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Seeing Blindness: The Visual and the Great War in Literary Modernism

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SEEING BLINDNESS: THE VISUAL AND THE GREAT WAR IN LITERARY MODERNISM

A Dissertation Presented

By

RACHAEL ERIN DWORSKY

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DEDICATION

For my mom, dad, and sister, who have sacrificed so much

And in loving memory of

my grandfather,
David L. Dorsey (1930-2014)

&

the one who really taught me how to read,
Professor Robert Coleman-Senghor (1940-2011)
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The Great War introduced explosive weaponry and military tactics that would create an entirely new economy of visuality and blindness in war. Over 23,000 soldiers were discharged from the British army during the First World War as a result of seriously damaged eyesight, the French army suffered approximately 2,400 blinded casualties, and the United States incurred approximately 850 soldiers with visual defects, 400 of whom were totally blinded. These historical contexts anchor my analysis of modernists’ attention to the wartime pressure to be blind (a pressure materially abetted by the war’s wounding technologies), and their texts’ corresponding interest in the interpersonal dynamics of seeing and not-seeing. While many soldiers were physically blinded in battle, civilian blindness about the war and their refusal to see the reality of wounded veterans catapulted this phenomenon toward epidemic proportions, motivating modernist writers to critique forms of national blindness that promoted a false sense of reality and immunity among civilians. In a discussion of a range of modernist texts, including Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone*, Frederic Manning’s *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay*, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, this
dissertation rewrites current scholarship that highlights modernism’s ambivalence about the visual. Departing from those who highlight modernism’s skepticism about seeing, and building upon those who view visuality as a central aspect of modernist aesthetics, I suggest that a closer look at modernists’ First World War literature invites the possibility of redefining the visual outside the lens of violently war-torn bodies and the disembodied optics of war, as modernism’s insistence upon the intersubjectivity of sight reminds us that perceiving the other, and apprehending that the other also perceives is made possible by the inherently reflexive nature of seeing. Ultimately, I suggest that the ethical demands of seeing in a war-ravaged world generate new emphases in literary modernism on the positive and reparative power of the visual to serve as an antidote to the visual’s other more violent and disturbing forms.
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INTRODUCTION

“…to make you hear, to make you feel…before all, to make you see.”
- Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus* (1897)

“I am blind—but no blinder than is the mind of the world these days. The long thin splinter of German steel which struck in behind my eyes did no more to me than the war has done to the vision of humanity. In this year of deep confusion—clutching, grabbing, spending, wasting...plague and famine, desperation and revolt—mankind is reeling in the dark.”

--Ernest Poole, *Blind: A Story of These Times* (1920)

In 1919, Ernest Poole, an American novelist and journalist, began writing a war novel entitled *Blind: A Story of These Times*, a book that sought to make the post-war world see that it had lost its “vision.” In 1920, the novel sold over fifteen thousand copies, and was published in at least four different foreign countries, including Germany (Keefer 85). *Blind* tells the story of Larry Hart, a World War I veteran who lost his vision after being hit by a piece of German artillery in the war. Larry’s doctor believes his blindness to be a form of hysteria and prompts Larry to begin composing an autobiography, using writing as a way to overcome his blindness. The entire novel consists of Larry’s written recollection of the past, beginning in 1875 and ending in 1919, with Larry still blind, but more optimistic about the future of the postwar world. In the last couple of decades, *Blind* has received little attention from literary scholars.¹ The novel is long and its plot, language, and narrative techniques are not particularly compelling. Yet its contemporary popularity suggests that *Blind* hit a chord with readers in the first half of the twentieth century—that indeed Poole’s novel aptly characterized

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¹ Poole’s best-known novel is *The Harbor* (1915), but even this novel has not received much critical attention. Truman Frederick Keefer has offered the most in depth analysis of Poole’s works.
the cultural epidemic of social blindness during this era, a symbolic blindness that paradoxically mirrored one of the most common physical injuries among combatants themselves. Over the next decade, modernist writers such as Mary Borden, Frederic Manning, William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway would follow in Poole’s path of meditating upon the social implications of blindness and war, including the degree to which social blindness leads to the alienation and dehumanization of those who have been deeply wounded or traumatized.

