not justify it; for this reason, Auden is “amoral.” What’s curious, though, is that Auden chose to keep the word “murder” in the poem even after he amended that line. I want to suggest here that Orwell has misjudged Auden’s line and that his misjudgment discloses far more about Orwell’s political education (or disillusionment) in Spain than Auden’s amoralism or inexperience.

In what sense is murder necessary? Like Orwell, more recent critics of Auden’s poem have staked out the force and implications of the poem’s ethical claims.

107 In a letter to Monroe K. Spears Auden clarifies the necessary murder and equally remains skeptical about the possibility of a just war: “I was not excusing totalitarian crimes but only trying to say what, surely, every decent person thinks if he finds himself unable to adopt the absolute pacifist position. (1) To kill another human being is always murder and should never be called anything else. (2) In a war, the members of two rival groups try to murder their opponents. (3) If there is a such thing as a just war, then murder can be necessary for the sake of justice.” (Qtd. in Spears’s The Poetry of W.H. Auden 157).
Nevertheless, many of them have reached far different conclusions than Orwell. Frank Kermode denies its partisan function; it is a moral poem and is not some sort of “recruitment poster.” In a similar sentiment, Samuel Hynes calls it “the least partisan” of the war poems. Hynes goes so far as to praise it for its “striking” treatment of the war in “psychological not political terms” (*AG* 253); ultimately, Hynes concludes, the poem is strikingly moral. Hynes’s reading, of course, passes over the line that incensed Orwell. These readings pit one moralism against the other without really explaining what makes murder necessary. Where, then, grounds this necessity? The temporal structure of the poem certainly freights the Spanish war with extraordinary historical significance; the reiteration of “yesterday,” “to-day,” and “tomorrow” also cast the war as one of historical necessity. Crude though Auden’s historical framing may be at first sight, it is significantly complicated by the competing voices in the poem. For one, the voice which intones “yesterday,” “today,” and “tomorrow” throughout the poem gives way to a host of other voices: a poet, a scientist, Spain’s laboring poor, and, finally, Spain itself. These voices have potential roles to play in the movement of History and they have choices to make. The poem, then, is far from an absolution of killing as necessary and unavoidable as Orwell would have it. As Edward Mendelson claims, Auden’s poem internalizes an irresolvable tension between Historical necessity and personal choice; it is the poet’s “conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder” and not a blithe embrace of it. Orwell seems to have missed entirely the moral quandary Auden poses and refuses to

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108 Edward Mendelson marks out two versions of necessity in his reading of the poem: there is necessity as in a “necessary evil,” where something so morally deplorable is nevertheless required by circumstance; the other version is one that figures necessity “as in the necessary obedience of matter to the laws of physics” (*EA* 322). For Mendelson, this latter version of necessity, one bound to the laws of History, is what Auden had in mind. Mendelson also reminds us that the poem couples necessity with choice. See Mendelson’s *Early Auden*, especially 315-324.
resolve in the poem; it is not that Auden’s poem is guilty of some “brand of amoralism” (Orwell CE I 516) so much as it questions the moral implications of political action, even if the poem openly supports that political action.

The point, though, is not merely to reassert the moral complexity of Auden’s poem against Orwell’s reading of it; rather, I want to recast Auden’s poem as a meditation on political killing—the conditions by which it can be declared necessary, the distinction between killing and murder, the relation of History and war. How does one determine whose murder is necessary? The communists murder of the anarchists? The anarchists random slaying of priests and clergy? The killing of fascists or the fascists killing of everyone else? Where these questions proliferate, Auden does maintain that killing, any killing of anyone, in war is still “murder.” Despite its conscious acceptance, guilt abides and killing is murder, regardless of historical or political necessity or moral choice. Auden’s poem never drifts into that no-man’s land of absolute enmity where killing is just and punitive because enemies are unjust, if not inhuman. Orwell’s misreading of Auden glosses over this peculiar affinity between the two. It is in this light that we should recall those instances in Homage to Catalonia where Orwell sees the “fascists” as human beings and not some horrific, inhuman enemy (this too is part of Orwell’s education in warfare). The first fascists Orwell actually encounters at the front lines are deserters who, by all appearances, are “indistinguishable from ourselves, except that they wore khaki overalls” (HC 17). When paired with his pangs of sympathy for injuring (and possibly killing) the enemy and the comic mode in which he records many of the combat scenes, it is difficult not to see Homage to Catalonia as defamiliarizing the notion of fascists as inhuman beings (of course, they remain enemies). To be sure, this is
part of the way Orwell’s text dismantles the allegory of the war and juxtaposes the
course, everyday experience of the war with the sleek version being peddled by the press
and various political factions. But this is also where the affinity between Auden and
Orwell ends. Auden acknowledges killing as a necessary, but unjustified and deeply
troubling, component of war and his poem stages those unresolved conflicts. Although
Homage to Catalonia disables the allegory of the war, Orwell’s bildung requires some
moral grounding to make sense of the war and his participation in it. If his political
education concludes with profound disillusionment, it also signals his gravitation towards
what Wendy Brown would call “moralizing politics” (22) or “anti-politics”; that is, a turn
away from the political (a turn that animates both 1984 and Animal Farm later on).

The wound Orwell suffered at the front lines ended his brief career as an
international volunteer in the POUM. Upon his discharge, he also passes from a warring
soldier into “a human being again, and also a little like a tourist” (Orwell HC 203). This
is perhaps the more incisive way to categorize the division that structures the narration of
the book: Orwell the naïve, politicized soldier and Orwell the educated, morally
enlightened human being. His disenchantment with political divisions and commitment,
which is on display everywhere in Homage to Catalonia via his deconstruction of the war
allegory and his retrospective narration, leads to a re-enchantment with universal moral
principles. “Curiously enough,” he writes, “the whole experience has left me with not
less but more belief in the decency of human beings” (Orwell HC 230). Curious indeed.
The departure, adventure, return structure of the travel book shows Orwell passing from
pat political truisms to a set of moral ones, from the black and white allegory of the
Spanish Civil War to a generally warm feeling about humanity, from a belief in particular
and historically urgent political causes to a belief in general, ahistorical moral goodness. What this passage indicates, though, is not Orwell’s failed personal development; the aggressive dismantling of the war allegory and the retreat into liberal moralism is a symptom of the impossibility of any political utopia, any political hope, that follows Orwell’s slow and painful realization that war and killing are neither honorable nor just, but integral components to all available forms of political sovereignty. *Homage to Catalonia* recodes war as both a primary instrument of political power and, through its snapshots of everyday life at war, the protracted decomposition of anything identifiably “human” in warfare. War, then, emerges not merely as the primary instrument of political sovereignty, but the instrumentalization of the human that, regardless of one’s political affiliation, gradually redefines what it means to be human. In this regard, Orwell’s exchange of political commitment for moral truisms is not the crowning moment of his experience; it puts on display both the desperation and ineptitude to forestall wars waged between different states and ideologies as well as the revaluation of the human that animated and resulted from the re-emergence of warfare as political *techne*.

**A War of One’s Own: Auden and Isherwood’s *Journey to a War***

“War’s being global meant it ran off the edge of maps; it was uncontrollable. What was being done, for instance, against the Japanese was heard of but never grasped in London. There were too many theatres of war.”

Elizabeth Bowen (1949)

“how everything turns away/Quite leisurely from the disaster.”

W.H. Auden (1938)

The rich literary history associated with the Spanish Civil War is indeed a phenomenon without parallel in the 1930s. Nancy Cunard’s hardline stance against
neutrality may seem harsh in retrospect, but few were without passionate attachments to the events in Spain. The same certainly cannot be said for European writers and the Sino-Japanese war. When Random House and Faber commissioned Auden and Isherwood to write a travel book on the Far East in 1937, the two looked towards the recent outbreak of hostilities between Japan and China. Unlike Spain, Auden believed China would attract far less fanfare. He even remarked “we’ll have a war all of our very own” (qtd. in Carpenter, 225). Where Orwell set out with clear commitments to the Spanish Republic, Auden and Isherwood simply wanted to understand the Sino-Japanese war as “neutral observers,” a phrase that they use on more than one occasion in Journey to a War. Auden would later draw the distinction between Spain and China in cultural terms. “China was utterly different. Spain was a culture one knew. One could understand what was happening, what things meant. But China was impossible to know” (qtd. Carpenter WHA 239). A different situation, then, calls for a different aesthetic. At first look, the book is an ungainly hybrid of various genres: it opens with a sequence of poems by Auden charting their passage from England to China; the middle portion that makes up the bulk of the book is Isherwood’s daily reports, which he pieced together from his and Auden’s travel diaries; the travel diary is followed by Auden’s photographs, the sonnet sequence “In a Time of War,” and a verse commentary. Some of these materials were published before the book was finally compiled and “In a Time of War” has certainly drawn critical interest apart from its placement within Journey to a War. 

109 For a sustained reading of the photographs in Journey to a War, see Marsha Bryant’s Auden and Documentary in the 1930s.

110 The publication history of the various essays, poems, and photographs is dutifully mapped out by Mendelson in W.H. Auden Prose: Volume I, 1926-1938. See pages 822-831.
As Marsha Bryant, Samuel Hynes, Tim Youngs, and many others all tell us, one of the first questions for any analysis of *Journey to a War* is how all of these parts fit together or, if they don’t, what it might mean to write about war in such a discontinuous, fragmentary way. Without skirting such a complicated question, my focus here will fall less on the old battle of unity versus fragmentation and more on the complex interrelations between these parts. Like *Homage to Catalonia*, the formal operations of *Journey to a War* participate in a recoding of war and, in keeping with that predominant feature of the travel book that interests us here, it turns its attention less to battles and grandstanding politics and more to the everyday.

To begin thinking about the arrangement of *Journey to a War*, we might consider how its various parts map onto the “ancient pattern” of the travel narrative: Auden’s poem sequence “London to Hongkong” tracks the departure; Isherwood’s “Travel-Diary” and Auden’s “Picture Commentary” constitute the adventure portion; and, finally, the return comes by way of “In a Time of War” and the verse commentary that follows. The key difference with *Journey to a War* and *Homage to Catalonia* or any other travel book that may deploy Blanton’s plot structure is this: there is no development, no *bildung*, of any sort to be found in Auden and Isherwood’s text. If the two arrive in the Far East with minimal understanding of Asian history or contemporary geopolitics, they conclude their journey with very little that could be called “knowledge.” While the authors fancied themselves as amateur reporters (and they certainly did not fancy themselves as anything but amateurs), their travel book opens with a bold acknowledgment of these limitations.

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Also see Chapter 15 “From This Island” in his *Early Auden* as well as Chapter 7 “Traveller” in Humphrey Carpenter’s *W.H. Auden: A Biography*, both of which chart Auden’s itineraries.
In the “Foreword” to the book, Auden and Isherwood delineate their “qualifications” as such:

This was our first journey to any place east of Suez. We spoke no Chinese, and possessed no special knowledge of Far Eastern affairs. It is hardly necessary, therefore, to point out that we cannot vouch for the accuracy of many statements made in this book. Some of our informants may have been unreliable, some merely polite, some deliberately pulling our leg. We can only record, for the benefit of the reader who has never been to China, some impression of what he would be likely to see, and of what kind of stories he would be likely to hear.

(JTW 13)

The authors do not pretend to impart any specialized knowledge nor do they offer any objective conclusions about the war. Instead, they record impressions. This is the vocation Journey to a War sets for itself. At the outset, Auden and Isherwood place their book squarely in the field of aesthetics (impressions) and not epistemology (knowledge). We might extend the division to say that the book prioritizes its literariness over its journalism. The impressions Auden and Isherwood collect are geared towards “the reader who has never been to China,” which is not an uncommon audience for a travel book. But Auden and Isherwood are not recording their impressions of the Chinese landscape or the country’s cultural attractions. These are impressions of what one would see and the stories one might hear in a country in a state of open war. The other reason the text disclaims authority over its subject matter, I suggest, is that the dispersed and discontinuous impressions Auden and Isherwood document through various genres have lateral correspondences, but they do not fit together in any integrated way. In visual art,
the clear analog would be a politically oriented collage like Hannah Hoch’s *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (rather than Kurt Schwitters more abstract *merz* works). The question, then, is how the parts relate without fitting together, without composing a unified work.

