To my loving mother and father, Mary and Ozzie Caloiaro, and my unceasingly supportive wife, Lillian Vargas-Caloiaro
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This dissertation focuses on Irish fiction and drama of the First World War with attention on the way these texts narrativize trauma, memory, and combat in relation to Ireland’s historiographic narratives and shared memories of 1914-1918. While my study aims to fill a gap in literary studies, it also answers why this gap exists in the first place; the Republic gradually occluded its Great War experience by commemorating the 1916 Rising while conversely, Northern Ireland incorporated the war into its unionist teleology. This study examines literature’s intervention on this tension. Although unacknowledged, Ireland has produced much literature on the First World War. And rather than simply supplying or corroborating with the Republic’s and Northern Ireland’s publically-received or endorsed national myths, I argue that these texts are contiguous narratives conveying more varied and self-critical depictions of Irishmen’s and women’s experiences of warfare, its physical and psychological traumas, and performative rubrics of masculinity between 1914-1918.

In investigating how the south and the north have processed the First World War, this dissertation focuses on inscriptions of trauma – the trauma of those lives lost or
injured, and more figuratively, the trauma induced by political factions claiming political utility of sacrificial idioms (of the thousands of Irish casualties, for instance) in order to legitimize state-formation. This dissertation shows how Ireland’s fiction and drama portray the complexities of Irishmen’s motivations for, and levels of awareness and pressure in becoming actors, so to speak, in the north’s and south’s political stakes in the war. The novels and drama herein elucidate how the political determinations during the War years strongly influenced which traumatic events were to be selected for inscription: for the south, the 1916 Rising’s casualties superseded its 200,000 Great War soldiers, while for the north, the Somme that same year became a ubiquitous symbol of unionist sacrifice, despite many northern soldiers’ indifference to such claims. This literature not only exposes the limitations of such selectivity, but it anticipates and critiques how such events would be narrativized into myth and memory by reflecting an overt consciousness toward such “processing” of memory.
CHAPTER 1  
A WARRING INTRODUCTION TO IRELAND’S 20TH CENTURY: NARRATIZING VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY

Intervention and Scope

As I write, Ireland has entered into an important time, one heralding in what President Michael D. Higgins has already anticipated as a decade-long span devoted to centenary commemorations beginning with the First World War. Since August 2014, the Republic and Northern Ireland will look back at one hundred years since entering that war. But even a century later, the First World War is part of a past that some hope to forget as much as others hope to remember. If in Ireland over last few decades remembering and forgetting are words are so often reiterated in the same breath as the War, it is because many of its modern conflicts and traumas are inextricably bound to it – the Easter Rising and the Somme Offensive in 1916, Ireland’s Independence and Civil Wars from 1919-23, Partition in 1922, even the Troubles, beginning in 1968 and finally ending in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Certainly Ireland’s twentieth century has been fraught with war and its related trauma. But only in the past few years is it fair to say that Ireland, particularly the Republic, has again begun to speak publically of its First World War experience and of that traumatic legacy. At present, it is no longer the closed-door talk of academes, but that of the family and friends of those who fought – the talk of home, the street, and the graveside.

Since July 2014, Ireland has begun the centennial anniversary to the First World War with a number of commemorations honoring the some 200,000 men from Ireland enlisted in the British Army.¹ In the Republic, we have seen in these commemorations

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¹ This figure represents the addition of new recruits of Kitchener’s New Army who enlisted between 1914-1918 on top of the 58,000 first and second-generation soldiers who were already serving in the Regulars
an unprecedented effort to acknowledge Irishmen and women’s service in that war. For the first time it is as if the Republic’s public process of recovery is twofold. Recovering the memory of veterans is a means of recovering from longstanding animosities within the Republic, and with England and Northern Ireland. In fact, a Republic president has finally spoken openly for such recovery as a national ambition. While dedicating a new Cross of Sacrifice in Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery on 31 July, President Higgins claimed that the First World War should signify for all contemporary Ireland a “multilayered sense of belonging” (Murtagh, Irish Times, 1 August 2014).

But as history has proven, this is easier said than done. Prior to July, Higgins had already anticipated the central though contested place that the War would play as 2014 ushers in a decade of centenaries, with the 1916 Rising, the Independence and Civil Wars, and Partition all remaining bound to the cultural and political transformations and the divisive traumatic legacy wrought in part by the Great War. A passage from Higgins’s keynote at the Abbey Theatre’s “Memory Symposium” earlier that year is worth repeating:

In the Irish context, WWI as a subject for commemoration poses the difficult issue of Ireland’s divided, or even divisive, memories. It casts the Battle of the Somme, so central to Irish Unionists’ identity versus the 1916 Rising, as our Republic’s founding myth. For years the First World War has stood as a blank space in memory for many Irish people – an unspoken gap in the official narratives of this state. Thousands of Irish war dead were erased from official history, denied recognition, because they did not fit into the nationalist myth and its “canonical” lines of memory (“Of Myth-Making and Ethical Remembering,” Keynote Address, 16 January 2014).

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before the First World War broke out. It does not include those Irish of the Commonwealths who enlisted, such as those from Canada, New Zealand, or Australia (Fitzpatrick 386).
Divisive and “canonical” memories, blank spaces and unspoken gaps, official state histories, myths – and narratives: Higgins’s words echo a vocabulary that time and again prove appropriate to Ireland’s War experience. Since 1914, the War has been made pertinent to public diplomacy regarding national determination. As such, it has since remained inextricable from political action, and resultantly, also from a legacy of conflict. Current discourse on Ireland and the War reiterates the consequences of this lingering divisiveness, of old wounds that have yet to heal. But what strikes me most about the current moment is that, for all the scholarship emerging in this vein, little attention is given to the ways that Irishmen and women have experienced the First World War as a traumatic event. And this consideration allows us to pose some important questions: how did combatants and civilians register the violence of warfare? How did Ireland deal with its dead, and its physically and psychologically wounded personally and publically? And what role did the War play in displacing particular Irish communities during the process of demarcating national borders? I would suggest that if we want to discuss Ireland’s War story fully, then we must examine the ways trauma influences and is inscribed into versions of histories, or “myths” and narratives – we must locate trauma’s inherency and appropriation in the formation of the Republic and Northern Ireland.

A brief glimpse at the events of 2014 reveals the relevance of such an approach. On 4 August, the Irish head of state along with sixteen European delegates whose countries fought in the War gathered at Liege and Mons for international commemorations honoring their soldiers on the month that Britain entered the War. President Higgins again expressed his desire that these commemorations “support
inclusive versions of memory” to encourage reconciliation (Collins, *Irish Times*, 4 August 2014). Yet, just three days earlier as Higgins spoke at Glasnevin, protestors of Republican Sinn Fein and the Thirty-Two County Sovereignty Movement hurled insults at the ceremony comprised of representatives from the Republic, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom (Murtagh, 1 August 2014). And in Northern Ireland, the Falls Road and Belfast City Cemeteries have been vandalized three times as of April 2014, with several WWI headstones in the World Wars-designated area damaged or smashed, and one Cross of Sacrifice graffitied extensively (*Belfast Telegraph* 22 April 2014). It seems Higgins’s prior words about War-memory’s “blank space” and “unspoken gap,” and even more so, its divisiveness and conscious erasure have proven just as fitting and portending to the War’s centennial reception. And coupled with the number of letters submitted to the *Irish Times* ranging from praise, the need for qualification, to sheer denunciation of the Republic’s engagement in local and international First World War commemorations, the current moment signals to us how the War continues to pervade the national consciousness, or we might even say, how its traumatic legacy continues to persist, like flashbacks, haunting that consciousness.

As I continue to investigate the First World War’s place in Irish memory, I have found that it is precisely this divisiveness that has proven enduring. If current coverage tells us anything it is that the War remains subject to strongly felt divergences in attitude and opinion. These are often contingent on personal, political, even class-based relationships to the First World War. To this day, we still witness Ireland asking itself the

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2 See “Commemorating the Dead of the First World War.” *Irish Times*. 5 Aug. 2015, for the wide range of responses to the Republic’s most public and publicized participation in commemoration ceremonies to date.
same questions that it did in 1914: how should some 200,000 Irishmen be inscribed into state history, or histories? To put it another way, how should the Republic and Northern Ireland narrate these soldiers’ personal traumas, and their posthumously traumatic legacies? Where is the place of the First World War in Ireland’s cultural, political, and public memory?

These are difficult questions to answer given Ireland’s politically charged and ideologically divided lines. And if current Irish historiography tells us anything, it is that the act of writing histories and inscribing discourses or cultural commemorations – or, all modes of narrativizing the War as event – has not become any easier over the last few decades. Writing, inscribing, narrativizing: these are terms and acts often repeated in intellectual and public debates on Ireland’s experience of the Great War. But there is something that I find slightly unsettling about Ireland’s current discussions of the War. In both scholarly and popular discourses, debate persists about which “histories,” “narratives,” and “canonical memories” are held or claimed by the two Irish states and their peoples. Irish historians, politicians, and the public have always been invested in their stories so to speak, of wars and conflicts. And yet what strikes me is that even now, Ireland for the most part continues to overlook another mode of narrative in a more formal sense – its own literary narratives of the First World War, particularly, the one hundred years of fiction and drama written about the “war to end all wars.”

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3 I use the permutations of “narrative” here with the intention of evoking its wide-reaching, theoretical connotations: the ordering of a sequence of events (story) into a “plot” or myth, the meaning inflected onto an event via inscription (the act of narrativizing), and the ideologies which are inherent, reflected, and transmitted in such acts. These ideas will be discussed at length in the upcoming pages, mainly drawing on ideas of Hayden White in his *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

4 As of now, there are two monographs on Irish First World War poetry, the former dealing with more canonical poets, the latter, with lesser read ones: Brearton, Fran. *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W.B.*
intent for this dissertation is to investigate how fiction and dram in particular intervene in questions regarding Ireland’s First World War experience: what role do these literary narratives play in investing – or, more accurately, *reinvesting* – meaning into the Republic’s and Northern Ireland’s current understandings and attitudes toward the War? And what can be gained by bringing these narratives into conversation with the mytho-historiographic narratives and the related social practices that the north and south have naturalized over the last century?

I will begin with a quote, one which is both perceptive and portending about the tensions between history and event, and between myth and memory of Ireland’s War years. Before dying at the Somme in September 1916, the Home Rule-Nationalist M.P., Thomas Kettle, a former Irish Volunteer and soldier in the 16th (Irish) Division anticipated how he would be remembered back home in the wake of the Easter Rising. Following the executions of the 1916 Rising’s leaders less than three months before 1 July, Kettle wrote: “these men will go down in history as heroes and martyrs; and I will go down – if I go down at all – as a bloody British officer” (Denman 145). Kettle anticipates the importance that inscription would come to play for the Great War in the tension between historical event and “myth.” As will be discussed at large in the subsequent chapters, the Easter Rising would change the tide of nationalist politics in Ireland, and with it, the reception of the War itself, as would the Somme for Ulster unionism. Just days after the Rising was quelled, sixteen of its leaders were executed

without trial. These executions, in a way, baptized the physical-force separatist movement in fire; the Rising was ultimately written as the south’s most crucial loss, eclipsing the 35,000-50,000 Irishmen who died as British soldiers in the War, and the Home Rule nationalism associated with their service.5

This dissertation will thus investigate the ways that both the south and the north of Ireland have chosen to process the First World War. And I will argue that if Ireland’s War literature has thus far been neglected in the Republic, and conversely, if the War itself has become radically appropriated by loyalism in Northern Ireland, it is because political determination during the War years strongly influenced which traumatic events were to be selected for inscription, and also, how those events were narrativized into myth and memory. I am also suggesting that the traumatic dimension of the First World War could move literary studies into more reciprocal connections with historiography, traumatology, and narratology. The War was an event inextricable from the politicizing and militarizing climate preceding and succeeding it – from the Anglo-Boer War era’s split between constitutional and separatist nationalism from 1899-1902, to the bloody debates regarding Home Rule and Partition after 1918 which took expression in the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars, and even later in the Northern Irish Troubles. Ireland’s turn

5 As will be discussed more at length throughout this dissertation, ostensibly, the original formation of the Irish National Volunteers was to defend against Belfast’s 1912 formation of the Ulster Volunteers, a paramilitary organization designed to block or defend against Home Rule’s threat to Ulster’s continued union with Great Britain. When John Redmond called for the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British Army in hopes of firming up Parliament’s guarantee that Home Rule would be granted after the War, ninety percent of the National Volunteers enlisted, while about ten to fourteen thousand members declined and remained in Ireland to form the Irish Volunteers. This paramilitary group would fight for Irish independence at the Rising, and were joined by the Irish Citizen Army, Cumann na mBan, and Fianna Eireann to form the Irish Republican Army. However, the majority of the original Irish National Volunteers, many of whom enlisted in the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions, came back to an Ireland whose political landscape was very different, and in some cases, very hostile to soldiers who comprised the army that executed the Rising’s leaders without trial.
into the twentieth century was surely characterized by militarization, violence, and increasingly hostile sectarianism. And currently, I find it problematic that too few studies consider the premise that the War’s massive loss of lives (and for some communities, the loss of their ways of life), and the War’s connection to the militarizing politics preceding and succeeding it certainly marked this moment a traumatic one.

One need not look past Ireland’s Remembrance Day commemorations to realize the extent of the War’s trauma. In the south, tens of thousands gathered in Dublin at intervals well into the 1920s to honor the sons, husbands, and fathers who comprised Ireland’s some 200,000 servicemen, thousands of whom were killed. Private grief took further public demonstration as “official Irish government representatives laid wreathes at the London Cenotaph,” and “the Fianna Fáil government after 1932 provided a publicly acknowledged state subsidy for the completion of the Edwin Lutyens-designed Irish National War Memorial” (Jeffrey IE 257). In the north, Remembrance Days involved commemorating the Somme, and understandably so, for the 36th (Ulster) Division had sustained 5,500 casualties between 1 and 2 July. The Somme became a centerpiece for Orange marches, Northern Ireland’s Somme Association, and more recently, the Somme Heritage Center in Newtonwards. Ulster and the south’s commitment surely merited the type of public commemorations that would enter these soldiers into collective memory. However, the extent to which Ireland’s national politics controlled and shifted the War’s memory is significant. The separatist-orienting Republican Party gradually suppressed the War on account of commemorating the Rising as its telos, while unionist Ulster integrated the Somme into purely loyalist
commemoration, leaving little room for non-unionist and individual grief in soon-to-be Northern Ireland.

Here, then, we should pause to consider the interrelation between politics and commemoration surrounding the War, and the ways whereby inscriptive and social practices – and consequently, narrativizing – have programmatically informed the War's memory. Throughout this dissertation, my intention is to consider Irish First World War fiction and drama functioning as narrative modes that intervene on prevailing state-narrativizations of the War. This paradigm, I would say, necessarily affords proper attention to the politically determined shifts in Ireland’s memory of the War, or the function of memory regarding the War – what Avishai Margalit would term a shift from “common memory” to “shared memory” (1). Common memory is an accumulation of all individual memories of those who have contemporaneously experienced an event. By contrast, shared memory is a deliberate attempt after an event to integrate individual, firsthand experiences or views into a singular version of remembering; shared memory is indirect, the “memory-of-memory,” constructed through public communication to go beyond the living, forming a collective memory for subsequent generations. This type of shift-in-memory elicits my concern with the subjects and modes of commemoration particular to the north and south, for these are the inscriptive and social practices whereby narratives of the War are composed. That is, these are the substance of state-endorsed conceptions.

In Chapters two and three, I will more fully contextualize Irish War literature within the south and north’s galvanizing conceptions of nationhood, since those conceptions took expression in the Home Rule and Partition debates that would to an
extent, pre-determine the War’s place (or absence) in shared memory. But presently, for the purposes of establishing this dissertation’s critical paradigm, I would like to delineate in a more general fashion how political motivations construct shared memory which in turn, inform commemoration and mythography. As Margalit points out, shared memory is communicated to individuals via dominant state (or political) institutions through testimony, histories, and archives, through speeches and ceremonies hosted by public figures, even through monuments and street names. Such institutions predicate shifts from simply remembering, to determining who and what is remembered. This is to say they have the power to imbue memory with value by prioritizing and legitimizing particular actors, the events in which they participate, and their motivations. Throughout this dissertation, I will consider the interrelations between political intentions, nationality, and memory as a premise to approaching Ireland’s War literature, especially in the context of war-induced trauma: that there were actors and events of Ireland’s warring history, and necessarily, there were acts of selecting and prioritizing particular actors and events to inscribe a version of memory as “shared memory.” In this context, I intend to argue that Irish literature of the First World War is written within, and in some cases in response to (if we borrow Margalit’s terms on memory) “the push and pull of two poles: history and myth” (2). This literature can revise the Republic’s and Northern Ireland’s current, respective versions of shared memory; moreover; it can also provide us more circumspect and reconciliatory views of Ireland’s War experience.

This premise implies that shared memory is a space for transformation, and I want to suggest that Irish drama and fiction of the First World War intervenes in that space. These narratives confront the modes of memory-shifting that throughout this
dissertation I will refer to as state narrativizations, or (commemorative) mythographies of the War. But before proceeding to the literature, it is important that we define these terms, mythography and narrativization, and identify their relationships to literary narrative. The exchange between “myth” and commemoration in Ireland is predicated to a large extent by warfare, especially conflicts of national determination. As Higgins notes, “commemoration often takes the shape of rituals aimed at revivifying the war’s events and heroes” with an “emphasis on ‘living myths’ of the heroic dead” (16 January) – what Avishai calls, “revivication rituals.” Such rituals keep Ireland’s heroic dead alive amongst its living. For instance, the notion that the men of the Rising died for a republican, separatist south, and that those of the 36th (Ulster) Division for a loyal, unionist north are integrated in their own ways into what Johnston McMaster calls the “myth of redemptive violence” (McMaster 8). As such, “1916” signifies competing versions of shared memory which in turn enact distinct, politically motivated commemoration or action. And this rather Barthesian delineation of myth is one that I want to employ in the subsequent chapters: the interrelation between inscriptive and performative practice. As signifier, 1916’s idioms, iconographies, and commemorations are non-arbitrary signifieds wrought by institutionally (or socially) constructed notions, assumptions, or “narratives” that naturalize the two Irelands’ conceived nationalities. This is the process of mythography.6

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6 Here, I take Barthes’s approach to myth by cataloging specific physical and performative signifiers exclusive to the north and south (images, symbols, murals, commemorations, public rituals, and nominalizations) and associate them with their imbued signifieds (often, polarizing ideologies of national identifications on the lines of separatist-nationalist-Catholic and unionist-loyalist-Protestant).
What is relevant about Barthes’s theorization is that he shows myth to be both recursive and inherently ideological. Mythologization is a process whereby institutions integrate events into distinct histories and social episteme. Events may be rendered useful, even sacred, through their integration into a preemptory worldview. Throughout these chapters, one of my primary concerns will be to identify these acts of integration, which to extend Hayden White’s terms are acts of inscribing history – that is, the narrativizing of event. My intent, however, is not to construe narrativizing and mythologizing as inherently malicious forces. Rather, they derive from the human impulse to order events, to lend events a formal intelligibility. As such, narrativizing, that is, historical representation, naturally carries “distinct ideological and even specifically political implications” (White ix). And in the subsequent chapters, I will investigate some specific political and ideological motivations and assumptions affecting and predetermining how the First World War would be integrated into coherent “histories” – or put another way, into transforming the (imagined) present as the fulfillment of a past from which a dominant social group or “nation” has desired to descend. From this paradigm, literature is not conceivable as oppositional to narrativization, but rather, its narratives are also ideological forms (and acts) which are contiguous and even integral to “historical” understanding. Throughout this investigation, then, it is my hope to consider Irish First World War drama and fiction as well-sources of revision yet also integration into more “ethical remembering” (Margalit). That is to say, this literature can

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7 White asks “us to distinguish between a historical discourse that narrates and a discourse that narrativizes, between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story” (2). The latter is the act that this dissertation concerns itself with.
be the source-material for new, circumscriptive “myths” of the War and its preceding and successive crises.

**Interlude: James Joyce**

As a point of departure, I also want to argue that Irish War literature often connects this conflict to those before and after it. This context is crucial for assessing the War’s place and function in Ireland. I will demonstrate that in many of these narratives, 1914-1918 is figured as a key moment within the increasingly militarizing landscape that would characterize Ireland’s twentieth-century politics. Inherent to this literature are important questions regarding that landscape: what was the tenor of Irish-English relations at the turn of the century, and the status of Irishmen serving in the British military? And relatedly, how did Home Rule, separatist, and unionist politics galvanize (sectarian) militarization before, during, and after the War? These narratives supply us moreover, with a human dimension. They invite us to consider that such national issues necessarily included, influenced, and often imposed upon the lives of Irishmen and women. And what I will elaborate in the following chapters are the tensions – and oppositions – between the experiences and understandings of the First World War on the personal level, and the state-level sectarianism that effectuated versions of those facets as means for self-legitimation and fulfillment: alongside the literally traumatizing violence of the War (and Rising), can we also conceive of the preemptive ideological pressures to understand or remember violence, pain, or loss as a locus of trauma? Finally, to what extent can absolute (state) claims made to traumatic suffering or its shared memory impede recovery – to what extent does violence “flash back” so to speak, and repeat? I am suggesting that this literature deals with what Jenny Edkins would deem the contestation over possessing trauma, when personal
experience or comprehension of a violent event resists the use-value either claimed or
denied to it by a political or state contingency’s own narrativization of that event (15).

At this point we could begin asking what these issues look like in the literature.
Through these texts, we can derive a more comprehensive sense of Irishmen and
women’s proximities and understandings of war, militarization, and sectarian violence
surrounding the War years. I would first like to begin by considering a text that serves as
a heuristic to these issues – James Joyce’s seminal novel *Ulysses*. Composed between
1914 and 1922, Joyce overlaid into *Ulysses*’s fictive time of 16 June 1904 the escalating
military violence that racked Ireland and Europe. Surely, the violence of the First World
War and the Easter Rising reached Joyce’s personal life. During the War, his brother
Stanislaus was interred in Lower Austria from 1915 to 1918, his University College
friend Thomas Kettle died at the Somme as a Royal Dublin Fusilier, and his college
friend Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was executed without trial during the Rising. Yet as
Richard Ellmann notes, Joyce claimed “open indifference” (423) to the outcome of the
Great War, and according to Dominic Manganiello, the “tenor of critical statements” on
Joyce’s fiction insists on his “‘fanatical neutrality’ on political matters, and of the divorce
of his art from social issues” (1). As both critics rightly argue, however, Joyce’s literature
does in fact engage with these conflicts. Robert Spoo and James Fairhall have gone on
to suggest respectively for a “historiographic doubling” (106) or overdetermination (165)
within *Ulysses*, wherein militaristic imagery of bombardment, artillery barrage, and mass
death in “Nestor” and “Circe” correspond to the Great War and the Rising. And recently
Greg Winston’s *Joyce and Militarism* examines Joyce’s global-local purview of Irish
militarism during “the run-up to the First World War,” within “the escalating tensions of
the Anglo-Irish conflict as it entered the modern phase of armed insurgency” (11).

Winston rightfully claims that “Joyce was not so much concerned with reflecting the traumatic action of the battlefield or its aftermath as with revealing its perennial causes” (60). This is expected, since *Ulysses* takes place almost solely on 16 June 1904 in Dublin. But I would like to suggest that what Joyce depicts in *Ulysses* is the enduring, precipitous *memory* of military action, particularly, as it reifies war’s “traumatic action” within or as militaristic or sectarian violence in Ireland.

To extend Winston’s attention to the perennial causes of Irish militarism (both intra- and international), and its consequences, I want to first examine one war referenced in *Ulysses* which critics have yet to address in a sustained way – that is, the Second Boer War (1899-1902), a conflict most contemporary to 1904, and the one most figured into the novel. I would suggest that the Boer War is pivotal in *Ulysses* for revealing Joyce’s temperament toward war and militarism in Ireland at the turn of the century. The novel reflects the ruptures this war effectuated in Ireland’s social and political life, ones that I will ultimately argue precipitate into the Home Rule and Partition debates that determined Ireland’s mobilization into the Great War. For many Irish, particularly nationalists, the Second Boer War represented the modern militarization of British imperialism. Some nationalists even went to fight against England with the Boers in South Africa, while others back in Ireland did so through diplomacy or violence.8 These Irish saw in the Boers’ anti-colonial claim to independence against Britain, their own longstanding struggle toward self-rule – the Boers as “brothers in oppression.”

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8 The irony of Boer War violence is heightened by the fact that two Irish commandoes known as the Transvaal Brigade, organized by John MacBride, fought with the Boers against the British (and at times, against fellow Irishmen).
But throughout *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom acknowledges and defends a too-often forgotten or consciously elided fact about the Boer War: that some 30,000 Irishmen fought for the British Army during this campaign, some out of allegiance to Britain or familial “military tradition,” and many out of “economic distress” (Karsten 39). What is important about *Ulysses* is that it questions where such men stand in Ireland at a time when this very war began galvanizing anti-British physical-force nationalism as an alternative to constitutional diplomacy. The novel suggests to us that the contestation of allegiances in Ireland accentuated by the Boer War ultimately effectuates both British-Irish and internecine violence in the name of political identification – war in Ireland is amongst its own, so to speak.

Beginning in “Lestrogynians,” Bloom starts to both “flash back” and even oneirically experience Dublin’s opposition to the Boer War. As he enters Beresford Place, deeming Dublin’s authoritarian constables as hungry for “attack” (8.401-13), Bloom begins to recall being caught up in Dublin’s well-known 1899 anti-Boer War rally, and the violence that broke out as Joe Chamberlain received an honorary degree from Trinity College amidst nationalist protest. Denounced by many Irish as “‘the man who killed home rule’” (McCracken 31) and implementing colonialist policies resulting in the Boer War (Booker 91), Chamberlain’s presence in Dublin sparked vehemence in nationalist solidarity protests directed at the British Army and the Dublin Metropolitan Police, making it “one of the most violent scenes Dublin had witnessed in a generation” (McCracken 59). As Bloom comes across the site where he saw protestors spill a

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9 McCracken notes that although Charles Stewart Parnell espoused the Boer cause quite early, advocating for Boer independence did not become part of a nationalist, political identification until the first Anglo-Boer War, 1880-1 (10).
policeman’s blood (8.423-6), the narrative shifts into his consciousness, like a flashback: “right here it began. “ –Up the Boers!10 –Three cheers for De Wet! –We’ll hang Joe Chamberlain on a sourapple tree” (8.434-6). Bloom recalls his partial consent in joining these protestors, “those medicals” and “Trinity jibs” (8.428), in their violent resistance against equally violent attempts to suppress the riot. But in hindsight, he censures his complicity in the violent protest, however indifferent it was, remembering how after he was “fixed on” by a “horsepoliceman,” he dove for cover while the constable who was pulled down by assaulting protestors “cracked his skull on the cobblestones” (8.424-7). True to history, Bloom remembers the brunt of nationalist aggression directed at British troops, the D.M.P., and loyalists. However, he has since seen this aggression also turn inward, amongst the Irish populace.

What is significant about this scene is that it is the first in a sequence of moments wherein Bloom oneirically (re)experiences the internecine aggression wrought amongst the Irish on account of this divisive war. The novel raises a crucial question in this regard: how would those thousands of Irishmen fighting for the British Army be received after returning home? It is a question presaging the First World War a decade later. In the present, Bloom realizes that the Boer War continued to divide Ireland well after 1902, and that an increasing propensity toward martial action by avid young nationalists too often underscored this division:

I oughtn’t to have got myself swept along with those medicals. And the Trinity jibs in their mortarboards. Looking for trouble. […] Silly billies: mob of young cubs yelling their guts out. Vinegar Hill. […] Few years’ time half

10 As McCracken notes, it was James Connolly, Irish republican and socialist leader, who on 18 December, proclaimed the phrase, “Up the Boers! Up the Republic!” before breaking through a D.M.P. barrier and entering Beresford Place followed by pro-Boer demonstrators waving Boer flags and cheering for South Africa (54-5).
of them magistrates and civil servants. War comes on: into the army helter-skelter: same fellows used to. Whether on the scaffold high (8.437-40).

As do subsequent Boer references throughout *Ulysses*, this rumination suggests that a martial mentality is not only pervasive in Dublin, but *transferrable*. Bloom notes here a crucial paradox in affiliation. Many of these so-called nationalists would soon be in the employ of the British civil services. Moreover, Bloom predicts these young men entering “into the army helter-skelter” as soon as “War comes on” – an ominous portent, for Joyce likely had the Great War in mind when composing *Lestrygonians* in 1918. However, Bloom is not necessarily critical of nationalism (the hailing of Boer generals like De Wet as “Irish folk heroes” (McCracken 75)), nor does he decry political violence (the honoring the 1798 Rebellion at “Vinegar Hill” or heroicizing their sacrifice “on the scaffold high”). Rather, he experiences “the tug of physical-force ideology on the broader social fabric and [...] individual life” (Winston 12). As I want to suggest, he begins to look critically at this ideology’s *practicality* to the British state within the “Hibernian metropolis” (7.1).

Here, I would like to briefly turn to the image of Dublin that we obtain through Bloom’s focalization in *Lestrygonians*. Metonymized as the “peristaltic” *technic* outlined in Joyce’s “Gilbert schema,” *Lestrygonians’* (thematic) organ is the oesophagus, its symbol, “constables,” and its primary scene “lunch” – or as we will see later, vicious, almost animalistic eating. Throughout this episode, Bloom envisions Dublin (as he will later in *Circe*) as suffering from this desperate and aggressive “hunger,” which is both

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11 As agreed upon by Ellmann (502), Friedman (143) and Crispi, at least a draft of *Lestrygonians* was already completed by 25 October 1918 and sent to Ezra Pound, and it was published in the *Little Review* the following year.
literal and symbolic; British governance, *Ulysses* suggests, has not only materially deprived large segments of Dublin’s populace, but it systematically instigates and perpetuates militaristic tension. Under conditions of imperial mismanagement, Irishmen were apt to “sell themselves” into the employ of Britain’s martial apparatuses – the military and constabulary. Thus, while this system catalyzed physical-force nationalism, any violence directed against it would inevitably strengthen Britain’s rationale for continued governance. Furthermore, it would necessitate that political violence be enacted on Irishmen, by Irishmen. Bloom imagines exactly this:

Never know who you’re talking to. Corney Kelleher he has Harvey Duff in his eye. Like that Peter or Denis or James Carey that blew the gaff on the invincibles. Member of the corporation too. Egging raw youths on to get in the know all the time drawing secret service pay from the castle. […] Easily twig a man in a uniform. Squarepushing up against a backdoor. Maul her a bit. Then the next thing on the menu” (134).

Noting its propensity for inciting traitorousness, Bloom condemns British state apparatuses for instigating informants (“Corney Kelleher” and “Peter,” “Denis,” or “James Carey”), all of whom turned “queen’s evidence” against their countrymen (Gifford 169 and 94). Surely, “secret service pay from the castle” encourages unwarranted aggression amongst Ireland’s “raw youths”: they are “egg[ed]” on by the martial appeal of the “uniform” which as Bloom notes earlier, bolsters their terror-enforcement via interpellation. Moreover, Bloom also sees such martial apparatuses as insidiously masculinized – women are coerced by informants, “squarepush[ed],” before they are “maul[ed]” for information about insurrectionists. In Bloom’s eyes, such tactics

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12 In his monograph *The Myth of Manliness*, Joseph Valente refers to this paradox as “the double bind of Irish manhood” and argues convincingly for its exploitation by British imperial authority (1-15).
by Irishmen who are employed by the D.M.P. and the British military have caused the nation to consume itself – that “the next thing on the menu” is fellow Irishmen.

However, Bloom’s attack is not reserved for imperial Britain’s state apparatuses alone. He equally censures physical-force separatists, who, as a primarily middle-class minority, use similar measures of bribery to take advantage of the Irish’s impoverishment. Bloom’s critique of separatists’ terror-enforced political ethos and internal security, both informed by martialism, is also figured in terms of self-consumption:

Sinn Féin. Back out you get the knife. Hidden hand. Stay in. The firing squad. [...] You must have a certain fascination: Parnell. Arthur Griffith is a squareheaded fellow but he has no go in him for the mob. Or gas about our lovely land. [...] That republicanism is the best form of government. That the language question should take precedence of the economic question. Have your daughters inveigling them to your house. Stuff them up with meat and drink. Michaelmas goose. [...] Have another quart of goosegrease [...]. Halffied enthusiasts. (8.458-70).

Bloom indicts the physical-force minority Sinn Féin for bribing “halffied enthusiasts” into a political class whose fraternally-coded ethos for national belonging is violence. *Ulysses* suggests that this class’s “republicanism” does not take for its motivation the material conditions of the nation. Rather, it uses those conditions to sanction violence as a type of performative requisite for political participation. Under this paradox, catalyzed and maintained by Britian’s imperialist system, Bloom envisions Dublin’s internal violence as symbolic cannibalism. Reminiscent of the oesophagal-consumption theme in Book X of *The Odyssey*, Lestrygonians thus thematizes cannibalism (Williams 87). As Bloom proceeds past Beresford, he envisions Dublin’s men in Burton’s restaurant as violent cannibals: “see the animals feed, Men, men, men [...] every fellow for his own, tooth and nail. [...] Eat or be eaten. Kill! Kill!” (8.651-703).
What troubles Bloom is that Dublin’s propensity for political self-consumption seems to be intensifying. It is in fact Dublin’s recurrent evocation of the Boer War which causes him to continuously relive its divisiveness. In Circe the memory of this conflict is played out as Bloom’s present experience. Through symbolic hallucination (perhaps indicative of posttraumatic stress), Bloom is suddenly interrogated by the D.M.P., “The Watch,” for his “position” on (or in) the Boer War:

First Watch: Regiment.

Bloom: (turns to the gallery) The royal Dublins, boys, the salt of the earth, known the world over. I think I see some old comrades in arms up there among you. The R. D. F., with our own Metropolitan police, guardians of our homes, the pluckiest lads and the finest body of men, as physique, in the service of our sovereign.

A Voice: Turncoat! Up the Boers! Who booed Joe Chamberlain?

Bloom: (hand on the shoulder of the first watch) […] I’m as staunch Britisher as you are, sir. I fought with the colours for king and country in the absentminded war under general Gough in the park and was disabled at Spion Kop and Bloemfontein, […] I did all a white man could (15.782-798).

By rhetorically identifying himself as a Royal Dublin Fusilier, Bloom stages a defense that is in fact a double-critique. He calls out the insidiousness of Britain’s bellicose imperialism capitalizing from an Irish martial tradition, but nevertheless suggests that the Irish anathematize its own men fighting in the British military. Significantly, the Voice’s denunciation of Bloom as a “turncoat” proceeds after Bloom honors the R.D.F for its record of military courage. At this moment, the Voice then hails the Boers, suggesting that the Irish jury rejects the notion that Ireland’s military manpower be coopted into British service. Yet, while the jury condemns such Irishmen, Bloom attempts to recover them to Ireland. He does so by avowing to be a “Britisher,” a position whereby he underhandedly critiques Boer War policies. While personifying
Ireland’s known valor at Spion Kop and Bloemfontein, Bloom refers to the conflict as “the absentedminded war” wherein he “did all a white man could.” Both these references are common anti-imperial, Kiplingesque pejoratives used by pro-Boer sympathizers; as Keith Booker notes, the former “suggests that the Boer War was mindless and senseless,” and the latter indicates “the racism inherent in British imperial policies” (91). Ultimately, Bloom attempts to quell an Irish crowd hostile to its own, restoring to the nation’s memory those Irishmen who fought in the British army. He does so by not only critiquing England’s colonialist war, but the programmatic paradoxes that prompted Irishmen’s enlistment – Britain’s capitalizing off of Ireland’s military tradition and its economic depravity.

Through these moments in *Ulysses*, Joyce situates the Boer War’s political dynamics as anticipating those of 1914-1918, when burgeoning paramilitary activism was deemed an essential component of national determination. In fact, it was the Boer War that incited an irreconcilable split between constitutional and separatist nationalism (Matthews 100), the latter whose performative parameters came to embrace a notion of Ireland’s self-identified culture of military activism (Karsten 39 and McCracken 158). Ironically, however, “British officials and recruiters clearly sensed the importance of these motives” (38), Karsten argues. Recurring during the Great War, Joyce saw this as problematic for 1899-1902. In “Saints and Sages” for instance, he argues that Queen Victoria’s infamous Boer War recruitment was a thinly veiled attempt to benefit from

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13 Karsten cites a 1915 Sinn Féin leaflet which “complained that Irishmen were being recruited into the ‘enemy’s’ army ‘not by the recruiting sergeant’s shilling only, but by a cunning appeal to our traditional courage and a wicked attempt to … fill our young men with wondering admiration [of marching men and military bands] and make them long to show their inherent [sic] valour on a real field of battle’” (39).
Ireland’s sense of military tradition, an appeal for Irishmen to “sell themselves” into service. Speaking of the “English debacle in South Africa” (CW 164), Joyce denounces Victoria’s subversive recruiting methods in Dublin:

The truth is that she did not come; she was sent by her advisers. […] the war against the Boers had made the English army an object of scorn in the European press, and if it took the genius of the two commanders-in-chief, Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener (both of them Irishmen, born in Ireland) to redeem its threatened prestige […], it also took Irish recruits and volunteers to demonstrate their renowned valour on the field of battle. […]. In fact, the Queen came over for the purpose of capturing the easy-going sympathies of the country, and adding to the lists of the recruiting sergeants. […] This time there were no bombs or cabbage stocks, but the old Queen of England entered the Irish capital in the midst of a silent people (CW 164-5).

Referencing her violent reception in 1861, Joyce notes Dublin’s “difference in temperament” (CW 165) in receiving Victoria in 1900 – they are “silent.” He implies Dublin now sees its paradoxical position. Denouncing the queen would be to indirectly denounce those Irish serving the crown; however, praising the queen would comply with the crown’s “principal occupation […] to keep the country divided” (CW 166).

This is the type of systematic control over the memory-of-events that I will deal with in this dissertation, and which I would consider traumatic, or at least exasperating a traumatic event. Joyce goes on in “Saints and Sages” to associate such exploitative measures with England’s control of Ireland’s resources: “Ireland is poor because English laws ruined the country’s industries, […] because the neglect of the English government in the years of the potato famine allowed the best of the population to die from hunger” (CW 167). And while he does not justify factions in Ireland, Joyce does root them in England effectuating division through misrule: “Ireland is poor, and moreover it is politically backward. […] The Irish barons, cunningly divided by the foreign politician, were never able to act in a common plan. They indulged in childish
civic disputes among themselves, and wasted the vitality of the country in wars” (CW 167). Joyce is speaking here of internecine warfare, the kind that pervasively racked Ireland as he composed *Ulysses*; it is also the kind that, encompassing the Great War years, would become inseparable from Britain’s “European conflagration” (2.327), as Spoo suggests (111). Violence perpetuating violence and disownment: “wheels within wheels” (8.431) says Bloom, implying the compounding and repetition of trauma without recovery in the years leading up to 1914.

This is a crucial point suggested by *Ulysses*. Like many in Ireland, Bloom loses a close friend to the Boer War, “Percy Apjohn (killed in action, Modder River), a name recalled when Bloom is “alone […] alone” (17.1243-51). Molly holds a similar attitude and sense of loss about the war. In her oneiric soliloquy in Penelope, she resents that her “lovely fellow in khaki” “Gardner lieut Stanely G 8th Bn 2nd East Lancs Regt” was killed, essentially by those “old Krugers” who she wishes would “go and fight it out between them instead dragging on for years killing any finelooking men there were” (18.389-96). This would become the sentiment so often reiterated during the First World War. Like Bloom, Molly also looks critically at “Griffiths’” “Sinner Fein” position on the Boer War: “I hate the mention of their politics after the war that Pretoria and Ladysmith and Bloemfontein” (18.383-9). Their politics made no room for Irish soldiers under British employ. And *Ulysses* questions to what extent Ireland would sanction the inclusion and commemoration of such soldiers, or legitimize the memory and mourning of those who have suffered or lost.

Such questions are raised in Circe when Bloom and Stephen Dedalus get caught in a conflagration over nationality with the British soldiers Privates Carr and Compton
and a hostile Irish crowd. Tensions ensue after the entire lot of characters stumble out of a brothel (15.4313-61), in a scene that symbolically portrays Dublin’s base depravity and prostitution as perpetuated by Britain’s military-police state, correlating it to Dubliners’ (often necessary) propensity for “taking the ‘king’s shilling’” (Winston 190). What is also significant about this scene is that, again, the Boer War’s evocation not only sparks internal conflict about national allegiances, but its hostility re-intrudes on Bloom’s consciousness, erupting into a phantasmagoric, nightmarish event – almost like a flashback. Carr and Compton begin to belligerently ridicule Stephen as a “blighter,” threatening to “bash in [his] jaw” (15.4292-11). But this Irish-British confrontation ultimately causes nationalist and loyalist Irishmen to begin staking out political lines, in part, on the Boer War’s place in the national consciousness. As the politically divided crowd repeatedly appeals for violence in “a clean straight fight” (15.4461), Bloom and Stephen take a position of diplomatic arbitration, attempting to quell the hostility directed at them by both British soldiers and fellow Irishmen. Stephen claims to “detest action” (15.4413) even against the “brutish empire” (15.4569) if it is founded purely on the uncritical position of “green above the red” and pro-Boer solidarity for “De Wet” (15.4518-21). Bloom substantiates Stephen’s position. To the British soldiers and Irish loyalists bantering for a fight by arguing the “red’s as good as the green” (15.4519), Bloom calls attention to the fact that the Irish fought for the British in the Boer War, for which he is condemned “a proBoer” (14.4602): “We fought for you in South Africa,” he tells the “redcoats,” “Irish missile troops. Isn’t that history? Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Honoured by our monarch” (15.4603-4). Bloom’s call for acknowledging this fact as “history” is pertinent, for it prefaces (and echoes) the sentiment of 1918 when thousands
of Great War veterans returned home to a political climate veering toward dismissiveness, even hostility, to these men’s experience.

As such, Bloom’s defense of Irish service in the Boer War (amidst an Irish crowd in division over that war) is an attempt at national inclusion. Attending to this history, he argues, should signal to the Irish the necessity of consolidation, not division, especially given Britain’s record for programmatic, imperial-militarist policies. Moreover, Bloom and Stephen’s arbitration censures those Irish who adhere to parameters of cultural performativity predisposed to displays of male aggression as a priori political activism, whether for Ireland or Britain. With this in mind, we can turn to the moment immediately after Bloom and Stephen are accosted, wherein the “Distant Voices” shouting “Dublin’s burning! Dublin’s burning! On fire, on fire! (15.4660) signal the apotheosis of Dublin’s political division. As Fairhall and Spoo point out, the moment is an “overdetermined” or “historigraphic doubling,” wherein the novel’s 1904 setting belies prescience to both the 1916 Rising and the First World War (165 and 106). And I would add that the scene’s phantasmagoric, even absurdist depiction of warfare does not so much focus on the struggle for Irish independence; rather, it is one that both emphasizes Irish fratricide and reinforces the then-contemporary notion that through the Rising, “Dublin resembled some sort of Ypres on the Liffey” (William O’Farrell qtd. in McCarthy 72). The event is cast as “Armageddon” in a “lexis of battlefield and black magic” (Wales 260):

against Lord Gerald Fitzedward, The O'Donoghue of The Glens against The Glens of The O'Donoghue (15.4661-88).

The scene’s topos and time is overdetermined: at once, we witness the destruction of downtown Dublin as if it were Louvain, Arras, or Ypres. The onslaught is also a confrontation between archaic, cavalry-led advances of “heroes,” and the deathly waves of chlorine gas, Gatlings, 9-5s, and 15-inch guns that marked both the Great War’s destruction of past warfare, and its impersonal, indiscriminate leveling of human life.

Moreover, behind the phantasmagoria, Joyce figures serious historical irony into this scene. We are given an atemporal image of 1916’s internecine violence – “Tone against Henry Grattan, […] Griffith against John Redmond.” Irishmen are not (historically) battling the British, but each other. And as Bernard Benstock points out, “the list begins with actual figures from history, but dissolves into comic absurdity” (221): “John O’Leary against Lear O’Johnny.” The names become inverted in an image of Irishmen warring against their own flesh and blood. But considering the First World War, there is also literality to this. Joyce seems to have in mind the fact that three battalions of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers were deployed to attack the Easter rebels, the same regiment that fought in the Boer Wars and fought from 1914-18 at Mons, Gallipoli, the Somme, and Passchendaele, among others. It is an irony to be revisited time and again in the Irish First World War literature after Ulysses.

In its contexts of local and international (para)militarism, warfare, and trauma and memory, Ulysses’s narrative paradigm is of interest to this dissertation. Joyce’s scene of combat in Circe arises out of past conflict, the Boer War, alludes to contemporaneous and interlinked conflicts, Easter 1916 and the Great War, and we might even say, anticipates the early Troubles. As Fairhall argues about this aspect of
war, “Ulysses does inevitably reflect the era and circumstances of its making. It constitutes a response, in content and form, not only to World War I, the Easter Rising, and other upheavals, but to the preceding quarter of a century – a period of intensified imperial and national rivalries” (164). In this way, Joyce’s novel provides us with the proper framework for thinking of Irish First World War literature. These are narratives which often depict 1914-1918 as an intra-war moment, incorporating the socioeconomic and culturo-political fabrics that interlace the Rising, the Great War, and the troubles into “a ‘seamless robe’ of Irish experience” (Jeffrey IGW).

There is another facet of Ulysses applicable to this dissertation’s scope. That is the consideration of Ireland’s ethno-cultural, socioeconomic, and political diversity as they were both experienced and retrospectively imagined by postwar writers like Joyce. What spurred some 200,000 Irishmen to enlist in the British army for the War? Prominent cities for recruiting like Dublin and Belfast were modernizing metropolises that were tied closely to Britain from the 1801 Act of Union throughout the nineteenth century. A novel like Ulysses warns us against conceiving of early twentieth century Ireland solely within “the Irish Ireland agenda of an insular Catholic and nationalist peasantry” (227), as Vincent Cheng argues. We may consider Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom as representative of Ireland’s ethno-cultural, political, and religious diversity rather than simply as Irishmen marginalized by hardline separatists who, in truth, remained a small minority of the populace.