Four years before Poole’s novel gained widespread popularity, Robert Hichens (an English writer and journalist) addressed a similar epidemic in England. In a short piece he wrote in 1916, called “In The Dark,” published in *The Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Gift Book*, Hichens invites the possibility that soldiers blinded in the First World War may serve as insightful visionaries despite their physiologically blinded vision:

> A question that has come to some of us in connection with this war is this: Are we in England going to live in the dark when the war is over? I think that perhaps if we could look into the minds and souls of the blinded soldiers we should find that they see more than we do, that they discern horizons which are as yet far beyond our vision. Perhaps upon the battlefields from which they have returned they, who, like many us, have walked in darkness, have been allowed to see a great light. And by that light they may see us, not as we wish to seem to them and to all the soldiers, but as we are. They may even feel, some of them, that we are more in the dark than they are. (Hichens 18)

Hichens’s characterization of blinded soldiers as visionaries who have “seen” more than others helps to illuminate how and why modernist writers in the 1920s and 30s were prompted, in part, by war to think about the intersubjective nature of the visual. As many of these writers show, as soldiers came home either physically blinded or traumatized by bearing witness to such merciless violence, civilians intensified their wounds by disavowing *their own seeing*. In this dissertation, I trace an effort among modernist
writers to reshape the disavowal of sight, uncovering the ways in which they develop a more ethically and socially aware form of seeing—a kind of vision that embraces the intersubjectivity and beauty that “seeing” offers, even as they also refuse to overlook the violence and trauma that characterizes their current condition.

*Seeing Blindness* draws together two dominant approaches to modernism: first, the psychological and philosophical aspect of modernism that is concerned with, to use Woolf’s words, “subject and object and the nature of reality” (Woolf, *TTL* 23); and secondly, the First World War as the fundamental basis for and catalyst of modernism, as argued by those such as Paul Fussell, Jay Winter, and Vincent Sherry. This combination allows me to refresh discourses about the subjectivity of the visual in modernism, while also shedding light on newer “social” approaches involving war. In response to recent criticism about literary modernists’ ambivalence about the visual, this project reintroduces First World War literature as an historical and cultural impetus for modernists’ preoccupation with seeing and ocularity, including their efforts to make seeing and blindness visible. While some key scholars have read early twentieth-century modernist writers as offering a critique of vision, in that the subjectivity of vision is problematic in the pursuit of knowledge, that vision is hegemonic and objectifying, and that it is inherently violent, I argue that, despite a clear skepticism about human vision, their literary works also demonstrate a critique of social blindness. That is to say, it is my understanding that these writers do not necessarily, as Angela Frattarola argues in her

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essay on the importance of audition in literary modernism, “subvert the power of vision” (Frattarola 135) and replace this perceptive void by privileging other senses, but rather that vision and the lack of the vision, seeing and blindness, visibility and invisibility, become the object of study in literary modernism, as these writers, especially those writing during and after the Great War, reveal the dangerous consequences of not fully “seeing” others.

My project is divided into three sections: “The War Front,” “The Home Front,” and “The Liminal Front.” “The War Front” utilizes non-canonical modernist texts (Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* and Frederic Manning’s *The Middle Parts of Fortune*) that are closer to action to serve as context for “The Home Front” and “Liminal Front,” which focus on the canonical writers we know well: Faulkner, Woolf, and Hemingway. In “The War Front,” I trace the subjective reality of war as a psychologically and emotionally blinding experience—one that dismantles clear categories and distinctions, while simultaneously (and paradoxically) hardening those lines of separation in the form of dissociation and trauma. In “The Home Front,” I reflect on Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay* and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, novels that address war’s aftermath, including the wounded seeing of ex-soldiers who return home to societies whose vision of these veterans, and of the war more broadly, is also impaired. In an effort to think through blindness and sight as modernists’ way of working on the question of a subjectivity that is always an intersubjectivity that hinges upon the collective, I revisit the visual culture theories of Martin Jay and W.J.T. Mitchell. In the third section, “The Liminal Front,” I consider Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, a text that I suggest seeks to repair the traumatic vision by combining the war and home fronts. Finally, in the conclusion, I offer some possibilities
for how we might think about issues of seeing and blindness in postcolonial literature, as well as in modernist literature beyond the war front. Ultimately, I argue that these writers embrace “seeing’s” subjectivity and embodiment—a subjectivity that necessarily includes an intersubjectivity—rather than simply fearing the cooptation of vision by war-torn violence, blind belief, or militaristic and societal surveillance. Even more so, I illustrate how these writers recognize intersubjectivity as a way of addressing the problem of singular, objective, and authoritative viewpoints that hold dangerous potential for war and dehumanization.