While Orwell’s book shifted between private experience and political conflicts, it nevertheless maintained Blanton’s plot structure of the travel book. *Journey to a War* breaks from that pattern early on. Perhaps the unnamed component of Blanton’s schema, and admittedly a component that really need not be named in a travel book, is “arrival.” If we were to modify his structure to more readily accommodate *Journey to a War* it may look something like departure, arrival, adventure, and return. Auden and Isherwood’s main problem in China is that they never arrive, in a literal sense in some instances and in metaphorical ones in others. Even the departure section, Auden’s “London to Hongkong” poem sequence, interrogates the idea of the journey itself and poses arrival as an enigma. The first poem, “The Voyage,” Auden questions the aim of any such journey. The first two stanzas consist of a series of questions. The poem opens with a watcher on a quay watching the traveler depart. “Does it still promise the Juster Life?” (*JTW* 17). Is the journey not only to another geographical location, but to another form of life, some utopic place? The voice of the poem then transitions from the bitter watcher to the traveler, posing equally vexing questions:

> And, alone with his heart at last, does the traveller find  
> In the vaguer touch of the wind and the fickle flash of the sea  
> Proofs that somewhere there exists, really, the Good Place,  
> As certain as those the children find in stones and holes?  
> (Auden and Isherwood *JTW* 17)
In complete solitude, the traveler confronts those yearnings that underwrite his voyage. The “Good Place” where one might discover the “Juster Life” is ridiculed, compared to the naïve make-believe games of children. To these series of questions the poem answers decisively:

No, he discovers nothing; he does not want to arrive.
The journey is false; the false journey really an illness
On the false island where the heart cannot act and will not suffer:
He condones the fever; he is weaker than he thought; his weakness is real.

(Auden and Isherwood JTW 17)

The physical journey is simultaneously a psychological journey, not entirely unlike Graham Greene’s Journey Without Maps. For Auden, though, this romanticized version of travel has little purchase. That very wish for the “Good Place” and the “Juster Life” is not simply a utopic yearning; it is a “fever,” an illness. Auden’s traveler “does not want to arrive,” but to forever remain in transit on the ship, “the false island where the heart cannot act and will/not suffer.” To exist in the moment of transit, a suspended, perhaps infinite passage, suspends both personal responsibility and suffering. While Mendelson and Auden’s biographers have read the poet’s personal struggles into the sense of isolation that pervades the poem, it is equally important to remember that the poem has a literary (and less biographical) function as part of a larger book on war.

What I want to emphasize with “The Voyage” is the very problem of arrival it stages, both in terms of what sort of place awaits the traveler and the corresponding, perhaps romanticized, sense of development or awakening that the traveler anticipates. For whatever romantic, exotic, or Orientalized associations English travel literature has historically attached to the Far East, that land is not what awaits Auden and Isherwood.
If Said and other postcolonial critics are right to argue that the East always appears as static and outside of history in western travel writing, the Sino-Japanese war places China firmly within history. The problem of arrival is not only that the China Auden and Isherwood discover does not match up with their preconceptions, but moreover, that the war zone in China is equally unfamiliar. When the pair dock in Hong Kong, they find a city full of British and western officials as well as familiar rituals and customs. Hong Kong, long a British possession, is, by all appearances, a colonial western society untouched by the political strife tearing apart the country; for Auden and Isherwood, this conflict between appearance and reality induces a dream-like state that forestalls their expected arrival:

One’s first entry into a war-stricken country as a neutral observer is bound to be dream-like, unreal. And, indeed, this whole enormous voyage, from January London to tropical February Hongkong had had the quality—now boring, now extraordinary and beautiful—of a dream. At Hongkong, we had said to each other, we shall wake up, everything will come true. But we hadn’t woken; only the dream had changed. The new dream was more confused than the old, less soothing, even slightly apprehensive. It was all about dinner-parties at very long tables, and meetings with grotesquely famous newspaper characters—the British Ambassador, the Governor, Sir Victor Sassoon.” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 28)

Having arrived in China, Auden and Isherwood encounter a city bearing few signs of the Sino-Japanese war; instead, they find signs everywhere of a more protracted war rooted

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111 See Chapter 5 of Bryant’s *Auden and Documentary in the 1930s* for a full explanation of the way Auden and Isherwood ironize their own preconceptions of China.
in and waged through economics, territorial occupation, and geopolitics. “Hongkong,” the poem that concludes the “London to Hongkong” sequence and pairs with the first pages of Isherwood’s travel diary, we have what should very well be the poem that transitions from the departure phase to the arrival.\(^{112}\) Instead, Auden’s poem, with muted disdain, observes a smoothly functioning city. He casts the operations of this city, though, in dramatic language, highlighting its artifice: those running the city are “the leading characters” (Auden and Isherwood \textit{JTW} 23) who “know the manners of the modern city” (Auden and Isherwood \textit{JTW} 23); they know their parts, they fit their roles. “Only the servants are unexpected;/Their silence has a fresh dramatic use” (Auden and Isherwood \textit{JTW} 23). Are these “leading characters” the ambassadors, governors, and other British functionaries? And do the servants, whose entry creates some sort of dramatic tension, signify the intrusion of the Chinese into an otherwise occupied and secured British territory? The political tension Auden and Isherwood stumble upon here is not the one between the Chinese and the Japanese, but the underlying tensions of an occupied city. But what accentuates and troubles the artifice of Hongkong’s peaceful and, to these Western eyes, modern appearance is the war waging on the periphery. “Off-stage, a war/Thuds like the slamming of a distant door” (Auden and Isherwood \textit{JTW} 23). Is the war threatening to interrupt the day-to-day life of the city (are the noises offstage distracting attention from the dramatic action onstage)? Or, in another way, is it related in some way, perhaps in way that helps sustain the economic life of Hongkong (are the offstage actions directing and supporting what is visible on stage)? Arguably, the bulk of \textit{Journey to a War}, especially Isherwood’s “Travel-Diary,” is about finding the war off-

\(^{112}\) Humphrey Carpenter notes that “Hongkong” was composed in Brussels months after Auden and Isherwood concluded their journey.
stage and discerning the links between the daily life dramatized onstage and the destructive character of war threatening to remake China and Asia altogether.

The only statement arrival in China comes by way of a scene where arrival means coming out of the dream-like state and, by extension, trying to understand the actions on and off-stage in the Sino-Japanese war. Auden and Isherwood leave Hongkong for Canton where Isherwood believes the real China, that is, the China at war, awaits them. They leave behind “the dinner-tables, the American movies, the statue of Queen Victoria on the guarded British island, steaming west into dangerous, unpredictable war-time China.” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 28-9). Their arrival has been merely deferred, it seems. But what Isherwood discovers in Canton is not a separate “war-time China,” but an indecipherable war zone unlike anything he anticipates. An air-raid breaks while the authors take tea at an American missionary settlement. Isherwood’s nerves are clearly rattled, but his hosts take little note of it.

My eyes moved over this charming room, taking in the tea-cups, the dish of scones, the book-case with Chesterton’s essays and Kipling’s poems, the framed photograph of an Oxford college. My brain tried to relate these images to the sounds outside; the whine of the power-diving bomber, the distant thump of the explosions. Understand, I told myself, that these noises, these objects are part of a single, integrated scene. Wake up! It’s all quite real. And, at that moment I really did wake up. At that moment, suddenly, I arrived in China.

(Auden and Isherwood JTW 32)

Isherwood emerges from his dream-like state and “suddenly” arrives in China. This is not, however, a moment of revelation. In an almost Joycean epiphany, Isherwood
glimpses the deep, interwoven connections between the signs of English culture and history that surround him on the inside and the “distant thump” of bombs on the outside. The objects inside and the noises outside, as he says, “are part of a single, integrated scene.” That scene, and the manner in which *Journey to a War* attempts to integrate these diverse and discontinuous things, marks the moment Isherwood understands that the war is not a local or even regional affair. It is one piece of a truly global war. The task of *Journey to a War* is how to archive all of these disparate elements and to arrange them in a way that shows how colonial history, political economy, and warfare are all part of a “single, integrated scene.”

Their first aim, then, is to find the war. For Auden and Isherwood, this meant quite simply venturing to one of the fronts. Their efforts to visit a front are routinely frustrated, detoured, and abandoned. The only front they manage to visit proves to be rather uneventful and obscure to them. Yet, it is this feature that allows Hynes to herald *Journey to a War* as “*the* war-book of the period just before war became the Second World War” (341). For Hynes, *Journey to a War* discloses a form of warfare that is unlike anything the authors may have known of the First World War and quite different from what Auden may have seen in Spain: “in its scale, its confusion, its huge destruction of cities and people, it was the war that was coming” (Hynes 342-3). This book belongs to what Hynes calls the Literature of Preparation. The question underwriting *Journey to a War*, then, might be what sort of war is on the horizon. If warfare does not consist of two armies immersed in trench warfare, then how does one define war? The major distinction is a technological one that developed rapidly between the wars—air war. In many ways, what Hynes calls the Literature of Preparation and what Sebastian Knowles
refers to as anticipation is the literature that attempts to grasp a form of war that is technologically capable of shifting the war zone from designated fronts to metropolitan and civilian areas. That Auden and Isherwood document every air-raid and air-raid siren, even those that pass without event, suggests not only the extensive use of airplanes in the Sino-Japanese war, but also a sort of sublime combination of fascination and anxiety. If *Journey to a War* is in fact part of the Literature of Preparation, its concerns, anxieties, and even metaphorics had been prepared in the previous decades. Even the earliest forays into aerial technology were accompanied by a particular anxiety: how long before the weaponization of the airplane? The answer came in part three years before the First World War, giving a brief look into the yet unrealized capabilities of aerial bombing. The first bomb dropped from the sky came courtesy of an Italian plane engaged in a colonial “policing exercise” in Tripoli in 1911; long the testing grounds for new military tactics, the outlying colonies of England, France, and Italy witnessed firsthand the brute force of European air power. In many ways, this event was long anticipated; the awe of flight and the fear of air war are coincident phenomena, and, as Sven Lindqvist shows, this coupling extends back at least to the eighteenth century’s experiments with air balloons.113 The twentieth-century quickly realized the long nightmare of air war, but the British dreamed this nightmare a little differently, and, perhaps, more feverishly.

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113 As the Montgolfier brothers ascend to the skies in their air balloon on November 21, 1783, J.G. Heyne, a Prussian lieutenant, imagined how one day these inventions might “rain down fire and destruction on whole towns with catastrophic results for the inhabitants” (Lindqvist 12). See Sven Lindqvist *A History of Bombing* for more excerpts from this curious and unnerving history.
Surrounded by water and buttressed by its naval power, England had enjoyed considerable immunity from belligerent powers since the Norman Conquest of 1066. That its territory was now susceptible to invasion and destruction from the skies was an event of enormous importance, initiating a new and surely unwanted spatial consciousness. This is exactly how publishing magnate Lord Northcliffe perceived Santos-Dumont’s first European flight in October 1906. “The news is not that man can fly,” he remarked, “but that England is no longer an island.” Three years later when Louis Bleriot made the first flight over the Channel, H.G. Wells echoed Northcliffe’s somber observation. “In spite of our fleet,” he wrote, “this is no longer, from the military point of view, an inaccessible island” (*ELW*??). The world, it seemed, was shrinking and England’s proximity to her continental neighbors was, from the military point of view, extraordinarily dangerous. For a nation whose political power was tied partially to its geographical status, the absolute modernity of the airplane inaugurated an era of absolute vulnerability. *Journey to a War* may depict no front worthy of the name, but Auden and Isherwood’s entire journey is punctuated by multiple air-raids. We might say, then, that the front is no longer the decisive space of battle because the airplane has made everything into a target: the front is nowhere because it is everywhere. Increased technological capability translates into increased vulnerability.

After Isherwood “wakes up” to China after his first experience of an air-raid, we witness not only the frequency of air-raids, but how quickly they infuse every aspect of daily life. As Isherwood witnessed and as military theorists had long forecasted, air war’s primary goal was not to eliminate an army, but to erode the will of the population and to cripple the home economy. J.F.C. Fuller, whose ideas on warfare would soon
endear him to Hitler and the Nazis, wrote extensively between the wars on the use of airplanes to revolutionize the entire practice of warfare. In his 1923 book *The Reformation of War* he figured the expediency and aim of air power in strikingly physiological terms:

> Aircraft enable us to jump over the army which shields the enemy government, industry, and people, and so strike direct at the seat of the opposing will and policy. Provided that the blow be sufficiently swift and powerful, there is no reason why in a few hours, or at most days, from the commencement of hostilities the nerve-system of one of the contending countries should not be paralysed.

(107)

Defined in this way, air war erases the legal distinctions between combatants and non-combatants: anyone in an enemy city might be deemed a legitimate, if not legal, target. The renewed sense of vulnerability for England creeps into the very metaphors of war discourse. The city is not a highly mechanized or industrial complex: it is a living being composed of nerve-systems; it is a target and its operations can be paralysed. Fuller’s language is repeated in Basil Liddell Hart’s *Paris, or the Future of War* which also pursues the potential changes in warfare wrought by aerial technology. “A nation’s nerve system,” he writes, “no longer covered by the flesh of its troops, is now laid bare to attack, and, like the human nerves, the progress of civilization has rendered it far more sensitive than in earlier and more primitive times” (Liddell Hart 36). These biological metaphors cross from the domain of military theory into poetics and they structure one of the more striking scenes from Isherwood’s diary. From a rooftop in Hankow, Isherwood watches the Japanese planes fly overhead, darting in and out of the searchlights. His
description pits the language of precision and geometry against the same language one finds in Fuller, Liddell Hart, and other air war theorists: “The searchlights criss-crossed, plotting points, like dividers; and suddenly there they were, six of them, flying close together and high up. It was as if a microscope had brought dramatically into focus the bacilli of a fatal disease. They passed, right, tiny, and deadly, infecting the night. The searchlights followed them right across the sky” (Auden and Isherwood *JTW* 71). Air war shifts the traditional comparison of war as a duel to war as an infection, pervading and indiscriminately disrupting all facets of daily life.