However, this is not to say that the mythos of southern Ireland as purely rural, Gaelic, Catholic, and separatist was not revivified throughout the early 1900s. One need not look past the often-discussed confrontation between Bloom, the Hungarian Jew
baptized both Catholic and Protestant, and the Citizen, the hyper-masculine, Gaelicizing haranguer modeled after Michael Cusack. The xenophobic Citizen, who hails the Fenian movement’s exclusivist slogan “Sinn Fein amhain (Ourselves alone)” (12.523-4), is as many critics note, a parodic composite of Irish essentialism. He condemns “mixed middlings” like Bloom for being “a stranger in our house” (12.1151). Since Bloom refuses to use “force like men” through “the business end of a gun” (12.1475-7) for separatism, the Citizen denounces him as a “Virag from Hungary” better suited to “adorn a sweepingbrush” in a “nurse’s apron” (12.663-7). And insofar as Bloom advocates (however idealistically) for a “union of all, […] General amnesty, […] universal brotherhood,” (15.1685-92), the Citizen attacks him in a moment portending Circe’s Rising-Great War scene. The narration (parodically) figures the biscuit tin the Citizen hurls at Bloom as if it were an artillery barrage; it transforms into an “object of enormous proportions hurtling through the atmosphere at a terrifying velocity,” whose “seismic” impact causes a “catastrophe” wherein “all the lordly residences in the vicinity of the palace of justice were demolished and that noble edifice itself […] is literally a mass of ruins beneath which it is to be feared all the occupants have been buried alive” (12.1858-8169). Joyce repeatedly suggests that monocular ideologies regarding Irish nationality, citizenship, and allegiance would exasperate sectarian violence in the War years. Sure enough, those ideologies came to eclipse southern Ireland’s cosmopolitan landscape at a time when hundreds of thousands of Irishmen were enlisting in the British army. As we will see throughout this dissertation, thousands of Irishmen, many of whom were nationalists, found no contradiction in serving in Britain’s military and civil services. In his semiautobiographical The Amateur Army (1915) for instance, Patrick
MacGill comfortably refers to his Royal Irish Rifles regiment as “we British” without a tinge of irony. Such texts show that Irish nationality and war service are much more complex subjects than state-narratives (even historiographies) might have us believe.

**Outline of the Chapters**

In Chapter two, we will therefore examine wartime drama and fiction’s emphasis on national commitment, and the performative pressures of combat it entailed. We will attend to some often-overlooked War-era texts that address the politically divisive and militarizing landscapes surrounding enlistment. Bernard Shaw’s drama *O’Flaherty V.C.* (1915) and the Belfast participants John A. Birmingham’s novel, *Gossamer* (1915), and short story collection, *Our Casualty* (1917), and St. John Ervine’s novel *Changing Winds* (1917) all ruminate on the south and north’s rationales for encouraging young men to enlist. Shaw and Birmingham lay bare the ironies behind Ireland appealing to young men’s inclinations toward militarization and the possibility of “emigration,” insofar as combat is touted as a means to both sacrificially “legitimize” themselves – and, either an independent Ireland or Ulster’s right to Union. Furthermore, Birmingham’s *Gossamer* and *Our Casualty*, and Ervine’s *Changing Winds* expose how the reciprocating performances of manliness and (para)militarization are not in fact exclusively Irish constructs, but transnational ones. My argument will be that these early texts reflect the similarities underscoring Irish and British discourses on national commitment and the ways they take expression through militarized masculinity. The demands on individual men are often the same, though the political factions calling them to action are markedly oppositional. Chapter two will conclude with Donegal born, London Irish Rifles enlister, Patrick MacGill. I will end by arguing that through his semiautobiographical trilogy, *The Amateur Army*, *The Red Horizon*, and *The Great Push* (all 1915) along with his combat
novel, *The Brown Brethren* (1917), MacGill shows combat initiating in his characters a process of a (politically) maturating voice which gradually becomes more critical of the War Office while nevertheless remaining confident in the British Army’s possibility for a supranational *esprit de corps*.

Chapter three will continue investigating the intersections between militarism, masculinity, and nationhood by turning to postwar combat novels and drama. Beginning with the combat novels of Patrick MacGill’s *Fear!* (1921) and Liam O’Flaherty’s *The Return of the Brute* (1929), this chapter will first argue for what has been considered in retrospect, the surprisingly “un-Irish” and more generally “British” dimension of these two Irish nationalists’ combat narratives. While MacGill and O’Flaherty align with the tendency for (British) postwar writers to thematize disillusionment, what distinguishes the two are their depictions of war trauma causing combatants to both resist the British chain of command and outright revolt against it. The normative British combat novel, claims David Trotter, suggests that combatants must adapt their “performance” to classed, gendered, and national mandates – a conservative paradigm (35-7). However, MacGill and O’Flaherty’s novels not only articulate the very *trauma* that this hegemonic pressure effectuates, but the literal *traumatization* it necessitates: their protagonists – injured, bloodied, damaged – gradually break from the illusion of performing for any nation. And decoupling masculinity and combat from any national rhetoric of sacrifice, they begin to in fact imagine the “enemy” as the very rank-and-file system which orders them into the trenches, and hurls them first into the line of fire.

We will conclude Chapter three by examining Sean O’Casey’s two well-known combat dramas *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) and *The Silver Tassie* (1928), and Iris
Murdoch’s novel *The Red and the Green* (1968). O’Casey and Murdoch depict Great War combat as inexorably enmeshed with domestic politics and Easter 1916 in such a way that Ireland’s home-front was in a very real sense, a politically crucial site of warfare. Through these texts, we will begin to examine more in depth the extent to which Ireland’s political cultures informed (para)militarization. As Fran Brearton claims, during the War political cultures would “predetermine the roles” of the soldier, causing him to fight “under a weight of expectation of which he could quite feasibly be oblivious” (9). O’Casey and Murdoch’s texts display the ubiquity of such pressures across Ireland’s demographics. From hardline separatist rebels in *Plough*, to Protestant Anglo-Irish Great War soldiers in *Red and the Green*, or entirely apolitical ones in *Tassie*, the men in these texts are driven, however unwittingly, by politically hegemonic forces which couple utilitarian ideals of national determination with self-sacrifice. These authors deconstruct this *mythos* by figuring man-to-man attachment as a space outside the performative, politicized parameters of (Irish) combat and nationhood. I will ultimately suggest that O’Casey and Murdoch depict warfare’s psychological and bodily damage as inducing in the characters and readers what Jenny Edkins deems trauma’s constructive, political possibility: the consolidation of the traumatized to use that suffering in order to “challenge structures of power and authority” which “transcend boundaries of culture and social group” (5). These authors do through their narratives just the opposite of what Irish states would do. They “open a space for genuine political challenge by encircling the trauma rather than attempting to gentrify it” – that is, they work against the state’s incorporation of such events into a purely “linear narrative” of national coherence (Edkins 15).
Chapter four takes up the consequences of being locked in a traumatic state by turning to three novelists who have written about one particular class’s unique experiences of the War’s losses, that of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Beginning with Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* (1929), and moving to J.G. Farrell’s *Troubles* (1970) and Jennifer Johnston’s *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (1974), this chapter will trace these novelists’ portrayals of the Anglo-Irish as experiencing loss through the War in two senses: the Ascendancy lost thousands of its young men, many of whom were either sent to fight or went at the behest of demonstrating loyalty to Britain; and ideologically, it witnessed firsthand the loss of its privileged class-identity within an increasingly separatist-orienting postwar south, a consequence of the War’s effects on Irish domestic politics regarding Home Rule. In all three novels, the Ascendancy’s sense of traumatic loss manifests as paralysis, silence, and as the tacit realization that its very existence, economical, cultural, and political, was becoming increasingly untenable. However, while to some degree Bowen, Farrell, and Johnston empathize with Anglo-Irish decline, I will argue that these authors' novels are more concerned with depicting the Ascendancy’s tendency to become “locked” within its own traumatic suffering. As it attempts to relive its past and deny the changing sociocultural and political landscapes heralding its obsolescence, the Ascendancy becomes entrenched and inward-turning, unable to adapt or move past a prewar image of itself. All three authors suggest that consequently, and to its own detriment, this class ignores or delegitimizes the War-induced traumas and losses of the Irish classes that would soon outlive it. As such, the novels presage this increasingly problematic aspect of mid-twentieth century Irish relations.
The final chapter will thus address the place the First World War continued to play within Ireland’s Troubles-era sectarianism. Such is the project of three contemporary War plays, Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), Christina Reid’s *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name?* (1989), and Sebastian Barry’s *The Steward of Christendom* (1995). This chapter will address the types of trauma and “loss” which in their own ways, the north and the south registered on account of the War, arguing that the traumatic experiences of the Great War have remained unresolved and un-dealt with well into the twentieth century. McGuinness, Reid, and Barry all depict the repetition of such trauma as either flashbacks intruding on War veterans or as hauntings by the ghosts of Irish casualties. As such, they analogize traumatic “return” as an aspect of the War-era’s sectarian politics doubling back or repeating within or as the Troubles. We will also examine McGuinness, Reid, and Barry’s attention to the influence that claims to casualties and traumatic loss (either of the Great War or the Easter Rising) have had in the two Irish states: the north and south’s conceptions of their “sacrificial” dead bear weight on their individual claims to state delimitation and legitimacy. In this context, I will argue that these plays also evince a more figurative form of trauma during the post-War decades; the political pressures enveloping Irishmen as they served (the status of southern unionism, republican separatism’s threat to Ulster loyalty, and the differences between Ulster loyalism and unionism) these continued well past 1918, inscribing veterans into tenuous positions. It will be argued that these plays ultimately suggest that both sides of the border rendered these men as political casualties in their own ways. By the 1930s, the Free State’s republican-oriented mentality grew more amnesic toward its War
involvement, an aspect resonant in Barry’s *Steward of Christendom*. And in Northern Ireland, the 36th Ulster Division’s casualties were not honored personally so much as they were coopted collectively into an iconography exclusive to Ulster’s Protestant Unionism, an issue addressed in McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster* and in Reid’s *My Name*.

Given the “Troubled” tenor of the 1980s (redolent of post-1918’s sectarianism) these three plays raise crucial issues regarding the War’s recurrent tension: they portray the ways state narratives of the War inscribed Irish veterans, and by staging – literally performing – the practice of recovering veterans’ and relatives’ memories (and the ghosts that haunt them), these plays reveal the ambivalent effects which state inscriptions have upon Irishmen. Moreover, all three authors address the extent to which veterans are in a sense victimized by the two Irelands coopting, eliding – or even institutionalizing – personal traumatic suffering. To conclude, I will argue that McGuinness, Reid, and Barry compose narratives which take part in a contemporary effort to reconcile the lingering consequences of the two Irelands’ state-sponsored narrativizations of the First World War.

Finally, in a brief epilogue to this dissertation, I will provide an overview of the two new Irish Great War combat novels that have emerged in the 2000s. These are Sebastian Barry’s *A Long Long Way* (2005) and Alan Monaghan’s *The Soldier’s Song* (2010). I will discuss these works as emerging in the wake of recent revisionist approaches to Irish Great War historiography, those that have prompted more comparative, reconciliatory – and I would add, more cosmopolitan – narrative paradigms for Ireland’s future. These two novels reflect what we might call Ireland’s
“post-revisionist” conceptions of its First World War experience, which is to say, its new millennial myths.
In *O'Flaherty V.C.: An Interlude in the Great War of 1914*, the first Irish drama entirely of the Great War, Bernard Shaw's protagonist Dennis O'Flaherty is no longer at the Front. By the summer of 1915 he has already been given leave back to Ireland to work temporarily as a recruiter. The play opens with O'Flaherty trudging up the road to the “Irish country house” of “General Sir Pearce Madigan,” the Anglo-Irish baronet of O'Flaherty’s “native place” (197). He is exhausted. In the background are the receding notes of “God Save the King” and “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” as “three cheers” go up for him. (197). A thrush flutters off in a note of alarm while he collapses on a porch chair. The tiresome aura of the War still follows him with its songs, birds, and labor; he is home, but cannot get away. In fact, Dennis O'Flaherty remains significantly and irreversibly shaped by the combat he has just left. As the play's title eponymously suggests, he has been distinguished with the highest award given for demonstrating valor in the face of the enemy, the Victoria Cross. As a poor, working-class private, the Victoria Cross is O'Flaherty's only claim to status, but it is a significant one. Even General Madigan confirms, “that little Cross of yours gives you a higher rank in the roll of glory than I can pretend to” (197) – “what you did was brave and manly” (204). But O’Flaherty thinks differently. Back in Ireland, he now looks at both his native country and England through eyes that have witnessed the trenches’ violence and privation. His

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1 Shaw had in mind Lady Gregory’s Protestant Ascendancy estate in Coole Park near Galway as a model for Madigan’s estate house, writing in 14 September 1915 that the opening scene “is quite simply before the porch of your house” (quoted in Laurence and Greene 94).
body has withstood warfare only now to be paraded as a model of manly “valor” and “patriotism,” motive and proof that common Irishmen could go to the Front and distinguish themselves through combat. O’Flaherty now sees through this assumption. But as he attempts to deny the British Army’s claim to his use-value as an Irish V.C. recipient, O’Flaherty’s war experience also prompts him to abandon his former illusions about his prewar life in Ireland.

Shaw initially expected his short, one-act play to be performed at the Abbey Theatre on 23 November 1915. And it is notable that only in 1930 did he re-subtitle it, A Recruiting Pamphlet. In that year, he prefaced the play by stating rather tongue-in-cheek, “it may surprise some people to learn that in 1915 this little play was a recruiting poster in disguise” (193). His initial timing and irony were intentional; the year 1915 marked a peak in Irish recruiting and one wherein propagandistic recruiting posters designed specifically for Irishmen were also at their peak under the newly formed Central Council for the Organization of Recruiting in Ireland (CCORI) (Tierney, Bowen, and Fitzpatrick 55). But pressured by the British Army, Dublin Castle, and even the Abbey under Yeats, Shaw’s play was stricken from the schedule and still has yet to be performed at the Abbey.² Without question, its premise was cause for unease not only amongst the British Army, the CCORI, and Dublin Castle, but also Ireland’s anti-recruitment contingencies, especially advanced nationalists. O’Flaherty V.C. portrays an Irish enlister whose traumatic experiences and subsequent feelings of exploitation at the Front give him reason to lambast British patriotism, and what he sees in retrospect as

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² Its first production was actually put on in Belgium by the 40 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps on Saturday, 3 February 1917 (Gunby 86-87).
the destitution and degeneracy of his rural Irish family life back home, due to his mother’s radically insular Irish nationalism. Shaw’s premise surely put him in a critical crossfire, as it raised a seemingly unanswerable question: was O’Flaherty V.C. designed to bolster Irish enlistment, or was it actually a typical Shavian satire designed in fact for the opposite effect? The question is still debated today amongst critics.\(^3\) However, given Shaw’s conscious ambivalence toward Britain’s war policies and any nationalism, I think we can run the risk of claiming that in his infamously paradoxical fashion, he intended both. Moreover, comparatively speaking, O’Flaherty V.C.’s satirical “even-handedness” (to borrow a term from Lawrence and Greene \textit{xix}) is paradigmatic of a transnational positionality that is then seen recurrently in subsequent Irish First World War literature during the years of combat.

Preceding novelists George Birmingham, St. John Ervine, and Patrick MacGill Shaw’s \textit{O’Flaherty V.C.} was the first text to anticipate how First World War combat could alter Irishmen’s conscious identifications with country, class, and creed, identifications that were only further exacerbated in Ireland by the political rifts caused by the 1916 Rising. Shaw and the novelists following him were set on depicting the War as a conflict through which Irishmen often came into more acute awareness about their identities, both class-based and political, or at least national. \textit{O’Flaherty V.C.} is crucial to such depiction, for it is a text that anticipates how combat – its trauma, survival, and

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its opening the possibility of receiving recognition in duty (like the Victoria Cross) – could alter the Irish combatant. I will begin this chapter by posing O’Flaherty V.C. as a frame of reference for such alteration. Shaw composed his play at a moment when Irishmen’s motivations for enlisting were numerous and complicated. Enlistment was contingent on living conditions, location, and class as much as they were on politico-national affiliation (often associated with the paramilitarization of the Home Rule crisis), and more ubiquitously a youthful yearning for adventure abroad. O’Flaherty V.C. demonstrates the potential for combat to cause soldiers to begin questioning why they are fighting, or whom they are fighting for.

This is the case with Shaw’s young, rural working-class protagonist O’Flaherty who is representative of a large number of early Irish recruits. As an unprofessional, “green” regular, many recruits like O’Flaherty would return from the War changed, changed utterly, just as the Ireland they had left was becoming a political warzone, if not a literal one by April 1916. I would therefore like to preface this chapter by focusing on the transformation that O’Flaherty V.C.’s protagonist undergoes through warfare. Crucial to Shaw’s play, Dennis O’Flaherty resists the potential for his combat experience to become scripted into any propaganda by Britain’s War Office, particularly his V.C. recognition; rather, he channels his experience only to possess it for himself, forming for the first time in his life an oppositional political consciousness. To put it in Jenny Edkins’s theoretical terms, O’Flaherty now insists that the act of traumatic “remembering can be insurrectionary and counter-hegemonic” (54). Insofar as he has undergone near-death experience, brought death to others, and has witnessed the War's slaughter, O’Flaherty bears the weight of that trauma, yet disallows himself from
being gentrified into any narrative of national legitimation or patriotism (Edkins 15). In fact, indicative of latter War-era novels, military service becomes for the Irishman an emigrative experience through which he begins to differentiate between the expectation of utilitarian sacrifice and his own survival and material conditions; in a manner of speaking, war induces in men like O’Flaherty a desire for “denationalizing” from the nationalist-unionist and Irish-British dichotomies.

From the outset of the play, O’Flaherty “denationalizes” himself by disavowing any prerogatives granted to him on account of a Victoria Cross recipient that are not his own. What most critics have overlooked about Shaw’s drama is that its critique mainly generates from O’Flaherty’s taking possession over his own war-decorated body, an impetus for his claims to overt political resistance while still in the Army’s employ. The proclamation for self-possession is for O’Flaherty inextricably bound to his material conditions. When the play opens for instance, Dennis can claim nothing of his own except his Victoria Cross; he has no wealth, inheritance, or national pride. He arrives exhausted at Sir General Madigan’s Ascendancy estate feeling duped out of proper leave from the Front since his status as a V.C. recipient makes him a valuable Irish recruiter.⁴ Tellingly, it is the façade of patriotic performance that Dennis must enact as recruiter that sparks his indignation toward this labor:

I never knew what hard work was til I took to recruiting. What with the standing on my legs all day, and the shaking hands, and the making

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⁴ Although he denied the connection, there is room to believe that Shaw modeled his protagonist, Dennis O’Flaherty, on the first Great War Victoria Cross recipient, Michael O’Leary (a slight anagram), who singlehandedly killed eight Germans and took fifteen more as prisoners. The CCORI used O’Leary particularly for a recruitment poster, which reads: “An Irish Hero! One Irishman defeats ten Germans. Sergeant Michael O’Leary, V.C., Irish Guards. Have you no wish to emulate the splendid bravery of your fellow countryman? Join an Irish regiment today.”
speeches, and – what’s worse – the listening to them, and the calling for cheers for king and country, and the saluting the flag til I’m stiff with it, and the listening to them playing God Save the King and Tipperary, and the trying to make my eyes look moist like a man in a picture book (198).

O’Flaherty is even given permission by Madigan to embellish his V.C. story to include “fighting the Kaiser” and at least six “giants of the Prussian guard singlehanded” (200) in what appears to be a presumptuous appeal to Ireland’s mythic, Cuchullain martial tradition. It is exactly this type of exploitation that Dennis sees as legitimizing his opposition. Through his eyes, his use-value as a decorated Irishman is an ironic extension of being exploited as a combatant. Openly laying bare this irony, he tells Madigan in caustic hyperbole: “Holiday, is it? I’d give five shillings to be back in the trenches for the sake of a little rest and quiet” (198). Like many working-class Irishmen who possessed next to nothing, Shaw’s protagonist sees nothing to lose and perhaps even something to gain by going to war.5

Dennis distinguishes candidly between his own motivations for quitting recruiting and returning to the Front and Madigan’s appeal for his continuance. “[T]here’s a gratifying side to it, too,” opines Madigan, “[a]fter all, he is our king; and it’s our own country, isn’t it?” (198). Dennis’s retort is incisive about the material and ideological

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5 In his 1930 preface to O’Flaherty V.C. with its wry new subtitle, A Recruiting Pamphlet, Shaw speaks with measured satire of the unquantifiable motives that sent many Irishmen to enlist; for many, it was unemployment, coupled with the adventurous desire to leave Ireland even if through soldiering: “I know by personal experience and observation, that all an Irishman’s hopes and ambitions turn on his opportunities of getting out of Ireland. Stimulate his loyalty, and he will stay in Ireland and die for her; for, incomprehensible as it seems to an Englishman, Irish patriotism does not take the form of devotion to England and England’s king. Appeal to his discontent, his deadly boredom, his thwarted curiosity and desire for change and adventure, and, to escape from Ireland, he will go abroad to risk his life for France, for the Papal States, […] and even, if no better may be, for England. Knowing that the ignorance and insularity of the Irishman is a danger to himself and to his neighbors, I had no scruple in making that appeal when there was something for him to fight which the whole world had to fight unless it meant to come under the jack boot of the German version of Dublin Castle” (194).
realities underscoring differences in motivations for service: “Well, sir, to you that have an estate in it, it would feel like your country. But the divil a perch of it ever I owned. And as to the king, God help him, my mother would have taken the skin off my back if I’d ever let on to have any other king than Parnell” (198-9). In 1915, Shaw’s play anticipates the complications that working-class Irish recruits would face in being “claimed” so to speak. While the War Office tended to appeal to a unionist-oriented or “universal rights” patriotism (with some legitimacy), many separatist nationalists assumed Irishmen had no place fighting England’s war.6 Caught between these tensions, Dennis’s recent combat experience supplies him ammunition against the limited and to a degree, similarly ideological rhetoric of both sides. Dennis does not take well to Madigan’s words about “the sacred rights for which we are fighting,” or the supposed “simple question of patriotism” (202). Through war, Dennis realizes patriotism means little if one has nothing to protect. As he admits, he himself has been reduced to stealing from Madigan’s own estate just to eat and pay taxes back to him (190 and 205).

In Dennis’s eyes, such material deprivation has turned the rural classes further against the English, his own mother included. Madigan is stunned when Dennis refers to Mrs. O’Flaherty as a “Fenian and rebel” (199), admitting that while he joined the British Army to secure his mother “the biggest allowance” (210), he has actually had to

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6 Shaw not only tasked the sort of universal patriotic rhetoric for which Madigan is a mouthpiece, but also the CCORI’s more pointed appeals to an Irish Catholic majority. In his preface, he quips: “But the War Office insisted on approaching them [Irishmen] from the point of view of Dublin Castle. They [Irishmen] were discouraged and repulsed by refusals to give commissions to Roman Catholic officers, or allow distinct Irish units to be formed. To attract them, the walls were covered with placards headed REMEMBER BELGIUM. The folly of asking an Irishman to remember anything when you want him to fight for England was apparent to everyone outside the Castle: FORGET and FORGIVE would have been more to the point. […] And recruiting ended in a rebellion, in suppressing which the British artillery quite unnecessarily reduced the centre of Dublin to ruins, and the British commanders killed their leading prisoners of war in cold blood morning after morning with the effect of long drawn out ferocity” (193).
tell her that he is fighting “for the French and for the Russians” (199) rather than for England so as not to be scorned for traitorousness. Deeming Irishmen “the chosen people of God” and the only competent military leaders England has (as well as Home Rule politicians) (206), Mrs. O’Flaherty’s nationalism is not overlooked by the play’s comedic satirization; her knee-jerk patriotism is not too dissimilar from Madigan’s. Dennis does, however, see his mother’s shortsightedness as partly symptomatic of English misrule. And on these grounds he merits qualification when Madigan bluntly asks him, “does patriotism mean nothing to you?” (202). Dennis impugns him, even self-correctively:

It means different to me than what it would to you, sir. It means England and England’s king to you. To me and the like of me, it means talking about the English just the way the English papers talk about the Boshes. And what good has it ever done here in Ireland? It’s kept me ignorant because it filled up my mother’s mind, and she thought it ought to fill up mine too. It’s kept Ireland poor, because instead of trying to better ourselves we thought we was the fine fellows of patriots when we were speaking evil of Englishmen that was as poor as ourselves and maybe as good as ourselves (202).

In retrospect, Dennis realizes that intellectual and physical impoverishment have not only gone hand in hand, but have led him to enlist. Such was the paradoxical case for Irishmen like O’Flaherty; as Heinz Kosok notes:

As early as 1915 Shaw identified the underlying reasons for the readiness of Irishmen to join the British Army: unemployment and the desperate living conditions of Irish tenants on the one hand, and material security not only for the enlisted men but also for their dependents on the other. In this as in other respects, Shaw aims at debunking high-flown rhetoric, replacing the insincerity of such ideological pseudo-values as patriotism and honour with the real motivations of ordinary people (56-7).
Only through such motivations does Dennis realize the necessity of claiming his own political voice rather than being made “representative” of Madigan’s or his mother’s unthinking patriotism.

Crucially, Dennis develops his voice through the trauma of trench warfare – one that like the experience itself, is individuated and cannot be spoken for by another:

What’s the Cross to me, barring the little pension it carries? [...] You know what a poor ignorant conceited creature I was when I went from here into the wide world as a soldier? What use is all the lying, [...] when the day comes to you that your comrade is killed in the trench beside you, and you don’t as much as look round until you trip over his poor body, and then all you say is to ask why the hell the stretcher-bearers don’t take it out of the way. Why should I read the papers to be humbugged and lied to by them that had the cunning to stay at home and send me to fight for them? Don’t talk to me or to any soldier of the war being right. No war is right (203).

But for similar incomprehension, Dennis also directs scorn at Ireland’s “tyrant” (209) – his mother and former fiancée, Teresa. While Mrs. O’Flaherty sees Dennis as a traitor for accepting the V.C. from the “English king” (208), Teresa wants him to return to the Front only in hopes of obtaining a “wound pension” should he be injured (212) (anticipating the mercenarial women of Sean O’Casey’s plays *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Silver Tassie*). Insofar as his experience is unknowable to them, so is Dennis’s motivation for service:

[How can you know what you never seen as well as me that was dug into the continent of Europe for six months, and was buried in the earth of it three times with the shells bursting on top of me? I tell you I know what I’m about. I have my own reasons for taking part in this great conflict. I’d be ashamed to stay at home and not fight when everybody else is fighting (209-10).

As Shaw says of his protagonist, Dennis’s “own experiences in the trenches has induced in him a terrible realism and an unbearable candor” (quoted in Lawrence and Greene 95). Dennis claims only those men who like him, with him, have witnessed the
horrors of combat. That claim pervades much Irish literature of the First World War and marks the crucial difference between politicizing oneself, and being politicized despite one’s own voice (or silence).

In an insightful article, Terry Phillips claims that this play’s universal warning against working-class exploitation “reveals the socialist position from which Shaw wrote” (136), whereon “the class makeup of an audience for O’Flaherty V.C. is more important than its nationality” (140). The question of Irish recruitment and enlistment is telling in this regard. Dennis represents a denationalized identity. He denies any claims to heroism signified by his V.C., since ironically, he has enlisted in Britain’s army out of economic necessity only then to be disowned by Irish nationalists despite his support for his family through his separation allowance. In 1915, Dennis sees an Ireland already rife with the War’s contradictions. It is intolerable to him – and of him. Thus, at the play’s end he chooses returning to “the war’s alarums” over home (218). Through this choice, Dennis claims affinity solely to those men who like him, have endured combat – in what Jon Patočka calls the War’s “solidarity of the shaken” (134).7

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the Irish authors who were on the front lines and wrote of the Great War between 1914-1918: George Birmingham’s Gossamer (1915) and Our Casualty (1917), St. John Ervine’s Changing Winds (1917), and Patrick MacGill’s Rifleman MacGill’s War (1915) and The Brown Brethren (1917). These authors represent a significant diversity whose demographies inform their literary

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7 With the First World War in mind, Jon Patočka refers to the “solidarity of the shaken” in Heretical Essays as those who consolidate themselves based on a shared persecution or shocking experience, like war, in order to resist state-level impersonal power and coercion. He writes that “the solidarity of the shaken is built up in persecution and uncertainty: that is its front line, quiet, without fanfare or sensation even there where this aspect of the ruling Force seeks to seize it” (135).
content. The Belfast-born George Birmingham was a Gaelic Leaguer and Church of Ireland rector who was commissioned as a Chaplain to the Forces in France from 1915-16; St. John Ervine, a Belfast Fabian socialist, Shaw biographer, and director of the Abbey Theatre enlisted in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers after witnessing the Easter Rising, and ended up losing his leg at Flanders; and the Donegal-born, Catholic working-class expat Patrick MacGill enlisted in the London Irish Rifles and was wounded at Loos in 1915. As veterans who all wrote semiautobiographical fiction (some during their service), these authors also in a way, form a solidarity of the shaken. Their texts are testimonies of the War. From Birmingham’s and Ervine’s ambivalently unionist-nationalist “landocrats” who enlist for combat, to MacGill’s working-class Irish soldiers of disparate loyalties, their novels testify to a fluidity of identities, motivations, and attitudes toward the War and the Irish Question. Throughout this chapter, I will suggest that such representations qualify, even oppose the south’s and north’s distinct state-oriented, shared memories of the War, especially those that gained traction around the pivotal year of 1916. This literature provides answers to the question of why Irish Great War literature “is a category whose existence is only just coming to be acknowledged” (Phillips PMGI 51). Their narratives are counter-voices. They clash with the “authoritative” accounts proffered by Irish states, accounts of “the powerful, those who have perhaps more of a stake than most in concealing the contingency of forms of social and political organization” (Edkins 5). My intent is to argue that as alternate, contiguous narratives of survivors, these texts “challenge the structures of power and authority” upheld by state narrativizations: they work to “transcend boundaries of culture and social group” (Edkins 5).
But before turning to the novels, we should address a few questions that this paradigm might raise. For instance, to what extent were these novelists consciously writing counter-narratives, or from what point of view can we read them as such? These questions lead us to the figurative battleground surrounding 1914-1918, that of Ireland’s future identity as the north and south vied for distinct political authority in contestations over Home Rule and separatism, and union and Partition. Keith Jeffrey identifies the Great War as the defining moment in Ireland’s twentieth century political development (1-4). This has merit, for the War had far-reaching influence – the Third Home Rule Bill’s postponement (and ultimate veto by the Easter Rising), Ulster’s subsequent feverish cry for union, the War for Independence, the Anglo-Irish Treaty and Partition, and the consequent Irish Civil War. Moreover, the Boer War-era split between constitutional and separatist nationalism not only fed into 1914’s anti- and pro-recruitment factions in Ireland’s south, but the Home Rule crisis’s new contingence on the War further catalyzed the south and north’s paramilitarization. By 1914, Ireland’s contestations for political authority had serious stake in the War. As thousands of constitutional nationalists pledged their service to Britain in hopes that Parliament would fulfill Home Rule, so did Ulster unionists, but for continued union. Meanwhile at home, separatists saw the War as an instrumental moment for possible rebellion.8

8 Daniel O’Connell’s republican dictum, “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity,” was vivified by the leaders of the Rising, who saw England’s occupation with the First World War as a perfect moment for revolution, as evident in the second paragraph of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic: “Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe [that is, Germany], but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory” (Proclamation 1916).
The fact was the First World War was an anticipatory moment in Irish politics. Fighting for (or against) England was a means of legitimizing Irish political authority. But it was also anticipated that these legitimizations would entail death, and the rhetoric of sacrifice. Inevitably, the War's dead and wounded became that sacrifice. Far too often this was not the choice nor intent of individual, private soldiers, but that of soon-to-be Irish states post facto – as one soldier in Frank McGuinness’s Sons of Ulster laments, “We are not making a sacrifice. Jesus, you’ve seen this war. We are the sacrifice” [my italics] (52). The tendency for men to become political casualties is important to this dissertation’s focus on trauma and narrative; for the north and south inscribed the dead into their own collective, subsequently shared memories through communication and commemoration, integrating this immediate traumatic past into narratives of their distinct state “histories.” But here, I would like pose a question that Edkins raises about state-level uses of war and the dead: “do political communities such as the modern state survive in part through the scripting of these events as emergencies, or even, indeed, as traumatic?” (5). We should not deem the Republic’s and Northern Ireland’s mourning as solely political posturing. However, we should be attentive to their scripting insofar as it eclipses or subsumes personal experience – especially traumatic sufferings which neither sanction nor fully align with it.

Certainly much was at stake in Irish recruiting even though many Irishmen like Shaw’s O’Flaherty initially had little knowledge of this. As Paul Fussell avers, what was surprising about the 1914 declaration of war was “that trouble was expected in Ulster rather than Flanders” (24), for the Third Home Rule bill had put Ireland on the brink of
civil war. When H. H. Asquith’s Liberals introduced the third bill in April 1912, Ulster’s marginal unionist majority saw it as a direct threat to forcibly concede its centuries-long legacy of loyalism. This political tension culminated with rapid sectarian paramilitarization in Ulster. Five-hundred thousand Ulstermen and women signed the Solemn League and Covenant and formed the Ulster Volunteers, vowing to oppose Home Rule by force if necessary. In an effort to consolidate the north’s paramilitary factions, Sir Edward Carson and James Craig formed the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), pledging a body of 100,000 men to the War. After the UVF imported 246,000 rifles and 3,000,000 rounds from Germany to Larne on 24-5 April 1914, southern nationalists responded by founding the Irish Volunteers, a 160,000-man paramilitary to guard Home Rule and who in response, subsequently imported German weapons to Howth in July. By mid-1914, Ulster was described as “an armed camp” (Fussell 25).

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9 In 1911, a sea-change swept the home rule debate when the Parliament Act of 1911 restricted the House of Lords’ ability to veto the population’s will as represented by the House of Commons. This act brought the Home Ruler-Unionist debate nearly to a boil, which resulted in Ulster’s and the south’s paramilitarization which exceeded into the War years. Historian J. J. Lee states it best: “by removing the last parliamentary bulwark against home rule legislation for Ireland, this major measure of constitutional reform in the United Kingdom outraged Irish unionists, whose infuriated reaction to the threat of home rule unleashed violence into twentieth-century Irish politics” (1).

10 It is important to note, however, that the North and South’s militarization at its very basis stemmed from a mutual but differentiable shortsightedness about Home Rule’s effect on Ireland. Ulster’s armament in response to the Bill was in a sense, an overreaction. The Bill proposed quite limited self-government for Ireland. Westminster still controlled defense and foreign policy, relations to the Crown, custom and excise, land purchase, the police force for six years, and safeguards against religious discrimination. Ultimately, Ulster’s fear, that the Bill would move Ireland closer to full independence, was as unsupportable as nationalists’ faith that the Bill would do just that. Housed in that faith was the expectation that Ulster would have to concede its loyalism to the English crown. And for nationalists, that identity must be conceded, as it violated their sense of a unified, all-Ireland independence. But just when the Commons passed the Bill in May 1914, and Home Rule looked imminent, the situation stalemated. The Lords returned the Bill with an exclusion clause, an indefinite opt-out for Ulster’s nine counties. For a detailed discussion of this debate, see: Lee, J.J.. “Rebellion 1912-1922.” Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society.
As traditional and "revisionist" historians agree, what brought Ireland almost to blows in 1914 depended less on measurable variables than on psychological ones stemming from deep-seated, differing conceptions of Irish race and nationhood – roughly, Ireland as Catholic, independent, and unified on the one hand, and Protestant and loyal to the Crown on the other. Conceptions of Irish nationality in these delimitations relied less on geographical boundaries than on attritional disputes fought between Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists on the premises of “ethnic” superiority or bigotry regarding competence in political rule. Despite the Third Bill's limited provisions for Irish self-government, it abashed Ulster's self-identification as a nation. As J. J. Lee suggests, it was “from a sense of violated machismo, that the unionist rank and file, outraged by the very notion of a right to self-government for a baser breed, revolted against the bill” (7). However, Home Rulers’ reluctance to take seriously Ulster’s political grievances and its willingness to militarily defend those grievances likewise amounted to violating Ulster's right to opinion on Ireland's diplomatic trajectory.

Far from diffusing nationalist-unionist hostility, the War not only marked a culmination of Ireland’s sectarian paramilitarization, but politicians channeled those men into the War for political purposes. When Westminster postponed the third bill’s implementation on account of the Great War’s outbreak, both Edward Carson (the Irish Unionist Alliance leader) and John Redmond (the Irish Parliamentary Party leader) attempted to redirect the UV and IV respectively into the British forces. The two men had opposing objectives in mind. Carson hoped to swing Britain away from granting Home Rule while Redmond hoped to hold Britain to it. This became a type of war in
itself, as “recruitment was used by both sides in a curious game of one-upmanship as Sir Edward Carson and John Redmond vied with each other to curry favor with the British Government” (Haughey 53). At Carson’s behest, 35,000 UVF entered the 36th (Ulster) Division, known thereafter as “Carson’s men”; in the south, 169,000 IVs took up Redmond’s call to British arms, forming the National Volunteers who served in the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions up until the Somme in 1916. In committing Irishmen to the War effort, both men intended to secure their party’s interests, Carson for Ulster Unionism and Redmond for all-Ireland Home Rule. But these men’s Home Rule-Unionist diplomatic ambitions (both seeing “England’s difficulty as Ireland’s opportunity”), do not fully account for common soldiers’ enlistment. This is especially visible in nationalist Ireland when the IVF split over Redmond’s call to British arms. Separatist Eoin MacNeill splintered the IVF by founding the Irish Volunteers, 11,000 men “pledged to the cause of Ireland, of all Ireland, and of Ireland only” (Jeffery IGW 24). As MacNeill consolidated separatism at home, determining “that the war must not pass without an Irish insurrection” (Bartlett 376), Redmond’s men marched to the “enemy’s” war in Europe.

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11 These intentions were made clear in both men’s public speeches. For instance, on 3 September 1914, speaking to Ulster Unionists, Carson endorsed Ulster’s contributions to the War as a bulwark against Home Rule: “If we are betrayed whilst we are acting loyally to our country, the infamy will not be ours. […] We do not seek to purchase terms by selling our patriotism … on the question of Home Rule we stand where we have always been. It will never be law in our country. […] Our duty is clear […] knowing that the very basis of our political faith is our belief in the greatness of the United Kingdom, and our Empire, to our Volunteers, I say without hesitation: Go and help save your country” (Belfast Newsletter 4 September 1914). That same month, Redmond’s declaration on behalf of the Irish Party reinforced the south’s commitment on the premise of anticipating an Ireland united under Home Rule, and for Ireland to unite itself through its commitment to the Great War: “I … appeal to our countrymen of a different creed, and of opposite political opinions, […] to allow this great war […] to swallow up all the small issues in the domestic government of Ireland which now divide us; that, as our soldiers are going to fight, to she their blood, and to die at each other’s side, in the same army, against the same enemy, […] their union in the field may lead to a union in their home, and that their blood may be the seal that will bring all Ireland together in one nation” (Deane, ed. Field Day II 345).
However, while the IV was founded to oppose Home Rule, this does not mean that Redmond’s NVs necessarily supported it, nor that Redmond’s diplomatic maneuvering even influenced the Volunteers’ enlistment (as the same can be said for those who enlisted in the 36th (Ulster) Division). Many Irishmen found their call to duty owing either to more abstract, unquantifiable ambitions: to the liberation of small, Catholic nations like Belgium (a motivation that even high-profile IV separatists like Patrick Pearse condoned), to adventurism, fraternal loyalty, youthful impulse, and certainly to the king’s shilling. Some desired experience with arms (a small margin even for separatist ends) – and underscoring many of these, to enact, in Jeffery’s words, “that powerful mythic figure, the ‘fighting Irishman’” according to the “supposed Irish martial tradition,” an appeal that both Redmond and recruiting authorities took advantage of (Jeffery /GW 21). If such aspects influenced the Volunteers, then they surely influenced the bulk of Irish enlisters. In fact, over half of the 95,000 enlisters had no political ties or connections whatsoever to the Volunteers (36).

The point is that domestic politics can only partially account for Irishmen’s mobilization in the First World War. Yet, even before 1 August 1914 the private soldier often unwittingly fell under the weight political parties predetermining the way their service would in turn serve Home Rule or Partition back home. As Thomas Hennessey shows, nationalist, separatist, and unionist politicizations gained traction amongst the public via speeches, recruitment campaigns, and newspapers from 1912-1914. Pervasive to domestic politics were reiterations of oppositional (though similar) idioms of sacrifice, legacies of defense, and national myths. These were accentuated and acted on in the pivotal year of 1916. The Rising unfolded on account of England’s occupation
on the continent, and that rebellion subsequently placed more pressure on Ulster to claim the Somme for sealing its loyalty in blood. As Fran Brearton states of Irish soldiers: “the Irish National Volunteer, however straightforward and politically validated his motives might have seemed in 1914, found the goalposts effectively changed by the 1916 Rising and its aftermath. It was also true, in a different way, for unionist volunteers in the north, whose actions were politically validated as a demonstration of loyalty to the extent that their personal experience was written out of history” (9).

In the next chapter, we will not only consider the pervasiveness of the south and Ulster’s competing narrativizations of 1916, but also in Nigel Hunt’s and Jenny Edkins’s terms, the competition between Irish states and combatants in making claims to traumatic suffering. As postwar authors like Sean O’Casey will suggest, sectarian factions too often eclipsed personal suffering by anticipating, claiming, then commemorating specific traumas in order to legitimize their state-formations, at the expense of others. But by turning at present to the semiautobiographical fiction of Birmingham, Ervine, and MacGill spanning 1915-1918, we can begin to get a holistic sense of how 1916 marks a rupture. Like Shaw’s O’Flaherty, Birmingham’s and Ervine’s protagonists initially show little if any cognizance for the way Irishmen would be increasingly politicized by enlisting in the British army. In fact, they and their characters are much like the transnationally-inclined Irish expat and veteran Patrick MacGill – all three authors and their works serve as evidence that “the eve of the First World War saw an Ireland in which a fluid sense of national identity was evident,” while the years 1914-1918 “created the circumstances which led to a form of psychological partition which could not have been predicted before the war” (Hennessey 235).
St. John Ervine and James Owen Hannay (George A. Birmingham)

Both of Belfast Protestant lineage, George Birmingham and St. John Ervine were Home Rulers early in life and well-known authors throughout the United Kingdom. Their popularity arose partly from their traditional, but challenging realism. In the novels of our study, they candidly and comprehensively portray the gossamer threads of identity in an Ireland racked by the winds of modernization and warfare. Aptly enough, Birmingham’s *Gossamer* and Ervine’s *Changing Winds* are about the Great War as the modern dilemma. These novels depict the War tearing Irish identity between Irish-British, nationalist-unionist, Catholic-Protestant, north-south, agrarian-industrial, socialist-capitalist. Birmingham and Ervine inflect themselves in their protagonists Sir James Digby and Henry Quinn (Taylor 141 and Woodbridge 208), and in both novels, the War signals for these young men crises of allegiance and duty on account of their lineage. Both are inheritors to the estates of centuries-old Protestant unionist families. But Digby and Quinn are indifferent to their families’ lineages of landocratic, agrarian commercialism. Digby opts for the life of a London-centered, cosmopolitan gentleman, as does Quinn. For their own reasons, both are drawn toward enlisting in Britain’s New Army. The two characters represent the well-rounded progressivity of the urban, secular, self-made Irishman within early 1900s Britain, a demographic whose prevalence is too often unacknowledged in readings of Irish literature. Read together, *Gossamer* and *Changing Winds* evince the inescapability of the Irish Question for such men, and how fully enmeshed that question became with the First World War. By bringing these novels together, we can observe their similarly nuanced depictions of the attitudes that Irishmen developed both through and toward their service. Digby’s and Quinn’s positions exceed commitment to any one country or nation: while
acknowledging the pervasive, utilitarian impulse toward sacrificing oneself in war for patriotism or nationalism, they eschew the tendency for war to be mandated as “compulsory” sacrifice, or for such ideology to selectively claim and prioritize one particular sacrifice at the expense of others. This is apt to both novels given that Gossamer “anticipates that cleavage in Irish loyalty created when Easter 1916 erupted in the midst of the Irish Great War effort” (Foster 397), and since Changing Winds concludes with Quinn’s witnessing that cleavage firsthand in Dublin, a final catalyst which ironically, ultimately prompts his enlistment.

The two novels’ Edwardian styles reinforce their form; meandering and contemplative, they represent the men’s psychological ambivalences. The novels are distinct, however, in that Gossamer begins with Sir James Digby having already seen action in 1915, wherein he is wounded, given the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), and resigns his commission though returns to his regiment. In Changing Winds, Henry Quinn leaves Balleyraine for U.C.D., then London, where he lives with a cohort of young English and Belfast professionals whose eventual deaths in the War (and that of his former nationalist tutor in the Rising) strengthen his fortitude to finally enlist himself. Written in 1915, Gossamer is our point of departure. Its inspiration was Birmingham contemplating his own duty to the War effort while on the Lusitania’s last transatlantic voyage. He composed his novel that same year while serving as a chaplain in France (Taylor 143-4),12 and through Digby, the wounded veteran, Gossamer begins with aspects of Birmingham’s own entrance into the War. The wryly self-effacing Digby

retrospectively tells of his lead-in to the War also starting on a transatlantic Cunard steamer.

From the outset, the novel is about identity, or at least for Digby, his positionality. The bulk of the narrative entails Dibgy revealing his own sense of self after his combat injury, and he does so by triangulating associations with the novel’s two other main characters, Gorman, an Irish Nationalist MP and Home Rule ambassador, and Ascher, a London-based Jewish-English (though actually German) millionaire financier, both whom he first meets in 1913 aboard the steamer. For Digby, the men come to represent two significantly different, cosmopolitan identities: Ascher is an independent, *laissez faire*-minded financier who ultimately chooses to remain dedicated to his firm’s clients instead of returning to Germany to enlist, and Gorman an objective, altruistic Nationalist who sees Irishmen’s War service as crucial to both continued British relations and Home Rule. As one who appreciates individuals and disdains making assumptions about classes or their “ideals,” Digby upholds these men as exemplars of responsibility, Ascher to his investors around the globe, Gorman to his country and constituency. And more than he admits, Digby himself is concerned about where his responsibility lies – a concern he tacitly knows is exacerbated by public assumptions about his class’s nationality and contribution to the War effort.

Compared to Shaw’s *O’Flaherty V.C.*, Birmingham’s *Gossamer* more accurately portends the War presaging crisis for the Ascendancy. Reflecting on the events leading to 1914, Digby recounts the demise of his baronetcy. He sold his land to tenants, and to his pleasure has become a middle-class, international investor. Now with an almost half-jesting, self-resigned fatalism he pronounces himself to be “of that unfortunate class
of Irishman whom neither Gorman nor anyone else will recognize as being Irish at all”; he is “a man of no country,” “of no political opinions of any sort,” and one who “no definition of the Irish people has yet been framed to include” (6-10). Sir James Digby certainly did not go to war out of patriotism. In fact, his wounding and DSO are grounds whereon he altogether extricates himself, like O’Flaherty, from claims to heroism or duty to England. It is after 1918 when Digby tells us:

I am a man of no country and therefore know nothing of the emotion of patriotism. This seems a curious thing to say to a man who has just had his leg mangled in a battle; […] I went out to the fight, when the fight came on, but only because I could not avoid going. I never supposed that I was fighting for my country. […] I cannot manage to feel myself an Englishman. Even now, though I have fought in their army without incurring the reproach of cowardice, I cannot get out of the habit of looking at Englishmen from a distance (6-9).

However, while Digby does not necessarily look favorably on his so-called “immunity from the fever of patriotism” (7), he does reveal how he ultimately “could not avoid going” (7). His complicated position is not dissimilar from that of Henry Quinn in Changing Winds.