This introduction provides an overview of the historical and cultural theories of vision that influence current conversations about the visual in modernism, with particular attention to mapping out the shift from objective to subjective vision. From there, I turn my attention to nineteenth and twentieth century literary scholars, tracing the current critiques about the visual in modernist literature culture. As I outline the ways in which the visual has been critiqued by literary scholars, I also begin to recalibrate recent readings of modernists as dissenters of the visual. Then, in the third section, I lay out recent conversations about the Great War as the impulsion for modernism, after which I will draw the two discourses of visuality and war together, uncovering how and why blindness—in its physical, psychical, and social forms—was “epidemic” of the Great War. As I ground my argument in historical research, I expose how and why, for modernist writers, literal blindness during the Great War came

**Seeing and the Eye: An Introduction to Historical and Cultural Theories of Vision**
Greek philosophy stands as one of the earliest in a lineage of Western culture that valorized the sense of sight and aligned it with human intelligence and empirical epistemology. For Aristotle, sight assumes an epistemological vantage point when, at the beginning of *Metaphysics*, he proclaims: “All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses...above all others the sense of sight...we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many distinctions between things” (*Met. A, 980a*). To this today, metaphors associating visuality with knowledge and wisdom saturate our everyday vocabulary: when we have intellectual “insight,” we are “enlightened” and ideas are “illuminated”; to “see” is to understand, comprehend, or have “foresight”; and the idiom “eyes are windows to the soul” implies that by simply looking at one part of a person’s body, we can access that person’s deeper hidden truths. Yet even as sight has frequently been understood as a valorous epistemic agent, it has also been criticized.

Writers and thinkers have long debated about “scopophilia,” expressing a clear skepticism about sight and pointing to the human eye’s limitations, and the problems of perspective, attention, and illusion that make visual perception unreliable in the pursuit of objective truth (*Jay, Downcast 6*). As Jonathan Crary argues in *Techniques of the Observer*, the end of the sixteenth century through the end of the eighteenth century marks a period whereby optical perception was trusted as a successful method for gaining knowledge about the material world. Descartes’ philosophy, most widely interpreted as “seeing” with the mind’s eye, became particularly influential because of its “valorization of the disembodied eye,” an unblinking, monocular, fixed gaze (*Crary 81*). The Cartesian
view came to shape Western conceptions of epistemology, while also driving a visual tradition that emphasized perspective from a single static viewpoint—a viewpoint from an observer that is distanced both physically and emotionally from the apperceived. As Crary explains, the development of perspectival representation was also embedded in the technology of this era, in particular the camera obscura: a darkened box with a small opening one side through which light passes and projects mirrored images of external objects on the opposite surface. According to Crary, up until the eighteenth century, the camera obscura “stood as a model, in both rationalist and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world” (Crary 29).

However, by the nineteenth century, the camera obscura—as a discursive model of vision—became problematic for its exclusion of the corporal subjectivity of the observer. Linda Williams further elaborates:

> The camera obscura had guaranteed access to an objective truth about the world based on the secure positioning of an immaterial self within the empty interior space of the camera, from which perspective a secure knowledge could be found. But such access to truth was based on the notion of a privatized, isolated subject whose sensory experiences are subordinate to an external, pregiven world of objective truth. (Williams 6)

As Williams and Crary agree, the objective rationality of the camera obscura as a model of vision—a model of vision put forth in the writings of Locke, Descartes, and other empiricists—collapsed around the 1820s and 30s when urbanization and innovations in new visual technologies caused the observer to become an object of observation, relocating processes of vision within the human body.³ Moreover, the shift from the