Part of what *Journey to a War* tracks is the process by which war, even a war coded as all-pervasive, becomes everyday. As *Homage to Catalonia* no doubt shows, for all the destruction of war, its routinization quickly translates into boredom and triviality. For all of Isherwood’s nervousness and discomfort during the first air-raid in Canton, he quickly becomes inured to the threat of the raids. On March 25, a raid opens the day in Su-Chow and Isherwood records it with the same disinterest as he would any other routine event. A day later a “big raid on the station and the centre of town” (Auden and Isherwood *JTW* 102) causes little alarm; Auden and Isherwood hear the bombs, but were too “deeply engrossed in the treasures of Dr. MacFadyen’s library” (*JTW* 103) to pay them any attention. By April 20, the air-raids are now “not only a danger but a positive nuisance” (Auden and Isherwood *JTW* 152). And, by April 29, Auden and Isherwood’s cool temperament prevails and the air-raids are pure spectacle: “Soon after lunch the sirens began to blare. We put on our smoked glasses and lay down flat on our backs on the Consulate lawn—it is the best way of watching an air-battle if you don’t want a stiff neck. machine-guns and anti-aircraft guns were hammering all around us, but the sky
was so brilliant that we seldom caught a glimpse of the planes unless the sun happened to flash on their turning wings” (JTW 172). This particular raid, however, marks the Japanese Emperor’s birthday and the spectacle of the air-raid gives way to a gruesome scene of mangled bodies and mass casualties. Auden and Isherwood find “five civilian victims” (JTW 174) next to an evacuated and unused arsenal. There is nothing flip or disinterested in Isherwood’s descriptions of the dead. They are “terribly mutilated and very dirty” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 174); their flesh has been “tattooed” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 174) with the gravel and dirt from the explosion. All the bodies appear lifeless, but Isherwood jots down these chilling notes from the scene: “As we stood beside one old woman, whose brains were soaking obscenely through a little towel, I saw the blood-caked mouth open and shut, and the hand beneath the sack-covering clench and unclench” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 175). Depictions of this sort are not the kind of thing the two travelers or their audience will receive with detachment or disinterest.

These horrific scenes serve as reminders that indiscriminate war also makes indiscriminate killing a part of daily life. Auden’s two juxtaposed photos in the “War Zone” section of his photo-commentary visualize this indiscriminate killing. The caption to the top photograph reads “the innocent” and the bottom one “the guilty.” Both bodies are shattered and anonymous. The first is on a stretcher with a covered face; the second has been destroyed beyond any recognition. The legal and juridical categories of innocence and guilt have no purchase on this sort of indiscriminate warfare.

I’ve suggested that various components of Journey to a War are interrelated, but not necessarily contiguous. Many of the poems from the opening sequence and the photo-commentary pair with instances from Isherwood’s diary to heighten the
particularity of the Sino-Japanese War. Taken together, these parts draw into a single matrix the unfamiliarity and the ordinariness of war, its suspension and remaking of the everyday. However, the latter portion of the book, “In a Time of War” and the verse commentary, shifts its attention from the particularity of the Sino-Japanese War to the universal experience of war writ large. Much like “Spain,” “In a Time of War” begins with an historical narrative, full of prelapsarian scenes. As history progresses forward, war, cruelty, and disaster characterize the punctual events. Painted in broadstrokes, Auden’s universal history includes his experiences from China, but its integration robs the Sino-Japanese War of all the singularity and detail given to it by the rest of the book. Both “In a Time of War” and the verse commentary view this particular war as one moment in a larger, more general war. Even that general war is no longer a political war with specific historical causes; as the verse commentary has it, it is a war, perhaps a test, of moral fortitude. The concluding voice, the last word as it were, is “the voice of Man” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 300) calling out for “at last a human justice” (Auden and Isherwood JTW 301). Like West and Orwell before them, Auden and Isherwood begin with the inscrutable particularities of a political situation and lapse back into the general, ethical values that are, at bottom, not universal or general at all, but liberal values. Such recourse to seeming depoliticized and timeless virtues operates as a reproach to violence and political power, but, like Orwell’s closing visions in Homage to Catalonia, they are also melancholic signals of disappointment. In their surgical attention to the everyday at war, these texts from abroad are witnesses to a future without political alternatives. Their internalization and breaking of Blanton’s ancient pattern is, in the words of Wendy
Brown, “a symptom of a broken historical narrative” (23) with no conceivable alternatives.

**Forecasts of War: Bruegel, Icarus, and History Without Witness**

The verse commentary is not the last commentary in verse Auden would write under the influence of the Sino-Japanese War. Composed in Brussels in December 1938, Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” is, on the surface, an ekphrastic poem about Bruegel’s *The Fall of Icarus*. Alexander Nemerov rightly contends that we historicize Auden’s poem and read it not only as a meditation on suffering and art, but the suffering Auden witnessed in China that so much of the western world turned away from.\(^{114}\) The air-raids, civilian casualties, and omnipresence of war was the contemporary reality in China and, as Hynes observes, a glimpse of the war coming to England. In one way, *Journey to a War* asks how art and literature can approximate a form of war incommensurate with any extant legal or moral categories. If the book asks this question without providing any final answer, it still labors under the injunction to make its readers look at the war and its suffering, and, perhaps, to draw the connections among its disparate parts that work itself was incapable of doing. Auden’s poetic rendering of Bruegel notes how easy it is to aestheticize suffering and disaster: “the sun shone/As it had on the white legs disappearing into the green/Water” (*SP* 80). Yet, these lines attention to color and detail contrast greatly with the lines that follow: “and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen/Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky./Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on” (Auden *SP* 80). Daily life for the shipman continues uninterrupted

\(^{114}\) “Aerial machines, squinting upwards, innocent victims—these experiences so fresh in Auden’s mind must have given the fate of Bruegel’s falling boy a contemporary resonance” (Nemerov 785).
despite Icarus’ fall and, earlier, the ploughman too ignores Icarus’s death because “for him it was not an important failure” (Auden SP 80). Bruegel’s painting, at least Auden’s rendering of it, pairs an event with the daily. The shipman and the ploughman may turn away, but the painting makes us look at the disaster and, perhaps suggests that the real disaster lies in the failure of these two characters to witness an historical event, to measure the impact of history on daily life. Journey to a War and Homage to Catalonia both search for a literary form that will show the disasters of history not as negligible interruptions set apart from the daily round, but intimately and inextricably related to it. As forecasts of a future war, these works ask their readers to look at these wars abroad, to train their eyes on what is happening beyond England’s borders, even if they are incapable of understanding.
CHAPTER IV:

THE CAMERA-EYED SHORT STORY

“The more firmly organised a country is the less room there is for the short story.”
Sean O’Faolin

“It [the short story] can, while remaining rightly prosaic and circumstantial, give scene, action, event, character a new poetic actuality.”
Elizabeth Bowen

Few locations are as integral to literary modernism as the metropolis. Joyce, Doblin, Dos Passos, Eliot and Woolf, Breton and Stein, are all urban writers whose names now operate synecdochically for Dublin, Berlin, New York, London, and Paris. The formal dexterity of their works can be traced to both the conditions of city life as well as the cultural exchange and publication networks that these metropolises afforded. In this regard, Raymond Williams’s classic essay “Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism” has lost none of its potency. Williams warns against any general theory of modernism as a “response” to the machinations of the metropolis. He rightfully shows how Wordsworth, Dickens, and Gissing were all urban writers, but, of course, hardly modernists in any sense of the term. For Williams, it isn’t the mere prominence of the city in twentieth century literature that marks out anything specifically modernist. Instead, Williams suggests that we specify the relation between modernism and the city in historical terms. For him, its specific historical character has to do with the concentration in the metropolis of intellectuals, artists, publishers, salons, and other
arbiters of taste. In terms of cultural production, Williams is certainly right, but the metropolis for the modernists writing after 1914 was haunted by that other quintessential location—the war zone. Remnants of the war zone lurk everywhere in the modernist metropoles of the 1920s: Septimus Smith brings the madness of the trenches into the heart of Woolf’s London while disfigured soldiers hobble through Grosz’s Berlin. In the last chapter I argued that war travel narratives participated in a larger recoding of warfare and what counted as a war zone; this chapter investigates the generic and formal changes in modernist short fiction as the vibrant, peaceful metropolis transforms into a war metropolis.

Much of the recent criticism of modernist fiction and war has focused primarily on the novel. Paul Saint-Amour’s subtle arguments about modernist fiction and air war theory in the interwar years concludes by recasting the most read urban novels of the 1920s as war novels. His readings of interwar urban novels by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Italo Svevo tracks an abiding air war anxiety that surfaces in the way these texts figure the city. Saint-Amour renames these novels encyclopedic fictions, referring primarily to their attempted inscription of a social totality and their obsessive, meticulous documentation of urban space. If we move the timeline ahead into the late 1930s and 1940s, the anticipation of war, be it unconscious or otherwise, gives way to event of war. If the encyclopedic novel catalogs and preserves the city against the impending

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115 The “New Modernist Studies” has produced a series of texts that seem to reinforce Williams’s thesis, even if only indirectly. See, for example, Lawrence Rainey’s *The Institutions of Modernism*, Michael North’s *Reading 1922* and Jean-Michel Rabaté’s *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*. While not preoccupied specifically with the city, it becomes clear that the mechanisms for the production and distribution of modernism as well as the historico-political conditions for the arts were primarily urban phenomena.

116 See his excellent article “Airwar Prophecy and Interwar Modernism.”
destruction of air war, then how might the short story mediate the city amidst the actual event of war? I pursue this question by focusing specifically on the late modernist short story collections of Christopher Isherwood and Elizabeth Bowen. Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* and Bowen’s *Ivy Gripped the Steps* record two different kinds of war cities—*Goodbye to Berlin* charts the transformation of a city from a troubled liberal republic into the seat of one of the century’s most violent totalitarian regimes while Bowen’s stories capture the city not so much in a moment of transformation, but in a state of suspension. But more than the two types of war cities these works diagram in their own ways (of which I will say more below), these collections both deploy what I call camera-eye narration. As I will show below, Isherwood and Bowen borrow heavily from photography and its vocabulary to articulate the ways in which their stories engage the war metropolis. In both collections, the camera-eyed narration has the peculiar effect of contesting any realistic or mimetic representation of war; instead, in ways particular to their historical situations, Isherwood and Bowen’s camera-eyed short stories disavow such representational modes and indirectly mediate the city at war. The other affinity between these collections resides in their status as “books”; that is, as both authors would say, their books are not novels and, in many ways, do not even exhibit any identifiable form. As discrete fictions and integral components of a less-defined work, Isherwood and Bowen’s story collections are records of everyday life in the war metropolis, but they

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117 Studies of the novels and poetry of the Blitz are numerous. See Sebastian Knowles *A Purgatorial Flame*; Phyllis Lassner *British Women Writers of World War II*; Marina MacKay *Modernism and the Second World War*; Michael North “World War II: The City in Ruins” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*. I choose to concentrate on Bowen’s *Ivy Gripped the Steps*, an American edition of stories published earlier in England, because that volume contains a profoundly illuminating and complicated preface that not only theorizes the war short story from her perspective, but also makes the claim for the first time that the stories in the collection form some kind of vague whole, which, as I show above, binds it formally to Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin*.
also refigure the relationship between everyday life and the city into a less clear relation between the quotidian and the war metropolis. My readings here will try to demonstrate how the vexed form of these collections act as political allegories of the passage of the liberal city into varying states of emergency.

“Rightly Prosiac and Circumstantial”: The Short Story as War Photography

The other genres I have focused on up to this point—the novel, autoethnographies, travel book—have critical traditions behind them that have sparked vibrant debates. This has not been the case with short story criticism; discussions move in such fits and starts that one would be hard-pressed to note a critical tradition and much less of a sustained debate. Most critics agree that the origins of short story theory begin with Edgar Allan Poe’s review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*. Poe delineated two aspects of the short story that no theory after him has been able to dismiss: its length and the corresponding aesthetic effect. Because the stories can be read in a single sitting they, unlike the novel, capture “the immense force derivable from *totality*” (Poe “Review” 47). Their brevity alone enables these stories to display “the unity of effect or impression” (Poe “Review” 46), a common goal of all composition for Poe. Unity of effect and the force of totality are not far removed from Gyorg Lukacs’ own proclamations on realism, which we have seen earlier and will have occasion to revisit in the course of this discussion. And yet, the general trajectory of thought on the short story pairs it tightly with distinctly anti-realist trends, be it painterly Impressionism or modernism.118 Fragment and totality, realism and modernism, impression and

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118 See Valerie Shaw’s *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* for an argument about the short story and Impressionism; Dominic Head’s *The Modernist Short Story* is the clearest and most recent full-length study of the short story that claims it as a specifically modernist genre.
knowledge: if the categories of discussion are not unfamiliar, they are certainly not unchanged after passing through short story theory in general and the ways in which they apply, or don’t apply at all, to *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Ivy Gripped the Steps*.