Younger, less assertive, but more candid than Digby, Henry Quinn also descends from a line of Protestant, though Ulster, unionists whose father, a new estate owner, is not only an avid cultural nationalist, but intends to spearhead agricultural reform and Home Rule, despite opposition from fellow Ulstermen. A bildungsroman (partially of Ervine’s early life), Changing Winds documents the personal and public challenges Henry faces whose apotheosis is the Great War and Easter Rising. He deeply respects his father’s progressive nationalism (a Home Rule which does not negate unionism) and his regionally-minded profession of agricultural science; moreover, he strongly desires to emulate his father’s manly courage, which he strongly
regrets lacking. Nevertheless, Quinn chooses to become a professional novelist, moving to Bloomsbury, London with his former schoolfellows. They are all Englishmen and Fabian socialists: Gilbert Farlow an aspiring playwright, Ninian Graham an engineer, and Roger Carey a lawyer. Like Digby, Quinn is a privileged cosmopolitan. He takes interest in personal lives (including courting an Irish peasant girl, Sheila Morgan, and two English ladies, Mary Graham and Cecily). Likewise, he keenly studies British public affairs though distances himself from them – though not because of a war-numbed indifference (or resistance) like Digby’s, but from his self-professed cowardice.

Both Digby and Quinn represent an Irishness common at the turn of the century. They are professionalizing sons of a declining landed gentry who nevertheless maintain access to that society, and who at once love Ireland and England, though selectively, and with careful restraint. Both men retreat from the winds of change that begin to strain the fabric of Irish and British life. But as they come to realize, shelter is futile: outside Parliament’s walls, Home Rule now confronts a physical adversary as the UVF arms, and the Irish Volunteers retaliate by arming; the Curragh Mutiny opens a chasm between Unionism and Ulster loyalism; and by the time the UVF and IV both import guns from Germany, war is declared on the continent sending all Britain into anxiety, confusion, and armament, of which the UVF and IV are part. *Gossamer* and *Changing Winds* especially convey the heightened alarum that 1914 signaled for Irishmen of this changing class. Not only moved by Britain’s seemingly ubiquitous mandates for men to act on patriotism, Digby and Quinn also feel the pervasive pull of Irish loyalties – ambivalently, to protect the union, to aid Home Rule, and defend “small nations” like Belgium. Moreover, they are dogged by the fact that ironically, going to war may sure up
their chief interests, which are professional and institutional ones; for Digby, it is extending international finance even into Ireland, for Quinn, it is national reform of an all-Irlander type, advocating (Belfast) industrialism, trade unionism, social outreach, and reforming education, agriculture, infrastructure, and advancing “self-regeneration” by combatting “the Publican, the Priest, the Politician, and the Poet” (534).

*Gossamer* and *Changing Winds* ultimately prescribe the evenhandedness with which their protagonists enter the War on grounds of utilitarian, national responsibility. And the novels are at pains to show how even ostensibly oppositional notions of responsibility are worthy of equal merit. For Digby and Quinn, wounding and death bring this realization. A central dilemma in *Gossamer* involves Digby’s friend Ascher seeking guidance on whether he should return to Germany to enlist or keep his investors secure by staying in England to manage his firm. While out of responsibility to his regiment Digby claims to have “no choice” but to return (508), he affirms Ascher’s individual sense of responsibility in not enlisting:

> When I think of that business of his, […] the immense complexity of it, the confidence of thousands of men in each other, all resting at last on a faith in the integrity of one man, or rather of a firm—the existence of such a business, world-wide, international, entirely independent of all ties of race, nationality, language, religion, in a certain sense wider than any of these—it’s a great, human affair, not English nor German, not the white man's nor the yellow man’s, not Christian nor Buddhist nor Mohammedan, just human. Ascher owes some kind of loyalty to a thing like that. It’s a frightfully complicated question; but on the whole I think he is right (509-10).

But only after Digby is wounded at the Front does he develop this affinity with Ascher’s sense of loyalty – a personal, apolitical, and supranational one. “I have no country, but I believe I can understand Ascher as well as Gorman does. […] Ascher suffered severely because at a critical moment in his life a feeling of loyalty to his native land gripped him
hard. I have also suffered, a rending of the body at least comparable to Ascher’s rending of the soul. But I have not the consolation of feeling that I am a hero” (7). Like Shaw’s O’Flaherty, Digby learns to eschew claims to heroism though he returns to war; similarly, combat has taught him that “loyalty” is contingent on circumstance, as is its merited expression.

The supranational purview that motivates Digby back to combat is also what finally bolsters Quinn’s courage to enlist. Only after his childhood friends are killed in combat does Quinn find his resolve. Gilbert and Ninian quickly perish in Gallipoli and France after enlisting in the spirit of altruism. The shock Quinn feels at their deaths is accentuated when after getting caught in the Rising, he learns that John Marsh has also been killed. For Quinn, all three men embody what Marsh deemed sacred: “men still willing to die for their ideals, even when they know they haven’t a chance of success” (588). Moreover, even beyond Digby, Quinn feels a sense of noblesse oblige that not only extends to Ireland and Britain, but one that makes his overcoming cowardice seem an obligation. Yet, while Changing Winds sanctions bravery, it takes O’Flaherty V.C.’s and Gossamer’s positions on de-sanctifying heroism. This plays out in Quinn’s ruminations on ridding his cowardice:

But in his heart, he knew that he was afraid to go. […] The fear of death was in him and he could not allay it. The fear of mutilation, of madness, of blindness, of shattered nerves sent him shuddering from the thought of offering himself as a soldier . . . and mixed up with this devastating fear was a queer vanity that almost conquered the fear. “If I were to go in, I might do something . . . something distinguished!” There were times when he gave himself up to dreams of glory, saw himself decorated with high awards for bravery. He would imagine himself performing some impossible act of courage . . . saving an Army Corps from destruction . . . showing resource in a period of crisis, and so bringing salvation where utter loss had seemed inevitable. But these times of glory were few and brief: he saw himself most often, killed ingloriously, inconspicuously, one
of a crowd, blown, perhaps, to pieces or buried in bombarded earthworks (514).

Here, as in later Great War literature by authors as diverse as Liam O’Flaherty, Wilfred Owen, and Erich Remarque, Changing Winds provides an early depiction of a recurring tension: the pressure (or desire) to negate the anxiety of the War’s anonymous, violent obliteration by preforming selfless, heroic acts which could affirm one’s manhood.

Quinn comes to view this call to arms not in purely Irish or English terms, but through a transnational “patriotism” (525), which will later define the works of Irish combatants like Patrick MacGill, as Phillips points out (PMI 52-3). Abjuring nationality and class, Quinn envisions an inclusive identitarianism in Britain’s “defence”:

There was here no question of birth or possessions: the slum-man felt this stirring in his nature as strongly as the landlord. In that sudden, swift rising of young men when war was declared, each man instinctively hurrying to the place of enlistment, there were men from slums and men from mansions, all of them, in an instant, made corporate, given unity, brought to communion, partaking of a sacrament, becoming at that moment a sacrament themselves… (525).

However, with prescience, he anticipates and overtly resists the tendency to cast combatants as utilitarian sacrifices – the type of top-down politicization that would appropriate idioms and performances of bloodshed in post-1916 Ireland. Quinn continues:

But if this stirring in one’s nature made a man both a sacrament and a partaker of a sacrament, was there not yet something horrible in this spilling of blood, this breaking of bodies? Was this sacrament only to be consummated by the butcher? Was there no healing sacrament which, when a man partook of it, gave him life and more life? Was there not an honourable rivalry among nations, each to be better than the other, to replace this brawling about boundaries, this pettifogging with frontiers? Was there to be no end to this killing and preparing for killing? (525).

Quinn’s words are of the First World War, but they portend the violent reprisals over national boundaries that would bleed Ireland well after the War. Changing Winds thus
concludes with Quinn’s resolve to enlist, yet without bravado. Anticipating death, he turns to “England, France and Flanders, and the fields of blood and pain” (571).

Like his protagonist, Ervine left Dublin right after the Rising to enlist. Early on, Ervine admired the revolutionists’ spirit although strongly opposed their timing and methods. He enlisted in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers; and Patrick Maume notes, “he joined an Irish rather than a British regiment due to an impulse of hatred for a London crowd cheering Casement’s execution” (73). Yet Ervine viewed the Great War as begun by the old at the expense of the young. After losing his leg in combat in 1918 and suffering from lifelong pain, he also suffered the pain of seeing his hopes for a post-War, all-Ireland Dominion crushed. He condemned the atrocities on both sides of the Irish Civil War and became disillusioned with what he saw as the Free State’s and Northern Ireland’s recidivist antipathies. Likewise, George Birmingham was also quite stricken with events post-1916, although more reservedly. It was actually the Rising, he claimed, and waiting for the Censor to allow correspondence while he was in France that turned him white-haired with “miserable anxiety” (quoted in Taylor 144). But the distaste with domestic politics that Ervine spoke of vehemently after 1916, Birmingham commended to paper with a lighter hand. Written nearly the same time as his equally neglected memoir *A Padre in France* (1917), Birmingham’s *Our Casualty and Other Stories* offers semiautobiographical glimpses of the First World War.

Replete with New Army privates, seasoned professional soldiers, surgeons, chaplains, V.A.D. nurses, and civilians, the stories provide cutaways of the battlefront, “the rear,” and home-front training, balancing Birmingham’s characteristic satire with the solemnity demanded by war. *Our Casualty* oscillates between continental scenes of the
War (even the Suez defense) and Ireland on the brink of civil hostility in early 1914. In fact, the Irish Question surrounding the War is a common thread to the collection; written in 1917, it is an apt depiction of Irish sectarianism forming a “seamless robe” (i) of experience with the Great War, to use Keith Jeffery’s phrase. Whereas in Our Casualty Birmingham retains Gossamer’s grave earnestness about combat violence and death, he poignantly satirizes the paramilitarization arising from the Home Rule crisis. Nothing and no one escapes Birmingham’s line of fire, from Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers to Belfast Orangemen, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and Carsonite loyalists. With keen perspicuity, Birmingham’s stories reveal the underlying (and unacknowledged) similarities in the south’s and north’s bases for militarization; that is, they expose the Irish political scene’s hegemonic mandates interlinking martial action with manliness, the type of performative action appropriated into national legitimizations especially after Easter 1916 and the Somme. Moreover, the stories display Birmingham’s awareness that if England was “war-excited” in 1914, the move toward militarization was also ubiquitous in a “scarcely less excited Ireland” (quoted in Taylor 138).

Such interrelated tendencies toward militarization are introduced in the collection’s leading story, eponymously entitled “Our Casualty.” Setting the text’s comic dimension, “Our Casualty” is told by an elderly, unnamed narrator in the fictional seaside suburb of Balleyhaine, presumably in the north of Ireland. With seriousness, the narrator conveys the exploits of the Balleyhaine Veterans Corps, a self-appointed reserve corps comprised of all senior-aged businessmen whose sons are fighting the War overseas. To prepare for a possible German U-boat bombardment or invasion, the
BVC simulates tactical drilling on the coast with trenches, reserves, relief schedules, and casualty searches. With a parochially senile though boy-scoutish sense of military bearing, the narrator recounts one drill wherein the eldest corps member, Cotter, almost dies while acting as an MIA casualty.

As an overture to the collection, “Our Casualty” introduces tropes pertinent to Ireland’s politics surrounding the Great War. The story reiterates a knee-jerk commonplace about 1914-1918 – that the business end of War is of the older, well-off generation, while the young do the actual fighting. In the Irish context, it suggests more: as many historians point out, the siege mentality that Ulster held toward Home Rule’s threat found expression in paramilitarization, and rather impetuously. The BVC takes arming itself and emulating “the true military spirit” (9) to an extreme. In “grey uniforms” with “brassards,” they learn to “talk like soldiers” and appoint their only actual veteran, Haines, to oversee drilling operations, including rigging the beach trenches with barbed wire. They also keep women from “regarding them as a joke” by forming them into an ambulance brigade (9-11). But “Our Casualty” tasks the north’s political cries for “home defense” by casting them as somewhat delusional. In a comic idiom of espirit-de-corps, the protagonist recounts the entire suburb mobilizing on the stormiest night of the winter to simulate an invasion. To include Cotter, they conspire to appoint him their casualty and his house the field hospital. But as they lose themselves in imagining a “German attack” (22), they literally lose Cotter who almost dies from exposure when he refuses to respond to calls for his location, claiming, “casualties don’t shout” (24).

As the police apprehend the seventy-two year old man, “Our Casualty” puns on the reproof of Irishmen “playing soldiers.” Without a tinge of irony, the narrator
concludes: “I do not know if any medals will be given to volunteers after the war. Cotter certainly deserves one. I have never heard a story of finer devotion to duty than his.” (24). But satirizing such intractable delusion in *Our Casualty* is also extended to actual British training. In the next story, “Getting Even,” an unnamed battalion undergoes excessive training in England, August 1914, under the command of “the Colonel,” an “enthusiastic realist” who insists on turning field exercises into ceaseless “‘stunts’ and ‘shows’” (29). The only one who makes “no secret of his opinion that the Colonel was overdoing the ‘spit and polish business’” (26) is the field surgeon, McMahon, the one Irishman appointed in this battalion of English Midlanders. Everyone likes him, including the Colonel, despite McMahon’s “cheerful indifference to the energetic fussiness which prevailed” (27). Within view of a privileged, comfort-seeking Brigadier, McMahon circumvents orders to treat a myriad of simulated wounds by declaring every single “casualty” dead on arrival. Preceding Liam O’Flaherty’s *Return of the Brute* of the next chapter, Birmingham’s character “gets even” (more lightheartedly) against what he deems a hypocritical, exploitative chain of command. Through such scenes, *Our Casualty* gradually satirizes the tendency for “overdoing discipline” (44); for in the subsequent story, “A Matter of Discipline,” a wounded soldier – still very much alive – is actually prepared for burial against his will because the RAMC casualty list identifies him as killed in action.

Tellingly though, *Our Casualty* displays its strongest comedic force in “A Gun-Running Episode” and “Ireland For Ever,” two stories which satirize the extreme farce associated with domestic, sectarian militarization. In “A Gun-Running Episode” the narrator relays a conversation with Sam MacAllister, a boisterous yet likeable Trinity
College student whom he just bailed out of jail for half-kiddingly harassing a policeman. Though Sam’s father is a TCD dean, the chaplain of an Orange Lodge, and “hopes to march at the head of his regiment of the [Ulster] Volunteers,” the narrator is pleased that Sam himself has “no political convictions” (157). Sam claims that after he was bailed out, he was approached by Hazlewood, an American-accented man impressed with Sam’s penchant for harassing policemen (we as readers deduce that Hazlewood is a Sinn Feiner who takes Sam’s shenanigans more seriously than he ought). Hazlewood recruits Sam for a sailing crew, which he avidly joins, only to find out once at sea, and to his delight for reckless adventure, that he is on a gun-running mission. He is more entertained when he realizes that he has not been smuggling for the Ulster Volunteer Force, but for the National Volunteers into County Down, Ulster, reveling in the fact that “Protestants,” “probably [Ulster] Volunteers themselves” (157) even helped unload the weapons and ammo.

The story takes on a lighthearted, reconciliatory tone when Sam mistakenly transports the guns not to the IVs, but to a UVF headquarters in Armagh wherein he finds his father and Dopping, a “retired cavalry colonel” and “tremendous loyalist” (161-3). Having somehow gained entrance by faking the UVF’s coded signals, Sam finds out that being “a loyal man” (159) in Ireland has many meanings, for he then sees Colonel O’Connell of the IVs enter (a figure of “disloyalty” Sam jokes (162)), claiming that he has likewise received the wrong shipment of guns. Yet, the two colonels shake hands civilly and agree to keep their mixed-up shipments, vowing to meet again in “proper battle” (163). The narrator is stricken by Sam’s keen insights on the episode, despite his ostensible naivety. Sam does not “see that there’s much to choose between” the IV’s
and UVF’s resistance to the crown (158); moreover, given O’Connell’s and Dopping’s diplomacy, he claims England should remove “regular soldiers” from the Home Rule crisis “and leave us to settle the matter ourselves” (164).

The connection between the performativity of Irish paramilitarization and the Great War is made more explicit in “Ireland For Ever,” a darkly satirical account of another UVF gun-running exploit gone wrong, this time with Germans. The story opens in a Belfast quay on May 1914 as Lord Dunseverick prepares to smuggle German arms. Though a baron, wealthy and foppish, Dunseverick is “a hero with the Belfast working-man” whose speeches as an honorary UVF general move the men “to a degree of martial ardour, unprecedented even in Ulster, in his opposition to Home Rule” (165-6). Dunseverick gets swept up in his own rhetorical performances, and Belfastmen take him seriously when his “enthusiasm led him to say that he would welcome the German Emperor at the head of his legions as the deliverer of Ulster from the tyranny of a Parliament in Dublin” (166). The story in fact tasks the Ulster mythos of remaining “loyal unto itself first” (Murphy 63) as Dunseverick spouts, even “against the cursed English” (188). In the north of Ireland, that very mentality (however unrealistic) took expression not just in word but in martial action. Dunseverick (comically) exemplifies this, for without proper military training, he and two Belfastmen, McMunn and Ginty, clandestinely steam to Hamburg, Germany for UVF arms. But things fall apart. A German Captain, Von Edelstein, boards their vessel intending to supply the UVF with machine guns free of charge as a gift from the Kaiser; having heard Dunseverick’s harangues against England, the Germans believe that the UVF will also welcome “a regiment of Prussian Guards” to fight “the enemy,” England, alongside the UVF (185-6)
– the story speculates *post facto* a fictional, German rear-assault on England via Ulster as a “beginning” to the Great War. Offended by Edelstein’s implication that they are “rebels” (186) (a term too close to “nationalist” for the UVF’s taste), Dunseverick proclaims the UVF “loyal men” (186) and beats Edelstein, as the story concludes with him threatening to hang Edelstein back in Ulster.

Despite Birmingham’s north of Ireland heritage, the farcical dimensions of “Ireland For Ever” shows how he saw “loyalism” as a paradoxical signification, especially between 1914-1918 when its rhetorical and martial performativity oscillated between anti-British and pro-British, including the loyalist stance on the War. But in other stories of *Our Casualty*, Birmingham incites and evinces *pathos* for men who are shaken by witnessing death and violence. Such is the case in “His Girl,” a story told by one combatant, Daintree, to another (our narrator) about an officer, Simcox, who gets trapped in a shell hole in no man’s land during the Somme Offensive. After Simcox was debilitated from shrapnel during a counter-attack, he claims (to our narrator) that a photograph of a young girl found in a cigarette case is what kept him alive during the two-day crossfire. Interestingly, Daintree and our narrator intently avoid certain information while retelling the story; Daintree obliges the narrator’s request to omit depictions of the battlefield’s blood and gore, and both debate whether it is right to tell Simcox that his “girl” is actually a young private they know dressed in pantomime. In effect, the story suggests these men’s quiet turning away from combat violence and their effort to leave the incident’s romance intact for Simcox as he recovers.

Finally, we see such mature reservation subsequently reiterated in “Sir Galahad,” a story of a lone airman which echoes Yeats’s Great War poem, “An Irish Airman
Foresees his Death.” Awaiting a Turkish attack, a naïve battalion of “green” subalterns on the Suez defense are eager “to show what it can do” (126). When nothing happens, the men begrudgingly take to Captain Haddingly’s suggestion to stave off boredom by reading and discussing Mallory’s *Morte d’Arthur*. The men barely tolerate what they view as the epic’s anachronistic view of manly chivalry: before battle, Sir Gahalad visits a desolate chapel to pray, a chapel Haddingly likens to their battalion’s chapel in the desert. Whereas the men consider such reverential behavior an insult to the “dignity of English manhood,” Haddingly defends the depiction of military men “giving expression to their emotions” (136-7). But the men are not listening. In that moment they spot a single Flying Corps pilot pass over in a biplane. Even Haddingly gets swept up in envisioning airmen as “successors of Malory’s adventurous knight-errants” (138) – powerful, modernized, experienced soldiers. Later, the airman lands. To their astonishment, he takes no food or alcohol, or even talks. Rather, he heads straight to the church wherein he remains for half an hour. The only man who has seen actual combat, the pilot, reveres this place and moment of peace to seek as it seems, only absolution.

**Patrick MacGill**

Like Shaw and Ervine (and Britain’s Great War literary tradition), Birmingham shows the First World War initiating a process of maturation. Young men’s inexperienced, or positive expectations inevitably transform into objective, even cynical realism about the War’s demands on the body, mind, and convictions. Such was the case for our last wartime author, Patrick MacGill, the former “navvy” and émigré who enlisted in the London Irish Rifles and was wounded at the Battle of Loos in 1915. MacGill has left one of the most extensive literary records of life as an Irishman in the
British Army: three quasi-fictional memoirs, *The Amateur Army*, *The Red Horizon*, *The Great Push* (all 1915), (referred to collectively as *Rifleman MacGill’s War* (republished 2007), and two novels, *The Brown Brethren* (1917) and *Fear!* (1921). MacGill’s works are the first sustained Irish writings about trench warfare. Grounded in empirical experience, their *bildungsroman* trajectory reflects the process of maturation; MacGill records how the excited anticipation of the training corps gives way to harrowing bombardments, nightly trench raids, gassings, and death and wounding. Having undergone the latter at Loos, MacGill’s writings also reflect a common arc to combat narratives – psychical and physical trauma inducing a loss of faith in prior regimental or sociopolitical order, a reckoning manifesting as “disillusionment” by the 1920s. Nevertheless, he maintains marked confidence in soldiers’ inseparable bonds. In his eyes the Irish and British (or Scottish and Welsh) comprise a coherent regimental body, especially in mateship at the level of the section. Thus, despite the lack of overt political context in his texts, MacGill’s faith in *espirit-de-corps* reflects the kind of mentality which by the time *Brown Brethren* is composed (after 1916), we might read as oriented toward a transnational reconciliation.

MacGill begins *The Amateur Army* with an optimistic though inexperienced sense of motivation toward enlisting. Referring to the London Irish Rifles as “we British,” he cannot comprehensively account for the “psychological processes” of his fellow recruits other than a vague sense of a man’s duty to Britain and, like Shaw’s O’Flaherty, escape (11). But while MacGill comes to decry the ultimate exploitation of such choices, during his service he proudly asserts that he belongs to “the most democratic army in history” (12); he claims: “they are men of all classes, who had been far apart as the poles in civil
life, and are now knit together in the common brotherhood of war. Caste and estate seem to have been forgotten; all are engaged in a common business, full of similar risks, and reward by a similar wage” (32). This idiom is telling, for as David Taylor notes, as an itinerant, émigré laborer in Britain and literally distanced from Ireland, MacGill was a doubly “marginal figure” who developed “an idiosyncratic and sentimental socialism” (94-6). In MacGill’s words, “the bond of sympathy between soldier and worker” (14) is the strongest, as one often becomes the other. Moreover, MacGill emphasizes that the LIR knew him as one of two “real Irishmen in the battalion” (12) comprised mainly of Cockney Londoners by 1914; yet, the battalion is as comfortable singing “The Wearing of the Green” as it is “God Save the King” (70-1). Insofar as this sense of coherence was a willed reality for MacGill, it functioned as a stratagem for coping with combat.

In The Red Horizon MacGill records the LIR’s first taste of fighting at Festubert and Vimy Ridge, ending with The Great Push, by which time he had transitioned from rifleman to stretcher-bearer and was invalided home from Loos. Indicative of his later combat fiction (and War fiction at large), Red Horizon focuses on MacGill’s oscillating between retaining individual and collective resiliency in the face of his first experiences with violence, privation, and inter-rank (sometimes racist) hostilities. His stark depictions of death naturally increase in frequency: “dead bodies, and limp helpless figures hung on barbed wire where they had been caught in a mad rush to the trenches which they had never took” (90); later, recalling his friends KIA, MacGill admits, “I found myself weeping silently like a child” (152). Yet he retains a unique steadfastness in his memoirs, a stoic manliness. Such resiliency might be grounded in the fact that MacGill was no stranger to depraved conditions. His “view-from-below” surely offers an
alternative to the tradition of middle-class officers whose combat writings expose their comparatively “sheltered upbringings and shocked sensibilities” (Taylor 100). Thus, whereas the arc of MacGill’s memoirs evinces a drop in morale grounded in war’s impossible justification, its most notable feature is its sort of double-coherence: writing through his traumatic experiences keeps MacGill intact with his prior, unshaken psyche – and he channels effort into legitimizing the utilitarian sense of commitment amongst the men of his own section, wherein his faith remained well past his wounding in 1915.

Invalided back to London where he was seconded to the Army Intelligence Service (his placement was rumored to have been an attempt at stymying his combat writings which were deemed too critical), MacGill continued his saga of the London Irish Rifles in 1917 through his fictional account, *The Brown Brethren*. We might say that between *Amateur Army*’s optimism and *Fear!*’s bleak objectivism, MacGill’s ambivalence toward soldiering – like that of Shaw, Birmingham, and Ervine – is most apparent in *Brown Brethren*. The novel recounts the lives of a ragtag section of Irish, Cockney, and English riflemen in their harrowing exploits and minimal reprieve during the Loos, Somme, and Vimy Ridge engagements. One of the earliest fictional depictions of trench warfare, *Brown Brethren*’s strength is its portrayal of this single section (and its individual soldiers) combatting their complete annihilation, physical and psychological. At the rear, the men’s regular conversations are shot through with thoughts of dying, recurrent images of corpse-strewn plains, and the ghosts of deceased men. At the front, they not only undergo impersonal, mass slaughter by Gatlings, chlorine gas, and 5-9 shells, but they experience the unnerving proximity of hand-to-hand combat with Germans behind enemy lines, the isolation of being buried alive, and getting lost in
mazes of trenches. Within this context, the novel’s most unsettling tension arises: the men desire to maintain the coherent, manly fortitude of their section – that is, to stay resilient, alive, and remembered for their bravery – but the very inevitability of death demands that they must “let go” of their dead quickly, even unceremoniously. Coming to terms with this, however, is done tacitly, manifesting as a repression of those lost.

From its very first lines Brown Brethren belies the kind of pervasive combat anxiety which becomes repressed, even from positions of safety. The novel opens as the LIR spend a December evening in Cassel before marching back to Loos’s trenches.

Despite being in a civilian tavern at the rear, the war is inescapable for them:

Even here, back near the town of Cassel, the men were not free from the sights and sounds of the fighting. At night they could see the red agony of war painting the distant horizon, and hear the far-off rumbling of the big guns as the thunder and tumult of the conflict smote across the world. The men back from the line of slaughter tried not to think too clearly of what was happening out there. In the Cafe Belle Vue, where the wine was good, men could forget things (21).

But the fog of war is difficult to forget. More so than in the memoir trilogy, these soldiers resort to bearing witness to their nightmarish combat experiences like they are hauntings. The attempt to remain resilient in such an environment becomes a good-natured competition of one-upmanship for the men. In the tavern, an Irishman, Patrick Fitzgerald (whose itinerant background makes him one of several biographical composites), tells his Cockney companion:

Crawling out in the darkness between the lines […] the darkness ahead of you may hide anything. An awful face covered with blood may rise up in front, a hand may come out and grasp you by the hair. The dead are lying around you, poor quiet creatures, but you know that they’re stronger than you are. I often wish I couldn’t think. […] I dare ten thousand times as much to overcome my fear […]. When I go out on listening patrol I am always furthest out. I feel if I’m a yard behind the front man he’ll consider me a coward, so I get out a yard ahead of him and I tremble all the time (33-5).
Though MacGill’s characters still index the parameters of manliness and heroism by eschewing pangs of cowardice, their optimism about war is exhausted. The anticipatory “romance” (196) MacGill reiterated in *Rifleman* has given way to pure anxiety. Fitzgerald cannot walk at night without fearing passerbys as “ghostly” (63) German spies; the nocturnal march back to Loos, formerly exciting, is now invaded by incoherent paranoia: “he was living in a confused and muddled nightmare and his mind was a great vacant chamber filled with spectres more impalpable than air” (117). Each man becomes more isolated in his fears of breaking down, only staved off by seeking solace amongst the others.

Gradually, the anxiety-inducing specters of war are metaphorized in *Brown Brethren* as the detached ubiquity of mechanized killing – the shells, gas, and Gatlings that threaten the democracy of the living, British and German alike. The narrative accentuates the irony of such killing in a sequence of assaults beginning on Christmas Day. The LIR’s hoped-for solemnity is obliterated by an artillery barrage that opens a mine crater in no man’s land whereby the Germans attempt to invade the British line. The scene is phantasmagorical: the explosion “rose upright, like a gigantic monster from some pre-Adamite age” as “the earth vomited its entrails out” (145). Commanded to defend the crater from German takeover, the men’s lungs are ripped by gas, their bodies by bullets. The pit is a literal hell, filled with gas and mucky blood as “heavy coils of thick smoke wound snake-like […] illumined by ghastly phosphorescent lights that trailed up the sides” (147). In this haze of confused bloodshed (one Rifleman even asks if it was their own mine that detonated) is something profane: “All were sick of the job” (153), sick of being commanded toward their deaths, these British victors as much as
the defeated Germans. In fact, the eminence of such mass killing by top-down orders even incites sympathy toward German soldiers facing similar fates. At High Wood, Somme, the narrator regrets that the only choice for German “unfortunate wretches” held down in their dugout is to run and “be blown to bits” or “stay in their lairs and be buried alive” (425). In another instance, a naïve, nineteen year-old rookie, Reynolds, initially “full of military ardour,” finally comes face to face with a German soldier his age only to realize that he cannot “take the life away from that shivering, terrified creature” who is so much like himself (354-5). A stray bullet kills Reynolds seconds later.

What ostensibly seems ironic, however, is that despite the espirit-de-corps amongst the men while living, those surviving either do not speak of, or seem quick to forget their dead – and almost fatalistically. Upon Reynold's death, his companion bluntly admits, “I knowed it would pan out that way” (358). By the time the LIR reaches Vimy Ridge, the rifleman, a “khaki-clad Sisyphus” (149), has resigned himself to fatalism: “the soldier is a mute, impotent figure, a blind pawn in the game of war” (243). This sense of blind, isolated futility coalesces in a tortuous episode wherein Fitzgerald gets lost alone in a maze of British and German trenches while delivering a message about a German attack. The scene is another hellish apocalypse: “War’s earthquake had rent the whole country. Dark sepulchral chasms yawned in the ground […]. The rusty steel muzzles of the guns looked grotesque and distorted. […] Dead man lay all over the place, shamelessly exposed” (208-9). In the dead of night “alone and astray” (211), Fitzgerald becomes disoriented, panics, and under “a galaxy of star-shells” (214) gets irrevocably lost in the cross-trenches. He stumbles out of the trenches fraught of “uncanny spirits” (216) into a pit of corpses to evade machinegun fire. He sinks in muck,
shouting to no one “as the earth rose greedily, as if wanting to clutch him” (218). With bleak irony, Fitzgerald finally escapes this shallow grave to rejoin his men only for a few seconds before a heavy German shell entombs the entire section. In these moments Brown Brethren gives way to “a sense of futility, if not of actual disillusionment,” as Taylor notes; “there is nothing heroic about the hapless Fitzgerald, stumbling through an alien landscape of death and destruction, physically but also spiritually lost, narrowly escaping death in one trench only to find it in another” (142-3).

And Fitzgerald is given up for dead with a similar detachment shown toward those that had gone before him. Though two years later, to his companion’s shock, he returns to live in Cassel, France as a civilian. Brown Brethren ends with Fitzgerald’s survivor testimony, an early, fictional account of combat-induced posttraumatic stress. His testimony exposes how posttraumatic stress can affect war victims through hauntingly real flashbacks that induce persistent feelings of isolation, and which in MacGill’s time, had not yet received psychiatric diagnoses for proper institutional intervention. Fitzgerald begins by pointing out that he has only been told what initially traumatized him. After being buried for three days with a head wound during the Vimy Ridge shelling, he remembers nothing, including awaking in a Versailles hospital wherein he attempts to escape still thinking he must deliver his message about the German attack. Losing all agency, Fitzgerald is invalided home only to begin suffering from hallucinations about combat while in an English asylum:

I didn't remember anything about it. Even now my mind gets mazed at times when I'm excited, and queer ideas came into my head. [...] After a while I found myself in England. I don't even remember crossing the Channel. I was in a muddle all the while. Sometimes I would think I was in the trenches and I would wake up from my sleep, jump out on the floor and stand against the wall, thinking that I was on the firestep on guard. I
must have been a troublesome patient. And then one night […] I thought that somebody put a cold hand over my forehead. I shouted out “Who's there?” I opened my eyes, looked up and saw a man with a black beard standing at my bed. “Who are you,” I asked. “Your Sergeant-Major,” said the man. He raised his fist and made one smash at my face. I dodged the blow and then a man in a warder's uniform rushed in and pulled the sergeant-major away. […] I was in a lunatic asylum. 'Twas enough to turn my brain. And it's a difficult job to prove that you're sane when you're in a madhouse. They won't believe you, for some damned reason or another. I used to go up to the warder and say: “Look here, matey, I'm as right as rain,” and he would nod his head and say: “Oh, yes, of course you are.” But ‘twas easy enough to see that he didn't believe you. God! I often felt like strangling the man. It wouldn't do me any good, I knew, to kick up a ruction; so I kept very quiet and well-behaved (434-7).

Fitzgerald attempts to act sane in order to reenter the British Expeditionary Force, but he is deemed unfit and discharged with a pension. Ironically, this induces in him another form of anxiety, and sense of isolation – Fitzgerald, the “one that had done his bit, who had been through the thick of it, […] lion hearted,” had become one of many veterans put “out on [his] own,” seen now as “a wash-out […] pensioner, non bon” (438).

Fitzgerald’s experience is similar to that of numerous wounded veterans who were invalided back to England and Ireland. Such casualties suffered from the contradictions that rather ironically were effectuated by the martial dimensions of Britain’s early twentieth-century constructs of manliness (Bourke 73-5). Insofar as veterans were wounded physically or mentally, they often fared poorly in competition for domestic-sector employment; moreover, the pervasive assumption of the laborer (or soldier) constituting the ideal, able-bodied male paradoxically left wounded veterans on the outside. Thus as Joanna Bourke notes, “there was little place for disabled ex-servicemen in the new ideal of male domesticity. By failing to assert a masculine role through bringing in an adequate wage-packet, the disabled man could only be further feminized by the performance of male domestic labour” (74). Fitzgerald sees through
these contradictions. He indicts the “very rich […] grand old men” who feign “self-denial” and parade him around praising his virtues only “to further their country’s cause” while privately he is deemed a “burden,” petitioned with bribes to be placed “somewhere out of sight” (439-41). Fitzgerald refuses, choosing to emigrate to France and marry a woman whose father was killed at Verdun. Reminiscent of Shaw’s and Birmingham’s protagonists, Fitzgerald gestures toward the (Irish) veteran’s emigrative impulse as an act of protest against the sociopolitical contradictions of life back home and-or as a reaffirmed commitment to his men.

Even by 1917 Brown Brethren began anticipating some of the decades-long difficulties Ireland and Britain faced as veterans returned home. Whereas civilians felt the genuine need for honoring veterans and for reintegrating them back to their prewar lives, these sentiments came at a time trending toward increased disillusionment and cynicism about the War. A “loss of faith” not only extended from the realization that modern warfare inexorably took an unprecedented number of lives, but from the fact that medical, psychiatric, and institutional services could not yet comprehensively treat the physical and psychological damage done to combatants. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, authors like Patrick MacGill, Liam O’Flaherty, Sean O’Casey, and Iris Murdoch began noticing that these difficulties were compounded for Irish servicemen. They returned home to an Ireland that was, in effect, writing a new history that extended from a past which especially after – or because of 1916 – had little place for those soldiers who had fought in the British Army during the First World War. In the next chapter, however, I would like to evaluate southern Ireland’s attitude toward the War from a perspective that has not yet been fully considered. The fact was that some
Irish combatants, like MacGill and O'Flaherty, became disillusioned with the British Army's exploitative chain of command, if not with Britain's terms of nationality. These authors' postwar combat novels *Fear!* and *The Return of the Brute* along with O'Casey's play *The Silver Tassie* are at pains to express this opposition, and with an uncommon candidness for the 1920s. Furthermore, we will see how southern Ireland's noncombatant authors, Sean O'Casey and Iris Murdoch, express an equal apprehension toward the martial demands of Irish separatism. *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Red and the Green* all depict the very myth-making performances of separatism affirmed in part by combat with First World War soldiers, as Dublin became a battleground on 24 April 1916.
It is impossible to speak of Ireland in the First World War without speaking of myths, particularly those narrativized about 1916. Myths abound not just on a Barthesian, structural level, but on the (under)ground level of the trenches as “wars and rumors of wars.” MacGill gives credence to this in his neglected 1921 combat novel, *Fear!*. As in Barry’s *A Long, Long Way* and McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster*, in *Fear!,* the Easter Rising’s “traitorousness” begins seeping into trench lore. At one point in the novel, as English soldiers “damn Ireland” (61), a boisterous, impetuously brave Irishman retaliates, “has any other neutral country put as many men into the field–?” (61). This man is a well-seasoned soldier, MacMahon, who though wounded, refuses to wear stripes, chevrons, or medals for recognition. An uneducated nationalist, he derisively compares “Prussianism” to English “Jingoism” (60), even desiring that “the Sassenach” taste “the same medicine they gave to Ireland” (61). Yet MacMahon is the section’s most loyal and brazenly courageous man, repeatedly throwing himself into the line of fire. In fact, MacGill intentionally casts MacMahon as a type of myth himself, a stage Irishman; he is fiercely tribal to his men, enlists admittedly to escape war-pleading Irishwomen, and though he lambasts English “propaganda” for exploiting Britain’s “working man” (57-9), MacMahon prides himself on an Irish martial tradition in combat. Like Shaw’s O’Flaherty, MacGill’s Irishman valiantly enters the fray for a country he does not serve and for a War Office he loathes.

*Fear!* is not just MacGill’s first literary foray after 1918, but his first after the pivotal year of 1916. Discharged in 1919, MacGill returned to an Ireland much less hospitable to soldiers than the one he had left in 1915. As David Taylor notes, “his
enlisting in the British Army alienated him from Irish nationalists, particularly Sinn Fein, which had vociferously condemned those who joined up” (6). Gaining political traction during the Irish Civil War, Sinn Fein reinforced the Easter Rebellion as the apotheosis of Irish martial action (eclipsing that of 200,000 Irishmen at the Front) while in Ulster, the Rebellion was a foil for Unionists to cast the 36th (Ulster) Division’s 5,500 Somme casualties as sealing its right to continued union. And herein lies a structurally mythographic dimension to Irish First World War politics: the diplomatic war for Ireland’s future worked to consciously predetermine how those Irishmen fighting in Europe were to be received – or to appropriate Seamus Deane’s pun, how Irishmen’s martial actions would be interpreted “wherever green is read.” In Fear!, MacGill extends the transnational predicament Ervine and Birmingham wrote from; Ireland’s Great War soldiers were gradually caught in a performative impasse. They were fighters, but not legitimate ones since their cause was not ordained. Insofar as an Irish combatant’s enactment of martial manliness (what Joe Valente refers to as the Irish “myth of manliness” (1-25)),1 falls outside or even contradicts that of the Easter revolutionaries, the Sinn Fein majority would not write their service or tragedy into the Free State’s or Republic’s founding myths. Oppositely in Ulster, war service would not be written about outside the myth of the 36th Division’s Somme sacrifice.

1 Valente argues that ironically (and a well-rehearsed argument), that Irish physical culture and manliness which undergirded physical-force nationalism had its roots in British imperial physical culture just as much as it did in Gaelic sport. Prior to Valente, Seamus Deane in “Wherever Green is Read,” provides a larger frame of reference for the “well known similarities between British imperial and Irish national practices,” such as: “blood-sacrifice, […] racist ideology, a glorification of violence, belief in the destiny of the nation, the recreation of a glorious past in fancy-dress charades, […] health and strength movements (sports and body-building as a new form of morality, the Boy Scouts, predecessors of the Pearsean Fianna)” (237).
In this context, MacGill’s *Fear!* and O’Flaherty’s *The Return of the Brute* (1929) introduce a heuristic for reading the postwar texts of Sean O’Casey and Iris Murdoch. Due to the events of 1916 in Dublin and on the Somme, the performative myths of (Irish) martial masculinity could no longer be “read” outside the purview of the south and north’s discursive myths of national legitimation. That is, if an Irishman did not fight for an independent republic or for continued union, or was not willing to be retroactively ascribed as such, he was eventually written out of public commemorations; he was written out of the common and shared memories through which the Republic and Northern Ireland authored their modern origin stories. And in Hayden White’s terms, herein lies the ideological dimension of myth: that inherently, social groups “choose a past, retrospectively and as a manner of negating whatever it was from which they had actually descended, and to act as if they were a self-fashioning community” (149); this is the Nietzschean sense of imagining the present as a fulfillment of a past wherefrom one desires to descend. Like all mythographies, the north and south gradually predicated prescriptive “readings” of those 30-50,000 Irish soldiers who not only lost their lives, but did so amidst ideological and political turmoil which they may not have been fully aware of, or aware of at all.

There is a type of victimization here which as I will suggest in this chapter, all four authors thematize. Soldiers went into battle with the inevitable discursive and performative pressures to fight for their “country” (whether for Britain as an extant state, or for an imagined one like an un-partitioned Irish Republic). They underwent a level of physical and psychological trauma that was hitherto unparalleled in modern warfare. Yet, Irish domestic politics would either gradually forget or unequivocally appropriate
that trauma. Both acts distinctly erased or subsumed a combatant’s individual suffering. Consequently, the mythologies encompassing Ireland’s traumatized, that is, those who were cast as “our sacrificial dead,” began to bear weight on conceptions of masculinity and enfranchisement after 1918. In this chapter, I will identify these acts as modes of (state) victimization, and one of my central claims will be that such victimization is akin to ideological trauma – an event of sociopolitical fracturing that “flashes back” or is relived as our four authors Patrick MacGill, Liam O’Flaherty, Sean O’Casey, and Iris Murdoch write from 1929 to 1965.

**Patrick MacGill and Liam O’Flaherty**

Traumatology and narratology will provide us a frame for examining post-1916 texts, and this frame is especially relevant as we turn to our first two novels, MacGill’s *Fear*! and O’Flaherty’s *The Return of the Brute* (1929). As narratives by working-class Irishmen who were both wounded on the Front, *Fear*! and *Brute* not only give expression to the grunt soldier’s experience, but in MacGill and O’Flaherty’s cases, to the combatant’s fortifying a proletariat agenda, and for O’Flaherty, even a forceful nationalism. Hastily composed (perhaps self-consciously), these novels are a *tour de force* against the British Army’s tendency to replicate and reinforce the types of performative pressure and the ethno-national and classed divisions that characterized Britain’s imperial social order in the early twentieth century. *Fear*!’s Henry Ryder overtly derides the “old men” that send the young, the uneducated, the imperial children of Britain to their deaths. *Brute*’s Billy Gunn\(^2\) goes further. He murders the corporal who

\(^2\) *The Return of the Brute*’s protagonist’s name, Billy Gunn, is a thin disguise of the name that Liam O’Flaherty used when he enlisted, William (‘Bill’) Ganly, his mother’s maiden name (Kelly *ix*), which leads us to read his protagonist through a semiautobiographical lens.
persecutes both him and his young, fledgling companion. For Gunn, the “enemy” is not German, but British. In this regard, these novels oppose the War to an extent that was not popular in Britain until the dominance of 1930s officer-class writings by Sassoon, Owen, Blunden, and Graves. And I would submit that in the cases of MacGill and O’Flaherty, as Irish combatants, we can read their opposition to the Great War as dually motivated. Insofar as these novelists thematize the individual soldier’s resistance to the ideal of utilitarian sacrifice propagated by the War Office – and the soldier’s expendability on those grounds – MacGill and O’Flaherty work to bridge the gap with the Rising’s anti-War revolutionaries’ position; moreover, when read holistically, the theme of anti-heroism or the antihero in these novels expose the similarity in the revolutionaries’ tendency for appropriating “their” soldiers at the expense of expropriating those Irish soldiers overseas.

What is notable about Fear! and The Return of the Brute is that their protagonists are not Irish (though Fear! contains Irish characters), but English and Canadian respectively, and both protagonists are outsiders to the rest of their sections. In fact, the outsider-turned-rebellious is central to these novels’ purviews. As we turn to these narratives, I will suggest that inasmuch as MacGill’s and O’Flaherty’s “outsider” vantage points are expressions of their own lived “alienation” from the Irish Free State after 1918, their novels exhibit what Jon Patočka calls a “solidarity of the shaken” – that is, those war participants and victims (of the Great War in particular) whose experiences, often traumatic, have driven them out of former complacencies and toward countering or dismantling the formerly established order. This is a significant position for Irish combatants to take after 1918. Written during the time when the Free State’s insularity
burgeoned and Irish veterans, Remembrance Days, and Great War memorials began to be intently sidelined, MacGill and O'Flaherty compose antiwar combat novels which depict British soldiers of whatever race or political creed as *victims* of the British War Office and its performative parameters – and by analog, of the Free State also. Such a position was not only radical, and precedent to Britain's antiwar canon, but in the context of Ireland, these novels can be read as evoking empathy for Irish combatants who became victims of imperialism; for MacGill's and O'Flaherty's narratives critique the British war machine on the same grounds as leaders of the Rising did. In the words of ICA leader James Connolly, Great War soldiers were exploited by a “pirate empire” (*Irish Worker*, August 1914).³ MacGill and O'Flaherty would certainly seem to agree.

The war machine grinding the masses is the theme central to MacGill's final and most scathing combat novel, *Fear!*. Having worked for Military Intelligence (MI 7b) before being decommissioned, the novel's preface, likely self-authored, sheds light on the trajectory of MacGill’s combat writing after he was wounded at Loos in 1915:⁴

> The blue pencil of the Censor was too busy during the War to allow a realist such as Patrick MacGill a chance of exposing the Truth. Unconstrained by the thought of blue pencils, Patrick MacGill has been able to write about war as war actually is. It is a terrible picture he presents [...] The realism of *Fear!* will bring home to all the conviction that such things must never be allowed to happen again (i).

*Fear!,* reverts back to the first-person memoir style of MacGill’s first semiautobiographical trilogy *Rifleman MacGill’s War*, but with marked difference. His

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³ Thus, above Liberty Hall, wherein Connolly’s ICA packed munitions in anticipation for an Irish rebellion, there hung throughout 1914-1918 the popular banner: “We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland.”

⁴ David Taylor notes it is a possibility that MacGill was transferred to Army Intelligence to silence his antiwar writings (155); even still, across the political divide, there opened up a “gulf between him and the new leaders of the Republic of Ireland” (163).
former faith in the war effort as a democratic, utilitarian ideal is now stripped bare. What is left, outpoured through protagonist Henry Ryder, is quintessential (modernist) disillusionment: “I am alone” (9). MacGill’s narrative, that is, Ryder’s memoir, is an exposure of the soul. And, standing in as it were, universally and empathetically for the rank in file soldier, MacGill’s protagonist intently exposes the artifice – the fictionality – of the myths whereon prewar Britain rested. In his first entry, Ryder de-claims himself from such myths, shunning their rubric:

The new values which govern the conduct of men, the flesh and blood so cheaply bought and so easily lost, and the world into which I have been flung, I feel that I cannot live up to the standard which is now set before me. I have come to my work with no enthusiasm for any ulterior object such as patriotism, belief in the justice of the cause for which I fight, or faith the final good of the conflict. I’m simply here (27-8).