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³ Locke compares the human mind to a “dark room” (or camera obscura) in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: “External and internal sensations are the only passages that I can find of knowledge to understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances,
objectivity of the camera obscura model of vision to a subjective vision located in the
physiology of the observer, as Crary highlights, coincides with the invention and
increased interest in nineteenth century optical devices that brought with them a strong
interest in optical illusion. The invention of the kaleidoscope in 1816, along with the
stereoscope in 1838 (and the widespread commercial use of it throughout North America
and Europe after 1850), became intertwined with a host of research in the early-mid
nineteenth century on subjective vision, including optical illusions, color theory,
afterimages, and hallucinations. By the 1830s, the camera obscura was “no longer
synonymous with the production of truth and with an observer positioned to see
truthfully,” and a new science of vision erupted, one that meant “increasingly, an
interrogation of the physiological makeup of the human subject” (Crary 32,70). It is at
this point in history, Crary suggests, that physiology “became the arena for new types of
epistemological reflection that depended on knowledge about the eye and processes of
vision” (79).

As the nineteenth century marks a turn wherein the body starts being recognized
as a producer (rather than an objective recorder) of images, vision becomes understood as
inherently subjective. Walter Benjamin describes Baudelaire’s figure of the flaneur, who
idly wanders the city and distractedly observes all its sights and sounds, as emblematic of
the urban, modern experience. The model of vision embodied by the mobility of the
flaneur allows for multiplicity and subjectivity that diverged from the fixed monocular
position of the Cartesian eye. The flaneur’s subjectivity, as Baudelaire explained, was “a
mirror as immense as the crowd itself; or a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness,
or ideas of things without: would the pictures coming into a dark room just stay there, and lie so
orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man”
(rpt. in Crary 42).
responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the 
flickering grace of all the elements of life” (rpt. in Schwartz 40). The kaleidoscope’s 
repetition of a single image from multiple points of view to create new continuously 
changing images is, for Baudelaire, the quintessential modern visual experience.

The shift from the objective Cartesian model of vision to a subjective model 
rooted in the physiology of the observer brought with it a matrix of questions in 
nineteenth-century psychology and science about the relationship between the mind and 
the body—questions that had significant implications for understanding war trauma. As 
critics such as Randall Knoper, Peter Melville Logan, and Jane Thrailkill have 
established, “nineteenth-century physiologists posed a challenge to distinctions between 
thinking and feeling, and mind and the body, in their elucidation of the ‘reflex arc,’ a 
conception that dethroned the centrality of the brain in the reception and processing of 
stimuli” (Thrailkill 38). Mind-body interactions are a central concern in regards to 
questions of perception and subjectivity, with particular stakes in war literature. When 
neurologist S. Weir Mitchell studied his patients’ phantom limb experiences during the 
American Civil War, he discovered “not just that mental perceptions were the result of 
bodily processes but that the bodily processes might have an impact on perception” as 
well (Otis 327). The interdependence of the mind and body meant that one could suffer 
from “traumatic neurosis,” a term first used by the German neurologist Herman 
Oppenheim (1889) to describe the “functional problems [that] are produced by subtle 
molecular changes in the central nervous system” (Van der Kolk, et. al 48).
Critiques of Visuality: An Overview of the Scholarship