Timothy Clark and Nicholas Royle’s special number on the short story in the *Oxford Literary Review* provides one of the more recent and imaginative takes on the short story, both in aesthetic and epistemological terms. Clark opens his essay with the simple observation that nothing of any real substance has been written on the short story since the early 1990s. “Short story theory,” he writes “was not so much at a crossroads as in a cul-de-sac” (Clark 5). Before drawing on some of Clark’s insights, I want to turn to one of those interventions into short story theory—Dominic Head’s 1992 book *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*. Many of the bold claims in Head’s book—from his narrow and blatantly modernist definition of the short story writ large to his argument against epiphany in *Dubliners*—are certainly up for debate, but his wide-reaching survey of short story theory remains invaluable if, for no other reason, he provides the stakes for a debate over the short story’s generic capacities, its difference from the novel, and what the genre’s specific social function might be.119 Tallying the claims of different kinds of short story theories, Head identifies a full absorption of Poe’s ideas of unity, brevity, and the imminence of the end (finality and totality at once it seems) in virtually all contemporary short story theory. Extracting the short story’s

Both arguments are extraordinarily rich and offer numerous ways for thinking through the short story’s aesthetic and social function. I only deal with those aspects of their arguments here that pertain immediately to Isherwood and Bowen.

119 One of the major shortcomings of Head’s arguments is the small catalog of short stories that fit the bill. His exclusions include D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad (although a serious consideration of Malcolm Lowry is a welcome addition), both on stylistic grounds. If anything, Head’s claims and the exclusions they entail denote a rather tight, perhaps conservative, estimation of what counts as modernism.
“intensity and its exaggerated artifice” (Head 2) from Susan Lohafer’s reading of the genre, Head reformulates the short story into a particularly modernist practice, bearing all the traits of formal innovation and disruption—discontinuity, episodic narration, fragmentation, defamiliarization—long accorded to modernist writing. Not only is the short story modernist through and through, it is more capable than the novel or any other prose form of capturing “the episodic nature of twentieth-century experience” (Head 1). One can read between the lines of Head’s argument a rather standard narrative of modernity that unwittingly governs the shape and function he attributes to the short story: modernity is the condition of shock and fragmented experience; it is by definition severed from tradition, and so forth and so on. As Jameson tells us so forcefully in A Singular Modernity, these “conditions” of modernity are in fact narrative tropes that overdetermine the general concept of modernism and, by extension, the interpretation of individual modernist texts. While the charge of modernist ideology in Head’s argument is not an inaccurate one, it is also not the most productive response; the more probing question would be to ask how the short story, with its generic and formal particularity and elasticity, is not just another iteration of a larger narrative of modernity (this would make its function no different than anything else written during the same period, thereby collapsing all the distinctions Head asserts), but, in a more Adornian way, how short stories engage with their particular historical moment.\footnote{Astradur Eyssteinson’s The Concept of Modernism made the observation many years ago that so much of modernism’s conceptualization rests on the idea that texts reflect modernity, as if “modernity” were an identifiable thing and not a narrative category.}

Both Isherwood and Bowen’s conceptions of the short story owe a significant debt to their interests in the vibrant visual culture of the 1930s, especially photography.\footnote{Astradur Eyssteinson’s The Concept of Modernism made the observation many years ago that so much of modernism’s conceptualization rests on the idea that texts reflect modernity, as if “modernity” were an identifiable thing and not a narrative category.}
As Valentine Cunningham points out, they were certainly not alone. Citing the work of not only Isherwood, but Auden, MacNeice, Dos Passos, Storm Jameson, and Graham Greene, Cunningham illustrates the “eager incorporation of filmic terms into the literary vocabulary” (BW 329) of the 1930s. Isherwood’s now famous line and hotly debated line from *Goodbye to Berlin*, “I am a camera…recording, not thinking,” (1), he shows, is likely derived from Dziga Vertov’s similar dictum: “I am a cinema eye—I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you a world such as only I can see” (qtd. Cunningham BWT 330). That Isherwood was aware of and actively engaged with film coming from Russia or the photo-reportage of Germany is not at all far-fetched. Bowen’s attraction to visual culture is perhaps a bit less known and less debated, but no less intriguing. In two of her pieces about the short story, Bowen likens short fiction to the cinema in one and to photography in another. What can we make of these borrowings from visual culture and what can it tell us about their short fictions? How do we assert the relation between them? In his study of literary modernism and the cinema, David Trotter cautions against making analogical arguments between literary and cinematic techniques and he does so with good reason. Trotter opts for an investigation that pursues the “parallel histories” (3) of literature and cinema. The parallelism he identifies is on the level of

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121 Valentine Cunningham’s chapter “Mass Observations” in *British Writers of the Thirties* makes several important connections between popular photography and the literature of the period.

122 Also see her essay “Why I Go to the Cinema” in Charles Davy’s 1938 collection *Footnotes to the Film*.

123 Trotter’s *Cinema and Modernism* should do a good to deal to reinvigorate debates about the precise connection between literary and cinematic form. It is surely interesting that his book begins with an essay of Bowen’s likening the short story to the cinema. He jumps on the connection but dilates short story to mean all writing, thus losing the potential richness to be found in Bowen’s highly suggestive comparison.
depersonalization, or impersonality. Citing the poetics of T.S. Eliot and others who sought to evacuate literary language of all subjectivity, Trotter argues that the modernist idea of language found a similar idea and technique in the “automatism of the camera’s eye” (9). In words borrowed from Garret Stewart, he characterizes this depersonalization as “disembodiment of perception by technique” (Trotter 10). The individual studies in Trotter’s book center on high modernist works and, indeed, if we hold to his idea of exploring “parallel histories,” the situation shifts considerably in the 1930s and, I would also argue the situation shifts not only during different periods but with respect to different genres. Valerie Shaw concentrates more specifically on the parallel developments of the short story and the visual arts.\textsuperscript{125} Shaw links the impressionistic quality of the short story to the aesthetics of painterly Impressionism and, in some ways, this may be more analogical than material. “At every stage of its development,” Shaw suggests, “the short story reveals affinities with the style of painting dominating the period in question” (13). Taken together, Trotter’s method and Shaw’s emphasis on optics and the short story open the way for reapproaching the formal dimensions of the short story and doing so alongside the aesthetic and political currents of the 1930s.

\textsuperscript{124} Karen Jacobs \textit{The Eye’s Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture} explores similar phenomena, but focuses mostly on photography. For my purposes here, the methodological value of Jacobs’s book resides in its suspicion of both analogical arguments between literary and visual culture and the “crude lenses of complicity or critique” (7) that often govern the political readings of modernist texts. In a more materialist way, Maggie Humm pursues similar questions to Jacobs in her \textit{Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema}, linking Woolf’s short fiction to snapshot photography. I don’t have the space here to pursue Humm’s provocations further, but her study raises larger generic questions about a “parallel history” between snapshot photography and the short story.

\textsuperscript{125} Although this particular claim is not relevant to my argument here, Shaw makes the materialist claim that short stories, in both brevity and the compression wrought via first-person narration, had as much to do with the small space afforded to them in newspapers and journals as it did with capturing “modern experience.” See the “Introduction” to her book for more.
Leaving behind the loose analogies of literature and visual culture for a more tightly historicized sense of their “parallel histories” (Trotter 3) also means tracking how those parallel histories change throughout history itself. The dialectical tension between actuality and its treatment that animated John Grierson’s documentary film movement and so much of the “realist” or “outward” turn of the 1930s is equally evident in the way both Isherwood and Bowen understand the relationship between writing and visual culture. However, the dream of a depersonalized mode of representation that Trotter finds in the writers of the 1920s is distinctly absent from writers in the following decade.

For both Bowen and Isherwood, the camera provided alternative, but not automatic or depersonalized, ways for looking at and writing the everyday. Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* opens with a camera eye panning the street scene beneath the narrator’s window. After a series of descriptive phrases the paragraph concludes on an interpretive note: “street leading into street of houses like shabby monumental safes crammed with the tarnished valuables and second-hand furniture of a bankrupt middle class” (Isherwood GTB 1). The purely descriptive slides into a simile and then interprets what it observes as property of a bankrupt middle class. Comparisons and judgments are not the work of a depersonalized, purely technological apparatus, but of the guiding hand behind it. The paragraph that follows the opening is the one that has provoked such varied response and it is worth quoting in its entirety (since it is so often clipped and marshaled for other purposes):

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, care-
fully printed, fixed. (Isherwood *GTB* 1).

The “I,” the subjective narrator, is joined to the passive, objective camera. The options, though, are not between subjective or objective modes of representation, even if this false opposition spurred so much of the debate over this passage. Antony Shuttleworth’s reading of this passage skirts the whole either/or format of the debate and offers this suggestion instead: “More than anything else the narrator seeks, by receiving data like a camera, to be free of interpretation…It is also not hard to see that the narrator must fail to fulfill his wish, since although no camera selects data and interprets it, there is no human observation that does not select and interpret. Selection is itself an act of interpretation” (156-7). What the narrator strives to do rhymes with Trotter’s idea that writers were attracted to the “automatism of the camera’s eye” (9), but Shuttleworth’s reading of Isherwood is sensitive enough to know that the narrator himself is suspicious of any such automatism. Isherwood’s narrator concludes the famous passage by reinserting the artist’s hand back into the process. The recording of actuality, the narrator suggests, is never separate from the developing, printing, and fixing that makes photographs and, to be sure, films. Looking at the everyday, recording it and assembling it into a single photograph, a longer film, or a written narrative entails what Grierson called the “creative treatment of actuality.” For Isherwood, recording like a camera simply meant gathering information, attending to the unexamined surfaces of daily life, and archiving gestures, objects, and everyday speech; only later, when these raw materials were to be assembled into a narrative would these random bits of daily life offer any sort of meaning.

In her “Introduction” to the *Faber Book of Modern Short Stories*, Bowen opens by pairing the short story and cinema and continues by linking the two in terms of their
immediacy: “the new literature, whether written or visual, is an affair of reflexes, of immediate susceptibility, of associations not examined by reason: it does not accept a synthesis” (“Introduction” 152). Echoing Grierson’s maxim of documentary film, Bowen believes that the short story “can, while remaining rightly prosaic and circumstantial, give scene, action, event, character a poetic new actuality” (“Introduction” 157). Almost a decade later Bowen evoked similar comparisons when discussing the war stories collected in *Ivy Gripped the Steps*. Bowen’s “Preface” to the American edition of her stories dubs the individual stories “disjected snapshots” (*IGS* xiv). Bowen’s choice of “disjected” is curious enough. The OED defines “disject” as “to throw asunder, scatter, disperse” and dates it back to the 16th century. Snapshots, then, are not precise, not documentary, and certainly not objective. These are, in her own words, “snapshots taken from close up, too close up, in the middle of the mêlée of a battle” (Bowen *IGS* xiv). Unlike the painters and photographers who have rendered with disturbing clarity the ruinous, bombed-out city, Bowen’s snapshots are too close to capture a panoramic view or to give structure to an entire scene. Instead, she has “made for the particular, spot-lighting faces or cutting out gestures” (Bowen *IGS* xiv). The emphasis on the snapshot, the snapshot so close to its subject so as to cast a shadow over everything but the particular gesture or image extracted from the “mêlée of battle,” highlights the brevity of the snapshot, which she distinguishes from the thoughtful artistry of photography of “photographers who were artists” (Bowen *IGS* xiv).

Unlike Isherwood’s camera, which records all details and processes by taking in an entire scene, Bowen’s disjected snapshots are not to be printed, fixed, or manipulated later by an artist. Concentrated on one particular scene or image for a more compressed
period of time, her stories present only narrative fragments of a frozen moment of time. Maud Ellmann’s idea of the modernist short story seems especially apt for Bowen’s war stories. “Typically beginning and ending in media res, a fragment amputated from a longer narrative, the short story blinds the reader to before and after, as well as to the wider world beyond its spotlit zone” (Ellmann 32). This is perhaps what Bowen’s snapshots do with their spot-lighting. We are not given to reconstruct the before and after or even the causes and effects of what takes place in a short story. In this regard, one can think of Bowen’s “In the Square” which alludes to all sorts of infidelities and past indiscretions, but whose “spotlit zone” (Ellmann 32) is not the complex lives of the handful of characters, but, arguably, the landscape, the square, and the house, all of which have been deformed by the air-raids. Bowen’s story invites us to forge connections between the destroyed barriers between inside and outside, the public life of the square and the private lives of interior spaces, and the open secrets now circulating among a mistress, a husband, and a wife. It is the connection between what is immediately available that is of importance; it is what we can learn about limitations, and perhaps blindness, from this “picture,” and not a willful withholding of information beyond the text that we must decipher or seek answers for elsewhere.