Ryder is “there” only through conscription. Finally sent out to Section 7 of the British Expeditionary Force in summer 1918, he confesses to what had kept him from enlisting on his own and what gnaws him at the Front: that he is “in soul a coward” (19).

Yet while Ryder’s narrative certainly expresses fear, even utter terror, it does not evince his self-purported cowardice. Rather, he fears that his resistance to act on national mandates will cause him to be deemed a coward. To Ryder, such pressure is as ubiquitous as it is damaging. And through Ryder’s polemic, it seems MacGill even attempts to purge his own, formerly sanitized accounts of war:

What did the papers not say! Prophets arose over the turmoil. […] God and right, the Sword of Justice, the rights of small nationalities, young heroes, young slackers, heroic Belgium, miscreant Prussianism, etc., etc.. […] And so it went many voices babbling. The fighting started and the shedding of blood became the order of the day. […] I felt sorry for those boys going to war as the corn sheaves go the threshing mill. […] In my opinion the directing powers of war, the political bodies, the war zealots, Junkers and Jingoes, belonged as much to this country as they did to Germany (30-4).
Echoing O’Flaherty V.C.’s satirization of the War Office’s attempt to appeal to expropriated, working-class Irishmen on grounds of defending “their” soil, Ryder decries such propaganda at work even in England’s own nationalistic appeals:

“Go and fight for your country!” was the call. “Go, you young men and do your bit.” “What country had they to fight for?” I asked myself, remembering that all the amount of England’s earth in possession of most of the villagers was that which stood in the flowerpots on the windowsills. No man who thinks, I argued, can come forward this moment if the sense of nationalism and patriotism was not fostered within him, if the past history of his country, the deeds of those who had gone before, were not a spur to urge him to follow in the wake of the past. Patriotism to make itself a driving force, in my opinion, must uplift men to heights indestructible and eternal. But the war had no such urge. You went forward to sacrifice yourself, and in doing so you sacrificed others. The blind, menacing threats of the body public goaded you to action, the call of empty drum the spur of vanity (34).

And written at the Front, Ryder begins and ends this memoir entry with a tongue-in-cheek admission that nevertheless troubles him throughout his service: “I had not the making of a man in me. In short, I was not a soldier and never would be one” (41).

There is both a self-consciousness and act of protest here regarding masculinity that aligns Fear! with O’Flaherty’s The Return of the Brute. Henry Ryder and Billy Gunn are dogged by the fact that their fortitude as men, physical and mental, is indexed by their capacity to fall in line with regimental discipline, even if abusive. In this regard, the novels thematize a paradox of martial masculinity. Within the chain of command, manly performance conforms to rank-in-file obedience, whereas resistance or outright rebellion is associated with abject cowardice and degeneracy; however, Fear! and Brute are at pains to show that what Ryder and Gunn actually come to fear is the potential for their unthinking obedience to be the real acts of human degeneracy – a literal return to brutishness. Indeed, the First World War certainly actuated a new, ironic fear about
degeneracy. Technological warfare turned landscapes into wastelands, and humans into mass killers and killed masses. The apotheosis of progress it would seem, was death. Both protagonists fear their descent as agents of such “degeneracy” – not just the fear of being “made” into unthinking killers, but that their performative worth as men is determined by conceding their own ethics to that of military authority.

*Fear!* begins with Ryder ruminating on the fact that from a military standpoint, he “had not the making of a man.” The novel draws a connection between Ryder’s lineage and his evaluation of his body and bearing, “matter and mind” (18). His deceased father was a small, abusive wastrel, who having married three times, fathered Ryder out of wedlock as an elderly man, leaving him to fend for his own reputation. His mother, a “timid, vacillating” (18) woman, was intelligent, but endured her husband’s abuse without defense. Ryder is thus self-conscious of his lineage; “unfit in body and weak in intellect, [...] with a heart that falters at the least hint of danger, in body weak [...] I think that my parents in ever begetting me were guilty of a crime” (18-19). In short, he fears that he is a degenerate, and what is more, that soldiering will expose his unfitness as a man. In *The Return of the Brute*, Billy Gunn suffers from a similar fear, but in the context of his paternal, erotically under-toned relationship to a nineteen year-old, upper class “beautiful boy” (19), Louis Lamont, whose noncompliance Gunn finds dangerously alluring. Gunn and Lamont are outcasts amongst outcasts. They are members of the nine-man, No. 2 Platoon Bombing Squad, all of whom save Lamont are decorated professional soldiers. But the men are also “degenerates”; wounded and shell-shocked, they are commanded into ill-conceived, “cannon fodder” missions, as if their desensitized alienation merits their expendability. Lamont cannot fight from sheer terror,
and insofar as Gunn tries to protect him, and tacitly love him, the two are seen as threats to a group of men already degenerating into mere brutes.

The few critics who have written on *Brute* have not commented on the relation between homosical eros and Gunn's descent into “degeneracy.” The novel begins *en media res*, March 1917, on a mired battlefront as Gunn attempts (as he does throughout this twenty-four hour period of their lives) to quell Lamont’s nerves by sheltering him from the rain of lead and water, as if Lamont were his child or lover. “Trembling violently” (7), Lamont is consistently lambasted by the men, including Gunn, for acting “like a woman” (15). As Lamont’s fear-induced paralysis becomes a legitimate threat to the section’s safety, the domineering and petulant Corporal Williams deems him a threat to morale. Williams also targets Gunn, as if Gunn’s sensitivity toward Lamont belies an equal cowardice. Unlike *Fear!’s* Henry Ryder, Gunn's imposing physicality contrasts his mild demeanor. A D.C.M. recipient, he is “Huge […] burly […] a typical fighter,” he has a “simple soul […] most gentle,” […] “like a mastiff, that most ferocious-looking and most gentle of all animals; who […] when roused or made vicious by brutal treatment, becomes as ferocious as he looks” (14).

It is not coincidental that Lamont is a strange allurement for Gunn, embodying the threat of noncompliance, which is to say, of “cowardice”:

He was a beautiful boy, with pink cheeks, dazzling white teeth like a girl and big blue eyes. […] And now the boy’s cowardice was sapping his sense of discipline; that extraordinary religion of the soldier which is proof against the greatest tortures; something that is brutally beautiful. […] The youth’s curious feminine cunning unnerved him, and made him feel the temptation to do something shameful and desperate. The youth’s obstinate determination to save himself from the horrible life of the trenches roused in Gunn a dangerous desire for freedom. This desire was dangerous for Gunn because he was a brave soldier, who knew there was
no means of escape, other than death or disablement inflicted by the enemy (17-19).

Gunn feels as if Lamont’s “seductive cowardice” (23) is beginning to overtake him, pushing him toward rebellion. This awareness is, however, a new consciousness which consequently rouses in Gunn an alternate notion of “the enemy.” Early on, he and Lamont agree (as does Ryder in *Fear!* (33)), that the grunt German soldiers whom they must kill are “just driven to it, same as we are” (11). Moreover, Gunn desires to run his “bayonet through the fellahs that started it [the war]” (15). In the dehumanizing confines of the trenches, he envisions one of these men as the Corporal: “the military machine is kept working by the Corporal, the purpose of whose existence is to irritate the cogs under his control, […] nine lunatics, who, guided vaguely by a remnant of their former sanity, tried to keep in touch with the reality they had lost” (29). In Gunn’s case, the more the war machine grinds him into discipline, the more he loses touch with reality. The fog of war becomes hallucinatory, he forgets the German enemy, and before him, “the Corporal was becoming transformed into a hairy animal; a brute which he wanted to kill” (55).

The trope of the officer-as-enemy that inhibits the *espirit de corps* in *Brute* is also at work in *Fear!*, although given different expression. Like *Brute*, *Fear!* suggests that combat effectuates a kind of dehumanizing detachment whereby one is conditioned to become an unthinking killing machine. While training at Salisbury Plain, Ryder writes with scathing sarcasm:

> We were taught how to kill men methodically with bayonet, bomb, and bullet. It was our duty to serve as soldiers, the duty of fit men and hale men. […] It was an honor conferred upon us to be taken on as helpers in the grand Crusade; it was a privilege to be allowed to kill our fellow men, and we were threatened, insulted, abused, sworn at when we did not make ourselves worthy of the honours and privileges showered upon us.
Like Gunn, Ryder feels “vilified” as a “being apart” (63), his gradual unwillingness taken for his incompetence. Ryder compensates for this lack of “manliness” through an almost hallucinatory act of transferred aggression, which tellingly, is enacted on his own section while bayonet training. Wounding his parrying partner, Ryder recounts: “I became mad and purposeful. I wanted to kill and go on killing. [...] A wild madness entered my blood. I [...] thrust at him again, and he was only saved by a man rushing out from the squad and seizing me. [...] It was then that I realized what I had been doing” (69).

In both novels, the regimental pressure to “perform” – to desensitize oneself to privation and abuse, to blindly obey, to kill – is exacerbated by a sentiment common during the First World War, that the lack of consistent hand-to-hand combat allowed too much time to revel in one’s fear of dying without having fought. MacGill turns to representing fear as the reaction to the alienation and brutalization that soldiers endured in the war, even during inactivity. As Ryder admits, “I was afraid of being afraid” (64), and in France, “the cold sweat of terror is oozing out from my body half the day and the chill of dread anticipation gnaws at my heart” (110). He is anxious that his very fear threatens his manliness: “What would they say if they knew? [...] Why am I not like other men?” (110). The compounded anxiety of having to perform yet be brutalized in the process causes Ryder to also envision reality as degenerating around him. Leaving Passchendaele, he remarks that Section 7 had “sunk almost to the level of brutes, [...] an army of dumb shadows” (218-9). Later on, when one man goes mad and plunges into no man’s land, Ryder offers to retrieve him. His entry reads like a descent into hell: “dead bodies in khaki and grey, in queer and distorted attitudes lay all over, [...] these, dying away, only served to accentuate the ghostliness of our surroundings, [...] strange
and menacing shapes, unfamiliar and uncanny, […] figures without reality, […] I dwelt in an eerie world of mystery and dread” (261-3). Even more in Brute, Gunn’s brutalization causes him to perceive trench warfare as a return to a primordial world. His own men:

Looked like ghouls in the gloom, buried to their waists in a hole; […] the horrid debris of war, emitting a stench of rotting, unburied corpses. From the pitch-dark sky the rain fell, unceasing and monotonous, like the droning of brine water falling on a floor of black rocks from the roof of a subterranean cave where moaning seals are hidden and flap about […] sounds of a dead world; they mysterious gloom of the primeval earth, where no life had yet arisen […] nothing but worms and rats feeding on death (19-20).

Led out for a raid by the abusive Corporal Williams, in pitch dark with no objective, Gunn’s section loses its humanity: “they no longer thought. They had lost individual consciousness. They had ceased to be human” (116).

Ultimately, both novels correlate losing one’s humanity with “acting out” through savage violence akin to rebellious transference. During a trench raid in Fear!, Ryder finally has the chance of “proving himself,” but the event only reinforces to him the killer’s unthinkingness:

A wild madness took possession of me and, blindly tearing away from my position, I rushed on the crowd. […] Reaching across the opponent’s weapon, I clutched the throat of the man. […] The German dropped his weapon as my fingers tightened their hold. […] I was filled with a mad delight […], his body sinking down, and his heavy mass wriggling grotesquely as it tried to free itself. […] Filled with a burning feeling of malignancy, trembling with a wild and wicked joy, I lunged the steel forward and caught the man on the face, shoving the bayonet through his gasmask and through his head (138-9).

As Taylor writes of this scene, “the warrior masculinity that MacGill espoused in his autobiographical writings has been perverted. In Fear! there is something of the soldier as an amoral automaton” (172). Ryder does not celebrate such animalistic killing. In fact, it traumatizes him. In nightmares and hallucinations, his German victim returns to
haunt him as a ghost. But in *Fear!* and *Brute*, as the protagonists feel their humanity slipping away, their ultimate response is not concession to regimental discipline or “honor,” but rebellion. They push back against the strictures of what David Trotter identifies as the British Army’s tendency to replicate “the durability of the class-system”: the “belief that the maximum of individual adaptability will ensure a minimum of collective change” (35).5

In the novel’s final combat scene, Ryder’s rebellion reaches its conclusion during a massive nocturnal assault over no man’s land. At some point, he blacks out and his German ghost returns with a bayonet hole in his cheek to condemn Ryder’s actions as cowardly: “Fear compelled you to do this Private Ryder, for you had not the courage to stand up for your opinions” (297). Then, in a supremely symbolic moment of irony, Ryder finds that his section has been mistakenly fighting its “own battalions, […] masked ghosts” (314) in the fog of war. Losing control, he awakens again with no weapon in a church under a crucifix. He has, in fact, deserted the sortie. Above him, he envisions the cross’s symbol of sacrifice in stark contrast to the so-called “sacrifice” of war. And yet, Ryder returns to the battle to be killed, not out of compliance, but out of self-retribution: “it matters not – nothing matters,” he admits, “who fires the bullet doesn’t matter” (316). He seeks atonement for what has become an army killing itself in the darkness. Men have devolved into beasts, and “mere anarchy is loosed upon the earth.”

*The Return of the Brute* takes the symbolism of a self-destructing army to an extreme. At the novel’s end, Gunn also begins to lose touch with reality when he is

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5 As Trotter argues, O’Flaherty’s novel thus falls outside “the paradigmatic British war novel” (35), and I would add that it is significant that such a novel is written by a working-class, Irish republican combatant.
forced into yet another futile, nightly raid out in no man’s land. Having just lost Lamont who dies from terror at the hand of Corp. Williams, Gunn increasingly displays symptoms of PTSD as each member of the nine-man section is killed. He eventually becomes completely oblivious to the German gunfire he heads into. Rather, he envisions the enemy as the one man in front of him, his persecutor, Corp. Williams. “With eyes fixed on the Corporal’s back,” Gunn imagines himself leading his (dead) predators onto their prey: “a vast multitude of brutes was crawling with him, tracking the Corporal” (135-6). The last scene is primeval. As Hedda Friberg notes, “once launched, the fight ceases to be a human affair” (126):

The Corporal had his bayoneted rifle pointed. Gunn carried his rifle like a club, […]. They fell to the ground and grappled with one another. They fought in silence, breathing heavily, tossing about on the ground, rolling over and over, butting with their heads, kicking and biting like animals. […] [Gunn] slowly sought the throat, found it and enlaced it with his fingers and pressed fiercely. […] He began to mangle the body with his bare hands. Now he was really an animal, brutish, with dilated eyes, with his face bloody. […] They began to fire at him from somewhere. […] Riddled with bullets, he died, bellowing and clawing the earth (137-8).

Things have fallen apart; the center could not hold. If Gunn’s rebellion is degenerative, it is a consequence of a dehumanizing “authority.” And insofar as such authority exploits the grunt’s expendability under the auspices of heroism, both Gunn and Ryder become antiheros whose only vindication is rebellion.

How are we to read these novels of the 1920s? Written by proletariat socialists, and Irishmen at that, they fall well outside Britain’s early, well-known and justifiably supportive (or propagandistic) accounts of the Great War, like Conan Doyle’s six-volume history *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* (1916-22) and John Buchan’s four-volume *History of the Great War* (1921-2). As such, they forerun Britain’s (and Ireland’s) nationwide progression from ambivalence, to cynicism, to outright
antiwar sentiment later popularized by Remarque’s (once translated into English) *All Quiet on the Western Front* and reinforced by the officer-class canon of Graves, Sassoon, Blunden, and Owen. To English readers, *Fear!* and *The Return of the Brute* would be radically un-British. And this is important for assessing these novels from the standpoint of the Irish question. We might reiterate that after his wounding at Loos, MacGill’s combat fiction gradually began to deconstruct the myths of manliness and combat, an effort reaching its height in 1929’s *Fear!*. Liam O’Flaherty’s war experience and combat writing followed a similar trajectory. After joining the Irish Guards in 1915, he fought at the Somme and was discharged with shellshock a year later after being wounded at Langemarck, Ypres Salient. O’Flaherty suffered from that trauma. He “remained shell-shocked from his wounding on the Western front in 1917, occasionally suffering bouts of bad nerves and depression” (Cahalan 8-9) which influenced his combat writing. After discharge, he became something of a permanent wanderer, but unlike MacGill, he often returned to Ireland, to his native Aran. He even acted on his Republican nationalism during the Irish Civil War in 1922 by taking part in the Anti-Treaty insurrectionists’ takeover of the Four Courts in Dublin.

Given O’Flaherty’s Republicanism, and the fact that he suffered from two nervous breakdowns during the time he composed *The Return of the Brute* (which most critics attribute to “shellshock and his traumatic experience in the trenches” (Kelly x)), it is easy to read this novel, like *Fear!*, as reaching across a divide. These novels depict

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6 As O’Flaherty recounts of his war experience: “I went into the Irish Guards and soon felt the soul-devouring horror of war, the thunder of deadly guns so different to the beautiful passionate roar of the sea, and the brutalizing effect of perpetually cohabitating with ghastly death, hunger, and debauched ideals. A kind shell released me in September, 1917, and I returned, soured and disillusioned and prone to sleepless nights, when I lay awake and wanted to compose epic poems about black and horrible things” (*Now and Then* 14-5).
soldiers being brutalized not just by combat, but by the British Army’s perpetuation of racial inequality and the class-system. In doing so, Fear! and Brute extend a double argument: their semiautobiographical protagonists evoke empathy for the thousands of Irish soldiers who had joined the war effort as unthinkably as they had, only to be traumatized, or to return to an Ireland less favorable to British Army veterans. And in the context of Ireland’s (semi-colonial) history of exploitation (prompting James O’Connolly’s 1914 pronouncement, “we serve neither King, nor Kaiser, but Ireland”), these novels can be read – and I would argue, perhaps they were intended to be read – not as foils to nationalist movements like the Easter Rising; rather, they legitimize a majority of southern Ireland turning against Britain, and certainly against the British Army. That army was responsible for illegally executing the Rising’s key leaders, an event that swayed public opinion in favor of the Rising.

The necessity of reaching across the divide was, I would argue, on the minds of our authors throughout the 1920s. Veterans like MacGill and O’Flaherty intently left Ireland in 1919 as the Irish War for Independence set in. They had reason. Following Sinn Fein’s landslide victory in the 1918 General elections, the Dail was formed, which then declared Ireland’s independence from Britain. That declaration circumvented Parliament’s indefinite veto of Home Rule on account of the 1916 Rising and thus led to conflict. Martial law was declared in most of southern Ireland as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) clashed with British Black and Tans and Auxiliaries. A truce was declared 1921, and Parliament partitioned Ireland under the Anglo-Irish Treaty, ending direct

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7 Quoting a letter from O’Flaherty’s daughter, Friberg writes: “His own daughter admits to having difficulty understanding his reasons: ‘Even by 1915, it must have been evident what an obscene idiocy that was,’ she writes, and adds that his sympathies remained basically Fenian to the end” (123).
British rule in 1922 by granting Dominion status to the newly formed Irish Free State. However, to Republicans’ chagrin, the Treaty created Northern Ireland, even though Ulster’s border regions voted nationalist in the 1918 election. Sectarian violence and reprisal killings racked Northern Ireland for eleven more months during the Irish Civil War. In these years, Irishmen who were formerly British soldiers occupied a tenuous position. The IRA distrusted Irishmen who had fought in the Great War, and furthermore, the British recruited many Irish veterans into its paramilitaries, the Black and Tans and the Auxiliary Division, supplementing the Royal Irish Constabulary during the conflict (Cottrell 21-8).8

Indeed, despite numerous politicians’ hopes that the north’s and south’s men fighting and dying side by side in the First World War would initiate reconciliation, the opposite happened. As Keith Jeffery notes, in the wake of Easter 1916, Partition, and the Treaty, “nationalist and unionist casualties of the Great War became more divided in death than they had ever been in life” (153). If this division had to do with the number of veterans serving in opposing paramilitaries from 1919-22, their service reflected the broader sectarian divide between de Valera’s Sinn Fein republican majority in the Free State and James Craig’s Ulster Unionist Party in Northern Ireland. As disputes over state boundaries and constitutional statuses intensified, Sinn Fein and the Unionist Party made their sacrificial dead and ex-servicemen salient to political identity.

8 Sebastian Barry’s novel, The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty (1998), depicts the Anglo-Irish War effectively splitting southern Irish allegiances well into the twentieth century. The Irish Great War veteran of the title decides to join the Royal Irish Constabulary after his demobilization from the Great War while the majority of those around him become soldiers for the Republican cause. The novel tracks the social pressures and threats that lead McNulty to flee his County Sligo home due to his falling on the wrong side of the political divide.
Republicans (and nationalists) and Unionists (and loyalists) sought to legitimize their hoped-for states by re-inscribing their casualties into a national *raison d’être*. The national “myths,” or state narratives, that were already coalescing in 1916⁹ crystalized during the conflicts of the 1920s, as Sinn Fein reinforced the Easter Rising’s dead as its sacrificial *telos*, and in response, Protestant Unionists claimed the 5,500 Ulster casualties on the Somme as their own.

As these traumas entered into shared memory, their political narrativizations through cultural production and public practices became more exclusionary over time.¹⁰ But we should first acknowledge (since even many revisionist historians overlook this) that the Free State initially commemorated the First World War quite vigorously. Tens of thousands would gather in Dublin on Peace and Armistice Days into the early-1920s. However, even by 1919, nationalist-unionist confrontations interrupted these events. And beyond literal interruptions, there were ideological ones. For instance, as Jeffery points out, the Irish National War Memorial committee’s plan to erect a Great War memorial in Dublin went through twenty years of deliberation “in what was clearly becoming a hostile nationalist Ireland” (117). It was finally relegated out of public eye to

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⁹ In “Irish Unionism,” Alvin Jackson describes the impulse in the 1920-30s toward mythologizing 1916: “War simultaneously united and divided the Irish people: 1916 came to represent a different form of magic number to different types of Irishman and woman, even though Protestants and Catholics were fighting and dying together on the Western Front. The Great War, and the battle of the Somme in particular, dominated Unionist history-writing in the 1920s, when the Irish Free State was being supplied with a revolutionary mythology and hagiography by its scholarly and polemical defenders. Celebratory accounts of the struggle against the British and of its protagonists filtered into the print of the 1920s and 1930s” (125-6).

¹⁰ Quoting Edna Longley, Guy Beiner emphasizes in his recent article, “Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, The Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland,” that Ireland continues a longstanding “preoccupation with triumphalist commemoration of traumatic experiences”; thus, “the Battle of the Somme, which is as central for Ulster unionists as is the Easter Rising is for Irish nationalists, ‘complicated the politics produced by the Rising’” (367).
Islandbridge, and despite de Valera’s initial dedication plan for 1939, Sinn Fein cancelled the ceremony on account of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{11} It was never officially opened and fell into dilapidation from lack of staffing. No president of the Republic commemorated the War Memorial until President Mary MacAleese did in 2006.

During this period – as would be expected, and certainly with some merit – the Free State (and Republic) and Northern Ireland made an effort to inscribe the Easter Rising and the Somme, respectively, into their iconographies. The Rising’s “canonization” in verse began with Yeats’s celebrated (though ambiguous) “Easter, 1916” and three poems by Francis Ledwidge (of the 10\textsuperscript{th} (Irish) Division before he died at Passchendaele), “O’Connell Street,” “Lament of the Poets of 1916,” and “Lament for Thomas MacDonagh.”\textsuperscript{12} These works enshrined the Rising’s dead into the legacy of martyrs for Irish independence. The military prison where those executed were buried, Arbor Hill, became a national monument. In the next decades, the Rising was made central to commemorations and culture. The Proclamation entered school curricula and an annual GPO parade was instituted on Easter Sunday, culminating in 1966’s fiftieth year celebration and the erection of the Garden of Remembrance. That year also saw RTE’s first major broadcast, commemorative programs on the Rising. While the

\textsuperscript{11} In fact, as Keith Jeffery elaborates, “The Second World War marked a critical watershed in the commemoration of the Great War in nationalist Ireland. While independent Ireland remained neutral during 1939-1945, [...] Armistice Day parades in Dublin were prohibited during the war. After 1945, as Yeats had predicted (and perhaps hoped) in 1927, Remembrance ceremonies began to decline in the South. They became much more marginalized than had been the case before 1939” (134-5).

\textsuperscript{12} For comparison, note that these poems are repeatedly anthologized and much more well-known than George Russell’s (AE) poem, “To the memory of some I knew who are dead and who loved Ireland” (reprinted in \textit{Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader}. Cork: Cork University Press, 2000). This is the only poem published during the 1916 period that sought to commemorate the Rising’s leaders, Pearse, MacDonagh, and Connolly, alongside the well-known Irishmen that fell in the Great War, Thomas Kettle, William Redmond, and Alan Anderson.
Troubles briefly attenuated the Republic’s public endorsements of the Easter Rising in the early 1970s, in Belfast, murals of the Rising were used to mark Republican areas, and sectarianism catalyzed civilian and paramilitary identification with the Rising in both states. Recently, state supported commemorations have been re-popularized, albeit more inclusively during the 2016 centennial. The Easter Rising’s cultural centrality is even taking new expression; in 2014, the Dublin City Council approved plans to create a historical walking path of the Rising, and in spring 2016, the RTE broadcasted the three-part documentary, *1916: The Irish Rebellion*.

Commemorating 1916 was also integral to Northern Ireland, but theirs was a different 1916. As Edna Longley suggests, “commemorations are as selective as sympathies. They honor *our* dead, not your dead” (69). In Ulster’s case, 1916 signified the Somme as the traumatic event to be scripted into unionist cultural practice. Key to mythologizing the Somme was integrating the 36th (Ulster) Division’s 5,500 casualties and 2,000 dead into Ulster’s centuries-long legacy of defending the right to union. Indeed, as early as the 19 July Belfast parades in 1919, Carson and the Unionist Party favored the Ulster Division’s presence in what was supposed to be a more inclusive Divisional commemoration (Loughlin 140-2). Throughout the Independence and Civil Wars, and markedly during the Troubles, the Orange Order began to predominate Northern Irish commemorations of the First World War and the Somme. In fact, the Order moved the Belfast marches to 12 July, aligning them with the Twelfth of July Battle of the Boyne parades that celebrate William of Orange III’s 1690 victory over Catholic James II, the battle that is remembered for sealing Protestant rule in Ireland. Anxiety over the Treaty further galvanized sectarianism in Unionist commemoration by
1921. That year, one of the first Great War memorials, the Ulster Tower, was dedicated solely to that division with a smaller one specifically paying homage to Orangemen who died. Once Northern Ireland was established, Orange marches, Remembrance Days, and the Somme Association continued to dominate public ceremony, and as in the Republic, such ceremony was accentuated by 1966’s fiftieth anniversary of 1916 and by the Troubles that followed. Throughout Belfast, and to this day, Ulster Division banners hang in loyalist areas, and murals align the Division with sectarian paramilitaries like the newer Ulster Volunteer Force (Robinson 94).13

Nineteen-sixteen has been processed into versions, into competing commemorations. To put it in Ian McBride’s terms, “comparison of loyalist and republican commemorations reveals not merely rival accounts of the same events, but alternative cultural codes which give rise to different ways of structuring the past” (27). Surely, Great War commemoration was integral to the battle for legitimizing a “past” and future. This fact was made starkly clear in 1987 when at a Remembrance Day commemoration in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, IRA bombers killed twelve, wounded sixty-three, and destroyed the Cenotaph in an attempt to target the Ulster Defence Regiment taking part in the ceremony. The specter of the war, it seems, continues to haunt its memory. However, as we will now see in the latter half of this chapter, the sectarian ideologies at war between the south and north also indirectly led republican

and unionist factions to victimize their own. Demonstrated by O’Casey in *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Silver Tassie*, and by Murdoch in *The Red and the Green*, the south’s emergent, more insular republicanism not only reinforced adhering to a utilitarian, blood-sacrifice for an independent Ireland by soldiering men, but it marginalized those who either could not or would not identify with that rubric. The same can be said for the strictures of unionism, as we will see later in Chapters four and five. If by depicting (Irish) men being victimized by war, MacGill and O’Flaherty sought to reach across the divide, O’Casey and Murdoch surely extend that gesture. Their works are about personal and familial damages caused not only by the rhetorical and performative mandates of soldiering, but by the politically constructed opposition between fighting for independence and for “king and country.”

**Sean O’Casey**

When O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* was in its fourth performance at the Abbey Theatre on 8 February 1926, the Dublin crowd rioted. Rioters excoriated the play as a distortion of historical events and for slandering Easter Week’s fallen men. Those men’s widows also coordinated to appear at the riot for that end. Later that month, O’Casey was met by further attack. In a letter to the *Irish Independent*, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington wrote of his play: “His vision is defective. That the ideals for which these men died have not been achieved does not lessen their glory nor make their sacrifices vain. ‘For they shall be remembered forever’ by the people” (*Letters* 173). Noting Hannah’s reference to Yeats’s and Gregory’s 1902 nationalistic play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, O’Casey riposted, “The people that go to football matches are just as much a part of Ireland as those who go to Bodenstown, and it would be wise for the Republican Party [Sinn Fein] to recognize this fact, unless they are determined to make Ireland the
terrible place of land fit only for heroes to live in” (O’Casey Letters 175). O’Casey was apprehensive of Sinn Fein’s emergent vision for the Irish Free State a decade after 1916. He saw the Republican Party clinging to a cultural rhetoric whereby they imagined an ideal state whose citizenry unanimously adhered to a narrative of national commitment toward the Easter Rising and mythologizing its dead.

In O’Casey’s view, such an “imaginary community” (in Benedict Anderson’s terms) was untenable, even inimical. A staunch socialist, O’Casey served as secretary to James Larkin’s socialist movement, the Irish Citizen Army (ICA). However, in 1914 he cautioned Dublin laborers that republican organizations were subsuming working-class movements that sought to reform the city’s impoverishing wages and inhumane living and working conditions.14 As David Krausse notes, by 1914 “O’Casey began to believe that the immediate benefits of socialist reform took precedence over the nationalist goal of political freedom” (30). He thus left the ICA when it turned toward republicanism. And by critiquing that turn in The Plough, O’Casey broaches an irony that the play’s critics have failed to interrogate. Working-class men justifiably entered the ICA, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and Irish Volunteers to throw off the yoke of both “British imperialism” and “insensitive Irish capitalism” (Krausse 30); however, there were thousands more working-class men – like those of the 16th (Irish) Division’s Royal Dublin Fusiliers, which we see in the play – who enlisted to take the “King’s shilling” in

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14 O’Casey’s letters to Irish Worker on behalf of the Irish Citizen Army behoove its members to refrain from joining the republican military organization the Irish Volunteers. After leaving the I.C.A. in October 1914, O’Casey later criticized I.C.A. members for turning their backs on labor by joining James Connolly who recruited these members in military service for Ireland’s independence under the Irish Volunteers. In 1926, O’Casey made it point to highlight that his former severance from the I.C.A. was on account of its developing militaristic nationalist tendencies: “I had left, abandoned, deserted, fled from (take your choice of terms) the I.C.A. long before James Connolly had begun to ‘prepare that body for armed revolution’” (Letters 176).
the First World War, many of whom had no political education and who did so to stave off economic impoverishment for themselves and their families (Denman 37).\textsuperscript{15}

As \textit{The Plough} opens in 1915, O’Casey depicts the fraught familial and social tensions of tenement life, further exasperated by burgeoning militarization. The first act is set in the home of two newlyweds, Jack, a bricklayer and ICA member, and Nora, an expecting mother and rent collector striving for upward mobility in a tenement “struggling for its life against the assaults of time, and the more savage assaults of the tenants” (65). But from the outset, their marriage is pulled apart by Jack’s rapacity for military notoriety. As Nora works toward upward mobility, refinement, and maintaining an air of “respectability” (79) for her husband and coming child, Jack is drawn by another desire – the spectacle of soldiering. His ambition, however, is not to fight for an independent Ireland as much as it is to enter the “tradition” of martyring oneself for Éire. In fact, \textit{The Plough} satirizes Éire, Ireland’s sovereign goddess, by paralleling Jack’s ambition to Michael Gillane’s in \textit{Cathleen Ni Houlihan}, who foregoes his familial commitment for the “inspirational rhetoric of nationalist commitment” (Allen 48). Jack, like Michael, abandons his newly wedded wife to defend “Mother Ireland,” and he commits to the ICA only insofar as its socialist activism under Connolly is subsumed under republican insurrectionism, and by which he can boast of his military regalia. The Clithroe’s tenants criticize Jack for joining the ICA only to make himself “conspihuous” with “his gun, an’ th’ Red Hand o’Liberty Hall in his hat,” and his “Sam Browne belt, […]

\textsuperscript{15} Terrence Denman thus notes of those joining the 16th Irish Division, “a large proportion of the Catholic army recruits were clearly not rabid nationalists. They came from the same background, although in larger numbers, as had contributed to the bulk of Irish soldiers prior to 1914: urban ‘laborers and corner boys,’ who ‘had no politics and took no interest in them’” (37).
always puttin’ it on an’ standin’ in the the’ door showing it off” (70). Likewise, Nora denounces his posturing: “Your vanity’ll be th’ ruin of you an’ me yet. [...] That’s what’s movin’ you: because they’ve made an officer of you, you’ll make a glorious cause of what you’re doin’” (92). Her words are prescient.

The first act concludes with two departures. Nora, along with Mrs. Cogan’s young daughter, Mollser, who is dying from consumption, are left at the tenement to watch Mrs. Cogan and Jack leave for the ICA rally headed by Patrick Pearse. The scene emblematizes the competition between filial and political commitment. Jack leaves Nora angrily since Nora has intentionally withheld from him the news that he had been promoted to Captain, the recognition he has longed for. Shortly thereafter, is another departure. The play sets up for comparison the image of Jack marching off with the ICA to the image of other men marching off, a regiment of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers “on the way to the front” (93). The moment evokes empathy for the women’s feelings of abandonment and betrayal; Mollser, a child “pitifully worn,” who “walks feebly and frequently coughs,” ruminates on dying alone since her mother neglects her to attend republican meetings, a loneliness that Nora sympathizes with:

Mother’s gone to th’ meetin’, an’ I was feelin’ terrible lonely, [...] I do be terrible afraid I’ll die sometime when I’m be meself....I often envy you, Mrs. Clithroe, seein’ th’ health you have, an’ th’ lovely place you have here, an’ wonderin’ if I’ll ever be strong enough to be keepin’ a home together for a man. Oh, this must be some more o’ the Dublin Fusiliers flyin’ off to the front (93).

In evoking the Fusiliers, the moment also correlates Irish Great War soldiers marching to war with the privation of the tenants who rely on their pay for survival. For as the Fusiliers pass, another woman appears, Bessie Burgess, a Protestant unionist who receives separation allowances provided by her son, himself a Dublin Fusilier
presently en route back to Dublin after being wounded in France. Bessie foresees how republicanism complicates the position of men like her son: “There’s th’ men marchin’ out into th’ dhread dimness o’ danger, while th’ lice is crawlin’ about feein’ on the’ fatness o’ the land!” (94). Her concern is that republicans will take advantage of the absence of men like her son, motivated by the separatists’ reiteration of Daniel O’Connell’s dictum, “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity.” For *The Plough* suggests that the republican cause would exploit working-class men who volunteered not to improve their socioeconomic conditions (the ICA’s initial intent), but for the spectacle of heroism propagated by the rhetoric of a middle-class nationalism not their own (Waterman 56-7).

The idiom of men’s blood-sacrifice coalesces with martyrdom in the second act as Jack listens to the “Voice of the Man” (representative of Patrick Pearse)\(^\text{16}\) from inside a public house:

> Voice of the Man [Fist Segment]: It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen. [...] Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood....There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them! [...] [Second Segment]: Comrade soldiers of the Irish Volunteers and of the Irish Citizen Army, we rejoice in this terrible war. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields. [...] For without the shedding of blood there is no redemption. [...] [Third Segment]: Heroism has come back to earth. [...] When war comes to Ireland she must welcome it as she would welcome the Angel of God! (96-105).

The Voice fervently advocates the glory of inevitable war, the sanctity and manly honor of blood sacrifice, and the divine providence of revolution.\(^\text{17}\) The crowd is charismatic for

\(^{16}\) O’Casey wrote to Robert Fisk in 1936, “some of the cuts are the actual words spoken by Patric Pearse, Commander-General of the Irish Volunteers, at a meeting which I helped organize” (*Letters* 619).

\(^{17}\) O’Casey places this speech in his play to convey, in both 1916 and 1926, the currency of reiterating this rhetorical tradition; as Ronan McDoland points out, *The Plough* deals with the republican politics of
this rhetoric. For “an army of martyrs” it is “holy” (96); as one man reflects, “I was burnin’ to dhraw me sword” (97-8). However, gone for the men is the initial rationale which O’Casey himself believed in – a material revolution of the working-classes. The second act thus concludes in O’Casey’s classic satiric fashion. Drunk men, depicted as intoxicated with nationalist fervor, verbally disavow their families. “In a state of emotional excitement,” Jack, Captain Brennan, and Lieutenant Langon enter the pub for more port, becoming “mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches” (114) as the Voice continues. As the men’s nationalism becomes conflated with their alcohol, they disavow their families, in a satiric nod toward Cathleen:

Langon: Th’ time is rotten ripe for revolution. Clithroe: You have a mother, Langon. Langon: Ireland is greater than a mother. Brennan: You have a wife, Clithroe. Clithroe: Ireland is greater than a wife. […] Death for th’ Independence of Ireland! (114-5).

As Ronan McDonald argues, The Plough not only indictst “families being torn apart by men drunk on ineffable dreams of political utopia” but also the disavowal inherent to Cathleen’s “political rhetoric, […] the mythology of Mother Ireland, who sends her sons out to die for the recovery of her four green fields” (137).

Women like Bessie Burgess, however, have their minds on thousands of other deaths, those Irishmen fighting in “Catholic Belgium” (103). Amidst the republican furor, she attempts to legitimate Irish soldiers as heroes as well:

There’s a storm of anger tossin’ in me heart, thinkin’ of all th’ poor Tommies, an’ with them me own son, dhrenched in the water an’ soaked

1926, a time when in post-Treaty Ireland, “nationalist ideology was resurgent in the partitioned Six Counties” (137). O’Casey actually edited actual speeches given by Patrick Pearse to make them more “dogmatic, aphoristic, and oracular,” and purporting that patriotic blood “is comparable to the blood of Christ the Redeemer” (235-6). He takes the resurgence of this rhetoric to task by condensing Pearse’s language, parodying its dogmatism. The speeches of Patrick Pearse which O’Casey has edited and inserted into The Plough can be found in: Pearse, Padraic. The Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches. Dublin: Phoenix, 1922, on pages 98-9 and 216-7.
in blood, gropin’ their way to a shatterin’ death, in a shower o’ shells!
Young men with th’ sunny lust o’ life beamin’ in them, layin’ down their
white bodies, shredded into torn an’ bloody pieces, on th’ althar that God
Himself has built for th’ sacrifice of heroes! (103-4).

When the Rising begins, Bessie claims that the revolutionaries are “stabbin’ in the back
th’ men that are dying’ in the threnches for them!” (122). O’Casey’s inclusion of a voice
like Bessie is important in 1926. He depicts the Dublin Fusiliers headed to the Front in a
play that appeared in the Irish Free State on the tenth year anniversary of the Battle at
the Somme. At the Somme offensive, the First, Second, Eighth, and Ninth Battalions of
the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, which comprised part of the 16th (Irish) Division, underwent
their first major battles. Behind The Plough’s foreground of Irish casualties at the Easter
Rising is the backdrop of soldiers at the Somme, where during that April week, John
Redmond’s “Sixteenth Division, his ‘Irish Brigade,’ had 2,128 casualties, including 538
killed; the majority in the two gas attacks of 27 and 29 April, when fighting was still going
on in Dublin” (Denman 129). But as Stephen Walker emphasizes, for decades after
1916, Free State republicans and Irish unionists were divided by remembrance:
republicans remembered the Irish who were sacrificed in the 1916 Rising, and unionists,
the Irish who were sacrificed on the Somme; “the positions cancelled each other out
and left an important body of men adrift in the middle ground: the thousands of Catholic
and nationalist Irishmen who had fought and died in the Great War wearing a British
Uniform” (Walker 8). Ironically, many 16th Division soldiers enlisted under the
assumption that their service would grant Ireland Home Rule at the end of the Great
War.

The reality of how 1916 tore apart communities and families is made bleak in the
latter two acts of The Plough as the rebellion begins. O’Casey actually drops his
signature comedic wit in these acts, beginning when Jack has to literally tear himself form Nora’s grip in order to fulfill his orders for the Rising. In attempting to free himself, he forcefully pushes his pregnant wife to the ground, a traumatizing event that causes Nora to go into premature labor and miscarry on the street. The consequence of Jack’s commitment is emblematized by the death of his own child, the loss of his posterity. The action that follows ends in a wake of un-heroic, even pitiful deaths. To Bessie Burgess’s scathing castigation, the rebellion keeps her from obtaining food as she continues to care for Mollser. Ironically, Mollser dies of starvation while tenement dwellers loot shops amidst the crossfire. But in this violence and political turmoil, it is Bessie that emerges as a heroine. In the last scene, after word reaches that Jack has died, Bessie takes in her Catholic nationalist neighbors to shelter them. She cares for Nora who after the loss of her child and husband, falls into “incipient insanity” (145). Keeping the housed revolutionary men quiet so that Nora can rest, Bessie chastises Capt. Brennan’s hypocritical eulogy that Jack’s “end was a gleam of glory […] a hero” (145). For in reality, Brennan left Jack to die – a “martyrdom” that could have been avoided. By the play’s end, Bessie not only emerges as the one character who takes death seriously, but who is willing to put aside her political and religious differences to care for those dying from privation and violence. In Bernard Bernstock’s words, O’Casey has reserved only the unlikely “Bessie for heroism” (71). *The Plough*, however, ends in stark irony. When Bessie attempts to pull the delirious Nora away from a window, she is mistaken for a sniper and shot dead by British soldiers.

Following MacGill and O’Flaherty, O’Casey thus confronts us again with an image of the British Army victimizing the Irish. However, *The Plough* more strongly
evokes empathy for those Irish like Nora, and Bessie for that matter, who were victimized or marginalized by the performative demands of physical-force insurrectionism – that in emulating myths of manliness, men would give their lives for Ireland at the expense of forgoing their families. Consequently, O’Casey’s play also exposes how the Free State’s “revolutionary mythology” (Lemisko 1) propagated a culture of exclusion toward Great War soldiers and those affiliated with them. Only two years later, O’Casey himself experienced such exclusion firsthand when Yeats infamously rejected his Great War play, *The Silver Tassie*, for production at the Abbey Theatre. In a stormy epistolary battle published in the *Irish Times*, Yeats criticized *Tassie* for its “disunity,” the very expressionist mode whereby O’Casey sought to render the War’s unintelligibility and trauma. What is less known, moreover, is that the Theatre had just been awarded its subsidy by the Free State, and a number of the Abbey’s board of directors were State delegates. That 200,000 Irishmen fought for Britain was a part of history whereon the newly formed state practiced “collective amnesia” (Martin 62). Seeing through Yeats’s agenda, O’Casey thus retorted that he was obsessed with the war;¹⁸ in fact, his brother, Mick, was a veteran, and O’Casey himself recovered from tuberculosis in St. Vincent’s Hospital in 1916 while it was being used to treat Great War casualties.

¹⁸ O’Casey goes on: “You say that ‘I am not interested in the Great War.’ Now how do you know that I am not interested in the Great War? Perhaps because I never mentioned it to you. Your statement is to me an impudently ignorant one to make. It happens that I was and am passionately interested in the Great War. Throughout its duration I felt and talked of nothing else […] You say: ‘You never stood on its battlefields.’ Do you really mean that no one should or could write about or speak about a war because one has not stood on the battlefields? Were you serious when you dictated that – really serious? […] Someone I think wrote a poem about Tír na n-Óg who never took a header into the Land of Youth” (4 June 1928, *Irish Times*).
What is significant about *The Silver Tassie* is that O’Casey critiques the masculinizing impulse of military performativity insofar as it becomes a totalizing index of male viability in postwar Ireland. The play poses the difficult question of how Irish soldiers’ injuries and incapacitations would compound their marginalization. Echoing *The Plough*, *The Silver Tassie*’s opening scene frames how bodily strength is codified in Dublin’s working-class culture as a rubric of male performance that takes physical-force resistance to British state apparatuses for its ideal expression. The scene opens in Dublin during the Great War as two older men Sylvester (Harry’s father), and Simon wait for the central figure, Harry Heegan. Currently at home on furlough from the Front, Harry is an Irish soldier and a two-time championship-winning athlete of the Avondale Football Club. He is expected to return home famously with his team’s third trophy – the coveted Silver Tassie. As the two men await Harry, they “chronicle” (170) his athletic feats of strength:

Sylvester: I seen him do it. […] Break a chain across his bisseps!

Simon: I quite believe you, Sylvester.

Sylvester: *(With pantomime action)* Fixes it over his arm … bends it up … a little strain … snaps in two … right across his bisseps! […]

Simon: The day he won the Cross Country Championship of County Dublin, Syl, was a day to be chronicled.

Sylvester: […] But the day that caps the chronicle was the one when he punched the fear of God into the heart of Police Constable 63 C under the stars of a frosty night (169-70).

The women who are present, a V.A.D. nurse, Susie, and Mrs. Foran, the wife of an abusive soldier, castigate Sylvester and Simon’s values as “vain” (169); in codifying masculine strength, both men idealize its fulfillment through Harry’s unprovoked act of violence against a member of Britain’s state apparatus, Police Constable 63 C, of the
D.M.P.. Sylvester narrates Harry’s performance in an idiom reminiscent (although vulgar) of heroic narrative:

Sylvester: I can see him yet (he gets up, slides from side to side, dodging and parrying imaginary blows) glidin’ round the dazzled Bobby, cross-ey’d tryin’ to watch him. [...] The quietness of the night stimulated to a fuller stillness by the mockin’ breathin’ of Harry, an’ the heavy, ragin’ pantin’ of the Bobby [...]. There he was staggerin’, beatin’ out blindly, every spark of energy panted out of him, while Harry feinted, dodg’d, side-stepp’d, then suddenly sail’d in an’ put him asleep with... (Simon and Sylvester together): A right-handed hook to the jaw! A left-handed hook to the jaw! (170-1).

Sylvester essentially makes Harry “a myth during his own youth” (59). And while the women do not denounce such violence, they do accuse the men’s “sin-splashed desires” (174) in mythologizing male aggression.