As many scholars have noted, the nineteenth century surged with interest in visuality, even when that interest took the form of critique. As vision became understood to be more subjective in the sense that it depended on the literal and figurative position of the observer, a swell of interest developed about the eye’s propensity for illusion and the limitation of vision when it comes to things that cannot be seen with normal human sight. Scholarly attention to “diminished faith” in the visual throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has taken impetus from Martin Jay’s pioneering work, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, wherein he argues that “a great deal of French thought in a wide variety of fields is in way or another imbued with a profound suspicion of vision and its hegemonic role in the modern era” (Jay, *Downcast* 14). Jay’s panoramic study has recently prompted critics such as Gillian Beer to argue that there was a destabilization of visual epistemology in nineteenth century Europe as a result of anxiety within scientific discourse about that which lay beneath the surface, invisible to the naked eye. In “Authentic Tidings of Invisible Things: Vision and the Invisible in the Later Nineteenth Century,” Beer suggests that as Victorian science started to call into question the validity of the human eye, by the end of the nineteenth century, “sound began to assume the status as ideal function that sight had earlier held” (Beer 90). Even as Wilhelm Röntgen’s invention of the X-ray and more modern innovations to the telescope and microscope continued to push against the limitations of vision, Beer suggests that such inventions only accentuated “how much lay beyond its powers and focus” (91).
While Beer focuses on later nineteenth century European culture, some nineteenth century critics have reached similar conclusions about American literature and culture. In his book, *A Familiar Strangeness: American Fiction and the Language of Photography* (2008), Stuart Burrows presents a realism that is “in sympathy with modernism,” arguing that American realist writers show an early awareness about the far-reaching implications that photography has on personal and national identity, in that it produces a notion of “modern identity as a matter of mass homogenization” (Burrows 12). The photographic writing (photographic metaphors, photographic terminology, use of ekphrasis, etc.) that characterizes realism’s efforts to get back to the things themselves, Burrows suggests, “is actually a sign of a loss of faith in fiction’s ability to represent the world—a loss that leads directly to ‘modernism’s skepticism toward the continuity between seeing and knowing’” (5). Reading the literature of this era as indicative of a “crisis” of the visual, Burrows draws upon Karen Jacobs’ *The Eye’s Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (2001), in which Jacobs argues that modernist writers share a “diminished faith…in the capacity of vision to deliver reliable knowledge” and that modernist writers “critique the forms of violence that vision inevitably seems to entail” (Jacobs 3).

With the emergence of an anti-ocular critique put forth by Jay, Burrows, Jacobs, Beer, and others, there has also been a heightened attention to the other senses, especially among modernist scholars. As critics such as Nancy Armstrong and Angela Frattarola have aptly pointed out, growth in art galleries, museums, advertising, and window displays, in addition to nineteenth-century inventions such as the graphic telescope, the binocular microscope, the stereopticon (“magic lantern”) and photographic camera, made sight the dominant sense for exploring the world in the Victorian period. On the other
hand, these scholars suggest, auditory technologies such as the telephone (1876), microphone (1876), phonograph (1878), wireless (1899), and radio (1906), which were invented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are therefore likely to have “shaped modernist writers as they came of age in the late Victorian period and became common household items within the modernist period” (Frattarola 134). In her recent essay, “Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel,” Frattarola argues that while the eye does not lose its importance in literary modernism, there is a critique of vision in modernism and a turn towards interiority, as well as a heightened significance placed on other senses such as hearing. Focusing on the works of Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce, Frattarola “demonstrate[s] how modernist writers connect their characters through shared listening,” while also arguing that “stream of consciousness is part of the auditory imagination” (132). In addition to Frattarola, others such as Abbie Garrington’s “Touching Texts: The Haptic Sense in Modernist Literature” (2010) and Santanu Das’s book Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature (2005) have helped serve as an impetus for scholarship that reads modernist writers as critiquing the visual and privileging the tactile experience.

Yet some scholars suggest that did not necessarily reduce vision’s capacity to record experience, nor did modernists necessarily react against these new means of perception. For instance, critics such as Sara Danius, Susan McCabe, and Michael North have focused on the ways in which the destabilization of vision, along with new visual technologies such as film and photography, shifted perceptual abilities in ways that stimulated high-modernist aesthetics. As these scholars illustrate, these new visual
technologies introduced modes of perception that constituted the modern visual experience.⁴

Furthermore, while over the last few decades, visual culture studies has come under intense scrutiny within feminist critiques of the male gaze,⁵ there has also been a proliferation of research on the mutuality of the gaze that draws upon the ideas of dialectical twentieth century theorists. Unlike the Cartesian disembodied eye that sees what’s “out there,” the existential phenomenologist account of the-person-in-the-world offers an approach to thinking about “seeing” as an experience of bodily immersion. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the body “is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a sensible for itself” (Merleau-Ponty, Visible 135). Thus, the body takes on a “chiasmatic” structure of two sides: “the body as a sensible and the body as sentient” (136). As Laura Doyle further explains:

To be an embodied subject is to be already double, to belong already to the world of others as well as self, and to arrive at one’s own visibility and audibility together with others. It is not only that I both see and am seeable, hear and am audible, am both subject and object in the world, but I am so for myself as well for others. I come to myself from outside, as well as inside. Long before I look into a mirror (Lacanian or otherwise), or in the absence of mirrors, I move across this hinge of myself, see my feet with my eyes, register my voice with my ears, touch my arms with my

⁴ Scholars such as Maggie Humm and James Harker have specifically focused on visuality as it shapes Woolf’s modernist aesthetics. Humm’s Modernist Women and Visual Cultures (2003) traces photographic approaches in Woolf’s Three Guineas, while Harker’s recent article, “Misperceiving Virginia Woolf,” argues that the limitations of visual perception are precisely what constitute Woolf’s modern literary experience, what he calls “the tenuous points of connection between the inner and outer worlds” (Harker 3).

hands—perceiving from the outside what I also sense from the inside, arriving at myself via an object-body that belongs to the realm of a material, onlooking order of others. (Doyle, “Toward” 6)

This duality of the self sheds light on vision’s reflexivity, as it reminds us that we are not simply subjects who see, but also visual subjects who can be seen, thus opening the possibility of intersubjective connection.

The notion that subjectivity is always an intersubjectivity that hinges upon the materiality of the outside world offers a refreshing update to György Lukács’ well-known critique of modernism’s privileging of subjectivism over objective, “social” reality. According to Lukács, realism presents the human subject as “zoon politikon, a social animal…[whose] ‘ontological being’…cannot be distinguished from [its] social and historical environment,” where as “the ontological view governing the image of man in the work of leading modernist writers is the exact opposite of this” (Lukács 396-397). “Man, for these writers,” Lukács contends, “is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings…Man, thus conceived, is an ahistorical being…strictly confirmed within the limits of his own experience” (397). One of the limitations of Lukács’s critique of modernism is that it overlooks modernism’s view of subjectivity as an intersubjective orientation—a view most prominent in their war literature. As modernist writers such as Borden, Manning, Faulkner, Woolf, and Hemingway show, war is most certainly a social issue—albeit a social issue that affects individuals personally and privately, as well as collectively and publicly.

**Modernism and War**
This dissertation places a renewed assessment of the visual and sensory within the crisis of ethics and intersubjectivity epitomized in the Great War. Building upon current trends in modernist and visual culture studies, *Seeing Blindness* focuses not on technologies of vision that shaped modernist texts, but rather on modernists’ attention to the wartime pressure to be *socially blind* (a pressure materially abetted by the war’s wounding technologies), and their texts’ corresponding interest in the intersubjective dynamics of seeing and not-seeing. That is, in many modernist works, vision and the lack of vision, seeing and blindness, visibility and invisibility, become the objects of investigation as writers during and after the Great War reveal the danger of *not looking*. For some of these writers, not to look means not to recognize the reality and the broader ethical concerns of the war, a blindness that puts us at risk of repeating its catastrophic violence. Collectively, these authors’ works correct the oversight of vision’s beneficial force through their efforts to mend the visual and reframe the intersubjective gaze after the violence and trauma of war.

As such, this dissertation adds to a growing field of research about the significance of the Great War in modernism. The relationship between modernism and the First World War has been closely analyzed many times over. Seminal works such as Vincent Sherry’s *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003), for example, joins Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) and Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) in the ongoing conversation about the Great War as a fundamental basis for and catalyst of modernism. In particular, Winter’s study is most relevant to my own efforts to read the visual within a socially intersubjective orientation, as his research stresses that mourning was a “universal preoccupation” of Europeans after
the Great War (Winter 28). Winter’s analysis of death and mourning as a “universal”
experience provides a strong grounding for my own argument about the intersubjective
nature of the visual in modernist war fiction.