If photography provides the metaphorics for explaining the mode of attention Isherwood and Bowen’s stories direct towards everyday life in the war metropolis, the kind of photography they refer to points to two competing conceptions of how the short story records or captures daily life. Isherwood’s roaming, recording camera eye, open to all phenomena, suggests that it is gathering anything that passes before it; its timing and focus is not Bowen’s spotlit, close-up snapshot. We might say Isherwood’s camera is
aiming for a widescale panorama where as Bowen wants the single image, a sort of Schlegelian romantic fragment that contains something of the totality, but is dis severed from it all the same. These distinctions indicate a certain kind of structure for their individual books. Isherwood’s desired panorama corresponds to the way his camera-eyed narration documents the slow transformation of the Weimar Republic into a totalitarian state; Bowen’s fragmentary snapshots capture a single moment in the “between-time” (IGS xii), or suspended time, of the war. The kind of camera eye these stories employ suggest two temporalities of the experience of war and, as I show below, these temporalities are bound to the type of war cities that compose both the background and the centerpieces of Goodbye to Berlin and Ivy Gripped the Steps.

Before advancing to the individual books, it is important to note that Bowen and Isherwood’s short story collections share another important feature: they are more than a group of discrete short stories, but less than a novel. Neither just short stories nor an integrated novel, this nameless book has an obvious predecessor in James Joyce’s short story cycle Dubliners. However, unlike Joyce’s methodically plotted collection, neither Isherwood nor Bowen consciously planned their books to have anything like the childhood-adolescence-maturity structure of Dubliners. Bowen writes that “Ivy Gripped the Steps is an organic whole: not merely a collection but somehow—for better or worse—a book” (IGS ix). Bowen herself did not conceive of the stories as interrelated at all until she perused the proofs for Ivy Gripped the Steps. She says that above all she was “most struck by what they have in common. This integrate them and gives them a cumulative and collective meaning that no one of them, taken singly, has by itself” (Bowen IGS ix). And while Isherwood’s readers have long called Goodbye to Berlin a
novel, Isherwood himself only ever refers to *Goodbye to Berlin* as stories. Indeed, many of them appeared independently throughout the late 1930s. *Sally Bowles* was published as a single volume in 1937 and John Lehmann’s *New Writing* also carried “Sally Bowles” and “The Landauers” before these were gathered together with the other orphan stories into *Goodbye to Berlin* in 1939. Neither a short story collection nor a novel; not entirely discrete and not completely integrated, these collections of stories designate an as yet nameless form. More than a generic or formal curiosity, the peculiar status of these texts along with their photographic vocabularies mark the primary ways in which they document and formally mediate the war metropolis.

**Exposure I, 1930-1933: Lost Novel, Lost Republic**

Any assessment of *Goodbye to Berlin* must first confront its generic instability. It is a memoir, but also a work of fiction; it is composed partially from Isherwood’s own diaries and yet he claims to have fictionalized so much of the material that “gradually, the real past had disappeared, along with the real Christopher Isherwood” (*BS* viii).

Isherwood’s biographers have been quick either to ratify or discredit the authenticity of episodes and characters; textual critics might hazard speculation on the degree to which Isherwood’s “real” past from the diaries was spackled over with the liberties he took in writing, changing names, or fictionalizing certain events from his diaries. Without diminishing the importance of those debates, I would like to table all the concerns over subjectivity (the narrative “I”) and objectivity (the veracity of the camera-eye) that crop up in those discussions and focus instead on the book’s formal operations. As its elegiac

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126 See, for instance, Alan Wilde’s *Christopher Isherwood*; David P. Thomas “Goodbye to Berlin”: Refocusing Isherwood’s Camera” in *Contemporary Literature*; David Garrett Izzo *Christopher Isherwood: His Era, His Gang, and the Legacy of the Truly Strong Man*; Antony Shuttleworth “In a Populous City: Isherwood in the Thirties” in *The Isherwood Century*. 188
title notes, *Goodbye to Berlin* fits rather snugly among other modernist city books. As I will demonstrate below, the book’s generic instability and formal distortions are encryptions of a city in the throes of political transition, or, as Isherwood would say in 1963 “a city that was, in fact, almost already on the brink of civil war” (*IW* 162). From the time Isherwood’s stories begin in the autumn of 1930 until their terminus in the winter of 1933, Weimar Germany existed in a continual state of exception. When the American stock markets collapsed in October 1929, President Hindenburg appointed conservative Heinrich Bruning as chancellor to ameliorate the worsening economic situation (and *Goodbye to Berlin* notes the reports of the emergency decrees in the newspapers after the state closes the Darmstädter und National for an “extended” bank holiday running from July 13 to mid-August 1931). 127 Bruning’s deflationary policies did little to halt the sharp decline of the German economy. As unpopular and ineffective as his efforts were, Bruning kept power for two years and “essentially ruled by decree under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution” (Weitz 163), giving him the unfettered authority to rule as a presidential dictator. Of course, this was not the first time that emergency powers were invoked to stabilize the republic, but it was the last time such powers were used in its defense. By the time Isherwood’s final Berlin Diary closes, Hitler has assumed power and the questions over the Weimar Republic’s capabilities to manage and avert political and economic crisis received their stark answer. Bruning’s presidential dictatorship suspended the Weimar Constitution in order to preserve it; with little interest in stabilizing the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich enacted a “state of

127 Eric Weitz divides the shaky economic history of the Weimar Republic into three phases: “The first phase, 1918-1923, was the era of inflation; 1924-29, of rationalization; 1929-33, of depression” (131). See Chapter Four, “Turbulent Economy, Anxious Society,” of his fascinating and wide-ranging book *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* for a more detailed account.
exception that lasted twelve years” (Agamben *SE* 2). In one way, then, the years covered by *Goodbye to Berlin* are not just the last days of the Weimar Republic, but what Giorgio Agamben calls “a transitional phase” (*SE* 15) where a suspended constitution does not preserve or protect democracy but, at least in Germany’s case, “leads inevitably to the establishment of a totalitarian regime” (Agamben *SE* 15). What Agamben’s argument gives us is an understanding of these last years not merely as the end of the Weimar Republic, but, in the words of Antonio Gramsci, an historical interregnum, a transitional period.

Suspension and transition: these conceptual categories have their aesthetic corollaries, I suggest, in the spatial and temporal dimensions of *Goodbye to Berlin*’s narrative logic. In this way, the seemingly inscrutable or irresolvable contradictions of Isherwood’s camera-eye narration have far less to do with subjective/objective (even epistemological) claims; instead, the camera-eye narration is a literary encryption of a political crisis. As both camera and narrative, Isherwood’s short stories conjoin two seemingly antagonistic modes of representation. The photograph, like painting but unlike cinema, is first and foremost a spatial art while narrative is a temporal one. The primary question, one so far unasked of Isherwood’s book, is how this curious spatio-temporal logic of *Goodbye to Berlin* maps onto the political logic of Berlin in the 1930s? Before addressing this question, though, we must first ask a more general, but no less puzzling, one: how it is possible for narrative to spatialize itself and, following that, is it possible for narrative to have both temporal and spatial dimensions? The classic, and, I think, still

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128 Agamben calls the Third Reich a “state of exception that lasted twelve years” (*SE* 2).

129 Gramsci’s well-known phrase is as follows: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (*PN* 271).
provocative work on space and modernist form remains Joseph Frank’s *The Idea of Spatial Form*, published immediately after the Second World War. Frank asserts that spatial form has become dominant in modern poetry and in the plastic arts and few would contest this proposition. His more striking claim is that narrative literature, particularly the novel, despite its reliance upon time, plot development, and sequence, evinces its own kind of spatial form (at least the novel since Flaubert). He argues the passing of time, the occurrence of events, and so on do not govern the modern novel and do far less to help us understand the more recalcitrant works of modernist fiction. He notes how Joyce, Proust, and Barnes demand to be “re-read” so that all the juxtaposed fragments can be grasped as a totality in a single moment; all the disconnected parts of modernist fiction only gather coherence by their relations in space at a given moment of time. For Frank, this narrative form has its analog in cross-cutting techniques in film where the succession of individual scenes are in fact happening at the same time in the story. So what we have instead of temporal development is “reflexive reference” whereby certain images, symbols, or scenes refer back and forth to one another in order, creating a complex of scenes that must perceived in an instant. Spatial form also bears with it a notably modernist aesthetic ideology. For Frank, the exchange of narrative time for spatial form entails the evacuation of history from art. “The dimension of historical depth,” he claims, “has vanished from the content of the major works of modern literature” (Frank 63). We might re-animate Frank’s analysis by contesting this particular implication. Spatial form, like other narrative maneuvers, might itself be an historical symptom.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ We might note that Frank makes his arguments about spatial form and the suspension of temporal progress at the very moment that much of Europe and the rest of world is literally undergoing reconstruction after the Second World War and the ideology of history as progress has little or no purchase in the western world.
Spatial form, then, does not signal a concerted or inevitable evacuation of historical content; in an Adornian way, spatial form is itself an encryption of historical content. In *Goodbye to Berlin* the conflict of spatial and temporal form is a mediated representation of the crisis of sovereignty in late Weimar. This brings us back to the way the relation between narrative and political logics. If Agamben’s work has renewed the debate on the state of exception, it has also mapped out the spatial logic of sovereignty. For my purposes here, his investigations are especially useful as they articulate the topology of this very crisis of sovereignty that, as I will show below, migrates into the narrative form of Isherwood’s book. Both *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception* examine the state of exception as a paradigm of government, outlining the chilling way in which western democracies have inscribed within their juridical order the legal capacity to pass over into dictatorships and to annex all power, even the power to kill. The Weimar Republic’s slow demise and the emergence of the Third Reich sit at the fore of Agamben’s analyses. Although he details the provisions scripted into the constitutions of other western democracies, it is the German example that illustrates the most extreme consequences and the darkest horizon of possibility that may result from the exercise of this provision. In both books, Agamben’s terminology consistently deploys spatial metaphors: words like “localization,” “threshold,” “inside/outside,” “zone” and the etymological origin of exception, *ex-capere* or “taken outside,” ground his discussion of sovereignty. Agamben’s spatial logic, however, is not altogether without its temporal component. His discussions of Weimar Germany, which are absolutely central, parse the details and legalities of suspending the constitution and activating the state of exception, but they also make very clear that arresting the liberal order also enables the transition
into a full-fledged totalitarian state.\textsuperscript{131} Suspension has a spatial logic but this does not mean that time stops or history ends. The spatial logic is simultaneously an articulation of a transition of political order: the suspension of democratic rule in Weimar had its condition of possibility within the governing juridical apparatus; paradoxically, this same condition opened the way for the Third Reich and foreclosed any return to parliamentary democracy.

Isherwood’s camera-eyed short stories manifest Germany’s political situation through the extreme tension between the suspension and spatialization of the photograph and the inherent temporalization of narrative. What I’d like to consider here is the way \textit{Goodbye to Berlin}’s spatial form tries to break and arrest narrative time as a way of both marking the political transition in Germany and, on the formal level, attempting to freeze and suspend it. The first and last stories of \textit{Goodbye to Berlin} appear to bracket the stories in a clearly marked chronological frame: the first story is “A Berlin Diary (Autumn 1930)” and the final one is its perfect companion, “A Berlin Diary (Winter 1932-3).” David Garrett Izzo states that the “stories are staged chronologically from “Autumn 1930” to “Winter 1932-33”” (140). However, a closer look betrays a much more complicated, less orderly timeline. The two Berlin diaries that bookend the collection are fairly clear in their dates; the others, however, stretch forward and backward into this period of time. “Sally Bowles” occurs between October 1930 and the summer of 1931; “On Ruegen Island (Summer 1931)” actually takes place during the months marked out for “Sally Bowles,” and Isherwood’s holiday on the island is referred

\textsuperscript{131} “It is well known that the last years of the Weimar Republic passed entirely under a regime of the state of exception; it is less obvious to note that Hitler could probably not have taken power had the country not been under a regime of presidential dictatorship for nearly three years and had parliament been functioning” (Agamben \textit{SE} 15).
to in a conversation with Sally; “The Nowaks” moves us forward to winter 1931, but the following story, “The Landauers” reverts back to October 1930 and, by virtue of Sally’s appearance, should rightly take place, as should “On Ruegen Island,” within the same window of time of “Sally Bowles.” What this crude outline suggests, I think, is that each story, even though linked with the others, is a discrete narrative and that the stories should not be read as episodes progressing through time in any linear way. Quite simply, they are not incorporated or driven by an overarching plot. We can recall here Isherwood’s repeated claims that Goodbye to Berlin is the result of a book he did not write; that is, a novel with a unifying plot structure. Isherwood opens his prefatory remarks to The Berlin Stories with an admission, perhaps an apology, of what he initially intended to do with his Berlin writings. Hardly the “portraits” as he would later call them, the individual Berlin stories were to be components of a much larger design. He hoped to place each plot and character within a more organized panorama of everyday life in Berlin, giving his readers “one huge tightly constructed melodramatic novel, in the manner of Balzac” (Isherwood BS v). With Balzac as the ultimate horizon, Isherwood’s first plan shares the protocols of the kind of realism that Gyorg Lukacs celebrated. In the novels of those most admired by Lukacs (Tolstoy, Mann, and Balzac), “every phenomenon shows the polyphony of many components, the intertwinement of the individual and the social, of the physical and the psychical, of private interest and public

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132 Isherwood makes these remarks in the “About This Book” essay that prefaces the 1954 edition of Berlin Stories and he repeats these observations in a lecture from 1963, both of which I consider in more detail below. In Christopher and His Kind Isherwood gave some credit to John Lehmann’s continuous demands for more Berlin stories for allowing Isherwood to avoid the “stodgy plot-ridden story” (qtd. Lehmann 29) he had initially intended. He praises Lehmann for pushing him towards the “informal form of Goodbye to Berlin” (qtd. Lehmann 29).