The women’s apprehension is legitimated moments later when Mrs. Foran’s soldier husband, Teddy, abuses her in a scene that once again depicts Irish male aggression directed at its own. Home on furlough, Teddy also emblematizes a “manly” physique; “he is big and powerful, rough and hardy. A man who would be dominant in a public-house” (183). But while Mrs. Heegan presumes that “the trenches would have given him some idea of the sacredness of life” (181), Teddy is inexplicably aggressive, giving his wife “a box in the eye” (183). Simon and Sylvester intervene to prevent Teddy from possibly “killing the poor woman” (182), but they brag of their own “manliness” in the process: Simon will “astonish” Teddy with his “left” and “right” hook” (182). They envision the faceoff as a contest. When Simon cowers from Teddy, Sylvester mocks his cowardice: “An’ the regal like way he went out to fight! Oh, I’m findin’ out that everyone who wears a cocked hat isn’t a Napoleon!” (183).

At this moment, the play reinforces its critique against martial performativity as Harry Heegan arrives, carrying his love-interest Jessie and the Silver Tassie, followed
by crowd and concertina hailing, “Up Harry Heegan and the Avondales!” (186). Harry’s description is telling. At twenty-three, with “khaki trousers, a military cap stained with trench mud,” and an athletic jersey on, Harry has “sinewy muscles of a manual worker made flexible by athletic sport” (186). And his inward bearing:

He is a typical young worker, enthusiastic, very often boisterous, sensible by instinct rather than by reason. He has gone to the trenches as unthinkably as he would go to the polling both. [...] It is the stupidity of persons in high places that has stupefied him. He has given all to his master, strong heart, sound lungs, healthy stomach, lusty limbs [...] excited now with the sweet and innocent insanity of a fine achievement (186-7).

That Harry goes “to the trenches as unthinkably as he would to the polling booth” underscores O’Casey’s critique of a martial rubric extending beyond political affiliation to the realm of hegemonic – “unthinkable” – cultural performance. As such, his “mythic” masculinity adumbrates both his individual and national demise. As Declan Kiberd argues, “in creating a sporting hero, O’Casey deliberately establishes an ideal of physical excellence which will be shattered in the war; and he mocks by implication the link between sport and empire in the upbringing of youth” (242).

*Silver Tassie* suggests that such performativity, as culturally engrained, finds its expression in martial action for which military service is an outlet and index. Thus, as Harry, his love-interest Jessie, and his best soldier-friend Barney, recall and exaggerate how the opposing team “couldn’t take their beatin’ like men” (188), they imbue the heroicization of their team with sexual imagery which associates aggressive male potency as viability before they return to the fields of France. Raising the Silver Tassie, Harry exclaims:

*(To Barney)* Out with one of them wine-virgins we got in ‘The Mill in the Field,’ Barney, and we’ll rape her in a last hot moment before we set out to kiss the guns!
Barney: *(taking a bottle of wine from his pocket)* Empty her of her virtues, eh?

Harry: Spill it out, Barney, spill it out [...] A drink out of the cup, out of the Silver Tassie!

Barney: Here she is now...Ready for anything, stripp’d to the skin! (189-90).

The men take sexualized aggression to indicate their fitness for battle, a correlation that the play shows will be shattered by war; “the sexual imagery so potent in this scene” as Nuala Johnson notes, “will contrast with the impotence, spiritual and physical, that will emerge in the context of battle” (119). When the men reach the Front in the second act, the play critiques this apolitical cultural rubric, which in part, has accounted for their recruitment.

Tellingly, the second act is devoid of any displays of heroism or even scenes of combat. Rather, it depicts the soldiers who repetitiously question their duties and reasons for being at the Front. The hallucinatory scene depicts the men of 6th Platoon as trans-like, “resting” but not at rest, and unable to speak intelligibly. One soldier initially asks, “but wy’r we’ere, wy’r we’ere, – that’s wot we want to know!” (200). The sparse dialogue (like a precursor to Beckett’s *Endgame*) accentuates the sense that Harry and his company have undergone a trauma which cannot be spoken of. Answers are submitted feebly, faithlessly: to provide “seperytion moneys,” to give “fame a leg up on the path to glory,” to defend “your king, your country” (200). Yet the men ultimately mock the emptiness of such rationales. In a litany perhaps inspirational to Frank McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster*, the men rehearse their fear: “2nd Soldier: perhaps they have forgotten. 3rd Soldier: Forgotten. 4th Soldier: Forgotten us” (205). In the context of 1928, O’Casey poses that fear as prescient, as their moment in combat reiterates the
theme of expendability so central to MacGill and O’Flaherty: that these men have “fall[en] for the feeble rhetoric of their commanders, and end up praying to a gun which will surely destroy them, […] unable to understand the events that were overtaking them” (Kiberd 243). Thus, the men’s repetitious questions go unfulfilled: 1st Solder: “But wy’r we’ere, wy’r we’ere, – that’s wot I wants to know? The Rest: Why’s e’ere – that’s wot’e wants to know! Barney: we’re here because we’re here, because we’re here, because we’re here!” (200). The men find their resolves to duty as empty. Thus, they find no suitable rationale to legitimize their service.

As the second act ends with the men on the verge of an artillery engagement, the third opens in a hospital ward depicting the damage, physical and psychological, that war has taken on the men. In this scene, as Simon and Sylvester recuperate side by side, Simon offers a foreboding premonition to Sylvester – “how are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!” (219). In this moment, an image of Harry confronts us which starkly contrasts his image in Act I. He “enters crouched in a self-propelled invalid chair” (219). Now a paraplegic, he is “silent and moody” (221). Formerly a reputed champion athlete and solider, Harry’s heroic image is shattered: he is reduced to wandering “down and up, up and down. […] Trying to hold on to the little finger of life. Halfway up to heaven,” and “him always thinking of Jessie,” and “Jessie never thinking of him” (220-1). As critics have noted, a key aspect of Silver Tassie’s technique is that as the scenes progress, the soldier-characters become anonymous, and Harry’s de-heroicizing is central to this; the characters dismissively anonymize their former hero. Susie, once close to Harry, now in her nursing duties, addresses him only as “twenty-three” (227). As Nuala Johnson points out, “O’Casey reminds us that the anonymity of
the soldier on the front facing an unknown enemy is replicated to some degree when
the troops return home” (122). Significantly, the third act reveals that the two most
aggressive men of the play, Harry and the abusive Teddy (also the ones most gravely
injured) are also the ones most irreverently forgotten. In fact, the degree to which the
injured Harry is forgotten is based on his inability to be “a man,” with “a body dead from
the belly down” (225). Harry’s sexual aggression, once an index for his manliness, now
indexes his emasculation. Tellingly, his former love Jessie quickly abandons Harry for
his once best friend Barney; and it is Barney’s new reputation as a heroic savior –
ironically, “for carryin’ [Harry] out of the line of fire” (233), which awards him the Victoria
Cross and spurs Jessie’s interest. That Harry’s de-heroicizing is rooted in his physical
incapacitation and impotency is made starkly clear when Teddy tells Harry’s mother, as
if something almost unspeakable, “I’m afraid he’ll have to put Jessie out of his head, for
when a man’s hit in the spine…” (234). In the final act, it is Harry’s physical state, his
unfitness for war, sport, and reproduction that not only relegates him out of his friends’
memories and lives, but also completely out of recognition and participation in the
Avondale Football Club’s fraternal order.

Indicative of O’Casey’s characteristic dramatic aesthetic, in Act IV, images of
viable, male bodies – in this case, of young, sporting, healthy soldiers of the Football
Club – are contrasted with images of male bodies that insofar as they are damaged, are
reduced to mere “creeping things” without the “pride of strength” (242). In an elegant
ballroom wherein soldiers fox-trot with women, the devastated Harry remains alone
wearing his war medals. He sees Barney sporting his Victoria Cross emerge from
dancing holding Jessie’s hand. They both envision Harry as less-than-human. Harry’s
presence makes Jessie her “shiver” as he comes “prowling after” them; Barney advises Harry to “take his tangled body somewhere else” (241). Harry has become an object of avoidance and even disdain, as if his heroic reputation was taken from him the moment his physical ability was. Harry realizes that in the eyes of the fraternity, despite having won the Silver Tassie “three times for them,” and having exercised his ability through war in the service of his comrades, his “name is yet only a shadow on the Roll of Honour” (251).

Harry pours a drink in the Silver Tassie not to commemorate living, able-bodied soldiers, but to those soldiers who have fallen in the Great War (252), before smashing the Silver Tassie under his wheels, battering in its sides. He then indicts the Club’s sense of belonging and remembrance by handing over the demolished cup, an image once praised – like Harry himself – as an icon of strength: “and now, before I go, I give you all the Cup, the Silver Tassie, to have and to hold for ever, […] mangled and bruised as I am bruised and mangled” (261). Claiming they “have wasted enough time” (262), the Club members return to dancing, unmoved and eager to forget men who can no longer represent them. As Harry and Teddy exit, they resolve to reevaluate what it means to be men who have fought and been injured in the First World War: “Teddy: our best is all behind us – what’s in front we’ll face like men, dear comrade of the blood-fight and the battle-front! Harry: what’s in front we’ll face like men! The Lord has given and man hath taken away! Teddy: Blessed be the name of the Lord! (261). In the denouement, O’Casey thus raises a key question of national belonging and remembrance – in Kiberd’s words, “how does a society which creates heroes with such relish actually treat them when they fall?” (244). As The Silver Tassie suggests, by
1928, casualties of the Great War were surely received less hospitably than those of the Rising.

Iris Murdoch

To end this chapter then, we will turn briefly to one last “1916” text which interrogates the reception of the Rising’s and Great War’s soldiers, Iris Murdoch’s *The Red and the Green*. Published to anticipate Easter Week’s fiftieth anniversary (the moment F. X. Martin notes as the peak of Ireland’s “collective amnesia” toward the war), Murdoch’s project is to revise Irish memory of 1916 as O’Casey did before her. Set in Easter Week, the historical novel's Anglo-Irish protagonist, the twenty-one year old Andrew Chase-White, returns to Dublin as a British soldier to recover from an illness incurred while training in France in the King’s Horse Regiment (of which Murdoch’s father was part). To his dismay, he has yet to see combat. And as the Rebellion draws nigh in Dublin, a love triangle develops amongst him, his tacitly declared, half-cousin fiancée, Frances, and his Catholic republican cousin and lifelong rival, Pat Dumay, a gun-running Irish Volunteer who feels as equally unproven in combat. The triangulation Murdoch presents to us gradually transforms into a complex metaphor exposing the extent to which gendered and martial performances, particularly of manliness, were inexorably enmeshed with and determined by the divisive politics of 1914-1918. In fact (and prefacing our next chapter on the Ascendancy), key to the narrative’s (gendered) politics is Andrew’s ambivalence as an Anglo-Irish toward nationalist insurrection and his fidelity to the British Army and unionism; the same can be said for Andrew’s half-aunt Millie, a previously landed, now widowed “Countess Markievicz”-like woman who not only helps Pat run guns, but is sexually predatory (quasi-incestuously) to both Pat and Andrew – another triangulation.
What *The Red and Green* stages is an empathetic though critical farce. Through Andrew’s politico-national and romantic rivalry with Pat, the narrative exposes the similarity of 1916’s culturally-constructed though *oppositional* mandates for manly, martial performance, and in metonymically gendered terms: both Andrew and Pat are virgins to both women and war. Andrew envisions potential consummation with Frances as a prerequisite to “proving himself” through combat in France, and finally confirming his manliness by “facing the screen” in the ultimate sacrifice. But unknown to Andrew (and what we find out only in the novel’s crucial epilogue, set in 1938), Frances loves Pat, who, through a Pearsean *ethos* (and echoing *Plough’s* Jack) only commits to one “woman,” Éire, vowing to defend her even if it means giving his life. But Murdoch figures both Andrew’s and Pat’s desire to defend and-or die for these metonymic women, Éire and Britannia, as anticlimactic (a kind of metaphorical pun). In fact, their family ties – and significantly, Andrew’s tacit love for Pat – ultimately override the sociopolitical pressure on them as rival soldiers: that, “history now required of them that they should shed their blood” (263), not just for Ireland or Britain respectively, but each others’ on grounds of fulfilling history’s demand for present national commitment.

The rivalry between Andrew and Pat underscores their naivety as being young Irish males, from which militarization benefits. Their innocence (akin to Harry’s in *Silver Tassie*) has actually been oversimplified by some critics who have taken the two as “archetypes” rather than as typically impressionable, competitive young men. In fact, Murdoch’s novel is about these men attempting to rid their innocence by experiencing sex and combat, but in the process, unwittingly turning to, rather than dispelling of the myths of Irish manliness that encompass these domains. Take Andrew: he is England-
born, though “unreflectively he normally announced himself as Irish” (10). His mother has returned them to Ireland (an anachronistic return of the Anglo-Irish) on account of the Zeppelin raids on London. Andrew is a “confused soldier” (8), realizing that in part, he was goaded into enlisting by “the enthusiasm of an entire community” and by his childhood “romanticism” (8). His reasons go beyond this, however. He has intently joined the cavalry (though he “detested and feared horses” (6)) solely because his strongest ambition is to emulate the “men of Ireland, his male cousins” (10), namely Pat, who is for Andrew a “magnetic centre,” the “‘the iron man’” in “sports and games” (15). Pat has remained the locus of Andrew’s “peculiar anxiety” (14). For Andrew, joining the British Army is not motivated only by a politico-national gut feeling. Rather, he means to validate himself through combat to surpass Pat’s similar ambition, and thus be “liberated from Ireland” (16). In so doing, Andrew wants to both gain Pat’s respect and incite his jealousy.

If Andrew’s enlistment is naïve, that naivety is only accentuated by his inability to see that pursuing Frances is a similar “romantic self-deception” (Gerstenberger 62). He intends to marry Frances only since his family expects it. Thus, he never acknowledges Frances’s independence, which takes expression as feminist nationalism. Frances opposes Home Rule (no enfranchisement for women), admits not to know even which uniform to wear if she were in the Great War, and solicits Andrew to become a conscientious objector. On the narrative level, Frances is poised within Andrew’s

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19 The passage continues on: “Andrew would have blushed to admit how much his zeal depended on early impressions of more patriotic passages of Shakespeare and a boyish devotion to Sir Lancelot. From the details of warfare his imagination still shuddered away. A knowledge of the facts of the war in the trenches had not destroyed his attempt to make sense of it all by means of romanticism” (8).
purview of a reciprocation between the “terrible violence” of *eros* and *thanatos* (21): if “France, not Frances, would lay his soul naked” (20), then the consummation of marriage – though “he profoundly feared the notion of the sexual act” – would prepare him for “the prospect of a return to the war opening before him like a black hole” (20-1). Tellingly, insofar as Frances remains his unrequited conquest (Chase-as-chaste), Frances’s secret love for Pat – and for Pat’s insurrectionist idealism – in fact, accentuates Andrew’s attraction and ultimate proximity to Pat as the insurrection draws nigh.

But *The Red and the Green’s* critique of naive romanticism is not reserved for Andrew. Perhaps more so, Pat’s mind is governed mechanically, almost unwittingly by the singular ambition to act an ideal martyr for Ireland. A coldly staunch Catholic republican, Pat adheres to social and sexual abnegation; as Brandon Kershner notes, if in the novel “Murdoch concentrates upon the interrelations of erotic love, death, and the urge to transcend oneself through dedication to religion or politics,” then “Pat is the perverse locus of much of this energy” (146). Surely, if Pat loves at all, it is only his younger brother, Cathal, an even more childlike radical than himself whom he contemplates killing out of love (an ironic *thanatos*) to keep from being killed in the Rising. But tellingly, Pat sublimates erotic love into Éire, envisioning his own death in combat as a sort of historical “climax” (consummation). *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* reverberates here. Like Yeats’s Michael Gillane and O’Casey’s Jack, Pat seeks to fulfill that sacrificial narrative – to embody and bring it into being. He himself imagines that his “vision of fighting for Ireland” fits “some design of history”; through “some distilled essence of romanticism,” he feels “chosen and already under orders” (80). To frame in
Joe Valente’s terms, Pat’s Irish *psychomachia* “is to identify metonymically the act of chivalric self-immolation with the salvation of Erin (Woman/Nation)” (108). And as Margaret Scanlan suggests, insofar as Pat’s steadfast, solitary ideal also echoes Stephen Dedalus’s artistic vision, his identity and conception of Ireland’s teleology reveal the interconnection between mythic narrative and historical event (370-1). Pat certainly reflects Yeats’s “heart enchanted to a stone.”

Within the context of manly constructs, what becomes significant is the extent to which Pat and Andrew mutually attempt to confirm their martial bearing through their triangulation with the titled, sexually predatory Millie Kinnard. Having “seen action” in the Boer War (18), Millie wears military regalia, smokes, and shoots a revolver; but despite her position in running guns, she does not conform to a coded political agenda. As such, her “playing at soldiers” (92) makes Pat (and Andrew) anxious. Yet, the narrative casts Pat’s anxiety as a particular act of suppression, for he is envious of the fact that compared to Great War soldiers – and as Andrew views him – he himself is simply “playing soldiers”:

> He had not enjoyed the spectacle of others suffering in a war which he could not join, and he had not liked it either when they distinguished themselves. There had been moments when his own war had seemed an unreal sham. [...] He felt a detached envy of the simple, open, public war which he could not join. He would have liked a cleaner, straighter fight, ‘a steed, rushing steed, on the Curragh of Kildare, a hundred yards and English guards…” (79-89).

On the other hand, in Andrew’s *own* self-consciousness, only a sexual “conquest” can precede and confirm his readiness to die in combat in France, and Millie becomes his aim. Andrew and Pat thus become drawn together, like doubles: for when Frances rejects Andrew’s proposal (secretly in love with Pat), Andrew spitefully seeks to “conquer” Millie to confirm his readiness for France, while simultaneously, frustrated at
the Rising’s initial, disarrayed inaction, Pat sexually pursues Millie as a masochistic act of private “revolt-revulsion.”

For the two men (and prefacing our next chapter), Millie’s defunct Ascendancy estate in Rathblane comes to symbolize a space of anticlimactic irresolution: here, while officer Chase-White, a Protestant British soldier, and Pat, a Catholic republican insurrectionist, vie for supremacy, in their similar revulsion to Millie, both only end up reinforcing their inability to perform, a psychosexual-as-physical anticlimax. However, through anticlimax, a mutual empathy develops between Pat and Andrew. This plays out later that day when Andrew, determined to reconcile with Pat before returning to France, finds himself caught in the Rising. When he comes face to face with Pat, both armed, Andrew now “realized that he was in action for the first time” (278). Yet he chooses not to fight. He allows himself to be handcuffed, realizing that if “he left this place he would be going into the firing line not to shoot at Germans but to shoot at Pat and his comrades”; he tells Pat, “we’re the same people, we’re brothers, we can’t fight” (279). The novel’s anticlimax – Andrew’s refusal to engage in combat with Pat – ultimately suggests Andrew eschewing politico-cultural obligation for family:

At that moment there had been a bond between them of dignity and respect. [...] He ought to have fought then and there in the Dumay’s kitchen with all the fury of his manhood. This was the encounter for which his whole life had been a training. He loved and he had always loved Pat Dumay. To have fought with Pat then up to any extremity of destruction and disaster would have been the last perfect expression of that love. But precisely because he had always idolized Pat the spring of power was broken inside him. He could not command the splendor of will which would have taken his cousin into a wrestler’s embrace. He had dishonored his uniform, and this dishonor could not be forgiven, or blotted out by any degree of heroism ever. And he had done it, in the end, because of Pat and for Pat; and in doing it he had done the one thing which would make Pat despise him eternally (301-2, my emphasis).
He allows Pat to fulfill his ideal sacrificial narrative amidst an Irish crowd who are as initially “detached, confused, if anything hostile” to the “Sinn Feiners” as they are to the British soldiers like Andrew standing shocked in “his uniform” (300).

The irresolution of The Red and the Green’s 1916 narrative is only given closure in its epilogue, written from Frances’s vantage point in 1938. Now living in England with an English husband, Frances recalls Ireland’s wars at a moment when the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War are imminent. Her son, who resembles Cathal in politics and temperament, wants to enlist in the International Brigade in Spain. Knowing war firsthand, Frances respects her son’s ambition; but because of it, cannot help but “live in fear daily” (305). The epilogue is about the subjectivity of recalling war, particularly its traumatic events, and how those events are processed and passed on to the next generation. Frances’s conversation with her son centers on her formative years wherein she lost the men she had loved to Ireland’s wars – the Easter Rising (Pat), the Great War (Andrew), and the Irish Civil War (Cathal). She reveres these men, in contrast to her husband who half-jestingly remarks that “every country tells a selective story creditable to itself,” and Ireland’s Rising is one of a “bloody-minded romanticism” leading to its isolationism as another world war draws nigh (306).

But through Frances’s memory, Murdoch acknowledges the fact that narrative and myth inherently shape motivation, action – and reality. Like Yeats’s “Easter, 1916,” Frances’s desire to commemorate the dead is not incompatible with myth. In that idiom, she even refers to Ireland as “Cathleen ni Houlihan,” and evoking Yeats’s litany, she numbers the dead: Pearse, Connolly, MacDonagh, MacDermott, MacBride, Joseph Plunkett” (310-1). Yet, what critics have not acknowledged in The Red and the Green is
the fact that through Frances, Murdoch unambiguously inscribes Ireland’s First World War dead into that litany. Aligning the “Irish regiments” with the Easter rebels, Frances commemorates Andrew Chase-White, an M.C. recipient, who “was killed at Passchendaele in nineteen-seventeen” (310): no less “Irish” to Frances than the rebels, Andrew is likewise no less “heroic” (310). She thus includes Andrew into her litany of those “inconceivably brave men” who in self-sacrifice “died for glorious things, for justice, for freedom, for Ireland” (311).

Written at 1916’s centennial (and in the quiet prelude to the Troubles, the bloodiest, sectarian period since the Irish Civil War), The Red and the Green argues for inclusive memory, or what Margalit calls ethical remembering – in our context, not only acknowledging and objectively assessing the narratives that led Irishmen into performances of combat, but also in balancing the commemoration of traumas incurred thereby. Like MacGill, O’Flaherty, and O’Casey, Murdoch reaches across the divide. And as we turn to the next chapter, we will examine how the question of ethical memory was especially pertinent to Iris Murdoch’s own class, the Anglo-Irish. For the tension on the “liberal Irish patriotism of the Anglo-Irish” (Conradi 13) evident in Murdoch’s The Red and the Green is indicative of the strain that 1916 put on her class: while numerous Anglo-Irish families had husbands and sons fighting in the First World War, many were Nationalists, identified as Irish, and struggled with their tenants’ desires for enfranchisement, ambivalences we will now see as we turn to the Ascendancy novels of Elizabeth Bowen, J.G. Farrell, and Jennifer Johnston.
CHAPTER 4
VIA MEDIA: THE ANGLO-IRISH BIG HOUSE NOVEL, GREAT WAR SOLDIERY, AND TROUBLED NARRATIVES

By the 1920s, Ireland’s dead seemed perhaps just as prevalent, and more revenant than its living. For the Protestant Ascendancy, being “troubled” by the dead was certainly an inevitable aspect of living in the crossfire of the Irish War for Independence and Civil War as the Irish Free State emerged. The attempt to endure amongst, in Bowen’s idiom, Ireland’s “ghosts” (62), signaled particular difficulty for the Southern Anglo-Irish, and one that also spoke to the whole of Ireland after 1918. For instance, as we have already begun to see in the last chapter, how would the trauma of war, individual and national, be dealt with through remembrance and forgetting? What would the Irish do with their dead and wounded in times of continued belligerence, especially when “claiming” war victims was rendered inseparable from political positioning? Surely, after the Irish War for Independence and Civil War, when Bowen began composing her seminal big house novel The Last September in 1928, Ireland’s dead became salient to the living. As it was for our last chapter’s authors, in the 1920s that Bowen knew, it was the Rising’s dead, “MacDonagh and MacBride / and Conolly and Pearse,” that were numbered and inscribed – the Insurrection would remain, almost exclusively, the trauma written “out in a verse.” ¹ But like Yeats, a fellow Anglo-Irish, Bowen saw such singular commemoration as a potentially calcifying myth, as hearts “enchanted to a stone.”

Striking the chord for J.G. Farrell’s and Jennifer Johnston’s Great War big house novels later in the century, Bowen confronts in *The Last September* the other side of Ireland’s trauma, its War dead, many of whom were husbands, fathers, and sons of the unionist Southern Ascendancy. But in confronting the literal dead, Bowen’s novel also confronts the figuratively dying – the Ascendancy itself. In the words from her 1952 preface, “the ambiance of death and danger, often of violence” lingered in the estate air; as an adolescent, she remembers how the “Anglo-Irish land-owning Protestant families” whose sons “fell in the First World War” were ultimately relegated to a “nearly heartbreaking” position, to their extinction *(ix-x)*.2 *The Last September*, like Farrell’s and Johnston’s novels do afterward, thus deals with the trauma of the dead and dying. It interrogates the Ascendancy’s limitations in remembering, or *re-collecting*, traumatic experience and comprehending it during moments of continued violence. The 1920s Troubles were one of those moments. Written during the Irish Independence and Civil Wars, *The Last September*’s narrative functions like trauma-narrating itself, a look “backward, down a perspective cut through the years” at “the mysterious, the imperious hauntedness of a period not understood in its own time” *(Bowen viii-ix)*.3

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2 In his “The Protestant Experience of Revolution in Southern Ireland,” Peter Hart cites first-person accounts of how the Anglo-Irish registered its loss in the Great War. While cautioning against exaggerating the Ascendancy’s contribution to the War effort, Hart nevertheless states, “many families were shattered by the loss of their sons (‘Hardly a week passed without news of a casualty, a brother, a cousin, an older sister’s fiancé, or a friend.’). The rural gentry, true to their martial traditions, suffered heavily as a class (‘The world we had known had vanished. We hunted again, but ghosts rode with us.’)” (84).

3 Bowen’s description of “returning” in memory to her Cork estate while writing *The Last September* is very similar to traumatology’s notion of working through trauma by narrating that experience. As Nigel Hunt argues based on Pierre Janet’s work, “recovery from trauma means making sense of it all again, learning to understand the world as it is in the light of the traumatic event, incorporating the new trauma-related information into one’s own narratives” (126). This is partially Bowen’s intent: “When I came to work on my second novel, it was the vanished era which took command – nor is it hard, at a second thought, to see why. The writer is like the swimmer caught by an undertow; he is borne by it back to those scenes of
Perhaps then, Anglo-Irish big house novels about the First World War can be considered narratives about traumatic events, and simultaneously, about how those events have been, or can be narrativized. This is not to say that these novels are any less ideological than the “narratives” to which they respond and confront. Rather, it is to say that during the Great War and the Troubles that followed, the Anglo-Irish as a class found itself more than ever, between two worlds, fraught by the traumas of both those worlds – their “blood-and-bone Irishness” on one side, and their “inherited loyalty to England” on the other (Bowen ix-x). In that position, Bowen takes the First World War as her point of departure for depicting a hybrid class coping necessarily, with trauma on both sides. This is an important aspect for situating The Last September and its progeny into a proper literary trajectory. Bowen’s novel begins a subgenre of big house fiction wherein the Great War is figured as a point-of-origin for post-War divisional conflicts which put the Anglo-Irish in a crossfire during the 1920s. For the Ascendancy, those conflicts were like specters, “imperiously haunting” its already ambivalent, increasingly paralytic position in an Ireland moving toward independence and Partition. Moreover,

his own life most steeped in subjective experience which he did not know of. Sensation accumulates where it is least sought; meaning flows in, retrospectively, where we were blind to any” (viii-ix).

4 Robert Garratt is influential in delineating two taxonomies of Irish novels which thematize trauma – “trauma novels,” and “novels about trauma.” He defines them as such: the trauma novel “identifies a work of fiction that treats as an important and central part of the story the struggle of a disturbed individual to discover, confront, and give voice to a vague yet threatening catastrophic past,” whereas novels about trauma “consider and develop traumatic experience as part of the background to a story” (5). This distinction is pertinent to this study – Farrell’s Troubles exemplifies the former, and Bowen’s The Last September and Johnston’s How Many Miles to Babylon?, the latter.

5 This approach is premised on considering that Irish War literature, like most historically-based literature, involves examining two notions of “story,” the first, the artistically invented narratives of literature, the second, the composed narratives of empirical history. Following Hayden White’s paradigm on the relationship between narrating about history – which is narrativizing – we will consider that the method of composing, for the literary writer and historian is the same: White argues that a fictive basis underscores all narrating, such that writing about the past (in literature or “history”) is always, simply, selecting a metaphor whereby the world is ordered (47).
these novels – as mediums for a distinctly “Anglo-Irish idiom” (Moynahan 254) – conceive of the Great War as a point-of-origin in another way: as a locus, and point of return, to an original site of (modern) traumatic event. As Julian Moynahan insightfully points out, by the twentieth century, Anglo-Irish narratives were “postmortems” (224); they dealt with the Ascendancy’s post facto interrogations of their death and dying, a return to the moment when “the Ascendancy becomes a Descendancy” (11). Narratives of Bowen’s aesthetic were a way of coming to terms with that descent. But it was also a way of critiquing it, inscribing “family-centered traumas” (232) as “a virtual allegory of Anglo-Irish uprooting and ruination” (Moynahan 225).

Bowen’s Last September (1929), J. G. Farrell’s Troubles (1970), and Jennifer Johnston’s How Many Miles to Babylon? (1974) form a literary trajectory that takes the First World War as an originating traumatic site for the Anglo-Irish. Further, as responses to the first and second waves of the Irish Troubles, these novels enact an “enforced return,” so to speak, to the Great War as an experience of loss. Their narratives figure recurrent, sectarian violence – that of the Troubles – as a consequence of an original trauma un-dealt with. But before proceeding to the novels, we should first reiterate some questions about Ireland’s trauma experience on a national level: to what extent did Ireland register its 30,000 Great War dead as a traumatic event, and did it do so within its catalogue of preceding national traumas? And secondly, did the Anglo-

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6 Neil Corcoran employs Bowen’s phrase in a variety of ways, and one of them is to explicate Bowen’s tendency to write about the troubled past in terms of haunting return. In discussing how Bowen’s fiction thematizes “returning” to original sites of distress, Corcoran writes, “Bowen’s writing […] manifests the entrapment of obsessive return, the inability to shake off a distressing, or distressed, past in a way which virtually demands to be under the rubric of Freudian return of the repressed” (9). This study takes the Great War as one point of return, whereby Bowen depicts repression as a debilitating response, effectuating the Ascendancy’s post-War decline.
Irish’s hyphenated identity inflect a deeper sense of loss on account of the War? These questions move us into some troubled waters, into the “Irish nationalist history” versus “revisionist” debate. National trauma has been at the center of this debate; yet, more could be said for the Ascendancy’s particular experience. For anti-revisionists like Brendan Bradshaw, questioning who has undergone traumas (dispossession, quelled rebellions, the Famine, mass emigration and evictions) and how those experiences are remembered or “mythologized” as lived history, is central to contending “anti-nationalist” revisionists' tendencies toward so-called value-free, empirical, de-mythologizing approaches to history. Bradshaw’s case is well taken. Though I would submit that considering Irish identities necessitates revaluating just who has undergone trauma, and furthermore, which experiences constitute traumatic ones. The Famine is illuminating in this regard. As contemporary critics suggest, alongside the agrarian majority, the Ascendancy experienced the Famine and subsequent emigration as “catastrophic history” (Moynahan 10). Though surely less damaging, the Anglo-Irish (nationally Irish as of 1801) did undergo food shortages, severe economic losses, death to fever epidemics, even abuses by British soldiery and police during the 1840s (Kreilkamp 9-10 and Moynahan 10-11). Such revaluation of trauma also sheds light on Ireland’s War experience.

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7 This is an important argument to Nancy Curtin’s “‘Varieties of Irishness’: Historical Revisionism, Irish Style.”

8 Quoting Bradshaw, Curtin emphasizes the potential risk for revisionist historians to either intentionally or unintentionally mitigate traumatic events through their historical method: “Three devices of the value-free approach contribute to ‘filtering out the trauma’ of Irish history – evasion (simply ‘ignoring the evidence’ of catastrophe), normalization (dismissing state-sponsored violence as a part of a normal historical process), and neglect” (197). This study intends to open up the consideration of which Irish have undergone the same trauma, and how that trauma may affect different Irish populations in particular ways.
Ireland’s collective response to the War’s massive Irish (and British) casualty lists suggests that the Irish – across class, political, and religious boundaries – deemed the First World War a national trauma. Well into the 1920s, tens of thousands gathered in Dublin for Armistice Day where roughly 250,000 Irishmen (whether nationalist or unionist, apolitical or Home Ruler, “native” or Anglo-Irish) were commemorated with more instantaneous unanimity than perhaps the Rising’s men initially were. Mourning and commemorating the War’s dead certainly entered national consciousness, even in the South at the height of its movement toward independence. But fair to say, Anglo-Ireland’s hybridity (being pulled by “Irishness” “one way” and “loyalty to England” “the other” (Bowen x)), caused this class to register the War’s loss in a unique way. Nineteen-eighteen brought thousands of the Ascendancy’s sons back home, some deceased. Many were unionist men who had fought to “avert the calamity of Home Rule” (d’Alton 71), much like their loyalist counterparts in Ulster. The onslaught of independence politics accentuated Anglo-Ireland’s sense of loss, both personal and political. As d’Alton notes, while Southern unionists thus marked 1914 “their finest hour; it was also their swan song, [...] the final coup-de-grace to a type of existence which had been in decline for many years” (77 and 88).

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9 As Keith Jeffery aptly points out (and challenging Roy Foster’s suggestion in Modern Ireland that the War was, entirely, anathema in the South during the 1920-30s), Irishmen by the thousands would parade in Dublin for Armistice Day, “official Irish government representatives laid wreaths at the London Cenotaph,” and “the Fianna Fáil government after 1932 provided a publicly acknowledged state subsidy for the completion of the Edwin Lutyens-designed Irish National War Memorial” (IE 257).

10 The similarities and contrasts, as conveyed by literary and historical narratives, between the Southern and Northern unionist (and loyalist) contributions to the First World War are a focus of this dissertation, as work on this comparison has yet to consider literary representations in a sustained way.
When we turn to Bowen, Farrell, and Johnston, we are stuck by a complexity of attitude toward Anglo-Ireland’s decline. On the one hand, their novels are weighted with a realistic sense of inevitability that, despite its collective loss to the First World War, Ireland would continue to forge an independence-oriented consciousness. The question of belonging to that consciousness, however, was deeply problematic for the Ascendancy. In the shifting sands of the 1920s, the non-unionist majority saw the Anglo-Irish, as they tacitly saw themselves, in an increasingly untenable position. Their past prominence was irrecoverable, their obsolescence imminent. As such, their state of silent resignation seemed perhaps as proper as it was inevitable. But on the other hand, these authors question the Ascendancy’s own attitude and response to that “inevitability.” Inasmuch as their novels display the Anglo-Irish’s particular silence and resignation at the loss of its sons and centuries-old existence, the narratives expose the limiting effects of this class’s mindset – of becoming locked into, or refusing to progress from a traumatic past. In this context, The Last September, Troubles, and Babylon form a trajectory that critiques Anglo-Ireland’s tendency to remain bound within a traumatic state insofar as it clings to or looks backward to an irrecoverable past severed from historical change. And as we now turn to the novels, I would argue that Bowen, Farrell, and Johnston design narratives that employ tropes of the big house – insularity, intransigency, and backward-looking – not only to analogize them more broadly to the symptoms of trauma that inflected Ireland’s sectarianism, but to show how War trauma, un-dealt with, thus repeats or replicates within or as the Troubles.11

11 The insularity or backward-looking mentality of the Anglo-Irish can be more comprehensively associated with what Cathy Caruth recognizes as latency: the preservation of a traumatic event which is yet to be fully comprehended and thus rendered intelligible (T 8). As Robert Garratt notes, it is the violent history – which I argue here, the First World War represents – that insofar as it signifies violence never
Elizabeth Bowen

When *The Last September* opens, we arrive with the Montmorencys at the Naylors’ Danielstown estate. But the narrative frames Hugo and Francie Montmorencys’ arrival, really, in symbolic terms as a troubled “sense of return” (14). Beneath the surface-brilliance of motor cars and shimmering “theatrical sunshine” (4) lies the autumnal resonance of the novel’s title, the adumbration signifying its beginning-as-an-end. From the first scene, the narrative counterweights this single “moment of happiness, of perfection” at the Montmorency’s return with the specter of “trouble” (3), a haunting sense rendering the characters’ conversation “constricted […] powerless” from the outset (3-4). The first question posed to the Montmorencys, rather cryptically, is whether they had been “stopped” for questioning, an interchange evaded by the company’s swiftness to enter the “mansion piled […] up in silence” (4-5). And as the plot-action progresses – always with an “intrusion of political history on isolated lives” (Scanlan 70) – we find that the Naylors’ characteristic “constriction” in speech is, definitively, linked to trauma and loss. There is a persistent communicative desperation on the part of the Naylors hinted at in this first scene. Throughout the novel, they increasingly desire to evade particular conversation, or, to enact measures of deferment about loss, not only of its men and class-status in the wake of the First World War, but about the threat that the Trouble’s political mentalité now holds toward the Ascendancy.

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thoroughly dealt with, and made comprehensible, such violence continues to surface and repeat itself in the present (what Freud refers to as *Widerholungswang*, an “acting out” of traumatic neurosis) (35). Garratt thus argues that when for instance, Farrell and Johnston were writing about the Great War, “events in Northern Ireland during this period demonstrated that Ireland was caught up traumatically in history, fated to repeat the violence of a previous generation” (13).
This evasion and deferment pervades the house as soon as the company sits down for dinner, a scene which moves the Naylors and company into their longest, though stilted, conversation about Ireland’s post-War condition. A siege mentality afflicts the Naylor estate’s last generation. At dinner, fears of being “shot” (26) by separatist insurgents invade the Montorency’s minds, as Lois’s liberally-minded cousin Laurence corroborates that, indeed, the Danielstown’s existence “seems to be closing in” (28). But while Lois and Laurence almost “feel” the Naylor estate as “transitory” (28), Richard and Marda prefer to deny (in Laurence’s words) any “crude intrusion of the actual” (59). That denial is a deliberate though debilitative deferment, enforcing the Naylors’ “rule not to talk” nor “listen” to “rumors” of war (31). As readers, we register this deferment through Lois and Laurence’s points-of-view, an aspect of the narrative style that demarcates their generational distance in perception and ideals from those of their wards. Lois in fact, senses her “doom of exclusion” (26) from the Naylors as no less domineering or haunting than that of the ancestral ghosts in “the crowd of portraits” around the table (27). In the Naylors’ enshrining those “high-up faces” as “immutable figures,” Lois envisions the estate’s “dwindled personality” as clinging to an “outmoded modishness” – the “cancelled time” of pre-War life (28). The Naylors intently look backward toward that life, longing for their own ghosts, though fearing they live amongst revenants.

The pervading notion of being haunted, even hunted, by Ireland’s revenants is an anxiety that closes in on the Naylors from all sides. Yet, while the specters of insurgents lurk about the fringes of the demesne, even rumored to have guns buried on the Naylor plantation (29), the palpable, overt threat, as the Naylors admit, is the terrorizing presence of the new British Army. Even as the company enjoys an after-dinner “sit” on
the steps, the grind of patrolling lorries unnerves them. The moment is notable in that it marks the Anglo-Irish’s drastic change-in-attitude toward the British Army after the First World War. In Richard’s most verbal accusation in the novel, he derides the Auxiliaries for damaging his plantation, terrorizing innocent people, especially women, and getting too much in the “habit of fighting” – even threatening loyalists (30). From the Naylors’ point of view, “the Army isn’t at all what it used to be (31). They identify the end of the First World War with “a great deal of disintegration in England and on the Continent” (31). This disintegration is, to them, literal and moral: it is a loss of men as much as it is a loss of an empire consolidated, an empire which many of its men have fought to preserve. “Loss” accounts for the Naylors’ characteristic ambivalence toward British soldiers; while in 1919, some Auxiliaries were professional class War veterans, these men, as well as new recruits, often proved to be mere mercenaries during the Troubles. The Naylors’ loss signals a loss of faith in their prior associations.

That the Naylors reminisce for what is in their eyes, a “disintegrated” order and moralism now obliterated by the Great War, is an aspect of The Last September hitherto overlooked by critics. This context not only elucidates the Naylors’ sense of traumatic loss, but the way that loss effects their debilitation. Ireland’s soldiers, dead or alive, were reminders of loss. Like the portraits of ancestors on the Naylors’ walls, throughout the novel, we see loyalist drawing rooms “thronged with photographs” of Irish War casualties, “all the dear boys […] many of whom, alas, had been killed in that dreadful War” (102). Portending the reprisal-killing of Lois’s War veteran love-interest, Gerald, Lois feels in one such room “the multiplicity of the photographed young men’s faces […] appalling her” (237). These commemorative portraits for the War’s dead signal to us a
crucial shift in attitude on the Naylors’ part toward the British Army. It signals their ambivalence in now maintaining, in Bowen’s words, “a longstanding happy social tradition” (x) with that army in a moment when “disintegration” is partially wrought by that army’s reprisals. As Bowen elaborated in 1952:

If it seems that Sir Richard and Lady Naylor are snobs with regard to their niece’s soldier friends, it must be recalled that the Naylors’ ideas date back to the well-ordered years before 1914, and that those poised, impeccable young officers who – hunting, shooting, fishing, dining and dancing here – had long been the delight and resource of all Anglo-Ireland, almost all fell in the First World War (x).

But the narrative is unsympathetic toward the Anglo-Irish’s longing for those “well-ordered years.” That longing is nostalgic for a closed off, pre-War, even Austenian class-based (military) social order. The Naylors’ notion of loss is suggested to be just as much a moral and class snobbishness, or high-mindedness, as it is personal – or rather, the loss of its gentry-class soldiers marks the loss of Anglo-Ireland’s pre-War existence, maintained by its dependence on and contribution to Britain’s forces.

The narrative looks upon the Naylors’ high-mindedness “coldly,” as does the house itself (4). And as a means for self-imposed isolation, it reflects the Ascendancy’s desire for a return, to an anachronistic and ultimately “finished time” of a “vanished era” (vii-viii). As Margaret Scanlan suggests, the Ascendancy’s high-mindedness distances the Naylors from both a new class of British soldiers and from any national grievances proposed by their agrarian tenants, while at the same time, it placates both groups with mere toleration or superficial benevolence (72-3). In one such instance, the tenant father of a wanted insurgent insinuates that the very British forces that gather with the Naylors at dances have essentially brought “their German war” into Ireland, terrorizing innocents (90). But in these moments, the Naylors prefer not to “listen” nor “say”
anything despite their potential to occupy a conciliatory position. They neither overtly commit to, nor oppose any side. To some degree, however, the Anglo-Irish’s debilitation is due in part to being trapped, perhaps unavoidably, between two hostile factions, what Moynahan refers to as a “Catch-22” crisis of its Irish identity (240). Yet, as Bowen imples in her 1942 essay “The Big House,” that debilitation also stems from outrage, “moral” and “cultural”: “the big house people were handicapped, shadowed and to an extent queered – by their pride, by their indignation at their decline” (CI 197). The Naylors’ sustained association with the Auxiliaries thus takes expression, rather paradoxically, as a form of prideful recalcitrance. It is an effort to retreat to a pre-War life, to deny or defer the War’s traumatic impact on its class – in Bowen’s words, to admit that soldiering men, “Lois’s 1920 gallants, war-damaged,” with so few Anglo-Irish left, now “came of less favored stock” (x).

This older generation’s class-based pride, manifesting as denial and self-imposed silence about the present, influences Lois but also incites resistance, especially regarding her prospects with the only “eligible” young men in Danielstown, English Auxiliaries. The Last September begins a trope in First World War big house fiction of correlating political transformation to sexuality. The narrative intertwines one with the other, so that sexuality is symbolically political, or political transformation is inscribed in symbolically sexual terms. This correlation speaks to Anglo-Ireland’s anxiety about lineage, about eros, an anxiety that bears particular weight on Lois as an inheritor of the Danielstown estate. In Lois’s “encounters” with men – and always military men – the narrative glosses these moments via discours indirect libre with sexuality and ghostliness. To Lois, these encounters are as exhilarating as they are
threatening. Early on, she confronts an insurgent like a “a ghost” in the demesne with a “resolute powerful profile,” evoking in her a sense of “excitement” and “adventure” which accompanies initial “horror” (42-3). This experience foreshadows the “Usher”-like mill scene, wherein Lois’s second encounter with an IRA gunman, one like “a ghost,” is sexually allusive (182). “Appalled and desirous,” Lois confronts the gunman’s phallic-like pistol with a sense of “embarrassment,” yet “ecstasy,” a moment symbolizing for her, ambivalently, “a sense of the future” for her class: the “gratification” yet “nightmare” of its “death” (179-84).

Encountering these potential threats is, to Lois, liberating – a way to finally “conceive of her country emotionally” (42). But the narrative displays her limitations in communicating what that conception should be. Hence, she remains ambivalently silent, self-editing about her “encounters,” even with Auxiliaries whom she likewise experiences as sexually threatening. If her contacts with republican revenants are like hauntings, her encounters with belligerent “Black and Tans” on the roadways similarly conjure a “particular horror” – that of “feeling exposed and hunted” (108). She even admits inwardly that her once girlish infatuation for soldiers “before the War” has now changed into apprehension (108). But like her predecessors, she remains silent about what is either inconceivable or incomprehensible – the “war-damaged” condition of the British soldiers in Ireland. The Ascendancy’s position is thus quite untenable: it socializes with the traumatized, yet seemingly only for pre-1914 class-cultural pretense, an act which enables the Ascendancy to defer acknowledging its own decline – its imminent obsolescence.
Lois’s and the Naylors’ characteristic silence surrounding threat, political-as-sexual, is their way of coping with their traumatic past and anticipating a similar future. Yet, their attitude is a siege mentality, an act of recidivism. No other scene elucidates that mentality more clearly than the British barracks dance, a moment that coalesces the novel’s themes of trauma and silence, political threat as sexual allusion, and cultural pretense as strategic avoidance. The barracks dance is ominous from the outset, laden with gothic, Usher-like tropes of demise. As Lois and a host of Anglo-Irish families take shelter in the British Auxiliaries’ grave-like barracks, their last bastion of life, the howling wind outside rattles the barbed wire enclosures like a portent of the insurgents’ threats beyond those walls. But the threat of violence, producing momentarily a “slight discomfort, of national consciousness” (209), is immediately thwarted and replaced with what one officer calls the frivolity of “post-War madness” (220). But that madness, an “impetuousness out of everyone’s control,” an “exalted helplessness,” is also symptomatic – Anglo-Ireland’s sense of collective loss and losing, and more literally, the threat posed by their associations with these traumatized, “shell-shocked” men of the First World War.