Meanwhile, my research also adds to recent efforts among scholars to adjust the
imbalance in the studies of modernism and the Great War, as I illustrate how modernist
writers used tropes of blindness about the war to draw attention to other social issues at
home, including gender, class, race, and empire. Scholars such Mark Whalen and Chad
Louis Williams, for instance, have addressed the marginalization of racial minorities in
scholarship on modernism and the Great War, while critics such as Angela K. Smith and
Sharon Ouditt have turned their attention to the often excluded female experience of war.
While the works of male soldier-authors have long dominated in the genre of First World
War literature, Angela K. Smith’s The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism, and the
First World War (2000) challenges the canonical modernism, that of Lewis’s “Men of
1914,” by exploring “the interface between women writing modernisms and the First
World War” (Smith 5). Smith’s research is particularly relevant in my chapter on Mary
Borden and the figure of the VAD nurse, as Smith reads Borden’s “forbidden zone, the
place forbidden to women but occupied by the hospital units” as “representing an
emotional space as significant as No Man’s Land” (72). As Smith argues, “The
psychology of despair is prevalent within the confines of these hospitals, the landscape of
despair surrounds them, thus providing women with their own arena for war experience”
(Smith 72). While I mostly agree with Smith’s overall assessment, I also slightly diverge
from her emphasis on the separation of the nurses having “their own arena,” as my
reading of Borden’s text highlights the extent to which these literal and metaphoric
gendered spaces (as well as other binaries) blend into and converge with one another.

Finally, my research links the recent scholarship on the relationship between
modernism and the senses (outlined in the last section) to the study of the war. As Tim
Armstrong establishes in Modernism: A Cultural History, “a heightened sensitivity to
sensation is central to modern experience” (Armstrong 90). Certainly this “heightened
sensitivity to sensation” is due in part to the nineteenth century turn towards physiology
outlined by Crary, yet simultaneously the event of the Great War, as Santanu Das
elucidates, “was one of the most sustained and systematic shattering of the human
sensorium” (Das, “War Poetry” 74). My research on social blindness and the
intersubjectivity of vision joins Das and others such as Trudi Tate, along with a large
circle of scholars who are interested in exploring how modernist authors address the
problem of bearing witness to the First World War. As Das illustrates, for soldiers, the
“shattering of the human sensorium” produced symptoms of shell shock (or neurasthenia,
as it was then known), most commonly mutism, nightmares, and tremors, even causing
hysterical “blindness and deafness, resulting from what the eyes and ears had witnessed”
(74), Tate, taking a historical perspective, focuses on the experiences of both combatants
and non-combatants, as she addresses how modernist authors address the difficulties of
bearing witness to an event that “one has lived through but not seen, or seen only
partially through a fog of ignorance, fear, confusion, and lies” (Tate 1). As I argue, this
occluded seeing among soldiers and civilians plays out as a dialectic of seeing/not-seeing,
as some modernist writers dramatize how blinded or traumatized soldiers came to see
more than able-eyed civilians.
A series of time-lapse photographs of British soldiers, taken by Lalage Snow, entitled *We Are Not The Dead* went viral last year. The photographs were taken over a period of eight months before, during, and after deployment in Afghanistan. What is most unsettling about these photographs are the eyes of the subjects: eyes that in the first photographs appear bright, alert, and focused, by the last photograph appear dark, sunken in, hypnotized.

![Figure 1: Selections from Lalage Snow’s *We Are Not the Dead*](lalagesnow.photoshelter.com)
Snow’s photographs are not the first of its kind. In 2012 the Internet was abuzz with Dutch photographer, Claire Felicie’s, compelling black and white triptych photographs of marines, entitled *Here Are The Young Men (Marked)*. The pupil dilation in these photographs are striking, as it serves as a visual indicator of the invisible trauma that lies beneath the surface. Snow and Felicie’s photographs represent a recent swell of attention to eyes traumatized by war, including studies on the link between traumatic brain injury and blindness, even though it has been an issue since the Great War.