133 In his 1963 lecture, Isherwood writes that leaving plot behind left him with the idea to write fiction “in the form of a portrait” (IW 166).
affairs” (SER 145). If configured properly, Isherwood’s colorful and expansive cast would do just that: each character and each space (one cannot underestimate the importance of space and location in Isherwood’s stories) would reveal the social totality. Holding all elements together and fitting them into a rather capacious, but “tightly constructed” (Isherwood BS v) plot like the nineteenth century realist novel would give form to the chaos of Weimar Berlin in its twilight years.

Rather than a fully orchestrated city novel on the level of Balzac, Isherwood’s unmanageable archive of daily life held only “an absurd jumble of subplots and coincidences” (Isherwood BS v), “a cat’s cradle of strings and wires and connections and plots” (Isherwood IW 164). Instead of approaching Goodbye to Berlin as a novel, it might be more accurate to follow Alan Wilde and liken the experience of reading it to “turning the pages of a photograph album” (68). Chronology is not a necessary ordering principle of any photograph album, but juxtapositions of two unlike things, regardless of the time when they were shot, can certainly produce effects. This may very well be what Wilde has in mind. There is, however, a slight twist with Isherwood’s camera-eye narration. A photograph alone may freeze a moment in time and exempt itself from any linear or even properly narrative time. But, as Roland Barthes’s incisive and moving commentary on photography makes clear, the photograph nevertheless induces truly singular temporal effects. The photograph is a “fugitive testimony” (Barthes CL 93) that “possesses an evidential force” (Barthes CL 89). Barthes insists that testimonial force of the photograph has nothing to do with the reality or actuality of the depicted object; instead, it attests to time itself. Every photograph testifies to the existence of whatever it captures; this is a past without future that is somewhat perversely repeated endlessly in
the present. This strange temporality is what Barthes refers to as “this-has–been”: the photograph manages to repeat the past without ever making it present, without ever promising any future. This is the pathos of the photograph and, indeed, its melancholic temporality; the photograph, Barthes tells us, possesses “that rather terrible thing…the return of the dead” (CL 9). Perhaps nothing exemplifies Barthes’s theory of photography’s pathos more than his reaction to the photograph of young Lewis Payne. This particular photograph captures the boy sitting in his cell and awaiting the death penalty for an attempted assassination of Secretary of State W.H. Seward, Barthes describes the temporal experience of the photograph in this way: “The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium. But the punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake…Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe” (96).134 Anterior futurity, catastrophe, pathos: these are certainly adequate ways for thinking how Isherwood’s readers in 1939 must have received his writings of Berlin on the cusp of Nazi control. The temporality of Isherwood’s camera-eye narration, then, is not to be discerned in the movement from one story to the next; neither is it to be derived from a larger plot that organizes, sequences,

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134 Barthes distinguishes between two methods of receiving a photograph. The studium is “that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste” (CL 27). This leads to a general interest in, perhaps, the technique used in a particular photograph, its cultural relevance, or the historical scene it reveals to us. On the other hand is a more affective reaction far removed from the order of cognition or contemplation. This is the punctum, “that accident which pricks me” (Barthes CL 27); the punctum is a detail that is not always intentional, but a product of the photographer’s “second sight” (Barthes CL 47), a way of attesting to something “that he could not not photograph” (Barthes CL 47) that nevertheless causes a sort of shock or inflicts a “wound” as Barthes is fond of saying. Barthes analysis, as unapologetically personal as it is, repeats in a way the old division of rational cognition and aesthetic experience and is not entirely unlike the “shock” effect of modern art that Adorno discusses in *Aesthetic Theory*. 
and arranges all of the individual “portraits” of his Berliners. Each story, regardless of its date, tells us first “this has been” while also echoing ominously what readers from 1939 forward now know about Germany’s future. In Isherwood’s photo-album, the Weimar Republic and those who were able to live on its fringes are the figures who have been; the totalitarian state that would go on to target many of his Berlin characters is the future we know and expect, the “this will be.”

There is perhaps no better manifestation of the frisson between photographic suspension and narrative transition than in two juxtaposed stories of two German families, “The Nowaks” and “The Landauers.” These two stories do not move forward temporally: “The Nowaks” takes place in the winter of 1931 and “The Landauers” moves us back into the previous year before extending forward to 1933. But juxtaposition of these two stories foregrounds extraordinarily powerful distinctions. The Nowaks are a German family struggling mightily under economic hardship. Herr Nowak, evincing somewhat liberal and cosmopolitan sympathies, was a former soldier in the First World War; his son, Lothar, a Nazi, works and donates his earnings to the family. At first sight, Frau Nowak is dressed in a “mangy old black coat” (Isherwood GTB 101). The apartment is cramped and Isherwood and Frau Nowak can barely stand in the “tiny kitchen” (GTB 101) at the same time. Roving from the kitchen to the living room, Isherwood’s descriptions emphasize the lack of space and the deteriorating rooms: “The living-room had a sloping ceiling stained with old patches of damp. It contained a big table, six chairs, a sideboard and two large double-beds. The place was so full of furniture that you had to squeeze your way into it sideways” (GTB 101). When Frau Nowak is admitted to the sanitorium, the conditions worsen for the Nowak family. Oddly
enough, removed from the claustrophobic, squalid lodgings in the Wassertorstrasse, Frau Nowak’s physical and mental condition greatly improves. Accompanying Otto to visit Frau Nowak at the sanitorium, Isherwood is struck with her initial appearance: “She looked years younger. Her plump, oval, innocent face, lively and a trifle crafty, with its small peasant eyes, was like the face of a young girl. Her cheeks were brightly dabbed with colour. She smiled as though she could never stop” (Isherwood GTB 133). To be sure, Isherwood’s depiction of the strange sanitorium makes it clear that Frau Nowak’s condition—her decline in the Wassertorstrasse and rejuvenation in the sanitorium—is related primarily to space. The sanitorium is hardly described as a place for recovery or relaxation. “The smell of the warm, clean, antiseptic building entered my nostrils like a breath of fear” (Isherwood GTB 133). Reprising the role of the camera, Isherwood’s narration trades sensation and judgment for description of the sanitorium: “Everything which happened to me to-day was curiously without impact: my senses were muffled, insulated, functioning as if in a vivid dream…My eyes could explore every corner of their world: the temperature-charts, the fire extinguisher, the leather screen by the door. Dressed daily in their best clothes, their clean hand no longer pricked by the needle or roughened from scrubbing, they lay out on the terrace, listening to the wireless, forbidden to talk” (Isherwood GTB 134-5). Extracted from the small, shoddy world of the Berlin slums, Frau Nowak’s body does not gain a new appearance so much as shed the markings and pressures of daily life in the Wassertorstrasse.

The Landauers, a successful Jewish family who own one of Germany’s largest department stores, live in a modern, luxurious home filled with art and manned by servants. Isherwood meets Natalia Landauer, one of his pupils, in a large sitting-room
“cheerful, pre-War in taste, a little overfurnished” (GTB 140). The Landauer family’s home, Bernhard Landauer’s modern flat and county cottage, and, of course, the Landauer department store stand in stark contrast to the decrepit Wassertorstrasse. The markings, then, are clear: poor, suffering Germans and wealthy, well-placed Jews. Because they are arranged in a reversed temporal order, the two stories do not exactly chart the growing anti-Semitism in Germany; divested of an overarching chronology, their spatial proximity works instead to examine, in the words of Samuel Hynes, “how a civilized democracy with a liberal tradition could choose fascism” (354). Nazism, it seems, brews and steeps in the slums; while German families struggle economically, even Germans who served in the First World War, wealthy Jewish families like the Landauers become targets for Nazi propaganda and German anxiety. This is, perhaps, why Isherwood opens “The Landauers” with a Nazi protest in the Leipzigerstrasse. The Nazis “manhandled some dark-haired, large-nosed pedestrians and smashed the windows of all the Jewish shops” (Isherwood GTB 139). Frl. Mayr, the anti-Semite with whom Isherwood lodged at Frl. Schroeder’s flat, “was delighted” (Isherwood GTB 139) at the violence. Her vitriol gives expression to the seething anti-Semitism in Berlin in the fall of 1930 and, coming as it does after “The Nowaks” story, one cannot help but link her anger with the declining economic status of formerly middle-class German families. Frl. Mayr’s rant names the Landauers specifically: “This town is sick with Jews. Turn over any stone, and a couple of them will crawl out. They’re poisoning the very water we drink! They’re strangling us, they’re probing us, they’re sucking our life-blood. Look at all the big department stores: Wertheim, K.D.W., Landauers’. Who owns them? Filthy thieving Jews!” (Isherwood GTB 140). The two family portraits in Isherwood’s Berlin photo album, the
Nowaks and the Landauers, could very easily have been juggled to place them in a more linear time. But the spatial juxtaposition, not chronology, tells the story of how fascism was possible and how anti-Semitism festered in and gained momentum during Berlin’s economic decline. Because the two stories do not follow chronologically and do not develop any particular plotline, Isherwood’s juxtaposition of the Nowaks and Landauers directs our focus on the important economic distinctions, which are primarily articulated through the living spaces of these two families.

Highlighting the tension between photograph and narration, space and time, also gives us a way of recasting Isherwood’s view that Goodbye to Berlin ended up as “an absurd jumble of subplots and coincidences” (BS v), falling just short of fitting into a grand narrative scheme. His chosen title for the proposed novel, The Lost, indicates the sort of characters that move in and out Berlin’s demimonde. Isherwood’s colorful cast—prostitutes, crooks, a coy bachelorette, German Jews—existed on the outskirts of German society during the Weimar years and would be the targets of Nazi violence soon thereafter. Using the German word Die Verlorenen, Isherwood wanted the double sense of “The Astray and the Doomed” (BS v) and “people whom established society rejects in horror” (IW 164). Isherwood’s lost novel comes to us as a photo-album of lost people, messy subplots, and coincidences. If the stories of the Landauer and Nowak families gracefully capture the spatial and temporal tensions of Goodbye to Berlin, then the endings of these subplots manifest this tension in another way. Nearly all of the characters Isherwood imagines on the fringes of society are lost in the sense of being doomed. Two characters who were able to flourish in liberal Weimar but certainly would have no place in the Nazi regime are Bernhard Landauer and Sally Bowles. As a wealthy
Jewish entrepreneur Bernhard and his family are targeted by Nazi gangs before Hitler assumes power; Sally’s English nationality would not endear her to the Nazis and her open sexuality that was nourished in the Weimar cabaret scene would not have been permitted after 1933. Indeed, Isherwood tells us that “the dives,” the sort of place Fritz Wendel, Isherwood, and Sally frequented, were suddenly of “great interest” (GTB 192) to the police. The establishments are routinely raided and “the names of their clients are written down” (Isherwood GTB 192). The fringes and outskirts of Weimar society are drawn within the full reach of the Third Reich: the regime keeps the city under surveillance and catalogues those lost people who will no longer be lost to the Third Reich. With their public spaces under watch and their names registered, they are indeed found and none the better for it.

What we can glean from Sally and Bernhard’s subplots are two different endings that, at least in narrative terms, function in a similar way: they are endings without conclusions. In one sense, Sally remains lost, even to Isherwood. At the close of “Sally Bowles” Isherwood writes that he has lost touch with her for nearly six years and inscribes a note to her at the conclusion of the story: “So now I am writing to her. When you read this, Sally—if you ever do—please accept it as a tribute, the sincerest I can pay, to yourself and to our friendship. And send me another post-card” (GTB 76). Her story quite literally ends with no conclusion, her subplot goes nowhere and, even more, connects to no larger plot. Bernhard leaves after the Reichstag fire and Isherwood never locates him again. It is only in May of 1933 in Prague that Isherwood overhears a conversation that gives him the “last news of the Landauer family” (GTB 183). Two men discuss the newspaper report that Bernhard Landauer has died of heart failure. The
ensuing conversation suggests that Bernhard’s death was not exactly a medical condition: “‘If you ask me,’” said the fat man, “‘anyone’s heart’s liable to fail, if it gets a bullet in it’” (Isherwood *GTB* 184). The other possible fate for Bernhard is equally stark. The fat man later refers to the camps: “They get them in there, make them sign things…Then their hearts fail” (Isherwood *GTB* 185). Unlike Sally, Bernhard cannot stay lost; he is recovered and presumably murdered, either by execution or perhaps in some other horrific manner in the concentration camps. Regardless, like Sally, Bernhard’s story ends without achieving any final conclusion, without gathering any meaning: the conclusion to his story evades Isherwood, coming as it does not from his pen, but from an overheard conversation. The political valence of these arrested plots is quite clear: there is no future for these people in a totalitarian state. Isherwood’s various narrative strategies—disconnected subplots, spatial form, juxtapositions—try on the one hand to account for the rise of the Third Reich, but, on the other hand, it holds all of these portraits and assorted stories together without deploying any narrative architecture that would assemble them into a single, Balzacian totality. *Goodbye to Berlin*’s refusal to submit these stories to a grand, unifying plot is an effort to suspend time; similarly, the absence of narrative totality is an encrypted contestation of the single-minded political totality that assumed power in 1933. Isherwood’s collection paradoxically tries to freeze the very history it charts.