One English War veteran, Daventry, a former “acting-major […] in France in 1916” (224) is the novel’s clearest image of traumatization, and he is another man whom Lois “could have loved” (214) yet finds “a shade satanic” (210). He competes predatorily against the benignant Gerald for Lois’s affection, though Lois recognizes Daventry as “hardly even a person” (229), “like a ghost” (231). Most significantly, he represents – or analogizes – the recurrence of trauma un-dealt with. Now a subaltern Auxiliary, Daventry has survived the Great War; but he is “shell-shocked” (212). That
infliction returns sporadically, and the narration correlates it to violent transference onto Ireland:

He kept shutting his eyes; [...] he had a headache. He had been out in the mountains all night and most of the morning, searching some houses for guns that were known to be there. He had received special orders to ransack [...], to search with particular strictness the houses where men were absent and women wept loudest and prayed. [...] Daventry still felt sickish, still stifled, with thick air and womanhood, dazed from the din. [...] He would go over the edge, quite mad (212).

Daventry is an image, or agent, of the potential devolution of Ireland predicated in part by 1914. He is “a ghostly survivor of the First World War not only brutalized,” claims Neil Corcoran, “but rendered a satanic ghost by his experiences of the actualities of military combat”; further, he is an image of “what Gerald might become” (58), bearing particular weight on Lois. Daventry is a figure of a revenant not avoided, but invited amongst his former “hosts.” But through his exasperation, fatigue – his shell-shock from the War – his transference is the Troubles: he begins “to hate Ireland, lyrically, explicitly” (212).

This condition seems a troubled, involuntary one. Worse, it is one whose implications are avoided: metaphorically speaking, the narrative frames Daventry as a “dance with the devil,” or “death,” for the Anglo-Irish. That dance is a carnivalesque avoidance of reality, a performative retreat to an irrecoverable past.

In the attempt to mask its own traumatic past, the Ascendancy chooses to “overlook” the way War trauma continues to inflict its British associations just as readily as it inflicts its (Anglo) Irish ones. Like Daventry, Gerald is caught up in this attempt. The Last September ultimately figures Gerald – a potential inheritor of the estate through

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12 Lois’s rejection of Gerald is perhaps dependent on this anxious inclination, though her rejection is certainly influenced, almost demanded, by the class-cultural pride of her wards, especially Myra, who is quite concerned about preserving a gentry lineage.
Lois – as a casualty of Anglo-Ireland’s avoidance. As a “threat” to an Anglo-Irish lineage (really, to its culturo-moral high-mindedness), he is rejected as Lois’s fiancée by the very class that, now, feigns esteeming War veterans as members of the quality. Essentially, what the Naylors reject is the reality of a changing order. When Daventry intrusively brings word of Gerald’s death to the Naylor estate, in the cold light of day, the Naylors “felt instinctively that he had come here to search the house” (298). Daventry becomes an Irish trope variation of “the stranger in the house.” As Corcoran points out, through this “intrusion and confrontation, then, we have the actuality of English military power in Ireland establishing its force and its threat to Anglo-Irish as well as to Irish” (59). The tragedy of the Naylors is that their trauma, un-dealt with, erodes community on both sides. Ultimately, they not only place themselves amidst the crossfire but catalyze that fire, often it seems, unwittingly.

*The Last September* thus questions whether the Ascendancy’s silence is a proper response to traumatic loss, of the War or during the Troubles. But insofar as the Naylors cling to one traumatic past, attempting to live in that past while disengaging from the traumas of, say, their tenants or English war veterans, the novel displays the consequences of their selecting or prioritizing one traumatic narrative over contiguous traumatic pasts. This recalcitrant “cut-off life” (*BC* 278) is antithetical to future community, a root problem to the century’s latter Troubles. *The Last September* anticipates that problem. As Moynahan remarks, in Bowen, “the deepest failure of the big house was its failure to provide a vital center for a community” (241). Inasmuch as Lois feels liberation outside the estate walls through her encounters with both “sides,” it is from the possibility, or inevitability, of new community.
James Gordon Farrell

If in *The Last September* Bowen thematizes the Great War as a traumatic point that inhibits the Ascendancy from forming community, J.G. Farrell, advances that theme forty years later in *Troubles*, a novel eponymously entitled for the 1970s. Like *The Last September*, Farrell’s *Troubles* interrogates the “cut-off life” of the Southern Ascendancy in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. But unlike Bowen’s primarily realist technique, Farrell employs an absurdist, Kafkaesque narrative style which emphasizes this life’s predominant and analogous problem – its overwhelmingly isolative, even xenophobic attitude toward community. Farrell, however, is keenly aware that the War’s trauma partly enforces this mentality. He is attune to traumatic loss lamentably afflicting the Anglo-Irish and English alike. More so than in Bowen, the style of Farrell’s narrative parallels its content. In *Troubles*, isolation, intransigence, and “unreliability” are themes narrated as symptoms of trauma afflicting the protagonist, Major Brendan Archer, a politically indifferent, middle-class English veteran “recovering from shell-shock” induced by the Great War (8), and his subsequent relation to the Anglo-Irish, Edward Spencer, a jingoistic former colonial administrator turned hotel-estate and land proprietor in Wexford. Filtered through Brendan’s flashback-laden experience at Edward’s estate during the Troubles, Farrell’s narrative operates by symbolic correlation. The protagonist’s very real limitations in perceiving “reliably” are a consequence of his War neurosis; that neurosis indicates or “produces” a *particular* type of nonrealistic narrative. In Farrell’s words, this narrative style focalizes on “people ‘undergoing’ history” (quoted in McEwan 125), a prioritization of the personally experiential – especially of posttraumatic experience – during tumultuous events. One question Farrell’s *Troubles* thus raises is how can literary narrative prioritize the “unreliability” of post-traumatic
perception and experience in order to metaphorize personal lived histories as contiguous, though inevitably conflicting, “narratives” of history? Thus Farrell’s novel asks us to consider, more broadly, how the War’s trauma influenced the historical (or mythologized) rationales behind twentieth century Ireland’s continued belligerence.

In *Troubles’s* 1919 context, “undergoing” history is to endure military violence. It is a novel whose protagonist is, psychologically speaking, as damaged and barren as the killing fields of France from which he has recently departed. Major Brendan Archer has not, nor cannot, leave that War in the past. His deceased soldier friends continue to haunt him in the present. Flashbacks to the carnage of the trenches infiltrate that present, persisting as events as “real” to Brendan as is his current existence at Edward’s Majestic Hotel. Brendan’s post-traumatic state locks him in what Jenny Edkins would refer to as “trauma time,” moments wherein trauma is relived or experienced, thus rendering the (traumatic) past inseparable from, and no less “real” than the present (15-16). As such, Farrell frames Brendan’s “narrative” as a *mise-en-abîme* to the very descent of the Ascendancy estate that comprises the novel’s plot. The Anglo-Irish demesne in *Troubles* is a living anachronism. Reminiscent of Bowen’s Danielstown, the Majestic Hotel’s Anglo-Irish residents not only rue the loss of their sons to the War, but in the incipience of nationalist violence, they attempt to “cling to the late-Victorian, early-

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13 Edkins’s notion of “trauma time” as inseparable, and no less “real” than linear time, is crucial for understanding why past traumatic events are still extant *in or as* the present for the traumatized: “Linear time and trauma time do not exist independently; […] they define and constitute each other in a complex relationship, almost like opposite poles of a dichotomy. Like remembering and forgetting, each implies the other: they are inextricably entwined. Trauma time is inherent in and destabilizes any production of linearity. Trauma has to be excluded for linearity to be convincing, but it cannot be completely put to one side: it always intrudes, it cannot be completely forgotten. And similarly, trauma time cannot be described in the language we have without recourse to notions of linearity” (15-6). *Troubles* illustrates this paradigm taxonomically as a trauma novel.
Edwardian period which they nostalgically regard as the height of British civilization” (Crane and Livett 81) – a civilization untouched by the Great War or the 1916 Rising. The return or recurrence of the past-in-the-present is thus a narrative strategy in Troubles that intersects personal War neurosis, signified by Major Brendan Archer, with the War as national traumatic-loss, undergone by the Majestic’s Anglo-Irish residents.

From the outset of Troubles, like The Last September, the narrative is designed to adumbrate how the violent past infiltrates the present, and how “living” solely within the past sends the Ascendancy up in flames. In an unspecified present, the narration begins by surveying the now-incinerated grounds where Spencer’s Majestic sat, a once preeminently “fashionable place” (6) of Victorian Wexford, whose façade looked toward England across “the Irish Sea (and not into Ireland)” (65). Like Last September, Troubles’s end (its present) is referenced in its beginning (its past), the reminiscent “in those days” (5) which begins the novel “in the vague tone of myth” as Scanlan notes (80). In a nod to Bowen, we see that “reminiscent” end – the incendiary ruins of the Majestic. Yet, pervading those ruins is the sense that the past cannot be fully elided from the now:

Curiously, in spite of the corrosive effect of sea air the charred remains of the enormous main building are still to be seen; for some reason […] vegetation has only made a token attempt to possess them. Here and there among the foundations one might still find evidence of the Majestic’s former splendor (5).

Foregrounding the “trauma time” which governs the novel, Farrell’s narrative opens with its characteristic recurrent conflation: the past “exists” with the extant, and throughout the novel, it even imposes itself onto the living. As Robert Garratt argues, “this sense of déjà vu is part of the novel’s traumatic effect. […] Farrell dramatizes the grip that the
past holds on the present by making *Troubles* above all else a novel of traumatic memory” (20).

It is noteworthy then that throughout the novel, the First World War’s violence is a point-of-loss for memory, or an assault thereon. The narrative is about re-collecting memory, in the sense of recovering from it by rendering it intelligible. Major Brendan Archer is a type of narratological analogy or model for this attempt. His individual “narrative” of recovery is primarily an attempt to piece together memories of his life before and during the War, revolving around his engagement to an Anglo-Irish woman, Spencer’s daughter Angela. But “recovering from shell-shock” clouds the Major’s sense of relation to Angela even after he “left the hospital” before the “great Victory Parade marched up Whitehall” (7-8): “he now only retained a dim recollection of that time, dazed as he was by the incessant, titanic thunder of artillery that cushioned it thickly, before and after” (7). But not only is Brendan’s “engagement” anything but settled, we come to realize that his very relationship is premised on a sense of patriotic performance, particularly on Angela’s part, one that looks past the trauma wrought on individual men and toward the “romance” of the War. “Angela perhaps feeling amid all the patriotism that she too should have something personal to lose, the Major that he should have at least one reason for surviving” (7).14 Brendan returns to the Majestic to call on his now ailing fiancée and to interrogate his very reasons for surviving. Yet in the

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14 This exchange, focusing notably on the culturally narrativized understandings of warfare, seems an echo of *The Last September*, when after feeling “exposed and hunted” by Auxiliaries patrolling, “Lois recalled with surprise that she had cried for a whole afternoon before the War because she was not someone in a historical novel” (108).
process, he finds himself caught up, even against his will, in interrogating what the
Anglo-Irish deem they have “to lose” in the War.

The answer to that question, as Edward Spencer would have Brendan believe, is
everything. Like Bowen’s glimpses of post-War Ascendancy estates, Spencer’s Majestic
is a shrine to the memory of deceased Anglo-Irish soldiers of the Great War. In his first
days at the hotel, Brendan is disturbed by Edward’s ritual commemorations for these
soldiers, as they incite undesired flashbacks for Brendan. Daily, Edward prays for “the
Fallen” in front of “a carved wooden memorial” with “two long lists of names” recently
etched in “like wounds,” casualties whom Brendan imagines with “ghostly arms”
extending out toward him, “long ranks of tiny eyes were now staring at him as if
accusing him of being […] alive” (43-4). As Edward lauds these men “in sepulchral
tones” for giving “their lives for King, for country, and for us,” Brendan “ground his teeth
at the accusing, many-eyed memorial and thought: ‘Hypocrisy’” (45). Brendan’s silent
accusation of Edward’s hypocrisy is telling. He sees Edward’s commemoration as a
lament for personal-as-“national” loss (not dissimilar from Angela’s). Inasmuch as
Edward rues the loss of his Ascendancy lineage, he likewise decries the Empire’s
disintegration – that “the presence of the British signified a moral authority” which “the
Republican movement” now threatens to destroy (55). As such, Edward’s estate
becomes a sepulcher for the living Anglo-Irish.

The Majestic is thus anthropomorphized, like Danielstown, as a hauntingly
domineering space. And Farrell pushes that symbolization to carnivalesque extremes.
The narrative filters our perception through Brendan’s attempt to “read” or make sense
of the claustrophobic, isolative, and monstrous character of the house and its
inhabitants. But it is precisely the Spencers’ siege mentality, their intractable clinging to an irrecoverable way of life, which impedes Brendan’s own desire to recover from his trauma by confronting it: “he was trying once again to delve into the past with the paralyzed fingers of his memory, hoping to grasp some warmth or emotion, the name perhaps of a dead friend that might mean the beginning of grief, the beginning of an end to grief” (44). Ironically, while Brendan attempts to end the intrusion of his traumatic past, he finds that the Spencers cling to theirs – and almost pathologically. The Spencers’ self-isolation is a chronic symptom of its lineage’s ultra-loyalism, manifesting literally as illness in various ways: Edward, a jingoist for the Orange narrative of loyalist history, hunts “natives” (85) half sportingly. When the Troubles near his door, he ends up murdering a man who tampers with his Queen Victoria statue. While he and his elderly residents repeatedly provoke Irish tenants, haranguing local pubs with Union Jacks, simultaneously – and farcically – they repress the ubiquitous reality that their “Unionist cause had fallen into decline” (123). Tellingly, Spencer’s last stronghold of unionists is depicted, like the Majestic itself, as physically ailing with unnatural rapidity, metaphorically (and unwittingly) “engulfed by the advancing green tide” (153).

Yet it is Spencer’s presumption that since the Major has been “loyal” (440) to Britain in the Great War, then Brendan is of the Ascendancy “tribe” (30), a de facto “member of the ‘quality’” (33). That membership indexes his “manly” (85) and “moral fiber” (86). Consequently, Edward implicates Brendan, literally, in hunting down rumored “Shinners” (24), re-exposing the Major to violence. Brendan laments this exposure. As Patrick Williams remarks, “the Major, having survived the trenches of the First World War, seems […] in flight from mass violence and concomitant notions of masculinity”
(170). But in implicating Brendan in the Troubles’s violence, Spencer in fact “returns” Brendan to the Great War: the Major finds that “the war was still there. He had not yet finished with it” (79). A significant correlation becomes discernable in Troubles’s narrative between the political violence impinging on the Majestic and Brendan’s flashbacks. As Brendan reads through news stories (printed in the Irish Times) about the Empire unraveling, he begins to “read” the Troubles within a global context, situating his own war “narrative” within a national one. Photographs of War veterans “smudged and accusing” haunt him, such that “the harvest was not yet complete,” [...] not yet “finished and forgotten” (79). Other reports of carnage, however, are equally haunting, those claiming that “what was going on in Ireland was connected with what was going on in Egypt and India” (177), as insurrectionist skirmishes are countered by Britain’s reprisal killings. What becomes apparent to Brendan is the unreality and performative aspect of the Spencers’ “cut-off life” – its clinging to a now tenuous narrative of class stability, moral superiority, and martial defense amidst a drastically changing political landscape – the Empire’s descent.

The novel then, figures the Troubles as psychologically returning Brendan to the War’s violence, a return catalyzed by Spencer’s “living” in the past. When Brendan departs for the War’s Peace Day celebration in Dublin (a secret attempt to flee Wexford), the War casualties that Edward commemorates haunt Brendan in nightmarish flashbacks: “tattered figures crawled towards him, pallid and speechless” (92). It is an omen. As a wounded veteran, Peace Day turns out to be anything but peaceful. The

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15 The news-clips inserted throughout Troubles are all excerpts from the Irish Times which Farrell collected from the British Museum as he was composing the novel.
crowd “stirring violently” laden with “Union Jacks” troubles him as he witnesses political unrest disrupting “the triumphant apotheosis of the Empire’s struggle for Peace” (93-4). When a mob breaks out, Brendan suspects that despite the ensuing violence, “Dublin was still living in the heroic past” (89). That sentiment is soon legitimated when Sinn Fein arrives, threatening soldiers, eventually gunning down an English “army officer” (101). The Major detects a “flaw in the smooth and majestic edifice of Peace Day” (89) – a feigning of “the heroic past.” He finds himself more than ever suffering from a sickening isolation, a longing for community. He returns to “the quality,” though regretfully, realizing more than ever that Edward’s community likewise belongs to Britain’s “heroic past.”

Brendan returns to find Edward verging ever closer to madness, attempting “to close the ranks” (123) further by proudly billeting Auxiliaries at the Majestic. Troubles, however, depicts this “community” like Bowen does, as an unacknowledged internal threat to the Ascendancy. The Major is “disturbed by their presence,” deeming the Auxies’ “bravery, steadfast obedience, […] chivalry” eradicated by 1914’s “holocaust” (168). To Brendan, these men are the living counterparts to the revenants that haunt him. The Majestic comes to experience their threat as real. The Auxies hold bayonets to elderly residents’ throats and forcibly invade local businesses, terrorizing Catholic (and Protestant) civilians unprovoked. Their violence increases and intensifies Brendan’s flashbacks. Suffering from war neurosis, Brendan becomes more inward-turning, apathetic to historical event (like the Majestic’s residents), hinted at by his dwindling interest in news: “the Major was perfectly numb to the daily horrors printed by the newspaper. He had become used to them as he had once become used to the dawn
barrage" (325). Living amongst revenants from the War, Brendan gradually becomes a “member of the ‘quality.’”

The Major’s inward-turning ultimately heralds his own demise when Spencer plans one last ball to capture the spirit of “the old days” (332), a climax that pays homage to Bowen’s scene from Last September. But Farrell’s scene casts the Spencers’ siege mentality as far more carnivalesque, even grotesque. As a way of life now disintegrated by the War, the ball is a choreographed dance for the dead. “The absence of youth […] lent the guests the appearance of wax figures, museum curiosities, unconnected with […] the seething modern world” (345). A remnant of the Ascendancy cordonning itself off: “this was the face of Anglo-Ireland, the inbred Protestant aristocracy, […] a separate species, which had ruled Ireland for almost five hundred years” (344-5). The Auxiliaries are the only young men amongst this class, though instead of acting as suitors, they act as terrorists, “threatening to shoot” (362) their hosts.16 Their violence sends Brendan into his most visceral flashback, wherein in a moment of terror, he conflates an Irish tutor, Evans, who is murmuring vicious indictments at the ball, with an anonymous soldier:

But now the speaking voice rose querulously, becoming audible; a confused string of obscenities reached his ears. The voice was unrecognizable, but an image flashed into the Major’s mind – of a man he had seen mortally wounded sitting hunched in a shell-hole with his intestines in his lap […] his blue lips still quivering with an unending rigmarole of curses while his eyes turned milky. […] There was only one person there. […] It was Evans. […] The Major grasped him by the frayed collar […] and wrenched him back […]. Sudden anger gripped him. He shook Evans with all his strength; all the growing bitterness of the last hour, […] all the tragedy and despair of the years in France exploded in

16 In one instance, the Auxies throw a cross-dressing Irish Catholic teenager, Padraig, into an icy pool on the hotel’s promenade. Brendan rescues him just before he drowns. It is a scene wherein British militarist masculinity acts out violence, tellingly it seems, on a “feminized,” rural Irish class.
one violent discharge of hatred concentrated on the loosely swaying head in front of him (354).

The instance exemplifies a crucially symbolic moment of traumatic repetition in the novel. Past violence repeats itself in the present. Unable to recover from the War in the Majestic’s paradoxical space of belligerent insularity, Brendan’s traumatized condition becomes an analogy to the Great War’s violence reifying in or as the Troubles. Brendan becomes an inadvertent aggressor toward the Irish, figured in the narrative through his symbolic act of transference onto the (metaphorical) face of emergent nationalist Ireland. Like the Spencers, Brendan thus subjects himself to ensuing nationalist reprisals. They seal their own fates – shortly thereafter, IRA members bury the Major on the beach facing England to drown alongside a Black and Tan. Analogously, Troubles’s beginning (its portended end) repeats, as the Majestic is set aflame, forcibly evacuating any remnant of an Anglo-Irish presence.

Writing Troubles throughout the 1960s, Farrell analogizes the intrusion of Brendan’s traumatic past onto the Troubled present in order to adumbrate Ireland’s situation in the 1970s. Farrell would later be explicit about that correlation: “I would go up to the British Museum newspaper library to read the Irish Times for 1920 and come back, buying an evening paper on the Tube. It was uncanny: exactly the same things were happening again, sometimes even in the same streets in Belfast” (quoted in Brock 73). Farrell’s rendering violence as recurrent to Ireland’s history is an aspect that Bowen would praise Troubles for in 1971. “It is yesterday reflected in today’s consciousness. The ironies, the disparities, the dismay, the sense of unavailingness are contemporary” (E 59). That “unavailingness” takes expression in the Ascendancy’s foremost symptom of traumatic loss – its ambivalence: it is a “community which is torn to pieces between
the warring impulses of order and continuity (the past),” writes Lars Hartveit, “and the vitality inherent in the process of change and renewal (the future)” (456).

Jennifer Johnston

The “warring impulses” that sealed the Ascendancy’s demise at home also infiltrated the battlefront, as Jennifer Johnston reveals in How Many Miles to Babylon?, her big house combat novel of 1974. Like her predecessors, Johnston is both retrospective and allusive about symbolizing Ascendancy decline. Babylon is the memoir of Alexander Moore, a young Anglo-Irish inheritor who is torn between allegiance to his father, Frederick, a quasi-advocator for Home Rule, and his viciously loyalist, isolative mother, Alicia. Chronologically, Alec’s backstory begins at the Moore’s southern Irish estate in 1914, when many of their Anglo-Irish peers begin sending their sons off to the Great War. As word gets back that many of these men have met death, Alicia is adamant that Alec, as an Anglo-Irishman, has a “duty to fight” (40) and even become “a dead hero” (46) for Britain. But Frederick deems that as the estate’s sole inheritor, Alec’s duty to the “the land must come first” (42), in order to secure a measure of survival for their class. Alec attempts to navigate between these two different notions of Ascendancy “community”: his mother’s centuries-old narrative of pre-War “order and continuity,” of class privilege and insularity, and his father’s anticipating, though too apathetically, the “process of change and renewal” that the Anglo-Irish would need to undergo in order to survive after the War.

But unlike Johnston’s forerunners, Babylon captures an often overlooked reality. The First World War marked for the Irish a potentially shared sense of loss, for separatist as much as unionist Ireland. The novel suggests that change and renewal could begin by narrating about trauma mutually felt, by “recomposing” an historical
narrative emphasizing traumatic loss as communal experience. Johnston raises a pertinent question in this regard: is it profitable for an Ireland fraught by the violence of unionist-separatist factions to identify similarities in how their War experiences were troubling? Her paradigm is thus retrospective, taking us via the novel, to a moment of shared loss – to the battlefields of France, a moment preceding any realization that the War’s specter would continue to haunt Ireland in the form of the Troubles well after 1918. But like her precursors, Johnston’s paradigm is also allusive, intended to foreshadow the sectarian rifts that would overwhelm Ireland by the mid-1970s, like a symptom of traumatic repetition. Commenting on her choice to narrativize the Great War in *Babylon*, Johnston stated in 1984 that her intent was to focus “on a dwindling way of thinking about Ireland”: to renew the imperative realization that “the two cultures in Ireland,” Protestant unionist and Catholic separatist, “cannot live without each other” (quoted in Boyce 25), a caveat that seemed all but forgotten by the 1970s. As her novel exemplifies (and key to the Anglo-Irish predicament) forgetfulness is often rooted in the selectivity of traumatic memory. Writing *Babylon* about “human relationships with the undercurrent of violence,” Johnston thus claimed at the height of the Troubles, that her novel was to be read “as a metaphor for what is presently happening” (quoted in Boyce 25).

As a novel, *Babylon* is about reconstructing a conciliatory “narrative” out of the Great War, one that calls attention to the very selectivity of memory, especially when re-collecting traumatic events. Like most of Johnston’s novels, *Babylon* is a first-person narrative, controlled by a singular agent who has undergone violence prior to narrating the story. Trauma in fact sparks the necessity of narrating; and like a confessional,
Alec's memoir reveals how a traumatic event essentially shapes his point-of-view, that is, his selectivity as storyteller. Reminiscent of *Last September* and *Troubles*, *Babylon*'s “beginning” marks an end. The novel opens in a dramatic monologue as commissioned officer Alec Moore, court martialed, waits to be executed by firing squad; he has just killed his Catholic nationalist friend, Jeremiah, in order to spare him the shame of being shot for going AWOL. The opening pages begin Alec’s memoir frame, chronicling his disaffection from his estate inheritance and subsequent enlistment with Jerry into the British Army. But before beginning his narrative about the past, Alec supplies a prelude demonstrating both the “unreliability” of any (traumatic) history, and significantly, the writerly position granted to him by Ascendancy class privilege:

> Because I am an officer and a gentleman they have given me my notebooks, pen, ink, and paper. So I write and wait. I am committed to no cause, I love no living person. […] So for the waiting days I have only the past to play about with. I can juggle with a series of possibly inaccurate memories, my own interpretation, for what it is worth, of events (1)

For Alec, his narrative is an attempt to “interpret,” and thus render intelligible, the “events” that have led up to his execution. But as Johnston points out, *Babylon* is not taxonomically a historical novel, but one about “human relationships with the undercurrent of violence.” The novel is intended to foreground how (in Farrell’s words) “‘undergoing’ history,” especially trauma, may forge mutuality in how violent events are understood. As Robert Garratt avers, Johnston concerns herself with *perspective* over empiricism by writing “trauma novels that emphasize the act of thinking, imagining, and recalling over the matter or events being imagined” (70). For us as readers, *Babylon* therefore shifts our focus, via Alec’s narrative, to *human relationships*, which in 1914 were recourse to the class-based partisanship intensified by Ireland’s ironic position within the Great War.
Alec begins his backstory by returning us to his adolescence at the Moore house, a place that like the Naylor and Spencer estates, is safeguarded from the Ireland beyond. Like the younger generations in Bowen and Farrell, Alec feels stultified by his parents’ high-minded class isolation. The first words of Alec’s narrative are plain spoken indictment: “As a child I was alone. […] I was isolated from the surrounding children of my own age by the traditional barriers of class and education” (3). His Ascendancy life is forebodingly entropic. The Moore estate’s symbolic decline is signaled by the failing health (and authority) of the male figurehead, Frederick Moore, inversely set off against his domineering estate wife, the ultra-loyalist Alicia Moore, an insular and mercenary socialite. As in Troubles, Frederick’s decline in authority takes expression in illness, effecting the estate’s further isolation. “Illness” in the novel is ideological as well as physiological. Alicia fears that Irish men, especially working-class ones, may infect their home with “some terrible disease” (5). She even sees her husband’s illness as a weakness correlating to his liberally-minded Home Rule sympathies, an index of his being “uncultivated, […] a peasant at heart,” “an ineffective man” (30-3) who has “never aspired to being an Englishman” (40). In such circumstances, Alec lamentably recalls being cordoned off from Ireland, rendered so “remote, so protected” (28) from any community – while ironically, he sees that it is his own estate which is degenerating.

Alec finds community in his only “private and secret friend” (13), Jeremiah, one of the Moores’ impoverished Catholic tenants with nationalist leanings. As the two boys enter the vales and hills of the demesne, they form a clandestine fraternity. In defiance of their imposed class separation, their time in the Irish countryside signifies for them a reconciliation. They swim, wrestle, and horseback ride by a swan-dotted lake, a
symbolically “idyllic” (15) locale which later in the narrative, functions as a leitmotiv of Yeatsian national memory, sustaining Alec and Jerry at the Front. To Alec, Jerry exemplifies how to finally be in the world and act like a man. Assertive, physically fit (though malnourished), and more worldly-wise, Jerry introduces Alec to Irish epic cycles, nationalist politics, and to the news of Europe’s oncoming war. Alec recalls these moments with Jerry as eye-opening: “I remember the moments that snatched me from the passive solitude of my normal life” (15). By finally experiencing the world, however, the “passive solitude” defining Alec’s estate home now confronts him in even starker relief – it is like an affliction.

Alec’s memoir correlates the War’s outbreak with his father’s unnatural aging and impotence – symbolically in the novel, a devolution toward the “death” of his class. The Moores are initially indifferent to the world, including the autumnal significance of the War. Sheltered by their “fields […] gold and firm,” they “paid very little attention to the war when it happened first” (35). But the War’s crude intrusion of the actual is soon realized when Alicia, hitherto completely “indifferent to” and “unconscious of the existence of this war,” pronounces that a fellow Anglo-Irish son, “Christopher Boyle, has been killed” in “Flanders” (37-9). The subsequent scene adumbrates the opposition of thanatos to eros that underscores so many literary representations of the Ascendancy’s post-War demise. Alicia demands that Alec become “a more adequate man” (45) than his father through his “moral duty” to “fight” in the Great War (40). In Alec’s recollection, his mother adheres to the old lie she tritely reiterates, “dulce et decorum est” (40). Her manipulation, however, is vicious: telling him that Frederick is not his real father, Alicia endeavors to appropriate him into becoming a “dead hero” (46) for Britain. Her ambition
toward *thanatos* anticipates severing Alec from his Anglo-Irish lineage. Marked as the end of *eros*, Alec recalls being “dispossessed in a sentence” (47). Alec narrates his permanent exit from the estate, however, as a *self-dispossession*, a rebellion from his class. In homage to Bowen and Farrell, Alec recalls releasing his anger, symbolically, onto the house. He “beat the fire to death,” watching the “dust” settle ubiquitously over the interior, an allusion to the incendiary “violence” (48) wrought on the Anglo-Irish estate. He narrates: “as it settled I felt the withdrawal of all those objects that had been mine by right. […] I opened the door quietly, […] leaving the inanimate, the inimical behind, […]. I could escape the eyes of the ancestors on the walls, to whom I was now an intruder” (48).

Alec dissociates himself from the substitution of *thanatos* for *eros*, or in Shari Benstock’s words, from the “sterile, forbidding environment” of the “Anglo-Irish home” (197). But Alec’s departure from his class “is mitigated” through his attachment to Jerry (Benstock 197). He chooses to seal his friendship with Jerry by enlisting with him in the First World War, an ostensibly ironic decision. He does so, however, certainly not to fulfill his mother’s will. Rather, his decision actualizes the possibility for new community, and definitively on Alec’s part, an anti-class and even apolitical form of Irish community. This possibility extends Benstock’s notion of how *Babylon* addresses mitigation through Alec and Jerry’s friendship. What follows is Alec’s endeavor to display, through his memoir, how shared War service (and trauma) can mitigate the type of internecine conflicts – of class and ethno-religious division – which Alec and Jerry’s relationship signifies. Like much Irish War literature, *Babylon* illustrates how the question of motivation for war service and of militarization by Irish men becomes politicized,
inseparable from Ireland’s future sovereignty status. But the novel suggests that combat could in fact alter what type of Ireland and Irish (masculine) identity is sought. From the blur of basic training to the fog of war, Alec and Jerry find that for Irishmen, the British Army’s notion of “national” duty and allegiance reinstates the very class-based divisions which they left Ireland to escape.

Alec and Jerry’s induction into the Great War is at once marked by their Major’s predisposed aversion to Irishmen, to their race and martial capability as men. Much of Alec’s memoir shifts the anxiety of combat onto Major Glendinning, an Englishman pathologically obsessed with making “a man” (1) of Alec and turning the Irish “illiterate peasants” and “incompetents” into “soldiers” (70). Glendinning immediately separates Alec, as a commissioned officer, from Jerry. Alec lamentably admits that Jerry was right: “it never entered their heads that I should be anything but an officer” (70-1). But from the outset, Alec transgresses his imposed separation from Jerry. He circumvents Glendinning’s “strict impersonal discipline” concerning class separation “between the men and the officers,” especially amongst the “damn bog Irish” (92). Despite their subjection to corporal punishment, Alec and Jerry resist conforming to the type of “soldiers […] men” (92) that Glendinning insists on. There is a quiet subversion at work in Babylon, particularly on Alec’s part in retaining his friendship with Jerry. He is intentionally noncompliant with British regimental discipline concerning class-separation, and by association, its subtended “masculine” performance. This shift in antagonistic focus – from the “enemy” beyond the trench to the one within – aligns Babylon, like O’Flaherty’s Brute, with Irish (and British) novels that as David Trotter argues, indict “the class-system” reified in the “trenches” (35). This reification, according to Trotter,
reinforces “the belief that the maximum of individual adaptability will ensure a minimum of collective change” (36). For Alec, the pressure to adapt is as ideologically violent as the War is physically, and these two forms of violence are often experienced hand in hand.

It is noteworthy then, that Alec foresees Major Glendinning’s pressure as precursory to his symptoms of combat neurosis. Incensed by the Major’s bombarding castigations, Alec’s hands begin to shake with regularity, and his anxious “beads of sweat” (71) become constant once he enters the trenches. “Frightened” and plagued by “nightmares,” his admission about combat is telling: “there were moments in fact that to die would have been preferable to continue to live. I was afraid that one day I might wake up and find that I had come to accept the grotesque obscenity of the way we lived” (84). Alec’s fear of acceptance speaks past the level of combat alone, and to the fear of individual adaptation. What becomes grotesque to Alec – and indeed nauseating – is the “evil” (152) embodied by Glendinning and his staff. At a national-class level, Alec's nausea (when looked at from Trotter's paradigm of the “radical” combat novel) evinces the relativity of nausea or disgust; Alec's nausea, symptomatic of his war neurosis, is induced inter-rank as often – if not more – than it is by any external “enemy.” Alec's aversion to that inducement incites revolt. He in fact attempts to resist adaptation to the collective by aligning with both Jerry and the class-conscious English officer, Bennett, a self-proclaimed “revolutionary” (103).

Alec places himself, for the first time, in the company of the politically minded. Jerry claims to use the War to gain arms experience for Ireland’s future revolution (102), and as a “fellow revolutionary” (103), Bennett scoffs at serving like “slaves” to “the fat
men at home” (86). But the boys find their forum for resistive expression only in civilian activity, in an apolitical “return” to the life of the home. In defiance of their imposed separation in rank (with nationality and religion certainly implied by their superiors) the three steal away to horseback ride, foxhunt, and drink together in civilian establishments. As Felicity Rosslyn notes, the cohort operates on its “refusal to ‘play the game’ militarily” by “ignoring their differences in rank” (112). This is certainly true. The further Alec is pushed into warfare (and its class ideology), the further he withdraws from it, desiring “to remain untouched” (125-6). That withdrawal is made, mainly, within their minds, as Alec and Jerry’s reminisce of Ireland. Through Yeatsian leitmotivs, Alec’s memoir correlates nationalist sentiment with the symbolically pastoral. He asks Jerry: “‘do you remember anything? Grass that hasn’t been walked on? Calm faces? Silence?’ ‘The swans. Yes. God,’ (110-1).” To Alec’s slight dismay, however, the exchange lapses Jerry into revolutionary thought: “when this war is over, […] we’ll have them running for their lives. […] There will be no trenches, no front lines. […] Every town, every village will be the front line” (111). Jerry envisions their actual return as a future for fraternal consolidation. That future is antithetical to the Moore estate’s prior class divisions which the boys experience as reified in the British Army. He tells Alec: “we need each other though. Your kind and mind. You’ll see” (111).

Alec and Jerry thus seal their camaraderie through what Mark Mortimer identifies as “youthful memories and resolves” (93). These leitmotivs provide the boys recourse from their “common sufferings and privations in the war” (93) – from traumatic experience, and most often, that inflicted by their own ranks. As a novel, Babylon is unique in figuring the trauma undergone by Irish men in the First World War as a
medium for potential consolidation. Alec and Jerry’s commonality in suffering is wrought, by and large, through the codes of the British Army, those of class and ethno-nationality and of religion and masculinity – the very same ones Alec struggled against at his estate. To alleviate and resolve that suffering, they adhere “to another code – of friendship” (Benstock 198). In the context of narrating about trauma (figured in Babylon as the protagonist’s memoir), it is notable that Alec’s “interpretation […] of events” (1) prioritizes friendship above the codes of class, ethno-nationality, and military law. Friendship functions, apolitically and alternately, as a code of psychosocial coherence. Their sense of duty to one another – and willingness to die for another – presides over, and ultimately takes the place of their duty to the state. While this trope is not uncommon in First World War literature, Babylon’s image of homosocial priority, especially one of cross-class consolidation, is unique given Ireland’s markedly polarized (and augmenting) division over that War. Alec’s memoir not only revaluates the meaning of fighting and dying as Irishmen in the Great War; it does so by effectively reconfiguring the “national-masculine” correlation enforced by British soldiering.

For Alec, the question of fighting out of loyalty balances on a knife-edge when days before their first major offensive, Jerry steals away at his mother’s request to locate his father who has gone missing down the line. But while Alec’s company prepares for the offensive, Alec himself prepares for a defense: to protect Jerry who is caught, and without proper evidence, is convicted as a deserter and a possible “traitor” (151). The narrative’s irony darkens as the threat on the other side of no-man’s land dissolves from his mind – Alec’s only sense of “fighting” becomes to defend Jerry from execution. In his memoir, Alec’s promise of defense signals a symbolic return to eros, a
tableau which imagines a code of homosocial consolidation as *national* consolidation:

“He threw an arm across my shoulders and we lay in silence. My warmth was spreading through him [...]. The beating of our hearts was like the cracking wings of swans lifting slowly from the lake, leaving disturbed water below”; Jerry’s response is, for *Babylon’s* vision of Ireland, metaphorically anticipative: “When we get home, we’ll have a place of our own” (141).

The novel reconfigures what the logic of sacrifice means for Irish men serving in the Great War. Alec and Jerry’s willingness to die for one another – a figuration, one might say, of sacrifice for Ireland – takes precedence over fighting for Britain’s war effort. But inasmuch as this logic of *personal* sacrifice transgresses British military law, Glendinning deems it a facet of Irish “emotionalism” (152), especially by an officer from Alec’s “background” (137). Like a revenant of Alec’s estate house, Glendinning claims that the only way to rid Alec of “the Irish disease, […] disaffection, disloyalty” is by “leadership and service” (121). Alec, however, sees his rubric as a “threat,” linking masculinity with nationality: “I will make a man of you,” the Major tells him (121). As Sharon Ouditt suggests, the Major’s logic of “militarist masculinity” (252) is what Alec identifies in his memoir as underscoring the very illogicality of Glendinning’s “views as to what reason means” (147). The ironic limit of “reason” is reached when on the eve of the offensive, Glendinning proposes that Alec lead the firing squad that will execute Jerry for desertion. Like Birmingham’s War-era satiric narratives on military law,

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17 Not surprisingly, Glendinning repeats a common stereotype about the Irish, claiming that “emotionalism” is a trait which should deny Ireland its right to political independence. He tells Alec, “How you damn Irish expect to able to run your own country when you can’t control your own wasteful emotions, I can’t imagine” (152).
Babylon shows the paradox in the Major’s adherence to “strict impersonal discipline” (92); he claims that on the eve of the attack, Jerry’s execution will maintain “the men’s morale” by showing how “deserters must be made an example of” (151). The utilitarian “logic” of Glendinning’s British – and overtly anti-Irish – discipline heralds death for Jerry (and Alec) in and by their own camp. Alec’s view of the Major is like a premonition: “outside, his war was shaking the world” (148).

In Babylon’s final scene, Alec frames his memoir’s denouement almost like a recurrence of his first disaffection from the “inimical” estate house. Determined to mercy kill Jerry, he consequently forfeits his own life to death by firing squad. Like his initial enlistment, Alec’s choice, tinged consciously with irony, is an act of personal commitment, one that is also an individual revolt. He desires to spare Jerry the indignity of being executed for remaining faithful to an ideal to which he mutually adheres, one that his executioners “will never understand” (156). Their mutual understanding is sealed by their desire for the last time, to “remember” – “The lake. The swans…” (154). But this time, Jerry’s response portends the fate of their (and Ireland’s) symbolic union – “I can remember nothing. […] Only that their wings sound like gun shots” (154). Jerry’s words darkly anticipate the “gun shots” of revolution that would reverberate throughout Ireland the year after Babylon’s fictive time, 1915. As Jerry’s “fingers clenched around” Alec’s, he thus replaces the Yeatsian leitmotif with another, with the revolutionary ballad that he and Alec sang the night they decided to enlist – “The Croppy Boy” (155). As Alec cocks his pistol, Jerry knowingly sings on: “I bear no hate against living thing, but I love my country above my King. […] Now father bless me and let me go…” (155). Alec shuts his eyes and pulls the trigger. Jerry’s death is Alec’s foremost traumatic event, the
beginning of his need to “sit and wait and write” before his own execution, as “the guns throb constantly, and louder up the line” (156).

The last image which returns us, literally, to the beginning of the novel, is an image of escalating belligerence: the violence of the Front reifies as the future of Ireland after the War. But in this last instance, Alec’s “interpretation of events” provides him, as Joseph Connelly suggests, “a sense of national identity and command of his own life”; his self-security finds expression in “the rapport, respect, dignity, and heritage that bind the two young men, leaving the reader with a sense of triumph” (120). If catharsis underscores the boys’ deaths, then it derives from Babylon’s vision of what, through the War, sacrifice can mean for Irish men. Sacrificing oneself for personal relationships – and undergoing mutual trauma – can take the place of, or take precedence over laying down one’s life for any utilitarian or sectarian political ideal, especially one that as the novel suggests, is without discrimination, an anti-Irish one. In such circumstances, Babylon depicts Ireland’s place in the First World War as a mutually-felt traumatic experience. And narrating about that trauma provides revaluative “histories” that are reconciliatory and mitigating. Such narratives are pertinent to inter-community relations – like nationalist and Ascendancy Ireland – those exacerbated after the War by the lack of such histories. Babylon thus looks back at the Great War to look forward. It displays how narrativizing about historical trauma may provide (present) rapprochement for a “Troubled” Ireland.

Johnston’s protagonist, in fact, adumbrates one of Irish War literature’s most pertinent focal points – the revenant violence which throughout the twentieth century, was symptomatic of Ireland’s collective trauma un-dealt with. Before his death, Alec
presages that violence: “perhaps one day I will be able to see the world with clarity, recognize the patterns that seem to weave and unweave themselves endlessly through life and history. Eternal recurrences” (149). If one dynamic became indicative of twentieth-century Ireland, it was its pattern of violence. That violence certainly seemed eternally recurrent by the second wave of the Troubles, when Johnston wrote *Babylon*. Her novel suggests that for nationalist- and Anglo-Ireland, and surely for England, violence – especially for men – predicated the national parameters of belonging. As Rosslyn rightfully points out, Johnston’s retrospection in 1974 “uncovers the impending disaster for Ireland and Irishness – the ideological definition of belonging that will drive divisions between North and South, Protestant and Catholic, and in cases like Alec’s, through the heart of someone who loves both the land and Jerry” (114).

For the Great War writers of the next two decades, Frank McGuinness, Christina Reid, and Sebastian Barry, the question of belonging becomes imperative given the Troubles’ ongoing violence. Like the big house novelists preceding them, these authors compose narratives wherein the First World War functions as a traumatic event determining wounded ex-soldiers’ (and civilians’) senses of belonging to a particular “Ireland.” And writing in an era of violence – when “sacrifice” is nearly axiomatic of national allegiance – these authors interrogate how national identification becomes bound to militarist masculinity, and how men’s traumas sustained in the War may become either anathema within, or the *raison d’être* for the two Irish states.
CHAPTER 5
MEMORY PLAYS IN THE TWO IRELANDS: POSTTRAUMATIC LEGACIES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND FIGHTING FOR RECOVERY

Entering into Frank McGuinness’s 1985 drama *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* is to enter once again into the realm of ghosts. It is a survivor play, one that stages how a lone veteran, Kenneth Pyper, is persistently haunted by the ghosts of his seven fallen Ulster Protestant comrades of the 36th (Ulster) Division, even six decades after 1 July 1916. Their presence forces Pyper back to confront his ever ambivalent attitude toward unionist Ulster and the separatist south. His opening soliloquy, addressed to Ulster (Northern Ireland in the play’s present) and the ghosts of his fallen comrades, is in fact just as interrogative about unionist veterans’ place in Ulster memory as it is about the south’s wartime separatist movement, Easter 1916. Pyper’s first words, more than anything, express his desire to forget about Ulster’s insistence that he remember the Somme: “Again. As always, again. Why does this persist? What more have we to tell each other? I remember nothing today. […] I don’t understand your insistence on my remembrance. […] I am angry at your demand that I continue to probe” (9). The protagonist’s lachrymose cadence is reminiscent of Beckett’s drama, especially the beginning dialogue to *Endgame*, “Clov: Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. […] I can’t be punished any more. […] Hamm: Enough, it’s time it ended, […] And yet I hesitate, hesitate to … to end” (1-3). Like Beckett’s protagonists, banished to live (through their eyes) in a present made desolate by, yet inescapable from their past, McGuinness’s Pyper is troubled by his past’s persistence into the present, its repetitions plaguing him as a continuous “curse” (10). But who or what, both plays ask, persists from the past, and what form do they take in the protagonists’ minds, and why?
In *Sons of Ulster*, we witness a character who experiences a genealogy ravaged by war and who consequently suffers from that trauma. While this theme is reminiscent of Ascendancy big house fiction, *Sons of Ulster* is indebted aesthetically to Beckett, a predecessor who connects McGuinness’s Ulster play to the Anglo-Irish literary legacy of the Great War that precedes him. In the context of Ireland after the two world wars, *Endgame*’s vision of an exhausted estate house, especially the demise of the master-servant (and proprietor-tenant) relationship, perhaps alludes to the Ascendancy’s postcolonial descent in the twentieth century. Compounded by the recurrent image of a dead or dying parental generation imposing itself upon those yet-to-die, Beckett’s characters suffer from the (postwar) barrenness of an ancestral house circumscribed by “death” (9) just as McGuinness’s Pyper envisions decades after the Somme, that the Ulster borne to him by his ancestors has “grown cold” (11) and “lies in rubble” (12). What persists in these two plays, as in Anglo-Irish Great War novels, is a decimated genealogy, which as undead revenants or ghosts, continues to mark a type of mythographical haunting onto the traumatized living. Like Hamm, the elderly Pyper speaks as if suffering from trauma; he has survived the Somme alone only to mourn the loss of his brothers in arms. But it is Ulster’s troubling present, its anachronistic propensity to mythologize itself and the Somme’s fallen as “God’s chosen” (10) – an “insistence on my remembrance” as Pyper indicts – which persistently returns him, quite

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1 Julian Moynahan describes Beckett’s generic technique as a “postmortem,” that is, “an evaluation or discussion occurring after the end or after the fact”; he draws attention on the word’s (or genre’s) metaphorical connotations of “an examination of a dead body,” referring to those like Beckett whose writings come “at the end of the line of Anglo-Irish tradition that carry out a sort of postmortem on the tradition (224-5). Throughout, I suggest that the tropes of genealogical ghosts and haunting characteristic of the Anglo-Irish postmortem, a southern unionist tradition, might have their counterpart in the Northern Irish First World War memory plays of this chapter.
ambivalently, back into an inescapably domineering history wherein time remains
cyclical: as in *Endgame*, always “zero.” Now in the present, as Pyper communes with
Unionist Ulster’s ghosts of the Great War, he oscillates between abstaining from, or
perpetuating this genealogy’s centuries-old culture of loyalism. If for the unionist (and
Anglo) Irish, the War’s dead caused anxiety about the South’s constitutional and
sociocultural future, for Unionist Ulster, the War’s dead, especially the 36th Division at
the Somme, were made salient to the very *telos* and *raison d’être* of the “Ulster
Protestant” identification in soon-to-be Northern Ireland. These casualties haunt Pyper
in that present; Ulster’s very teleological being in the War unnerves him, returning him
to that trauma: “I still see your ghosts,” he laments, “did you intend that we should keep
seeing ghosts?” (9). In 1980s Northern Ireland wherein Pyper still lives (and to which
*Sons of Ulster* responds), these ghosts are conjured amidst the Troubles; they are “the
chosen” seeking to defend “Ulster” once again, a defense of sociocultural, religious,
even ethnic “purity.”

As sectarian animosities of the War and Partition era resurfaced in Northern
Ireland throughout the 1970s-90s, the dead, the dying, and the “ghostly” presence of the
Great War came to foreground a paradigm of memory and recovery in Irish War drama
North and South, represented by Frank McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster* (1985), Christiana
*Reid’s My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name?* (1987), and Sebastian Barry’s *The
Steward of Christendom* (1995). These plays stage the War and the immediate post-
War era as recurrent and pertinent to the present, and in more ways than one. All three
plays were written at a time of resurging violence in Northern Ireland. After the 1981
Hunger Strike, wherein 10 republican prisoners died, the IRA deployed its “Long War”
by importing guns from Libya, and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) escalated its bombing campaigns into the mid-1980s. In retaliation, loyalist paramilitaries, mainly the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)\(^2\) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), began importing arms and explosives from South Africa. The mid-1980s were racked with bloodshed, especially following the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. And the specter of the First World War remained revenant to these times. Just two years after McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster* was first performed at the Abbey Theatre, the PIRA bombed a Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, killing ten civilians, one police officer, and wounding sixty-three others. The bomb also severely damaged Enniskillen’s cenotaph honoring Irish Great War veterans; such Northern Irish War memorials, like the one at Coleraine, Londonderry, in fact, influenced McGuinness to compose *Sons of Ulster* (Lojek 64).\(^3\) The IRA’s targeting a Great War commemoration, and significantly, in destroying the War’s iconography – and killing innocent commemorators – starkly reinforced to Irishmen and women how influential the War remained, particularly to claims of state delimitation and legitimacy. Enmeshed as they

\(^2\) The Ulster Volunteer Force was a loyalist paramilitary group which was formed in 1966 to combat the Irish Republican Army and should not be confused with “Carson’s men,” the anti-Home Rule organization of 1912 which formed part of the 36\(^{th}\) (Ulster) Division during the First World War. However, the name was meant to connect to the two, as do some murals across Northern Ireland to this day. For this discussion, see: Rolston, Bill. *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland*. London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991.

\(^3\) Lojek goes on to write that “McGuinness has dated his abandonment of the dream of a united Ireland to the Enniskillen bombing” (64). McGuinness references Northern Irish monuments, like Coleraine’s, as the spark inspiring him to write *Sons of Ulster* in an attempt to bridge the gap between the Republic’s and Northern Ireland’s memory of the War. Remembering how the idea came to him while teaching students, McGuinness tells Lojek in an interview: “suddenly, overwhelmingly, I made a connection to the war monument and the class. What if every single one of these men were killed? […] and then it hit me what the First World War must have done, particularly in the north, where so many young men, a generation of young men, practically, were gone. […] What would happen to their world? That was where *Sons of Ulster* came from” (64-5).
are with the North and South’s conceptions of their “sacrificial” War dead, the complications of these claims foreground the plays of McGuinness, Reid, and Barry.

But the First World War’s dead also enter into these authors’ works for another reason, one that reveals Ireland’s propensity, historically, to narrativize the War. In the 1980s, Ireland renewed an interest in garnering first-person testimonies from Great War veterans, since by this decade many survivors came closer to passing away. In the Republic and in Northern Ireland, the desire to record and remember the narratives of those who bore witness to combat also coincided with an uptick in attending public commemorations of the War. There was a tension during this moment in Ireland, captured and made central to the plays of McGuinness, Reid, and Barry. The Troubles, early and late, reflect ambivalences toward the post-War Partition era – the point of origin and predication of Ireland’s sectarian violence. The political pressures enveloping Irishmen as they served in the First World War (the status of southern unionism, republican separatism’s threat to Ulster loyalty, the Partition of Northern Ireland, and the differences between Ulster loyalism and unionism) these continued well past 1918, inscribing veterans into nationally tenuous positions. While the North and South widely commemorated veterans during Remembrance Days, ultimately, both sides of the border rendered these men as (political) casualties in their own ways. The Free State’s republican-oriented mentality grew more amnesiac by the 1930s toward its War involvement and late-century metropolitanism, an aspect resonant in Barry’s Steward of Christendom; and in Northern Ireland, the 36th Ulster Division’s casualties were not honored personally so much as they were coopted collectively into an iconography
exclusive to Ulster Protestantism, an issue confronted in both McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster* and in Reid’s *My Name*. Given the “Troubled” tenor of the 1980s, redolent of post-1918, these three authors’ works ask important questions about the War’s recurrent tension: how have state narratives of the War inscribed Irish veterans, and, how does staging – literally performing – the practice of recovering veterans’ and relatives’ memories (and the ghosts that haunt them) reveal the ambivalent effects which those state inscriptions have had upon them? And to what extent are veterans in a sense “victimized” by the two Irelands coopting, eliding – even institutionalizing – personal, traumatic suffering?

To view the First World War plays of McGuinness, Reid, and Barry is to view Irish veterans and their family members remembering and returning, often unwillingly, to the War. As Pyper sees his ghostly past self (although now lamentably) sealing allegiance with the ghosts of his Ulster comrades, so in Reid’s *My Name* does veteran Andrew, now ninety-three, recite the names of his fallen comrades of the 36th (Ulster) Division like “a Litany of the Glorious Dead” (255); and in Barry’s *Steward of Christendom*, former Kiltegan steward and Catholic DMP chief, Thomas Dunne, now in a psychiatric home, attempts to reconcile himself with the ghost of his dead son William whom he had sent into the War prompted partly by his imperial loyalty. Insofar as these plays

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Fran Brearton perceives the paucity of Northern Irish literature on the First World War as the result of the potentially self-negating position that Ulstermen found themselves in after the war: “the absence of a literature about the Great War in Ulster in the war and post-war years in the most accurate measure of history available: there does not appear to have been at the time any frame of reference in which both the Somme and Ulster unionism could be treated imaginatively in a way which would enable them both to receive their due. (From this point of view, it is not so much that Ulster’s Great War soldiers have been forgotten; rather they have suffered from an overdose of ceremonial remembrance)” (35). This chapter will argue that memory plays like *Sons of Ulster* attempt to both celebrate and push back against canonical lines of memory and commemoration.
display their protagonists’ imperative to remember, and the ritualistic aspect of remembering the deceased or fallen, these dramas fit into a particular subgenre – the “memory play.” Similar to this genre’s originators, McGuinness, Reid, and Barry develop the action and substance of their plays by staging the protagonists “playing out” or repeating their memories as the actual present; but characteristic of the genre, what the protagonists re-collect and relive as real are their unreliable versions of past events. Memory plays are, therefore, a-chronological in two senses. As Helen Lojek elaborates, the genre stages, literally, “the shape of memory doubling back on and debating with itself, not a shape evident in simple chronology”; and that shape functions to suggest “not that memory or history can balance the falsity of myth, but that memory and history themselves seek out the comfort of inherently false shapes” (66). And in McGuinness’s, Reid’s, and Barry’s plays, this “doubling back” on time is linked inseparably to trauma.

Insofar as Irish War dramas are about traumatic suffering, they offer a particular paradigm for how memory plays stage myth and history, and time and remembering. In Sons of Ulster, My Name, and Steward of Christendom, the protagonists’ former traumas – that of combat and the “losses” effected by war – all bear weight on how history and myth influence or impose upon the way survivors and their relations consequently remember. Traumatology, I would argue, functions as a heuristic to these play’s “doubling” of time. The past remains alive in or as the present, and the dead or

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5 A term coined by playwright Tennessee Williams for his play The Glass Menagerie, the genre of the “memory play” originates with Williams, Harold Pinter, and Brian Friel, although these authors may not ascribe this term to their own works. The genre’s conventions include heavy reliance on a protagonist’s rather dim, poetic, and quite unreliable versions of the past often vocalized through monologues and ruminations. The dramas’ sets are also minimal, drawing focus on the verbal content rather than the physical. These features are certainly central to the plays of McGuinness, Reid, and Barry discussed in this chapter, and in these cases, memory is of traumatic events and loss associated with one event, the First World War.
their ghosts intrude upon the living. The mode of this drama is to stage the protagonists’
autumnal years as symbolizing the pervasiveness of traumatic suffering: flashbacks or
repetitions compulsively haunt their nearly-ended lives. But why stage these repetitions
and flashbacks? Why dwell on the War’s dead and their ghostly hauntings? And can
McGuinness’s and Reid’s visions of Ulster Protestant Unionism be compared to Barry’s
vision of Catholic Unionism in the Free State? Repetition and flashbacks, ghosts and
haunting: thematically, all three plays “perform” traumatization. Victims have undergone
traumatic events, those which by definition evade full comprehension.⁶ I would like to
consider this irresolution as the central trope to these plays: in Sons of Ulster and
Steward of Christendom, insofar as Pyper and Thomas remain shaken by the deaths
and loss they experience on account of the War, and as they struggle to comprehend
why or for what Irishmen have died, the plays suggest the impossibility for these men to
situate catastrophic events into a symbolic order; they cannot render those events fully
intelligible, and thus, the experiences recur, resurface, flash back to the victims. By
exemplifying the very tenuousness or ambivalence symptomatic to these individuals’
experience, these plays look to interrogate the two Irish states’ tendencies toward
narrativizing national coherence – the characters themselves question that coherence.
But this is not always the case. My Name analogizes how trauma survivors may also

⁶ Throughout this dissertation, I draw on Cathy Caruth’s conception of trauma in her book Unclaimed
Experience which she derives from the American Psychiatric Association’s relatively unchanged and
durable definition of trauma: “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience
of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed,
uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). In these plays,
the hallucinations and intrusions of ghosts which continue to persist, represent the inability of the
protagonists to fully possess or own – that is, render intelligible – their past loss, or, to claim that loss for
their own in contrast to national claims upon it.
become regressive, seeking state and self-legitimation in prior conditions of national coherence, however tenuous that coherence was or remains.  

**Frank McGuinness**

Questioning that coherence is central to McGuinness’s seminal First World War play *Sons of Ulster*. It is a drama that interrogates the continuity of Ulster’s assumptions about its “nationality,” past and present. The play envisions the Somme Offensive as site of trauma for Ulster, but one that, given the backdrop of Partition, Ulster predetermines to integrate into an *ethos* of unionist sacrifice, into its lineage of loyalism. The play thus asks us to consider what pressures that predetermination places upon the individual, and how that pressure manifests in late-twentieth century Northern Ireland, the “Troubled” Ireland wherein Pyper lives out his last years plagued by his fallen comrades’ ghosts. By staging Ulster’s dead returning to the realm of the living – of time “doubling back” – *Sons of Ulster* suggests, in both structure and trope, that the War’s trauma remains unfinished and unclaimed in the present. It is not the obliteration caused by the War itself which haunts Pyper; it is living under the present realization that Ulster has obliterated any sense of individual self (suffering or sacrifice) and any telos except that of the “nation.” He has become ambivalent about Ulster’s weight upon him, even confrontationally commanding: “Leave me, do not possess me. I do not wish to be your chosen. […] I’ve learned nothing from you but how to preach in your name. […] After the war, for you, I had to be different again. To be extreme. The world lay in ruins about my feet. I wanted to rebuild it in the image of my fallen companions” (10).

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7 This tendency toward stagnating nostalgia demonstrated to some extent by all three plays’ protagonists likens the memory play’s critique to that of the Anglo-Irish big house novels of the prior chapter.
Pyper expresses that Ulster attempts to “possess” him as a combatant and survivor; yet, he marks his own difference and dissidence in his last days by giving himself only to his companions. But the drama asks, exactly what does this giving over entail? Pyper’s final expression of literally coming to a resolution at his end – the revelatory moment marked by his opening soliloquy – is a moment, I would propose, that is essential to reading Sons of Ulster in a way that has not yet been done, a reading through trauma: this scene, “Part I: Remembrance,” is not only an image of the affect trauma has on inducing Pyper’s particular type of political voice, but structurally, as Sons of Ulster’s literal present, the scene provides a temporal paradigm for interpreting the play’s past action. That action is staged as Pyper’s “flashbacks” or “returns” to the War, which comprise the subsequent acts, “II: Initiation” (pre-combat), “III: Pairing” (post-combat), and “IV: Bonding” (1 July 1916, Somme Offensive).

In “Part I: Remembrance,” Sons of Ulster begins with Pyper struggling against possession in two senses. His opening soliloquy is one of resistance. He resists Ulster’s propensity to claim him as a survivor, the weight imposed upon him to bear witness to “that slaughter” (10) strictly for the sake of the nation. As Pyper laments, it is this claim upon him, this insistence upon his remembrance of the War that has shaken him into “madness” (9). The very act of Pyper’s protest, this instance, in fact conjures before him not just the remembrance of his comrades, but their actual ghosts: “Pyper sees the ghosts appear, Craig, Roulston, and Crawford” (11), […] sees more ghosts rise, Moore, Millen, Mcllwaine, Anderson” (12). Their presence is unnerving, literally transforming the scene of Pyper’s present back to the scene of war, as if to claim him. And insofar as these ghosts predicate the very belatedness of traumatic return – the anachronous re-
experiencing of a disruptive “trauma time” (Edkins 57), Pyper feels unable to control this haunting. He deems himself, as we also see him – possessed by it. And throughout the first act, this possession initiates ambivalence in Pyper. He oscillates between the commitment he had formerly vowed to his friends, and whether to do them honor, he must consequently commit to their faith in a Protestant Unionist “nation.” But to what degree and to what use, Pyper asks himself, is he taken possession of?

The opening scene contains moments wherein Pyper is attuned to Ulster’s attempt to inscribe him into its “sacrificial” historical narrative of the Somme. He censures the possession which bearing witness in Ulster’s name would confirm:

I have seen horror. There is nothing to tell you. I am not your military historian. Do not turn me into an example. […] You are the creator, invent such details as suit your purpose best. Those willing to talk to you of that day, to remember for your sake, to forgive you, they invent as freely as they wish. I am not one of them. I will not talk, I will not listen to you. Invention gives that slaughter shape. That scale of horror has no shape. […] You have no right to accuse that suffering, parading it for the benefit of others (Silence) (9).

In acknowledging the effect of the War’s trauma, the inability for him, or anyone, to fully articulate its “horror,” Pyper indicts Ulster’s claim upon that trauma, the desire to possess its narrative, to “invent,” to give that (incomprehensible) “slaughter shape” for its own “benefit.” Pyper attests to Ulster’s impulse to situate the Somme’s slaughter, exclusively, within Ulster’s martial lineage; his words abjure the 36th (Ulster) Division from inscription into or as Unionism’s sacrifice. What he resists is Ulster’s singular claim on the Somme’s “scale of horror” since he deems that such events never be given “shape,” only invention. Sons of Ulster thus imagines traumatic history according to what Cathy Caruth would term “unclaimed experience”: for the victim, the “reality of the violent event” is that its “violence has not yet been fully known” (7). And through its
belated return, the violent encounter predicates “the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)” (11); traumatic history is “history that can be fully grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (18) – it cannot be singularly claimed or comprehended. But this incomprehensibility which indeed defines Pyper’s existence is also a departure or reaching-out. His own consciousness of the (universal) desire to claim the trauma – the acknowledgment “that history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own” (Caruth 24) – motivates Pyper’s ambivalence toward Ulster. Insofar as he is possessed by the impulse to commemorate his Unionist comrades, he must determine to what degree their honoring requires him to speak and act in their name, to represent their ideals.

We witness this ambivalence when in “Remembrance,” Pyper’s soliloquy, his (present) voice, begins to oscillate between protesting Ulster’s imposition upon him, and ventriloquizing the (past) idiom of his comrades’ fervid Protestant unionism. It is as if he literally transitions from his elderly, more resistant voice, to that of his transformative youth, and back again:

There is a type of man who invites death upon himself. I thought once this was the stuff heroes are made from. I enlisted in the hope of death. I would be such a man. But mine was not the stuff of heroes. Those with me were heroes because they died without complaint for what they believed in. They taught me by the very depth of their belief, to believe. To believe in you. What sense could you make of their sacrifice? I at least continued their work in this province. The freedom of faith they fought and died for would be maintained. There would be, and there will be no surrender. The sons of Ulster will rise and lay their enemy low, as they did at the Boyne, as they did at the Somme, against any invader that will trespass on to their homeland. Fenians claim Cuchullian as their ancestor, but he is ours, [...] His blood is our inheritance. Not theirs. Sinn Fein? Ourselves alone. It is we, the Protestant people, who have always stood alone. We have stood alone and triumphed, for we are God’s chosen.
(Silence.) Leave me. Do not possess me. I do not wish to be your chosen. (Silence.) (10).

This oscillation adumbrates the younger Pyper we encounter in the subsequent acts. He is at first, brash, iconoclastic, even masochistic enough to invite “death upon himself,” though as we later find out, only initially in symbolic defiance of his Ulster lineage. Yet, he admits to a transformation not uncommon in war. He comes to fight not against Ulster, but with and for its men. The 36th’s fraternal order, a bond sealed in blood for “what they believed in” transforms Pyper as one of them, into sanctioning their sense of nationality. Pyper’s words begin to blur the line between the “nation” and its men, as in this instance, he voices the very idiom which equates the two. Maintaining “their belief,” Pyper now claims to “have continued their work” in defending the “province.” He integrates the Somme’s “sacrifice,” however, not into the legacy of the Great War, but into Ulster’s centuries-old narrative of internal defense, beginning with the Boyne. This is not only a loyalist narrative, but in referencing the Cuchuallian cycle and Sinn Fein, it is a reclamation (or decentering) of nationalism’s own mytho-political idiom. And in this moment, Pyper begins to speak of the present – the era of the Troubles; he speaks of defending Ulster “against any invader that will trespass on to their homeland.” The siege mentality returns. In present Northern Ireland, Pyper’s voice is like a ghost from the Partition era: Ulster’s defense is not only against nationalist Ireland, but against the very possibility of England’s betraying its “unionist” province. Yet, immediately after that claim, Pyper demands dispossession, demands not to be Ulster’s “chosen.”

This moment interweaves the thematic strands that are dealt with in the three following acts – the telos of “sacrifice” in the valence between unionism and loyalism, and the ethos of ethno-religious exclusivity and heroism indexing the martial manliness
of Protestant Unionist Ulstermen. Insofar as Pyper reveals the currency of Ulster’s sacrificial ethos, his own past remains ambivalently interwoven with it. Pyper decries the sacrificial “loyalty” driving Ulstermen “to die for each other in battle” as a type of “hate”: “we wished ourselves to die and in doing so we let others die to satisfy our blood lust. That lust we inherited” (12). This complicated notion of “inheritance” which he opposes – that dying for Ulstermen be cast or narrativized post-facto as sacrifice for Ulster – in fact, predicates Pyper’s traumatic suffering; the distancing that it enforces between him and his comrades has become the reason for his irresolution toward Ulster. As Pyper attempts to restore those men unto himself, he is returned to the past, to his “initiation” into the 36th Division: “(Pyper sees the ghost of the younger Pyper. As if introducing that younger self to the other ghosts, he beckons towards them, invitingly) Dance. Dance.” (12). But now, returning to the past, we find that Sons of Ulster figures Ulstermen’s “initiation” into the War, if under Ulster’s terms, as a dance of death.

That the next act is entitled “Initiation” is somewhat ironic, for it centers not so much on the eight men’s entrance into the War as it does on Pyper’s initiating them into broader conceptions of being Ulstermen. Our very first image (a repetition from “Remembrance”) is of Pyper in the presence of his soon-to-be love interest, David Craig, cutting open his thumb while peeling an apple. Ever the theatric, Pyper transforms the moment into a symbolically rich and portending one, beginning with a curse: “Damnation. Blood. Hate the sight of it” (13). Ulster’s Red Hand, the 36th

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Division’s insignia, is our very first image, though Pyper curses that signification. In cutting his own flesh, which he envisions as the apple, “Beautiful. Hard. White.” (15), Pyper alludes to an original curse of temptation, Adam’s fall; but in the context of his own bleeding hand, Pyper re-signifies Ulster’s insignia not as the “nation” founded on the blood-sacrifice of its men, but as its men’s willingness to sacrifice themselves as Irishmen for one another. Rather disarmingly to all but Craig, Pyper envisions his own “flesh” as reason for commitment amongst men: “I have remarkably fine skin, […] remarkably fine for a man. Look, David, I’ve cut myself peeling an apple. Kiss it better (12); and later to Craig: “can I tempt you? […] Did you not join up to die for me?” (14-15). From the outset, Pyper dwells on “the grave,” linking it to eros (13), an attempt to reconfigure the men’s unanimous telos in dying for unionist Ulster, and even the reasons for their attachment to one another. Speaking to Anderson, he ironically rehearses to the men their own unanimity: “I asked you why you were here […]. I see I had better tell you. You are here as a volunteer in the army of your king and empire. You are here to train to meet that empire’s foe. You are here as a loyal son of Ulster, for the empire’s foe is Ulster’s foe” (16). Pyper defies this rubric consciously, enigmatically. Thus, the men deem him “mad” (36), and moreover, unsettlingly “rare” (16) in that they

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9 Declan Kiberd notices the interconnections here between Pyper’s homosocial desire for Craig and Pyper’s prescience about the alternative possibility of conceiving their collective sacrifice as purely for one another, as men, rather than as men for a conceived nation. Noting the allusion to the “tree of knowledge” woven into the image of Pyper’s bleeding hand as Red Hand of Ulster, Kiberd writes: “He cuts his hand and asks Craig to kiss it better, but the recruit refuses. The invitation is not just sexual; it is also a primal urging ‘to eat of the tree of knowledge and re-examine the tenets of inherited faith’ in the warrior world of blutbruderschaft. The blood on the hand portends the sacrifice to come. It is the first of many leitmotifs of the mythical Red Hand of Ulster: but it also evokes the great symbolic test of friendship and male bonding when Rimbaud plunged a knife into his hand to prove his love for Verlaine” (285).
find “something rotten” (48) in his sense of gendered and national attachment, acted out through his burgeoning relationship with Craig.

Pyper initiates himself as a foil to Ulster’s sense of hetero-normative and ethnoreligious coherence. As Nicholas Grene points out, while Sons of Ulster reflects the men’s regional diversity, they nevertheless consolidate on “common ground”; the men “are bound together by their loyalty to king, country, and faith, and loyalty of the 1912 Covenant pledging resistance to the threat of Home Rule” (248). “Initiation” shows this binding-loyalty to the Covenant and the union as a means for these men to act out, in McGaughey’s terms, performatively, Ulster’s masculinist ethos (41-6). From the outset, Pyper ironically plays off the men’s pretenses toward “manly” work, national and sexual aggression, and how these performances relate to an irreligious, cultural Protestantism. The men weigh each other, so to speak, as Ulstermen. After Moore, a UVF volunteer, quips that making his own bed is “women’s work” (18), they begin to competitively discuss their professions; Millen, a former miller, is immediately called out on his work: “give him a skirt and he’ll run you up a four-course dinner” (24). To be expected, Pyper differentiates himself as a non-laborer, revealing that he comes from, as does Craig, a family of greyhound breeders – a landed, northern Protestant family; he is an artist, a sculptor, bragging that he has “never done a day’s work in [his] life” (18). As he intends, Pyper’s difference produces uneasiness amongst the men. Rather playfully, he tells Roulston, “we have to be big boys here. Tough men on the training ground” (26). Pyper’s inflection is unsettling. As Declan Kiberd suggests, his persistent “effeminate quality disturbs the other recruits,” as do his hints at “homosexual longings” (285). Signaling their disturbance, and hoping that Pyper shows himself to be “one of [their]
kind” (26), they claim their war-readiness as formerly trained “Carson’s men,” militant against “Fenian rats” (26). A mirror-image of what the men ostensibly oppose in Catholic separatism, these Ulstermen list their UVF battalions like professions, deeming no part of Ulster “safe” from “Papists” (27). They resort to terror. The men joyfully recount shaving the head of a Catholic boy who had painted a tricolor on “an orange lodge,” and after painting “his arse green, white, and gold,” they “battered him down the streets of Coleraine” before his weeping mother (27). “Pyper roars with laughter” (27) at this story, though surreptitiously, a ploy to win himself tentatively into their confidence.

Through satirical mimicry, Pyper takes this moment to deconstruct the interrelations between sexual and politico-national aggression underpinning the performance of their irreligious, militant Protestantism. He has the men believe that during his Parisian artistic exploits, he married a former nun-turned-“Papist whore” (29), who he suggests may have been a transvestite, possessing “three legs,” “the middle one shorter” (30). Playing off the men’s professed beliefs in such “rumors” (30) regarding Irish Catholic nuns, he satirizes their ignorant earnestness by telling them that he not only married the woman to “make an honest Protestant out of her,” but then “sawed her middle leg off,” as was his “duty as a Protestant” (30). Pyper attempts to literalize, hyperbolically, the gendered aggression that informs these Unionists’ linkage between political “Protestantism” and Ulster’s “national” protection. That predisposition evinces itself immediately thereafter when the play’s most belligerent men enter, Anderson and McIlwaine. As they announce their entrance, political “Protestantism” and sectarian “masculinity” play out again in violence:

Anderson: We’re here. No cause for panic, ladies. The men are here. […] I spy a Taig. I spy a Taig. McIlwaine: Where? Tell me where? Anderson:
Use your nose, lad, use your nose. Have I not trained you to smell a Catholic within a mile of you? Get him. (*McIlwaine flings back his head, howls, rushes for Crawford.*) Tear his throat out. […] Millen: What the hell do yous two think you’re doing? Anderson: Defending this part of the realm. […] McIlwaine: He’s a Catholic bastard, he has no place in this regiment (34).

Pyper, however, turns this violence back on Anderson and McIlwaine. His performance adumbrates these Ulstermen’s tendencies toward self-destruction while also foiling their sense of masculinity. His exchange with the men is suggestive: “Pyper: I’d like to show you something. Anderson: I’d say you would if you’d one to show. […] Pyper: I observed to the company earlier how remarkably fine my skin is. They agreed. Do you? Anderson: what kind of milksop –. Pyper: Now, I want to show you how someone with my remarkably fair skin can perform magic. […] (*Pyper punches him in the groin*) (34-5). Pyper’s reprisal on Crawford’s behalf is a darkly comical, and literal, attack on Ulster’s “manhood.” He turns the context of “fighting” the War into a deathly premonition about Ulster’s claims to self-defense: that fighting “dirty,” that being betrayed – symbolized in this very scene’s internecine-like warfare – is the basis whereon the 36th Division will ultimately, in Pyper’s satirical idiom, be forced to “go first” into “Death” as Ulster’s “elect” (35-6). Pyper therefore suggests another bond. Intentionally slitting his hand with a penknife, he holds it up. It is a complicated gesture. As Kiberd notes, “that this wound is self-inflicted suggests that loyalism may ultimately destroy itself by the very energies it draws on” (286); yet, I would propose it is also an invitation: Pyper, drawing the “others’ attention, […] watch as Craig bandages Pyper’s bleeding hand,” this time very willingly, while they incant to one another: “Craig: Red hand. Pyper: Red sky. Craig: Ulster. Pyper: Ulster” (37). The act is an invitation, or initiation, into conceiving of Ulster’s blood-sacrifice as a bond between men, an
invitation to heal the self-inflicted wounds that Ulster, paradoxically, seems to predicate on its men.

Taking place back in Ireland after the eight men’s first tour in Flanders, *Sons of Ulster*’s third act, “Pairing,” stages a rewriting of Ulster’s loyalist mentality. Though hitherto unacknowledged, this act explores the role that combat trauma plays in redirecting – or as I hope to suggest – in decentering these men’s conceptions of a loyalist (and thus unionist) mentalité, and relatedly, their conceptions of their own expendability for and by Ulster as a “nation.” Though these men are on leave back in their home province, tellingly, they are staged alone in pairs, as if deserted: “Ulster: Boa Island, Lough Erne, carvings [Craig and Pyper]; a Protestant church [Roulston and Crawford]; a suspended ropebridge [Millen and Moore]; the Field, a lambeg drum [McIlwaine and Anderson]” (38). But insofar as the men are shaken by combat, by the War’s trauma, their detachment seems self-willed; each of their pairings expresses a loss of faith in, or betrayal by Ulster. All eight men desire to “forget” the war and to revaluate their former relationships to one another and the culture of Protestant loyalism that led them into battle. Revaluation and “forgetting” begin the act, as we see Pyper thanking Craig for saving his life during combat. But, likewise, Craig now asks help from Pyper. Amongst the hermaphroditic carvings at Lough Erne, he beseeches Pyper to help him understand – not only these carvings, but also how “to forget” and “get away from the war,” to “wash the muck” of it off and be “clean again” (39). For Craig, learning “about the carvings” initiates this process, and Pyper begins to correlate these (un-gendered) sculptures to his attempt at refashioning, thus rehabilitating, all eight men’s self-conceptions of being sons of Ulster; as Emilie Pine notes, “in these scenes we
witness their process of rehabilitation on home leave, as they attempt in their different ways to make sense of their experience of war and to accommodate it into their formerly secure and established identities” (61). That accommodation, a transformation, is important to *Sons of Ulster*’s commentary on Northern Ireland.

To Pyper, Craig’s saving him is more than literal. As he runs his hands along these carvings, either “men or women” (45) (and both he finds “beautiful” (31)), Pyper admits that Craig, as a man, has turned him away from his former life as an iconoclastic “sculptor”:

> I turn people into stone. Women and men. Into gods. I turned my ancestors into Protestant gods, so I could rebel against them. I would not serve. I turned my face from their thick darkness. But the same gods have brought me back. Alive through you. They wanted their outcast. I have returned with you to worship Enniskillen and the Boyne (47).

As Pyper admits to moving closer to renewing his “worship” of Ulster through Craig, two other dialogues overlap theirs, Roulston’s and Crawford’s and Millen’s and Moore’s, also about a posttraumatic renewal of faith. Combat has shaken these men, and particularly, their former faith in Ulster’s War effort. Roulston feels as if he has not yet “left the front,” while Moore keeps “hearing the dead,” fearing he “can’t go back” (41). Like Pyper, these men see the War as “beyond language” (46), beyond the limitations of unionist Ulster’s idiom of sacrificial legitimation. This realization compounds the men’s trauma; the War has shaken their faith in “Ulster.” *Sons of Ulster* stages this loss of faith in the final pairing of McIlwaine and Anderson, the two most charismatic unionists. They arrive at “the Field. Holiest spot in Ulster,” but after the “Twelfth of July,” to “beat the drum” as Orangemen (43-5). Having been “over across” fighting, they “couldn’t march” (43). They have come too late; the marches are over, the Field is deserted. Now, alone, their moment is symbolic: the trauma they have undergone – their bleeding for the
creed of Ulster’s unionism, a performance that the province records within loyalism’s narrative – has actually isolated them. But personally, War has awakened them. Recalling Pyper’s “trick,” Anderson and McIlwaine are finally struck by the very ritualistic performativity sustaining the “Ulster” they have believed in: “McIlwaine: “It’s no good here on your own. No good without the speakers. No good without the bands, not good without the banners. Without the chaps. No good on your own. Why did we come here to be jeered at?” (45). McIlwaine realizes that Ulster’s existence is marked by collective performance: “without other performers, without an audience, the markers refuse to attach to their purported meanings,” states Susan Harris, “the ‘holy ground’ is not holy. McIlwaine now knows, as Pyper always has, that the Protestant gods do not stand behind the performance of Ulster, that it is the human audience’s agreement to participate that gives the symbols their power” (12).

For all eight men, war trauma can no longer be propagated as the price of sacrifice, neither for unionism nor Protestantism. McIlwaine and Anderson recognize the (self) destruction which that former paradigm effected. “Belfast will be lost in this war. The whole of Ulster will be lost. We’re not making the sacrifice. Jesus, you’ve seen this war. We are the sacrifice” (51). The men turn to one another for an alternative to sacrificial legitimacy: “Crawford: I’m a soldier that risks his neck for no cause other than the men he’s fighting with. I’ve seen enough to see through empires and kings and countries.” (48). But more than anyone, Pyper understands that traumatic suffering leads not to a complete rejection of Ulster’s performative delimitation, but its revaluation. Pyper tells Craig that he fled his family for Paris to “escape Carson’s dance,” only to admit, “when I saw my hands working they were not mine but the hands of my
ancestors, interfering” (56). Here, Johnston’s *How Many Miles to Babylon?* echoes through Pyper’s similarity to Alec, especially in Pyper’s final admission that his ironic self-destruction is ameliorated by his love for Craig: “I would take up arms at the call of Protestant fathers. I would kill in their name and I would die in their name, […] my sole act of revenge. […] And then the unseen obstacle in my fate. I met you” (57). Craig saves Pyper from self-immolation against the state, as Pyper saves Craig (and the others) from immolating themselves for it. As “Pairing” moves toward traumatic recovery, reconciling the “nation” is actualized through personal reconciliation. In the act’s most figurative moment, Millen extends his hand across the bridge, restoring Moore from “all the dead” to “all the living,” – the eight – whom Millen tells him to name “one by one” (51).

The trauma these men endure during their first tour removes them, as Cathy Caruth would suggest, out of a synchronous community (11), in their case, wherein defending unionism is situated or even forced into Ulster’s loyalist narrative. Their betrayal by the nation is doubly felt: Britain threatens to “betray” Ulster’s loyalty (albeit constitutionally), while in turn, Ulster betrays its soldiers by imposing upon them the burden of blood-sacrifice. Thus, if as J. J. Lee claims, Ulster ironically vied “loyalty to themselves alone” (14), then these men’s loyalty, literally, unto themselves, revises loyalism. Aptly titled, the play’s final act, “Bonding,” revaluates loyalty and the meaning of 1916’s trauma, especially 1 July 1916. On the eve of the attack, while the men openly indict “top brass” (63), their language anticipates their own demise in a way that, like Alec and Jerry from *Babylon*, casts their duty as Ulsterman and to their own province in lyrical terms. Near the Somme, Pyper proclaims, “we’re on our own territory. We’re
fighting for home. This river is ours. This land is ours. We’ve come home. [...] The Somme, it’s not what we think it is. It’s the Lagan, the Foyle, the Bann” (73-4).

Anticipating death, Pyper foresees the 36th Division’s propensity to be claimed by myth as sacrificial casualties – this bears particular weight, given Sons of Ulster’s depiction of how the men receive another contemporary sacrifice – Easter 1916.

Consciously, the men turn the Rising into a farce. Referring to Pearse as a “boy” leading an army with “wooden rifles,” McIlwaine claims Pearse “couldn’t spell republic, let alone proclaim it,” and after being gaoled, cried before being shot for treason by his own mother, [...] a disgrace to their sex” (65). Pyper asks, “who gave you this version of events?”; Roulston responds, McIlwaine “invented” it (65). Pyper is attuned to the way McIlwaine’s narrative rewrites the Rising’s sacrificial – and traumatic – aspects. Thus, moments later, he turns the Boyne narrative into farce when the men reenact the Battle of Scarva10 “to make the blood boil” (69) before the attack. After choosing Pyper as King William’s horse, Anderson narrates the fight, reminding the men, “you know the result, keep to the result” (70). But Pyper intentionally falls, costing William the victory, in effect, farcing the (already) mock-battle. The men take it as “not the best of signs” (71). But Pyper’s rewriting exposes how, as Pine states, “history and tradition are always mediated by people and politics, and thus subject to change” (64) as ultimately, the scene reveals “the instability of myth” (63). In Pyper’s words, he does it “to stop the

10 What McGuinness seems to have in mind here is that the Battle of Scarva “staged” by the characters in his play is, in fact, a reenactment of a reenactment; Scarva, in County Down, Northern Ireland, holds a “Sham Fight” Pageant every 13 July which is a reenactment of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, attracting thousands, and is put on by the Royal Black Preceptory, a group related to the Orange Order. Pyper’s subversion is a dramatization of a dramatization, whereby he intends to deconstruct this particularly celebrated and fixed narrative.
heroism” (76) implicit in their performance. He checks his comrades’ propensity to be
inscribed – singly – as casualties in Ulster’s loyalist (thus unionist) myth.

How then does Sons of Ulster suggest we perceive these men right before they
knowingly go to their deaths over the top? This question returns us to Pyper’s soliloquy,
when he encourages his younger self toward the ghosts to “dance” (12 and 80). The
imperative is the same now as it was in 1916 – that “Ulster” is not a nation, but a
conception, only brought into being insofar as it is performed. Through bonding with
these Ulstermen, Pyper’s learns not to rule out but to alter that performance – to open it
up its ethno-religious and gendered delimitations, those that predetermine how the
men’s deaths at the Somme will be narrativized, cast into myth. The play attempts to
free up Ulster’s claim to the Somme, exclusively, as a traumatic memory politically
integral to the telos of Northern Ireland. Thus at “Bonding’s” end, while Pyper indicts the
anticipated “heroism” (76) of July 1916, for his men, he wears the “Orange sash,”
proclaiming, “save our country” (79). He de-claims any singular possession of the
Somme’s trauma, what Jenny Edkins would call an attempt at “encircling the event,
marking its place without narrating it as part of a linear story or national myth” (17).

Encircling the trauma, I would propose, is in fact one of the central prerogatives of Sons
of Ulster. The play’s aesthetic and structure – and what Pyper enacts in the play in his
present – are continuous returns to the traumatic event (signified by the Somme’s
ghosts) to decenter it. By dislocating the trauma from Ulster’s mythic (and linear)
inscription, we could say that Pyper envisions the Somme as “that which refuses to take
its place in history as done and finished with” (Edkins 59). The struggle that we thus
witness at the play’s beginning is Pyper resisting Northern Ireland’s persistent attempt
at possessing – claiming – the Somme’s narrative. And given the Troubles’ internecine violence to which Pyper now bears witness, he deems that “the temple of the Lord is ransacked” (12 and 80) but only insofar as, politically, Northern Ireland’s ethno-“religious” and gendered boundaries are of an anachronous, imaginary “Ulster.” Sons of Ulster is about reconfiguring such boundaries, an initiative whose purview McGuinness extended across borders; “it was an eye-opener for a Catholic Republican, as I am, to have to examine the complexity, diversity, disturbance and integrity of the other side, the Protestant people” (Plays, Volume I, x). And in the north, “the other side” may refer to the entire Border Region just as it may to streets like Springmartin Road in west Belfast, where physical walls still divide Protestant and Catholic communities. Northern Ireland retains a landscape of physical and ideological confinement whose lines are still etched, in part, by the political legacy of the Great War.

Christina Reid

While McGuinness’s play only gestures toward “Ulster’s” present-day condition (in the unionist mindset, apocalyptic), it is Reid’s My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name? that reveals how this psyche actually shapes Northern Ireland. Composed as a radio play for BBC, My Name is about one Somme survivor, Andrew Smith, a Protestant Orangeman of the 36th (Ulster) Division who now seventy years later, at ninety-three, attempts to reconcile himself to his imprisoned granddaughter Andrea from whom he is estranged. Now in 1986, Andrew resides in an “Old People's Home in Derry” (252) while his mind occupies the “time” of an older Ulster, one that My Name shows to be extant in Andrew’s imaginative, mythic desire. The drama is structured by two contiguous times, 1916 and the 1980s. As does Pyper in Sons of Ulster, Andrew oscillates between the past and present as if they exist contemporaneously, within one another. Written as
Reid claims “for radio, [...] for voice” (Kurdi 212), the play’s reliance on dialogue and monologue creates an aesthetic very similar to McGuinness’s “ghost play”: the protagonists both having undergone trauma, *My Name* depicts Andrew and Andrea speaking to one another without the other’s presence; and through voiceover, these characters also speak and respond as their prior selves, often with their past voices blending into their present ones. This temporal splicing reinforces the play’s occupation with generational difference, signified by the play’s symbolic, physical separation – the actual confinement of both characters, Andrew to an assisted living facility in Northern Ireland and Andrea to Holloway Prison, London. *My Name*’s figuration of these confinements both testifies to, and indicts the currency that mythologizing the Somme’s five thousand dead as “the chosen” has held on the Protestant unionist psyche.

When the play opens, we hear the voiceovers of both characters, now confined, as they recollect the same memory of “1964 when Andrea was aged two and Andy was aged seventy-one” (253). The memory is Andrea’s earliest, a poem entitled “My Name,” one Andrew teaches her to express his unconditional love, surpassing that of Andrea’s own mother. From her prison cell, as therapeutic remembrance, Andrea draws portraiture (as her grandfather once did), illustrating her grandfather teaching her to walk and talk. The moment demonstrates the role memory plays (regardless of referential accuracy) in comprising for individuals a coherent version of the past. Andrea states: “this should in truth be two drawings, not one. I didn’t learn to walk and talk all on the same day. But that’s how I remember it. Perhaps because the two events were joined in his memory” (254). This reaching-out (or back) reflects a mutual desire for the two to reconcile through shared memory. As a Great War play, *My Name* thematizes
seeking such common ground in history. As such, it exposes how the reductively
selective, collective memory of unionist Orangeism continues to predicate modes of
confinement in Northern Ireland – of the self and of others. The very space wherein
Andrew resides and will pass away symbolizes in the play the ideological (self)
confinement of “Ulster.”

Andrew exists in the institution alone, with no one and nothing, save for his
memories of Andrea and the War. The Somme connects Andrew to his granddaughter
whom he has steeped in Ulster’s loyalist idiom. In this moment, their voices fade into
one another as if bridging their isolation:

Andrew: “Them were the days in France. Real men. Heroes. Ulster
Protestant Orangemen. We’ll never see their like again … Joseph Sloan,
Billy Matchett, Isaac Carson, Samuel Thompson, Hugh Montgomery” …
The shared memory of these names has also come to Andrea as she
draws and remembers her childhood. She has been mouthing the names
that Andy taught her as he speaks. Andrea: … “Hugh Montomgery,
Frederick Wilson, Jame Elliott, John Cunningham, Edward Marshall … A
Litany of the Glorious Dead. […] Just a handful of the five and half
thousand Ulstermen who died on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.
My grandfather went to hell and back when he was just twenty-three years
old.” […] Andrew: “A Glorious Victory. Their Finest Hour. An inspiration for
painters and poets” (255-6).

But Andrea is motivated to recite this litany for reasons much different from her
grandfather’s. Memorializing the Somme is for her, as it is for Pyper, a way of honoring
a cultural-familial lineage, particularly, a belief system and event associated with trauma
felt individually and collectively. When Andrea remembers her grandfather, it is his tacit
suffering that manifests as his physical and ideological confinement which troubles her.
From her own isolation, she contemplates, “who does he talk to now, I wonder? Maybe
he just talks. To the wall … to the memories locked away in his old tin box” (254); and
later, as we hear Andrea’s “prison door slamming in the distance,” she withholds the
emotion of traumatic suffering like her grandfather: “I won’t cry. I mustn’t cry. Give me some of your fierce, proud strength, granda. Did you ever cry, I wonder, when there was nobody there to see? Perhaps you didn’t dare, in case you could never stop” (262).

Andrea’s remark is profound, and sympathetic. While My Name eschews narrativizing the 36th Division as heroic defenders against, in Andrew’s words, both “Fenians” (268) and the “Anglo-Irish Agreement” of “the English Government” (272), the play is justly sympathetic to the suffering that Andrew endures: like Sons of Ulster, Reid’s drama shows that the Somme’s loss also affects the individual insofar as ultimately Ulster’s soldiers become in effect, casualties (or property) to state politics. Reid suggests that this subjection is the deep-seated psychological trauma which, paradoxically, enforces the need for men like Andrew to legitimize a sacrificial mythography.

As we witness Andrea’s recollections onstage, we see that the necessity for narrativizing this faith-in-sacrifice ultimately becomes the mode of Andrew’s representative (self) confinement. We hear the voiceover of Andrew from 1969, like a ghostly return, as he brings Andrea to City Hall Belfast to teach her about Prinsep Beadle’s commemorating painting, Battle of the Somme: Attack of the Ulster Division. The painting depicts the Somme as a victory, reinforced by its inscription which Andrew quotes: “one of the greatest feats of arms in the annals of the British Army” (256). In the present, as Andrea draws the painting, she verbalizes its fictionalized rendition of “victory”:

The officer is young, golden, angelic faced. […] ‘Fritz’ is being taken prisoner … top of the painting … more to the left … and another German soldier lies dying. Not there … bottom left … An Ulsterman walks away from the dying man … he carries a bayonet. Blood-covered. He looks … nothing. Blank. His eyes are wide open, but he looks blind. The officer is bathed in a golden light … (257).
Andrea’s attention toward “proper” rendering – as simulacrum – correlates to the soldiers’ choreographically depicted action, focalizing on Ulster’s predisposition to victory. As “the past merges with the present” at this moment in the play, “the adult Andrea” recalls her grandfather’s retelling his actual experience at the Somme. He “got injured minutes after clearing the trenches,” and his friend Billy Matchett died a “terrible death” from a wound turned gangrenous after three days in no man’s land (257).¹¹ Through Andrea literally redrawing and commentating, My Name limns the tension (or contradiction) between 1 July’s individualized experience and its (state) narratization: though a defeat, the Somme was, and must be, remembered as a victory. As Jim Haughey argues, “Beadle’s painting effectively celebrates a defeat,” and “like the Easter Rising, a defeat in Irish memory often becomes a synonym for victory” (10). Moreover, Andrea reimagines the Battle of the Somme as underscoring the masculinist impulse rendered in this defeatist “victory” – Haughey notes how “Andrea, looking back now as an adult, realizes that the painting has also helped mythologize the Somme as Beadle celebrates the testosterone virtues of the Ulster Division” (10).

Reenacting those “virtues” by performing them sustains the Somme’s mythos for “Ulster” Orange culture, now, within Northern Ireland. Andrea remembers how Andrew

¹¹ The markedly great sacrifice made by the 36th (Ulster) Division on 1 and 2 July was significant, for four out of nine Victoria Crosses were awarded to the 36th, and they incurred 5,500 casualties and about 2,000 deaths. Unfortunately, as Philip Orr notes, amongst the backdrop of the 400,000 British soldiers lost to the Somme Offensive, and given the way domestic politics anticipatively claimed the Ulster Division as their sacrificial dead, the individual soldiers were indeed the ones who paid most dearly. Ulster HQ let its troops traverse no man’s land a little too soon, and the 36th Division never received the support that other divisions, like the 18th, had received against the German machine gun fire. Orr thus points out that while touted as heroes back home, the private 36th Division soldier on the front found out that, in fact, “he was not a hero; he was simply expendable” (200-1).
“See that solider there with the bayonet? Spittin’ image of Billy Matchett. [...] Billy was the best Lambeg drummer the road had ever seen. The Orange Lodge paid for his headstone. [...] Done him proud. Billy’s son, wee Billy, took over the beatin’ of the Lambeg drum when he grew up. Carryin’ on the name. Carryin’ on the tradition. Which is how it should be. [...] And now, young Billy’s dead too. Cut off in his prime like his father before him. Second World War. Dunkirk. Still, his son, wee Billy has stepped into his father’s shoes.” [...] Sound of the Lambeg drum. Andy caught in the memory. “Go on, ye boy ye! Yer granda’ll never be dead as long as you’re alive!” (257-8).