**Exposure II, 1941-1944: Disjected Snapshots and the War-Gothic**

Isherwood’s camera-eye skirts over the rough surfaces of daily life, penetrating the interiors of houses and clubs, and watching life in the Berlin streets to account for the transition of a liberal republic into a totalitarian state; at the level of form, as we saw,
Goodbye to Berlin also tries to forestall the emergence of a single-minded political totality. Bowen’s camera-eyed short stories work a bit differently. They are not so focused on transition between types of states or political regimes like Isherwood’s. To be sure, England had been in a declared state of emergency since the passage of the Emergency Powers Act on August 24, 1939. Although this legislation gave the state all necessary power to prosecute the war and defend its territory, the more immediate danger to the civilian population in the first half of the 1940s was from air-raids. Bowen’s stories are set firmly within this blitzed landscape, but they are not war stories in any typical sense. In the “Preface” to Ivy Gripped the Steps, the American edition of The Demon Lover and Other Stories, Bowen writes that these stories are “wartime,” not “war, stories” (IGS viii). Her recourse to photographic terminology gives us a sense of how her studies of “war-climate” (Bowen IGS viii) depart from the genre of the war story. For one, Bowen’s use of photography indicates the shortcomings of realist representation to grasp the totality of a city at war. Her camera-eyed narration is distinguished by its affinity to what she calls “disjected snapshots” (IGS xiv). Earlier, I pointed to the non-documentary function of these snapshots and how they trade in the clarity of photography for a “spotlit zone” (Ellmann 32). Bowen tells us that their focus is too close-up, blotting out everything else around it. She goes on to oppose her snapshots to the written reportage coming from the war as well as the aesthetically sophisticated visual representations of the ruined, bombed-city: “Painters have painted, and photographers

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135 On the extension of the Emergency Powers Act in June 22, 1940, Clement Attlee gave a speech that articulated the complete control of civilian life as one of the state’s objectives: “It is necessary that the Government should be given complete control over persons and property, not just some persons of some particular class of the community, but of all persons, rich and poor, employer and workman, man or woman, and all property” (qtd. in Calder 107).
who were artists have photographed, the tottering lacelike architecture of ruins, dark mass-movements of people, and the untimely brilliance of flaming skies” (Bowen IGS xiv). Readers of “London, 1940” will recall her stunning description of London after an air-raid, most of it recorded in a telegraphic style told in the first person plural; in that piece we get all the physical details of blown-out buildings, the mass confusion of displaced crowds, the work of the home front soldiers and volunteers, and descriptions of bombings. Whatever else Bowen’s stories contain, she apologizes that there are no “straight pictures” (Bowen IGS xii) like this to be found: there are no combat scenes, no harrowing accounts of air-raids, and none of the destruction that one might find in the short stories of someone like William Sansom (who Bowen admired). The direct transcription of a war zone is not the vocation she assigns to her short stories.

Her “spot-lighting” (Bowen IGS xiv) focus gives us only a fragment of a larger scene; her stories capture the “isolated” and the “particular” (Bowen IGS xiv). These fragmentary narratives, though, are not just another iteration of a typical modernist aesthetic practice. Let us recall once again her description of those scenes that have been successfully rendered by painters and photographers: “the tottering lacelike architecture of ruins, dark mass-movements of people, and the untimely brilliance of flaming skies” (Bowen IGS xiv). At once as realistic a depiction of a war scene as any photograph by Bill Brandt, Bowen’s inventory of the war torn city also reads like a list of gothic tropes: ruined buildings, dark masses of people, infernal skies. Bowen’s war stories have long invoked comparisons to the gothic. Jessica Briggs, Neil Corcoran, Phyllis Lassner, and Heather Bryant Jordan have all discussed the ghostly encounters that cut across these war stories.

136 Her introductory remarks for The Stories of William Sansom where she express both her admiration for Sansom and her thoughts on the short story as a form of fiction quite apart from the novel.
Corcoran reads the specters and hauntings of these stories as figurations, or negative images perhaps, of the actual dead of the Blitz who “nowhere appear literally in these stories” (148). For him, the ghosts act as substitutions for actual death; spectrality, then, stands in for what cannot take any literal and realist representational form. This way of reading interprets the gothic as an expression of what Michael North has called the “everyday surreality” (447) of the war city: where realist representation would slot the depicted material into an orderly, rational narrative structure, the gothic favors the inexplicable, the disjected, and the fragmentary. For John Paul Riquelme, “the Gothic has always been excessive in its responses to conventions that foster the order and clarity of realistic representations” (585). Death, unparalleled destruction, and inordinate suffering find their fullest expression in the gothic where, according to Julia Briggs, “the normal laws of cause and effect are suspended” (123). There is an ethical dimension to framing the narratives in this way: war and mass killing never appear rational and a traditionally excessive and transgressive genre like the gothic is quite adept at figuring war as excessive, transgressive, and irrational all at once. But what I will call Bowen’s war-gothic contains a political unconscious that supplements and antagonizes the ethical conscious of her stories.

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137 See Jessica Briggs “The Ghost Story”; Neil Corcoran Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return; Phyllis Lassner Elizabeth Bowen: A Study of the Short Fiction; Heather Bryant Jordan How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War; Maud Ellmann Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page

138 I am thinking here of Nancy Armstrong’s acute definition of realism as the narrative mode whose orderly structures correspond to an ideology of social order. In Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism she writes that she understands as “realism any representation that establishes and maintains the priority of the same social categories that an individual could or could not actually occupy” (Armstrong 168).
First, the war-gothic. During the course of my discussion of Bowen’s stories, a number of strategies and effects that many critics attribute to the gothic will appear inoperative in Bowen’s stories. These stories, for instance, do not long, as Maggie Kilgour claims of so many gothic narratives, for a “past which idealises the medieval world as one of organic wholeness, in which individuals were defined as members of the “body politic” (11). Quite the contrary, Bowen’s stories very much want to resuscitate the “I” and to bracket and preserve individualism against the flattening out of distinctions and the mass routinization of daily life “mechanised by the controls of wartime” (Bowen IGS ix). Also, the gothic is traditionally defined against the pastoral or the domestic, realist novel; in this regard, gothic literature is often set in some unreal or faraway place which loosens the “boundaries between psyche and reality, opening up an indeterminate zone in which the differences between fantasy and actuality were no longer secure” (Botting 12). Arguably, the many war prophecies of the 1930s begin to loosen the barriers between fantasy and actuality to achieve their apocalyptic tones and effects. A representative and truly exemplary instance of this comes from David Gascoyne’s journal. On October 13, 1936 he walked up Hampstead Heath. Upon looking down on London, he saw two cities—a romantic city of the present and the war metropolis of the future. One is rendered as pastoral and the other as gothic and sublime:

Ducks on the ponds, the water flaking into silver, the October sky remote and luminous. As the afternoon bordered on dusk, I climbed to the highest point of the Heath. A fresh wind blowing. Highgate far on its hill beneath slow-tumbling clouds to the left; to the right, below, London spread out under mist and smoke, grey-blue, immense, mysterious. What a heart-shaking spectacle it will be from
this height some night soon to come, when the enemy squadrons blackening the sky rain down destroying fire upon those roofs! I turned away. (CJ 25)

Gascoyne’s undisturbed London is almost Wordsworthian: the slumbering city shrouded in natural beauty where “all that mighty heart is lying still” (Wordsworth CP 14). The young surrealist attentively notes the mist, smoke, and clouds hovering over the city, but it is the city’s vulnerability, not its grandeur, that punctuates his observation. The very pacing and punctuation of the penultimate sentence intensifies the terror of his vision, pairing its syntax with the war-gothic imagery of “heart-shaking spectacle[s],” skies full of bombers, wanton destruction, burning cities, and so on. But there is more to the war-gothic than the grafting of traditionally gothic imagery onto the technological machinations of modern warfare (and this is precisely where the war-gothic changes significantly): everyday life in the war city is by definition an indeterminate zone where the suspense and imminent disasters of gothic plots are no longer exceptional or fantastic, but everyday occurrences. Thus, the division between pastoral and gothic that Gascoyne is still able to make in describing two Londons in 1936 would not be possible after 1940. Gascoyne’s futural city is Bowen’s present one.

Mark Rawlinson has analyzed the fascination among many writers with the “spectacle of metropolitan ruin” (75) in his British Writing of the Second World War. While he does not name the gothic specifically, he notes the return of the sublime as the preferred aesthetic mode for rendering the broken architecture and smoldering remains of aerial bombing.¹³⁹ Rawlinson notes a strong preoccupation with ruins and place in

¹³⁹ Virtually any study of the gothic will note Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime as one of the more powerful influences on gothic writing. See Maggie Kilgour The Rise of the Gothic Novel; Fred Botting Gothic; George E. Haggerty Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form.
wartime writing and visual art, ranging over Eliot’s *Little Gidding*, H.D.’s *The Walls Do Not Fall*, and Henry Moore’s sketches of the London Tube. Bowen’s stories do contain some of this imagery: the house in “The Happy Autumn Fields” trembles underneath the impact of a distant bomb, causing windows and ceilings to break apart; Mrs. Drover’s house in “The Demon Lover” has “cracks in the structure, left by the last bombing” (Bowen *IGS* 96); “In the Square” opens with references to “bombed away houses” (Bowen *IGS* 3). Interspersed within the settings and plots of these stories, these disfigured buildings are part of the everyday landscape. In addition, these stories incorporate the transformation of everyday life by war legislation. The Emergency Powers Act of 1939 was extended and strengthened on June 22, 1940. In that same month, another piece of emergency legislation passed to prevent any statements or rumors that might cause alarm; the confused and idle talk that entirely make up stories such as “Careless Talk” and “Pink May” might be read as enacting the kind of surveillance and eavesdropping that this legislation provided for. “Careless Talk” in particular takes its title from a propaganda poster campaign to curtail any discussion of war among the civilian population. These posters all show individuals in conversation in public places like restaurants, trains, bars, and even public telephones (fig. 1-4). Surrounding these figures are multiple images of Hitler drawn into the wall, hiding underneath a dining table, or peering from behind the telephone booth. The message is quite clear: no conversation is private and, to quote the tag line these posters carry beneath these images, “careless talk costs lives.”

Additionally, the mandated black-out surfaces in virtually every story set within a city. Clara in “The Inherited Clock” loses her way in the blacked-out city, passing
through the deserted streets “like a ghost through an endless wall” (Bowen IGS 44); the
dimmed lights of interiors give the night club in “Songs My Father Sang Me” a
distinctive surreality—walls “were rather vault-like” (Bowen IGS 75) and, in an image
that could be plucked directly from a surrealist painting, “dancers drifted like pairs of
vertical fish” (Bowen IGS 75); Callie worries about the “flaws in the black-out stuff”
(Bowen IGS 222) covering her “defended window” (Bowen IGS 222) in “Mysterious
Kôr,” a story that oddly enough takes place under a “remorseless moon” (Bowen IGS
212) that renders useless all black-out preparation.
"... strictly between these four walls!"

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES
"........ But for heaven's sake don't say I told you!"

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES
Be careful what you say and where you say it!

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES
"Of course there's no harm in your knowing!"

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES

Figure 4
The war-gothic, then, is the genre that mediates the paradoxically “everyday surreality” (North 447) of daily life in the war metropolis. This genre accommodates the written expression of daily routines closely managed by the state (as we saw in Chapter 2), while also recording the extreme precariousness of life and death. If towering castles, shut-up rooms, and thick shadows compose the settings of the traditional gothic, the war-gothic takes the ruined cityscape, half-destroyed houses, the mandatory black-out, and the anonymity of urban life as its favored tropes. If Riquelme and Nancy Armstrong are both right to term the gothic the dark side of the nineteenth-century realist novel, the war-gothic is the twentieth-century’s nightmare version of modernism’s metropolitan perception. Set amongst these very places stories like “Ivy Gripped the Steps,” “The Happy Autumn Fields,” “Songs My Father Sang Me,” “The Inherited Clock,” and “The Demon Lover” all draw upon past stories that haunt the lives of the characters in the present, turning basic daily doings into occasions for nightmarish encounters, disastrous epiphanies, or missing pieces of tragic lives now put together, but none the better for it. Many of these stories narrate the way the past catches up to the present, with lost memories being recovered, missed encounters finally accomplished decades later, and so on. The war-gothic, though, is not just the irrational or excessive other to the marriage plots and normative morality of the bourgeois novel; with its repeated plots that showcase a missing piece, increasing suspense, and ultimately the recovery of a lost past, these stories model a way of explaining the inscrutabilities of the present by realigning the past with the present. Symptomatically, these stories reveal a desire to attach the present to the past, to see present situations as logical effects of past causes; they do not necessarily

140 Of course, not all of Bowen’s war stories are set in the metropolis; however, there is no question that the city is at the fore of all these stories, even one like “Sunday Afternoon” set in neutral Ireland.
fetishize the strange and the bizarre, but, formally, they structure a way of explaining what, at first sight, appears inexplicable. Put another way, these stories demonstrate a break in historical continuity and then set about suturing that break. Michael North remarks that “the convergence of these two mutually opposed forces, the break in continuity that is virtually synonymous with war itself and the demand that narrative make some sense of things, results in a literature of short forms” (448). For Bowen, the war-gothic short story makes sense of things and restores continuity, but there is still the question of the disastrous and tragic outcomes that necessarily follow the restructuring of linear, historical time.

“The Demon Lover” will help us substantiate some of these formal principles of the war-gothic. Set in wartime London in late August, 1941, the story opens with Mrs. Drover’s return to the London house she and her family have evacuated. Bowen’s setting could easily have been culled from Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: at the twilight of a “steam, showery day” (Bowen *IGS* 95) trees glitter against accumulating clouds “already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out” (Bowen *IGS* 95). Absolutely alone, the only witness to Mrs. Drover’s arrival is a solitary cat weaving “itself in and out of railings” (Bowen *IGS* 95). The known and the familiar turn inside out; “In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness has silted up” (Bowen *IGS* 95). Inside the house, Mrs. Drover seems entirely displaced by the “traces of her long former habit of life” (Bowen *IGS* 96); interrupted by the war, the daily lives of the Drovers have left their marks and memories on the house itself through stains, worn wallpaper, and the traces of furniture moved away for storage. Mrs. Drover’s calm inspection of her former house stops when sees a letter addressed to her
atop a table. The strangeness of the letter intensifies as Mrs. Drover sorts through all the possible ways a letter might have arrived for her at an abandoned address and somehow made its way to the table. Mystery and suspense are redoubled with Bowen’s Radcliffe-like description of encroaching night: “the sun had gone in; as the clouds sharpened and lowered, the trees and rank lawns seemed already to smoke with dark. Her reluctance to look again at the letter came from the fact that she felt intruded upon—and by someone contemptuous of her ways. However, in the tenseness preceding the fall of rain she read it” (Bowen IGS 97). The letter, as it turns out, is from Mrs. Drover’s missing fiancé who disappeared in in August, 1916 while fighting in the First World War.

Dear Kathleen,

You will not have forgotten that to-day is our anniversary, and the day we said. The years have gone by at once slowly and fast.

In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. I was sorry to see you leave London, but was satisfied that you would be back on time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged.

Until then…

K. (Bowen IGS 97)

Mrs. Drover’s return is met by another return, a very belated return of a missing and presumed dead lover. She reacts to the letter as if she has seen a ghost: “her lips, beneath the remains of lipstick, beginning to go white” (Bowen IGS 98).

With all of the gothic plotting and scenery in place, it is this letter that causes a temporal break that the story mirrors syntactically and narratologically. In narratological
terms, the first narrative that carries the story forward in the present concludes with Mrs. Drover’s shock, expressed in a series of questions and, ultimately, an ellipsis: “The hour arranged…My God,” she said, “what hour? How should I…? After twenty-five years…” (Bowen *IGS* 98-9). A space separates Mrs. Drover’s shock from the mixed analepsis that moves the narrative back twenty five years to August 1916. Mrs. Drover sees her fiancé off to war; before departing, K. asks only that she wait for him. Months later, the man goes missing and is never found. The narrative moves onward through Kathleen’s life; it tells us what she did in the years after his disappearance, how she met William Drover, where they settled, how many kids they had, and so on. When we catch up with the rattled Mrs. Drover in her vacated house, we find her musing over the letter’s arrival and somewhat frantically planning her quick departure from London. This story famously ends with Mrs. Drover climbing in to a taxi only to realize that the driver is her ex-fiancé. She screams and the driver “accelerating without mercy, made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets” (Bowen *IGS* 105). With its deeply and traditionally gothic scenery, its building of suspense, missed encounters, and the ghostly return of a lost person, “The Demon Lover” successfully transposes the most identifiable conventions of the gothic into the war city. More than this transposition of scenery and content into a war zone, what makes this story a kind of war-gothic is its temporal structure. The narrative rupture following the letter internalizes the “break in continuity that is virtually synonymous with the war itself” (North 448) and the mixed analepsis moves backwards twenty five years into the past in order to explain the terror of the letter and the strangeness of its appearance (even as it heightens that strangeness).
What I am suggesting here is that “The Demon Lover” models two things: first, the horror and trauma of the First World War quite literally returns with the letter, drawing a continuous link between the two wars that is not uncommon in the literature of the 1930s and 1940s; second, its narrative structure poses a break and goes on to chart a line of cause and effect between the past and the present moment, thereby restoring the continuum of history. It is the conclusion of this story, however, that marks another key feature of so many of Bowen’s war stories and, indeed, a key feature of the gothic: even with linear time reconstituted and the explanatory power of narrative restored, the futures that await these characters are often disastrous. This story, and many others like it, has no difficulty realigning the past and the present, but its imaginative solutions, its sutured history, is utterly without a future.

Bowen called her stories “between-time stories—mostly reactions from, or intermissions between, major events” (Bowen IGS xii). “Between-time” also marks a conception of time where history has been suspended. Looking over her stories, Bowen would remark that “the past, in all these cases, discharges its load of feeling into the anaesthetized and bewildered present” (IGS xii), and that is certainly the case with Mrs. Drover’s discovery of K.’s letter. The suspension of progressive time becomes a definitive feature of war, which Bowen, in her own words, saw “more as a territory than as a page of history” (IGS viii). History as an animating force is surely absent from these stories. In his overview of literature of war torn England during the Second World War, North has observed that “timeless patterns only appear…when history interrupts itself and the present, with all the inescapable power of the here and now, is shifted for a moment to one side” (448). Because her stories zero in so closely on the ruined spaces of
daily life, and situate themselves in the gothic temporalities that these destroyed or decayed spaces induce, Bowen herself concluded that it is the “impersonal active historic I have, I find, not written” (IGS viii). Has she, then, written the personal inactive, non-historic? In a way, yes. Bowen’s description of war as territorial and spatial is a direct contestation of linear, historical time. In place of that, her stories implement a gothic “between-time” that splits into two distinct temporalities: first, the rush of the past into the present, which, as Bowen says, takes the form of fantasy, hallucinations, and, we might add, hauntings in her stories; the second feature is the curious absence of any future in these stories. Past and present interfuse in startling ways and there are many types of “returns” that share this temporality as Corcoran has pointed out. But “between-time” suggests a kind of temporality where past and present may be stitched back together, but the future is endlessly deferred; set in a period of endless war, it is no surprise that Bowen’s stories cannot imagine a future where tensions and conflicts are resolved. Perhaps more than the break in continuity that North points out, it is the absence of any future resolution that is the sign of war writing.141

The final story, “Mysterious Kôr,” makes for an interesting conclusion in this regard. When Rawlinson examines Bowen’s “Mysterious Kôr” and its use of imaginative cities and spaces as “imaginative therapy” (83), a part of “the mind’s flight from violence against persons” (83). “Mysterious Kôr,” though, is also very much about temporality. The story follows Arthur, a soldier on leave, and Pepita throughout London on a night of “full moonlight” (Bowen IGS 212). This is couple on borrowed time and their conversation begins with a discussion of the timeless city from which Andrew

141 See Chapter 7 of his Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return.
Lang’s poem, “Mysterious Kôr,” takes its title. As Pepita and Arthur debate the location of Kôr, they also reflect on its remove from linear time:

“[In] Kôr there is no sort of other time.”
“You’ve got the moon, though; that can’t help making months.”
“Oh, and the sun, of course; but those two could do what they liked; we should not have to calculate when they’d come or go.”
“We might not have to,” he said, “but I bet I should.”
“I should not mind what you did, so long as you never said
“What’s next?”” (Bowen IGS 217)

Kôr is, as Arthur tells Callie, a “ghost city” (Bowen IGS 231). Arguably, London appears nowhere as ghostly in Bowen’s short fiction as it does in “Mysterious Kôr,” and, yet, this imagined ghost city of Lang’s poem (and, of course. H. Rider Haggard’s She which the poem directly addresses) is clearly set apart as a place of escape, a place of pure difference. Its difference, though, and its apartness is largely due to its remove from history. Kôr is not a city susceptible to war and, moreover, unlike London, it is not under the tight time management of a war city with its curfews and black-outs. It abides by natural time: the sun rises and sets, the moon waxes and wanes. This time, though, proceeds independently of human calculation. Arthur remarks that he may be compelled to count and calculate time by the rhythms of nature and Pepita reinforces her attraction to Kôr when she tells him that she only wants him never to say “What’s next?”” (Bowen IGS 217).
“Mysterious Kôr” leaves a slight wrinkle in the historical schema of the other stories. It projects its futural and utopic hopes into a city of the dead whose timelessness consequently negates futurity. This is a city where time does moves not in any linear way, but through circadian, natural rhythms. In this way, “Mysterious Kôr” does not contain any analeptic gestures to re-establish the continuity between the past and the present. Instead, it seems to have abandoned history altogether, replacing it with a poetic utopia located outside of history and outside of time. Has Bowen’s final story given up entirely on the prospect of reanimating history and possibly ending the perpetual between-time of war? The story terminates with Pepita dreaming her way out of London and into Kôr. Pepita’s dreamworld version of Kôr sits underneath the same moonlight as London. But this city is unpopulated and there are no “soaring new flats” (Bowen *IGS* 212) or “crouching old shops” (Bowen *IGS* 212); no balloons to confuse the bombers floating overhead and no Underground train interrupting the quiet of the evening. In her “avid dream” (Bowen *IGS* 233), Pepita “with him looked this way, that way, down the wide, void, pure streets, between statues, pillars and shadows, through archways and colonnades. With him she went up the stairs down which nothing but moon came; with him trod the ermine dust of the endless halls, stood on terraces, mounted the extreme tower, looked down on the statued squares, the wide, void, pure streets” (Bowen *IGS* 233). Resembling Giorgio de Chirico’s proto-surrealist landscapes, Pepita’s Kôr is a projection of old European architecture and monuments (ones not destroyed by war and bombs). The wide open streets and the freedom of movement are surely negative images of London under war regulations. But more than that, Pepita’s dreamworld, like the fates
of characters in other stories, reflects negatively the impossibility of imagining any future.

**Books Without Futures**

Isherwood conceded that straightening out all of those tangled strings and subplots was “quite beyond my powers” (*BS v*). Such a concession might seem overly coy, coming as it does in an introduction to an already praised and successful book. Still, one might speculate whether the novel form, at least the one Isherwood had in mind, was too anachronistic, too ill-fitted for arranging the fractious experiences of Berlin between 1929-1933. Bowen discovered an unplanned and unforeseen order among her stories upon reading the proofs. “*Ivy Gripped the Steps* is an organic whole: not merely a collection but somehow—for better or worse—a book” (*Bowen IGS* ix). We have Isherwood’s failed novel and Bowen’s “book”: neither author proposes a single, narrative order to their collections, but they both clearly find connections and links among these discrete stories. To their authors, they somehow compose a single work. On the one hand, these works seem close to the short story collections of Joyce and Beckett, both of which contain discrete stories that bear some resemblance to an integrated book. The narrative architecture of Joyce’s *Dubliners* marks out specific relations between the stories as well as their progression throughout the book; in this way, Joyce’s story collection “aspires to the condition of the novel” (Ellmann 35). Closer in date if not in style to Bowen and Isherwood are the ten stories in Samuel Beckett’s 1934 *More Pricks Than Kicks*. These stories are the bare remains of a failed or unfinished novel about Belacqua Shuah. Somewhere between discrete stories and integrated works, these two books might sit comfortably next to Isherwood and Bowen’s books were it not for their
historically specific allegorical function. The suggestions of narrative coherence among and between the stories in both Bowen and Isherwood’s collections points to this vexing quality of everyday life in the war metropolis: the everyday goes on and continues even in a place without any future. Neither Isherwood nor Bowen could find narrative forms to contain or enclose a condition of pure duration (this would be the province of Beckett in his writings after the Second World War). Snapshots and camera-eyes could record, spotlight, and disject the fragments of the everyday at war, but they could not visualize everyday life beyond it.
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