While Andrea is careful not to dismiss this “Williamite” legacy, she does look apprehensively at these Orangemen’s tendency to plot Ulster’s narrative as a men’s history solely “about war” (259). She remembers Billy in the “Twelfth of July Parade” (258). Before he finally died while marching, he would beat the drum until “the blood trickled over the tattoos on his arms … ‘Ulster is British’; ‘No Surrender’; ‘Remember the Somme, Dunkirk, the Relief of Derry’” (258). What troubles Andrea is that national determination remains the domain of martial Ulstermen, especially for Andrew; “medals is for men,” he tells Andrea, “the men go off to war, and the weemin’ and children stay behind” (259). Furthermore, Andrea perceives that the politico-cultural positions of some Ulstermen – who have themselves suffered the Somme’s trauma – are elided if they are not of Protestant Unionism. Looking at a photograph, Andrea again rehearses the name-litany, including one such man: “and Edward Reilly, the only other survivor with my grandfather. His greatest friend … before the war. After the war, Edward sent his medal back. They were together in the middle of the photograph, and he cut Edward out” (261). Andrew’s elision is symbolic, an attempt to “cut out” or “reject” an undesired reality. He protests:
Turned down his medal. Turned traitor. Canvassed for the Labour Party after the war. Made speeches against the government and the monarchy. Betrayed all the brave men who fought and died so that we could be British and free. [...] Catholic throwbacks. [...] What sort of name's Reilly for a Protestant family? Intermarried [...] But it never leaves them. Popery. Bad Blood. Nationalism (261). Acknowledging her grandfather’s partial success, Andrea admits, “I never knew that Edward Reilly existed until I was sixteen” (261). It is Edward’s grandson, Eddie, who supplies her with “another version of the Battle of the Somme” (261), one apprehensive about “Ulster Protestant Pride,” “Orange sashes,” and its men being sent in first “over the top singing songs about the Battle of the Boyne and the Siege of Derry, as if the Catholic King James had been resurrected and was leading the German Army” (261). Yet as Andrea recalls, Edward also “mourned them” – Billy, Andrew, his entire company; Edward “survived and wept every time he told that story to his grandson” (262). But why this trauma deserves mourning is more complicated for Edward than it is for Andrew. The Somme signifies a post facto betrayal that Andrew will not, or cannot, admit to – that “Ulster’s” telos is founded in loss.

Ulster remains a “nation” only of the mind, its “coherence” delimited by ethno-national and masculinist performance. The play asks: in such circumstances, what can be done for those who do not nor cannot support such stringent parameters? My Name confronts this ideological confinement by showing how, like the Reilly family, Andrea verges toward experiencing the traumatic dislocation that this mentalité effectuates. One way the play suggests attenuating this dislocation is through removing oneself, literally, from the north of Ireland. And this is what Andrea does. Her choice exposes the degree to which “confinement,” in its ideological and physical senses, defines her grandfather’s existence. Andrea eventually leaves Belfast for London to pursue her talent in art (inherited from her grandfather) and, it is implied, to live independently as her own mother never had the chance to do while caring for Andrew, her father. Andrea’s choice, however, devastates Andrew. He imagines it as a betrayal to his legacy. From prison, Andrea recalls how her choice wounded her grandfather, though she is aware of the supreme irony his mindset represents:
Andrew: “They’re not like us over there.” Andrea: “He was hurt at me even considering that anything in England could be better than anything in Northern Ireland. It’s one of those paradoxes of the Ulster Protestant Mentality – being more British than the British, but at the same time, believing that anybody leaving the Province for the Mainland […] is letting the side down. […] Betraying the cause” (265).

It is the company that Andrea keeps in London, and the more circumspective view she develops toward war and Britain that ultimately cause Andrew to estrange her. Andrea becomes engaged to her well-off landlord, Hanif, an educated British-Pakistani. At the university, they study war poetry together performing an “improvised play about war” (267). Andrea soon comes to realize that aspects of her grandfather’s Somme mythography are appropriated; she re-quotes Andrew’s “Somme poem” – actually, Theodore O’Hara’s “Bivouac of the Dead” – which honors American soldiers who fell in the Mexican-American War, concluding, “I expect it’s much the same, not matter what war you die in” (267). Andrea’s realization speaks against Andrew’s uncritical reliance on the Somme’s scripted idiom, and against Ulster’s monocular view of itself according to that idiom.

*My Name* shows that the real paradox lies in Andrew’s unwillingness to see that his idiom speaks of Britain’s “betrayal” in War while upholding its saber-rattling. Praising Thatcher’s Falklands policy, Andrew tells Andrea right before he disowns her, “Britain rules the waves again. […] If Maggie’d been Prime Minister when that scum rose up out of the Bogside, the Troubles would have been over in a day. She’d have sailed the big gunboats into Derry the way she did to the Falklands, an’ wiped the Fenians off the face
of the earth” (268).12 In London, Andrea experiences firsthand how this political crisis (and immigration) registers at home. Her fiancée Hanif is attacked by a group of “skinheads […] out celebrating the English Fleet sailing from the Falklands” (271). He becomes mentally disabled, acutely paranoid about racist attacks. But Andrea remains faithful to him, returning to Belfast to ask for Andrew’s blessing over their union; upon realizing that her fiancée is part Pakistani though, Andrew disowns her: “He’s an Argy! […] A half-caste! A nig-nog! […] Get back to England and keep your black bastard there with you” (271). His banishment is permanent. In this moment, the play correlates “Ulster’s” ethno-national insularity to that of Thatcherite Britain; both are denials of reality, regressive senses of Northern Irish and British nationality. Thus, as Andrew is picked up (to be paraded) for the Somme’s “seventieth anniversary,” the scene shifts to Andrea’s cell in Holloway Prison with the “sound of another metal prison door closing” (271), enforcing another sense of closed-door segregation – of being confined. In her last soliloquy, Andrea reveals her present situation: she has been tried, strip-searched, and imprisoned for her presence at the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp protests against nuclear basing. Yet, her presence at Greenham is as personal as it is political. Invited by Hanif’s sister, Andrea envisions the all-women’s camp as a space for protesting war while commemorating its fallen, and also for women’s action. Confronting anti-riot police, Andrea lights candles (as other women do) for family members killed in Britain’s wars, and begins to recite her Great War litany. But as Claire Tylee points out,

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12 The paradox is, he states later, “I wore these medals the day I joined Carson’s army, after the Great War. We beat the English Government then, and we’ll beat them this time round too. Anglo-Irish Agreement be damned! Lloyd George couldn’t defeat us in 1920, and Maggie Thatcher won’t defeat us in 1986” (272).
“Andrea subverts her grandfather’s litany […] by adding new names” (212). Andrea claims, “the other three candles were for Edward Reilly and my grandfather and Hanif” (275). Her protest brings together voices from the margins: Greenham’s anti-militarist women vying to protect their children’s futures from war, those like Hanif who are denied “nationality” through racism – an analogy to Andrew’s attitude in Northern Ireland – and even soldiers like her grandfather, debilitated by British-unionist jingoism and masculinist militarism.

By Andrea leaving Northern Ireland, and looking at it from afar, Reid “makes it more than clear,” writes Imelda Foley, “that the only way out of a very sectarian, sexist historical morass is to get out. She configures change from outside, because it is impossible from within” (67). Like McGuinness before her though, Reid's play is about exposing that morass as substance written into the War’s exploitative narrativizations. She shows how presently, reconciliation can only be brought back to Ireland by confirming that substance as part of the War's posttraumatic legacy mutually felt. Andrea’s last attempt at reaching out to Andrew reflects this. She imagines the well-known moment when “one Christmas Day, during the First World War, a group of British and German soldiers called a halt to the fighting, and declared a truce” (276). In My Name’s 1980s present, Andrea’s desire analogizes the necessity of diplomacy to reconcile sectarian violence: “there must be an hour, a place, where he and I can meet. A piece of common ground. A no-man’s land. If it’s possible for strangers, then it’s possible for us” (276). The end of the play proposes that the War’s traumatic loss be not a politically divisive event, but a bridge over division. Andrea ends by stating that in order “to make peace” with her grandfather, she must be able to say, “I love you, even
though I have grown to loathe everything you believe in” (275). *My Name* imagines this attitude as a way out of Ireland’s ideological confinement.

Andrea’s final admission also reveals an important biographical impulse in Reid’s work, one that informs the play’s position on the Great War in a way later replicated during the next decade in Sebastian Barry’s 1995 drama *The Steward of Christendom*. Imelda Foley once asked Reid about the “ambivalence” whereby she depicts the Ulster Protestant psyche “like Frank McGuinness”:

> My grandfather was like that. When I asked him about the Somme he talked about valour, patriotism, loyalty. We wouldn’t question it. He couldn’t, because to question the war would have meant questioning his peacetime allegiances too, King and Country, God and Ulster. Everything he’d lived and survived by (Foley 60).

In *My Name*, Andrea expresses this sentiment about Andrew, acknowledging its seeming necessity:

> You must have moments of doubt. You must have. You’re stubborn and you’re proud, but you’re not a fool. Loyalty. Patriotism. Them or Us. You daren’t question what all that has done to you, because once you question even a small part of it, you end up questioning it all. And to do that, would be to negate your whole life. Everything you’ve lived and survived by (275-6).

Reid’s play rightly asks us to consider if it is possible or viable to accede one’s national allegiances entirely.

**Sebastian Barry**

Barry confronts is question in *The Steward of Christendom*. His play shows that the accession of identity is a question just as pertinent to the south as it to the north. Set in a “county home in Baltinglass, County Wicklow, in about 1932” (236), *Steward* stages the autumnal years of former DMP Chief Superintendent Thomas Dunne at a time when the Castle police force, along with Irish casualties like Thomas’s dead son – “the long
tradition of Irishmen in British uniforms” (O’Toole SC xi) – found their home had grown cold in the shadow of the newly elected Free State government, and afterward in de Valera’s Republic. As for Reid, Barry’s drama is prompted by his own family’s loyalist history, though Barry’s impulse to write Steward derived from his need to recover and reconcile an aspect of his family’s history not celebrated, but hitherto “forgotten.” He admits that up to the 1980s he would not reveal that his great-grandfather was, like his protagonist, the last Catholic superintendent to the Dublin Metropolitan Police. Barry claims that through Steward he attempted to “wrench a life from the dead grip of history and disgrace,” purging the southern mentality that would deem his great-grandfather a “disgraceful man” (Barry, Papers quoted in Cullingford). Barry’s intent in Steward is to redeem, or “re-member” Irish history to itself by staging as O’Toole puts it, “history’s leftovers, men and women defeated and discarded by their times” – men like Thomas Dunne, “an enforcer for a discredited regime” (vii).

Barry’s protagonist Thomas is a “Castle Catholic” (243), a defender of pre-War Ireland with an unflinching “loyalty, of steward to Queen” (250). He is an imperially-minded, cosmopolitan Irishman, an identity that as Steward shows, seemed not only contradictory in the eyes of 1920s nationalist Ireland, but as a regressive remnant antithetical to separatist aspirations. Since the late-1990s, critics have thus noted how the play attempts to recover those Irishmen and women at the margins of Ireland’s “official histories” (Meche 465). For Barry, this impulse is as national as it is biographical, a means of re-inscribing Ireland’s southern (and Catholic) unionists, those “discarded and forgotten” under the “heavy weight of Nationalist history” (Barry, Papers) particularly during “the joylessness of de Valera’s regime” (Cunningham). Throughout
the play, we see the toll which marginalization has taken on Thomas’s psyche. As in McGuinness and Reid, the protagonist’s mind seamlessly oscillates between past and present. But the present of the 1930s south is a period wherein Thomas’s dispensation is willfully forgotten, even met with open hostility. Guilt-ridden over his (indirect) part in the 1913 Dublin Lock-out deaths and that of his own son William in the Great War, Thomas desires forgiveness, public and personal. But Steward is objective about that desire, confronting the question of whether seeking grace should imply a total accession of one’s beliefs and allegiances. In so doing, the play also questions the tendency for the post-War south to mandate accession to separatist nationalism. As do McGuinness and Reid for the north, Barry interrogates the psychological strain wrought on the individual in the south when the (postcolonial) state looks to cohere a purely national(ist) psyche.13

In Steward’s representation of 1930s southern Ireland, we witness through analogy the pressure of institutionalization on the individual. As in Reid, that pressure indexes an imagined community’s tendency toward ideological (self) confinement, though in Barry’s drama, such confinement is made more literal. The first scene opens in 1932 onto “Thomas’s bare room in the county home in Baltinglass” (239), really, a euphemism for a mental asylum. Like Pyper and Andrew, Thomas awakens into Beckettian depravity, his room as neglected and disarrayed as the condition of his mind. His first half-dreamt words oscillate between Dedaelus’s infantilisms beginning Joyce’s

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13 While the impulse toward a coherent, national identity by postcolonial states is both natural and feasible, postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee do point out the potential limitations inherent in the process of nationalist decolonization: “all politics is now thought to be subsumed under the overwhelming requirements of the state-representing-the-nation. The state now acts as the rational allocator and arbitrator of the nation. Any movement which questions this presumed identity between the people-nation and the state-representing-the-nation is denied the status of legitimate politics” (168).
Portrait and nostalgic, poetic flourishes about his pastoral childhood home in Kiltegan:
“Da Da, Ma Ma, [...] amid the wild clover, and the clover again, and me the Ba Ba set in
the waving grasses, and the smell of honey, and the farmhands going away like an
army of redcoats” (240). But during this reverie, Thomas reveals a latent anxiety – his
father’s abuse, now triggered by and conflated with “Black Jim” Smith’s, Baltinglass’s
orderly: 14

Thomas: “Who is there?” Smith: “Black Jim.” Thomas: “Don’t come in,
Black Jim, with your blackthorn stick raised high. [...] There’s no need. Is it
Da Da? [...] Sleep says Da Da, or you get big stick. And when little Tom
no sleepy sleep, big stick comes in and hitting Tom Tommy, but now the
polished boots are gone, [...] and all is silence in the wooden world of the
house, except the tread of the Da Da, a-worrying, a-worrying, except the
fall of the big stick, cut from the blackthorn tree. [...] Da Da is golden,
golden, golden, nothing that Da Da does takes away the sheen and the
swoon of gold” (240-1)

A central trope to Steward is abuse wrought by one generation onto another.
This first scene coalesces a past, personal history of abuse with a present, institutional
one, foregrounding some questions the play raises: why does Thomas experience
violence or abuse as repetitious when linked to trauma, and why does his traumatic
memory (and suffering) become contained, confined, even disciplined institutionally?
Thomas reveals that he was committed to Baltinglass for a mental breakdown; after his
regime ceded the Castle to Michael Collins, the legitimate fear of separatist threats on
his life caused him to, delusionally, turn a sword on his daughter Annie. In his cell, he
contemplates his sanity: “Baltinglass, that’s where you are. “Mad [...] mad [...] Because
you were not civil to your daughter, [...] You were ranting, [...] raving, and so they put

14 Significantly, Thomas also conflates “Black Jim” with Jim Larkin, the leader of the Irish Transport and
General Workers’ Union, the Irish Labour Party, the Workers’ Union of Ireland; Thomas thus envisions in
Black Jim the “enemy,” Jim Larkin, who also led the 1913 Dublin Lockout wherein Thomas was
responsible for killing Irish strikers, to his later guilt and shame.
you where you were safe. [...] Like a dog under sentence. But please do not talk to Black Jim, Thomas [...]. This is a madhouse” (240-1). What can be said of Thomas associating his insanity with traumatic memory, wherein he conflates his father’s abuse with Smith’s?

_Steward_ literalizes the effects of authoritative control whereby Ireland’s War-era (traumatic) memory is disciplined and contained. Awoken by Smith, Thomas attempts to recount his rise as “a policeman” (243). Though now within Baltinglass, his personal history is policed, his memory met with hostility. Smith narrates Thomas’s life, in a word, _for_ him:

Dublin Metropolitan Police [...] that are no more. [...] Castle Catholic bugger. [...] Chief superintendent, this big gobshite was, [...] that killed four good men and true in O’Connell street in the days of the lock-out. Larkin. His men it was struck down the strikers. [...] Baton-charging. A big loyal Catholic gobshite killing poor hungry Irishmen. If you weren’t an old madman we’d flay you (243).

Smith’s lashing out is not unmotivated, for he claims that Thomas’s regime shot his brother in the 1920s, but as another orderly, Mrs. O’Dea, rightly points out, Smith is also of a generation _raised into_ a fortifying separatist narrative. Like Dunne himself, Smith _inherits_ an historical prerogative. Representatively, Smith contains the undesired material of the past by through institutional discipline. Thus, Thomas’s confinement is a physical and mental containment that polices his memories and ideology; and through the institution, his own Catholic loyalist narrative is disciplined – cast as arcane insanity – and accordingly, it can be suppressed, repressed, or occluded. But insofar as Thomas associates discipline with order, he repeatedly conflates Smith with his own abusive
father. Tellingly, Smith’s discipline is physical, coercive, enacted only when Thomas becomes “lost” in his mind’s past.

Though criticism has commented minimally on Thomas’s conflation, I would argue that it is important to Steward’s objective; it suggests that Thomas’s guilt derives from the less overt, more tacitly ideological pressure brought – and to an extent, invited – upon him by his past regime. If he seeks forgiveness, reconciliation, and inclusion into Ireland’s present, his motivation derives from a difficult acknowledgment: that he has also been an agent of neglect, or forgetfulness so to speak, foregoing his own family’s stewardship as “the steward of Christendom” for Victoria’s Ireland. Dubbing her the “perfecter of Christendom,” once in Thomas’s eyes, Victoria not only took the place of Ireland’s feminized nomination, Éire, but also took precedence over his wife:

I loved her as long as she lived, I loved her as much as I loved Cissy my wife, and maybe more, […]. When I was a young recruit it used to frighten me how much I loved her. Because she had built everything up and made it strong, […]. All the harbours of the earth […] her ships were shining and strong. […] And her mark was everywhere, […]. Among her emblems was the gold harp, […]. Her influence would reach everywhere, […]. Ireland was hers for eternity, order was everywhere, […]. I could love her fiercely. Victoria” (250).

Out of religious fervor for imperial Ireland, Thomas estranges his family, particularly his son William. As Jude Meche points out, Thomas’s coldness toward William perpetuates his own father’s legacy, derived from “an understanding of masculinity that prohibits affection between men” (Meche 466). Thomas saw “unmanliness” in his son; gifted to sing professionally (which Thomas loathed), Willie was not physically strong like his father, without “the height to be a policeman” (254). This question of men’s “fitness” for regimental service links Steward with Sons of Ulster and My Name, though also with O’Casey’s satires about 1916’s physical-force nationalism. These works look
apprehensively at the way Irish (para)militarisms (whether separatist, loyalist, or imperial-unionist) were underscored by a Victorian-era, cosmopolitan rubric of physical-culture for men: giving oneself bodily, even sacrificially, for an imagined nation became an extension of ideological commitment. As do his predecessors, Barry’s drama exposes the internal limitations and exclusions (and thus the underlying similarities) perpetuated by self-identifiably oppositional communities; but even more to the point, in *Steward*, though Barry reclaims Thomas’s marginalized demography, he deliberately exposes the hegemonic compulsions underscoring Thomas’s imperially-minded, Catholic loyalism – Thomas’s compulsion to send his only son Willie into the king’s service ends in his son’s death in Flanders. Thomas is haunted by that legacy. Un-dealt with, and not yet reconciled, Willie returns as a ghost and effectuates his father’s own “return” to the past, wherein he must confront those “things of [his] own doing, and damn history,” which are his “regret” (246).

*Steward* frames Thomas’s attempt at seeking his sons’ forgiveness as a model of reconciliation. Dunne’s fatherly neglect analogizes the south’s attitude toward its veterans, and also the strictures imposed by his own regime. This is made clear when Willie’s ghost first appears onstage, but only after Thomas wakes from a dream-memory of recruiting a young man whom he calls “son” (251) into the DMP. The temporal proximity of the two boys is notable, for after the recruit is accepted (into Dunne’s regime) and “shadows away,” Thomas then tells himself that he “must not speak to shadows” (252) – his repressed guilt, of favoring another over his son, comes back to haunt him, prompting a need for admission: “there is no one to look at me to suggest […] Thomas Dunne is still human. […] I am ashamed. I am ashamed. I am ashamed”
217

(252). Willie appears in this moment dressed in his army uniform, though suggestively, Dunne sees him as a child, a thirteen-year old boy “neat and round” (253). Sitting at the end of his father’s bed, Willie “sings to him Schubert’s ‘Ave Maria’” (253). The song’s lyrics which recount exile for refusing to join rebellion hint at both Thomas’s own actual “exile” from Dublin Castle during Collins’s takeover, and more so, his remorse for “exiling” Willie into the service. As he reaches out to his son in the way a father should, the consequences of his past confront him. Their exchange voices Willie’s only spoken line in the play: “Thomas: ‘Hello, child. Are you warm?’ Willie: ‘It’s cold in the mud, Father’” (253). Almost childlike, Willie’s reply is fraught with implications – the privation Willie has endured in combat while still only a boy, his own death in the trenches, and the very coldness of his father who sent him into death. Willie’s words prompt Dunne’s first request for forgiveness, “I know child. I’m so sorry” (253). His presence also initiates the first of Dunne’s temporal “returns” to his own time of exile. As the ghost disappears, the scene changes to 1922 wherein Dunne prepares to attend Britain’s handing over Dublin Castle to Collins. Thomas’s loyalist daughters see in Collins the end of their father’s career, “whose son gave his life for Ireland” (254). But Dunne corrects them, casting the blame not on an ideal of Home Rule War-sacrifice, but on his own rubric of imperial service: “Will gave his life to save Europe, […] which isn’t the same thing. […] I blame myself. There was no need for him to go off, except, he hadn’t the height to be a policeman. The army were glad to take him. I blame myself. […] It was the death of him. You cannot lose a son without blaming yourself” (254).

As in Ascendancy War fiction, Barry’s drama depicts how the War traumatized Irish demographies like the Dunnes’, among others. Through the 1920s troubles and
after, (Catholic) southern loyalists registered a sense of betrayal on both sides, by Britain’s devolving governance to Ireland, and by the south’s consequent narrowing of Irish nationality. *Steward* legitimizes Thomas’s attempt at reconciling himself not only to his own son, but to a separatist-orienting nationalism which remembers Easter 1916’s trauma over the Western Front. Through Thomas’s flashbacks, the play reveals the difficulty in this attempt, however, exposing how the galvanization of a separatist *ethos*, to some degree, even took coercive form in the 1920s. He remembers a moment right before being decommissioned by Collins, a time when “all the long traditions,” “all the proud regiments, […] the Dublin Rifles and the Dublin Fusiliers” were also being “broken up and flung out” (263). A flashback transports us to his daughter Dolly’s experience of this. She, her friend Mary Galligan, and a “good crowd” (264) of Irishmen and women go to honor the disbanding of Ireland’s troops. Only shortly thereafter, however, she recalls experiencing hostility on her way home. Dolly tells Thomas and her sisters:

> Mary Galligan was crying, and we […] were trying to comfort her, […] but this woman, a middle-aged woman, quite well-to-do […] struck Mary Galligan on the cheek, so as she left the marks of her hand there. And she would have attacked me too, but that the conductor came down and spoke to the woman. And she said we were Jezebels and should have our heads shaved and be whipped, for following the Tommies. And the conductor looked at her, and hadn’t he served in France himself, and as one of the Volunteers, oh, it was painful, the way she looked back at him, as if he were a viper, or a traitor. The depth of foolishness in her. A man that had risked himself, like Willie, but that had reached home at last (265).

Dolly, like so many other Irishmen and women, many of whom were constitutional nationalists, choose rather to commemorate their fallen: “[…] Ireland has lost its men […]. Regiments that protected us in the war, who went out and left thousands behind in France. Willie’s own regiment” (264). Commentating on an *alternate* sense of “betrayal” here, Dolly intentionally legitimizes the Volunteers’ Home Rule nationalism, a position
also sidelined by republicanism. Such betrayal affects Thomas more chronically, though no less severely; with his pension for forty years’ service reduced to nothing, he is dismissed back to Kiltegan – in a word, “abandoned” to live “like the dead” (272).

But what makes his exile so deeply felt so as to be repressed until recalled to him by his daughters, is that he is banished, tacitly, for his “unsuitability” to the new regime. While Thomas expresses a willingness to serve Collins’s Provisional Government, he, like his father had done, and like he had done to his own son, is eventually pushed out. Haunted by Collins as he is by his son and father, Thomas in fact conflates the three in his mind; through Collins, he “plays out” his desire for acceptance and purges the guilt of his own rejection, which he surrogated onto Willie. He recalls meeting Collins:

I could scarce get over the sight of him. […] handsome, […] the big face and body of a boxer. He would have made a tremendous policeman in other days. He looked to me like […] one of those prize-fighting men […]. I would have been proud to have him as my son. […] I thought too as I looked at him of my father, as if Collins could have been my son and could have been my father. I had risen as high as a Catholic could go. […] I knew that by then most of the men in my division were for Collins […]. And for an instant, as the Castle was signed over to him, I felt a shadow of that loyalty pass across my heart. By I closed my heart instantly against it. […] The savagery and ruin that soon followed broke my heart (287).

Thomas sees in the ruin that followed in the Civil War, a “familial” killing, the galvanization of sectarian violence which in taking Collins’s life, shifted the possibility for diplomatic conciliation in a “tide of ruin” (287). He recalls how his “admiration” for Collins was replaced by “sorrow”: “I remember the shock of sorrow when he was killed. I remember Annie and me crying in the old parlour of our quarters in the Castle” (262). Steward shows that it is the potential for such violence – reified analogously in Smith – which is both cause and effect for Thomas’s “madness.” After this flashback to meeting Collins, Smith detains Thomas, “strikes him with the pacifier” (281) which wounds him,
and then places him in a straightjacket. Equating Smith’s institutional violence to his father’s, he shows Smith the “scar” where his father cut him with a “knife” and the “mark” left by a belt – though Thomas tells Smith, “he loved me” (281). With unconditional grace, Thomas pardons both men, seeing part of himself in Smith and his father: “let him hit. What else has he but hitting? Does he know why the calf is stupid? No. There he is in his ignorance hitting. Let him hit” (282). In this moment of self-reproach, Willie returns, allowing Thomas to admit to the damage of disowning one’s own, and to the necessity of making amends:

My poor son […] I didn’t do as well […] with you. I was sorry you never reached six feet. I was a fool. […] Why do we not love our sons simply and be done with it? I would kill, or do a great thing, just to see you once more, in the flesh. All I got back was your uniform, with the mud half-washed out of it. […] I put it over my head and cried for a night […] I cried for a night with your uniform over my head, and no one saw me (283).

For Thomas, Willie’s death is an indirect consequence of internalizing his regime’s narrow-mindedness, the very phenomenon that now in the Free State, effects his own confinement, and with it, the memory of the First World War.

But toward the end of Steward, the memory of the First World War allows Thomas and Smith to confront their wrongdoings, mutually agreeing that “no man is beyond redemption” (291). As Smith bandages Thomas, “war-wounded” (290), he asks if Thomas had fought in the War, admitting to the death of one of his own family members: “I had a first cousin in it. A lot of men went out” (291). Smith’s sense of loss brings him to inquire sympathetically about Willie, whose only remaining legacy “in the world” is a letter he wrote to his father “sent from the trenches themselves” (291) right before being killed in action. Keenly interested in the letter, Smith reads it aloud at Thomas’s request. The depth of the men’s remorse is matched by Willie’s innocence,
mature honesty, and a capacity for forgiveness beyond his years. After recounting the tedium, privation, and destruction of the War, Willie seeks the support of his father, yet also, offers him support – it is the most moving moment in the play:

I hope you don’t mind my letter going on. It gives me great comfort to write to my father. I wish I could tell you that I am a hero, but truth to tell, there are few opportunities for valour, in the way we all imagined when we set out. I have not seen the enemy. [...] I think of home, and my sisters, and my father, [...]. God keep you all safe, because we have been told of the ruckus at home, and some of the country men are as much upset by that as they would be by their present emergency. I know you are in the front line there, Papa, so keep yourself safe for my return, [...]. The plain truth is, Papa, this is a strange war and a strange time, and my whole wish is to be home with you all in Dublin, and to abide by your wishes [...]. I wish to be a more dutiful son because, Papa, in the mire of this wasteland, you stand before my eyes as the finest man I know, and in my dreams you comfort me and keep my spirits high (293).

As in many Irish Great War texts, the distance of the War induces in Willie the desire to return to Ireland and restore himself to his family, especially his father. The letter also enacts a crucial inversion of the father-son dynamic. As Kay Martinovich notes, “a duality of father and son is suggested in the way that the words of the living Willie alternate between that of parent and child” (121). Willie finds solace in providing his father support through his letter-writing. Like a father, he admonishes Dunne to be careful during the Easter Rising until he returns; “in this way, Willie as son and father is comforted, but also gives comfort to Dunne, as both father and son” (Martinovich 121). Willie then concludes as a son, with the utmost praise to be given a father – that Dunne is the “finest man” he knows. The letter scene marks a supreme change in Thomas’s and Smith’s attitudes toward one another. Because of the honor Willie shows his father, it is the first moment in the play wherein Smith sees Thomas’s genuine uprightness as a man. Willie’s voice from the Great War also reminds Smith of the humanity behind the young Irish lives lost on the continent. He tells Dunne: “that’s a beautiful letter, Mr.
Dunne. A memento. A keepsake” (293). It restores to Smith a sense that the War remains an event in Irish experience not to be contained, but recorded as a collective trauma – he confirms that to Dunne: “it’s an historical document” (292). In doing so, Smith legitimizes the First World War’s place in Irish history, and ultimately, he even makes peace with Dunne, pronouncing him a “good man” (293).

As Steward nears its end, a sense of reconciliation permeates Dunne’s memory wherein he amends his patrilineal line even to the new state. Willie returns in the last scene, “his uniform flecked with gold” and his hand “solid” to his father’s touch, as Thomas helps his son into bed for their final rest. Though Dunne’s memory is now “topsy-turvy,” he tells his son, “the last order I gave to the men was to be sure and salute Mr. Collins’s coffin as it went by” (299). Thomas’s gesture is significant: we realize that his loyalty to Collins – the father-son figure – even endures past this regime-change, one which as Dunne anticipated, would gradually elide him and his son from memory. Dunne’s partial accession of loyalty (or identity) to the Free State is an act of conciliation that he hopes will be extended to his family, especially for his son’s sake as one of Ireland’s War casualties. Thomas’s last words allude to this hope through a story he tells his son. He recounts how one winter as a boy, his much loved “dog Shep went missing for some days” (300) after he had eaten one of the ewes he was supposed to be protecting. But instead of leading Shep home as his father instructed to be customarily killed, Thomas hid in the mountains all night “for love of the dog” (300-1). Finally, returning to his father and expecting that he and Shep “were for slaughter,” he is met with the utmost forgiveness: he “pulled me to him,” Thomas remembers, and “raised his own face to the brightening sky and praised someone, in a crushed voice,
God maybe, for my safety” (301). Dunne’s story is analogous; he desires that Ireland be merciful toward him the way he as a child, showed mercy toward the guilty (the “dog,” connoting traitorousness, whose killing of the ewe reflects the Free State’s attitude toward Dunne as imperial steward). Moreover, as his father had done for him, Thomas envisions the possibility of Ireland (generationally, his father and child) extending forgiveness and restoration back to him and his son. His last words express faith in the possibility of such mercy: “and I would call that the mercy of fathers, when the love that lies in them deeply […] is betrayed by an emergency, and the child sees at last that he is loved, loved and needed and not to be lived without, and greatly” (301). The play concludes with his son’s model reconciliation, as “Willie lies in close to him” (301).

The last image of Steward is of a deceased soldier being restored to the home and to southern Ireland’s historical memory. The scene is indicative of the way pre-millennial Irish literature sought to recover Ireland’s First World War experience from oblivion. As Elizabeth Cullingford points out, insofar as Barry re-inscribes the south’s “historically occluded” (12) – Catholic loyalists and War families – Steward “is a literary extension of the project of historical revisionism” (12). However, Barry’s work circumvents the binary between pro-nationalist and anti-nationalist narratives which historical revisionism has, albeit ironically, come to be associated with (Haughey 291). Rather, Steward, along with Sons of Ulster and My Name form what I would deem the beginnings of a “post-revisionist” literary project: insofar as McGuinness, Reid, and Barry validate the War’s trauma within Irish life, these authors also rightly interrogate the inter-political – even cosmopolitan – ideologies that caused men to become political casualties of the First World War. The ghosts haunting the loyalists Pyper and Thomas,
for instance, and the voices imprisoning Andrew are not those of German soldiers, or of a domineering command, or even of nationalist Irishmen; rather, these men are haunted, troubled, and confined by their own factions, families, and affiliations. More than anything, this literature confronts the internal antagonisms amplified by the War, troubling men and women from the north and the south.

In Willie’s letter to his father, one of his fondest memories is singing across no-man’s land to the “enemy,” German soldiers who sing back with equal charisma. Like Andrea in My Name, Willie imagines the War’s killing-fields not entirely as a space of hostility, but a space offering the possibility of finding common ground with the “enemy” – in the context of Ireland, with other Irishmen. Considered together, these plays look across “no-man’s land,” across the Irish border, and find similarities or mirror-images of, say, separatists’ ethno-national and religious mentalities in loyalists, or republicans’ nationalistic energy for Irish identity in Home Rulers and unionists. Further, they adumbrate the degree to which rubrics of manliness (derived from late-Victorian physical-culture) underscored similarities in the cultures of loyalist, separatist, and imperial paramilitary forces. As such, McGuinness, Reid, and Barry’s works invite us to begin viewing Ireland as it in fact existed at the turn of the century – as a richly cosmopolitan, modernizing, and to some extent imperially-minded nation, many of whose citizens saw no contradiction in serving in the British Army during the First World War. And it is conceiving of Ireland through its cosmopolitanism – through what I would call a “post-revisionist” paradigm – which has informed the narrative approaches to Ireland’s two latest millennial, Great War combat novels: Barry’s A Long Long Way
(2005) and Alan Monaghan’s *The Soldier’s Song* (2010), which we will conclude with in a brief epilogue.
The question of possessing or owning a traumatic event, which is to say rendering it intelligible, is always both an individualistic domain and a social one. Regarding traumatic experience and historical events, Cathy Caruth reminds us that the traumatized “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely posses” (5). Caruth speaks here to the enigmatic effect of posttraumatic stress disorder on a subject: “the delay or incompletion in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event” (5). It is this “always incomplete-yet-true” dimension of traumatic suffering that has serious potential social implications. For certainly, the act of listening and responding to survivor’s traumatic stories implies interventional reception, usually at first, psychiatric, but then also public. In the case of large-scale, human-predicated disasters like war – in our context, The First World War and the Easter Rising – reception becomes a national project, inexorably tied to political debate and its ideological undercurrents.

Certainly, speaking and bearing witness of the First World War has not been easy in Ireland. As Terence Brown asserts in his aptly titled article, “Who Dares to Speak?: Ireland and the Great War,” “The Great War is one of the great unspokens in Irish life, […] something which even now cannot find that full expression which would lay to rest for ever all its Irish victims” (228). Thus, the questions inherent to this dissertation’s method have been derived from the mode of psychiatric practice that encourages patients to find that expression by working through and bearing witness in the process of recovery. In these chapters, we have asked ourselves: can literature be a
form of testimony, and what is gained, or who can gain, by listening to these narratives? Our second question extends the first to its logical conclusion. In Jenny Edkins’s terms, what is at stake in the fact that the dead and wounded are all too often subject to being “claimed” or “appropriated” by political factions or national institutions intent on legitimating their own prerogatives (1)? Throughout these chapters, we have seen how such issues play out not only through Irish Great War literature’s figurations of combatants’ recall – or hallucinations and nightmares – of traumatic experiences, but also on a structural level, in the very real stress put on soldiers by being “read” and “interpreted” so as to become the raison d’être of imagined states, whether a republic in the south or continued union in the north. We have also proceeded from a premise corroborated by traumatologists like Caruth, Edkins, and Hunt, that literature itself is a form of testimony, which like human testimony, while capable of being put in service of the nation, can also function consciously as resistance. The survivor/narrator’s testimony-as-resistance is key to the literary texts depicting Ireland’s experiences of 1914-1916. For these texts force us to ask: what stories and whose stories – that is to also say, whose narratives of testimony – have been sanctioned over the last century, and whose have not? And, how can literary mimesis inform more ethical renderings and remembering of historical occurrences?

While perhaps it is expected, it is nonetheless important to note that these are the questions central to Sebastian Barry’s in A Long Long Way (2005) and Alan Monaghan’s The Soldier’s Song (2010). To conclude then, I want to point out how these authors self-consciously envision literary narrative as a mode of testifying to one of Ireland’s unspoken experiences, the suffering and identity crises of Irish soldiers in the
First World War. Looking at these novels from Edkins’s point of view on trauma – that (literary) testimony can also function as a form of resistance to the status quo – these novels pose a challenge us to revaluate “whose history survives” in contemporary Ireland and “whose truth gets told” (Hutcheon 120-3). They argue for the imperative of acknowledging the multiplicity and concurrency of testimonies of suffering; and in the context of the myths inscribed and reinforced about Ireland's war years, they argue for “listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, [...] or turn them all into versions of the same story” (Caruth EIM vii).

True to reality for many Irish soldiers, Barry and Monaghan narrate the Great War and the Easter Rising as interrelated conflicts. Protagonists Willie Dunne of A Long Long Way and Stephen Ryan of The Soldier’s Song find themselves unexpectedly caught in the iconic paradox of 1914-1918; as soldiers in the 16th (Irish) Division’s Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the 10th (Irish) Division respectively, they witness their own city of Dublin erupt into a war zone after returning from their first tours at Hulluch and Gallipoli. Crucial to both novels, Willie’s and Stephen’s inductions into violence imprint indefinitely on their minds: Willie sees his first leader, Captain George Paisley, gruesomely burned to death in a notoriously horrendous gas attack on the 16th Division at St. Julian, and Stephen is devastated when he finds out that the sniper he is forced to kill at Suvla Bay, who screams for hours before dying, is a beautiful young girl. Following the normative trajectory, these moments begin the young men’s descents into disillusionment. But the novels go further. As these killings imprint on their minds as atrocities, both protagonists cannot speak of them. Symptomatically, the dead begin to haunt them in flashbacks and
hallucinations – they are the first of many ghosts whom the men, without speech, cannot exorcise.

The inability to speak on account of trauma begins to take hold as Willie and Stephen encounter Dublin as a scene of war. The narratives become like stilted *bildungsromans*; what brings both of these nineteen year-olds out of their innocence while consequently silencing them in adulthood is being put in the impossible position of having to fire upon their own flesh and blood. Stephen’s brother, Joe, an ICA soldier, is shot and wounded by Ryan’s own division. For Willie, the situation is worse. In his complete naivety, even though his father is outspokenly political (the unionist, Catholic D.M.P. superintendent we just saw in *Steward*), he comes face to face with a young insurrectionist whom he initially assumes is a German soldier. He cannot fulfill his duty as a British soldier to fire upon Irishmen. The irony is driven further when during the very same week of the Rising, Willie returns to the killing fields of France to witness the infamous German gas attack at Hulluch. The attack initiates numerous “invasions.” As the gas overwhelms his battalion, Willie is not only haunted by the vision of “Pasley’s twisted form” from the St. Julian attack, but by the “thought of what those f-king men were doing in Dublin and he cursed them, cursed them for their violent ignorance” (110). In this moment he envisions his battalion as a meritoriously heroic though corrupted “*tableau vivant*, their pose supplicatory, their ghosthood immanent” (Harte 114) – they are without sanctimony, “only poor Tommies of Irishmen, Joe Soaps of back streets and small lives” (110). He pities what will become the oblivion of this moment’s “unsullied truth” to its (other) rendering in “history” (111).
The novels are about compounding trauma, for similarly, when Stephen returns to Messines, he is forced to shoot a sniper's assistant in the back, another young boy, and afterward, he is entombed in the earth when one of the Messines mines detonates. The ghosts of his dead men, their white, lifeless fingers persistently grip at him in his mind. What ensues for both young men is silence. Like so many First World War soldiers, Stephen and Willie cannot find the means to communicate to their families back home the horrors they have witnessed, nor do they wish expose the innocent to that horror. And the pivotal year of 1916 troubles their situations further; as Barry’s novel casts it, these men have now “come out to fight a war without a country to their name” (134). In such circumstances, Willie attempts to find empathetic reprieve by admitting in a letter to his father that he felt a quiet pity for the young insurrectionist he saw shot in Dublin. Yet for this admission, his father disowns him as a “treacherous gob” and severs all communication (247). Willie dies before they can make amends. A Long Long Way suggests that Thomas Dunne’s complete pitilessness for the Rising’s dead, and his own part in the deaths of those in the 1913 Dublin Lockout, are oppositional and equally inimical occlusions of trauma for which, alternatively, his son Willie rightly seeks a solidarity of the shaken.

It is after his father rejects him, and when he is silent about the literal stones thrown at him by ragged Dublin boys that Willie feels “like a ghost […] no longer a human […] just wisps and scraps of a person (252). His resigned silence – his self-extrication from (political) voice – is indicative of the position that some Irish servicemen occupied back home: “this inability to live of up to the myths, and the increasing disassociation between the Ireland they were fighting for and the Ireland they returned
to, which made repatriation difficult for all Irish soldiers, but for the soldier tainted with a brush of madness, even more so” (Bourke SS 158). As a novel, *A Long Long Way* figures Willie’s survival as “ghostly”; in Caruth’s terms, such narratives represent “the crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7). As his main project, Barry poses Willie as representative; his “ghostliness” on account of the First World War is accentuated by the south’s shift in political identity, making the nature of Willie’s survival, in fact, *more* unbearable – seemingly, irrecoverable.

But we cannot overlook the fact that in casting Willie as progressively more reticent, *A Long Long Way* does indeed, as Liam Harte argues, create a counter-myth, a “politics of pity” for Willie’s “state of arrested development” which is no less ideological than the myths the novel challenges (115). Willie never really comes into a realistically mature politicization that as Edkins notes is often the case with combatants and trauma survivors; rather, he is cast in an almost unconvincing “political and moral inviolability” (Harte 115). However, Harte’s claim does in fact fall in line with one of this dissertation’s premises, that no narrative is ever neutral, but ideological. And from the perspective of traumatology, we should not discount the fact that the novel’s figuration of silence represents a new consciousness toward employing literary narrative as a form of testimony intended to incite empathy for the *causes* of silence.

Surely, this is the intention that manifests in *A Soldier’s Song* through Stephen Ryan’s aphasia. While more literal, Stephen’s sudden inability to speak following the Messines mine cave-in can also be read analogously in Monaghan’s words, as a “self-
imposed silence.”¹ For even before Stephen is rendered literally silent at Messines, he cannot speak to civilians of the revenants haunting him. Back home on leave with his love-interest, Lillian, he must withhold from her how “he was menaced by ghosts” (193), prone to bouts fear even in calm moments which “bloomed inside him, filling him with dread” (224). In Monaghan’s words, these moments on home leave convey how the catastrophes of the Front which “Stephen had endured, were, quite literally, unspeakable.” That silence is then literalized after Messines. But rather than being rendered indefinitely reticent like Willie, The Soldier’s Song concludes with Stephen’s relationship to psychiatrist, Dr. Rivers, who enables Stephen to locate his peccant trauma and work through it back to speech.

Dr. Rivers’s intervention is at once a critique of the paucity and dire need of psychiatric aid in postwar Ireland, and also an acknowledgement of the necessity for allowing a space for Irish ex-servicemen’s voices. As Joanna Burke avers, these are not mutually exclusive categories; rather, insofar as (wounded) veterans were viewed on the “wrong side” of the political divide, to an extent, “their masculinity was in doubt, their loyalty was derided, and the passivity engendered on the modern battlefield was continued once they returned home” (SS 166-8). Irish ex-servicemen, especially those suffering from shell shock (posttraumatic stress), were afforded comparatively fewer psychiatric and rehabilitative resources than their counterparts in the United Kingdom, an aspect further silencing them within the Irish Free State (Bourke SS 167-8). From a traumatological view, Stephen’s bearing witness is thus a metaphor for the project of

¹ Quotes from Alan Monaghan are from my personal correspondence with the author, dating 21 May 2016.
literary narrative functioning consciously as a type of testimony of recovery – that is, discursively, the recovery of Irish veterans' voices, and narratively, recovering from this divisive moment in Irish history by narrativizing the historical circumstances that silenced them. As in *A Long Long Way*, we therefore read Monaghan's figuration of trauma as an appeal for empathy, or to employ Margalit's terms, toward an act of inclusion in the service of ethical remembering.

Fortunately, as Ireland enters a decade devoted to commemorations – many of them having to do with wars – locating horizontal moments of trauma has become the project of Irish First World War literature. Throughout this dissertation, we have seen how these texts can be read as reaching across the divide. Now, in the twenty-first century, that project is more conscious of itself. In returning to history to re-narratize it, Irish First World War literature intently turns to those troubling sites of traumatic events in order to listen to the other side. The act is one of empathy. In the words of Ernie O'Malley, to read such narratives – these testimonies – is an attempt to listen and comprehend “another man’s wound.” We should not discount literature’s significance to the Republic's and Northern Ireland’s current intents at listening empathetically to one another. For, as testimonies that incite empathy, these texts may reveal to us, in Caruth’s words, “the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” – and this is indeed, “a new mode of reading and listening” (*UE* 8-9).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native Floridian, Andréa Caloiaro attended Stetson University, receiving his Bachelor of Arts in English literature in 2008. While there, he developed a lifelong interest in modernist literature and narrative theory, and after being given the opportunity to lead an English class as a teacher’s assistant, he found his profession. During this time, he went to the University of Oxford to strengthen his newfound interests and expertise in Irish and British literature. After graduation, his teaching of composition and grammar at Valencia College in Orlando inspired him to head north to attend Boston College for his Master of Arts in English. Taking courses in the English Department and Irish Studies, and guided by Irish literary scholars, Andréa began studying Irish literature professionally. In 2011, he returned to the Sunshine State to pursue his PhD at the University of Florida under the direction of the internationally renowned Joyce scholar, Dr. R. Brandon Kershner, and with the mentorship and support of Drs. Marsha Bryant, Phillip Wegner, and Jessica Harland-Jacobs. He looks forward to a career in teaching and researching twentieth century Irish and British literature, especially in the contexts of war, trauma, and narratology – preferably, within walking distance from one of Florida’s sandy, sun-bleached coastlines.