Figure 2: Selections from Claire Felicie’s *Here Are The Young Men (Marked)*
For full exhibit: clairefelicie.com
Historical and literary texts indicate that the eyes were one of the most vulnerable parts of the body during the First World War. While trenches protected soldiers’ bodies, eyes and faces were most often left exposed to shrapnel, as evidenced in David Jones’s epic poem, *In Parenthesis* (1937), which references soldiers who are given “glass eyes to see.” In other instances, faces were maimed along with other parts of the human body, such as in Dalton Trumbo’s *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939), a novel about a World War I soldier who awakens in a hospital bed to find that he is missing his arms, legs, and his entire face (including his eyes, ears, teeth, and tongue.) While his mind continues to function, he is trapped in a body that has lost the ability to perceive with the senses. One particular scene in Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War* (1928) describes how an explosion of a grenade transforms a “young and cheerful lance-corporal” into “gobbets of blackening flesh,” the only identifiable body part being a single eyeball which lands under a duckboard (rpt. Tate 90). As the eyeball remains intact, though disembodied from its now obliterated owner, the eye becomes symbolic of the horror of bearing witness to the harsh violence of such a devastating war.

These literary representations of “war-wounded seeing” and the obliteration of the body emphasize that there is no detached perspective from which an observer can see war. As Gertrude Stein asserts in *Wars I Have Seen*: “However near a war is it is always not very near. Even when it is here […] I think even when men are in a war actually in a war it is not very near, it is here but it is not very near” (Stein 9). By drawing a distinction between the “nearness” and “hereness” of war, Stein implies that there is no privileged position from which one can clearly “see” war—that combatants who stand immediately

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in front of war are as unseeing as the civilians for whom the war is miles away. Paul Virilio has examined how the battlefield (after the First World War) shifted from the arm-to-arm, physical and personal combat, to a kind of combat wherein the enemy is nearly invisible, made visible only through the mediation of military visual technologies of optical aiming or telescopic enlargement. As Virilio persuasively argues, these visual technologies (including the use of photography for aerial reconnaissance, cinema footage, and propaganda) render a mediated perception of war as “representation,” thus creating a distorted field vision in which “each of the antagonists feels both that he is being watched by invisible stalkers and that he is observing his own body from a distance” (Virilio 72).

One of the aims of this study is to uncover the ways in which writers of this era highlight how this detached perspective of war is not only symptomatic of the soldier’s experience, but also how this way of seeing is transferred across to the home front in ways that involve epistemological and ethical questions. Building upon Virilio’s assertion about the close connection between war and vision, Ryan Bishop and John Phillips place modernist aesthetics alongside visual military technologies, as they trace the story of visual military technologies back to the First World War. In their analysis of a Keystone View Company advert for stereopticon images, entitled “She Sees Her Son In France,” Bishop and Phillips argue that the advert suggests that “various forms of technologies fully functioning in the public sphere can serve as prosthetic extensions of the senses that can neatly erase the division between the domestic and military spheres” (Bishop and Phillips 3). The ad’s bold type-faced line, “The Whole Family Can See the War Zone,” suggests a desire that goes deeper than a mother connecting with her son “across the miles,” as it uses popular mid-nineteenth century three dimensional visual technology to
create a detached and illusory reality of “seeing the war” from the comfort of one’s armchair.

![Figure 3: Keystone Advert, “She Sees Her Son in France”](image)


Comparing stereopticon images of the war to “talk[ing] across the miles with your telephone,” the advert implies to the viewer that these images of the war zone will fulfill the same kind of perceptual immediacy that one experiences when talking on the telephone. As the stereopticon was not a household invention used for communication, but rather for pleasure and entertainment, the promise here is a voyeuristic one.

Yet if we are to take Gertrude Stein’s postulation that war remains unseeable even to those who are immediately in front of it, the Keystone advert becomes problematic for its privileging of a clear detached viewpoint from which one can “see” war. Moreover, the ad hints a causal relation, namely that the *inability to see* drives us toward the illusion that *we do see*, reinforced by technologies that compensate for the human eye’s limitations. As Santanu Das argues in *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005), the inability to see was a condition of modern warfare. According to Das, the First World War was not seen at all, but was rather felt:
The First World War is remembered and represented as a time of darkness…[A]midst the dark, muddy, subterranean world of the trenches, the soldiers navigated space…not through the safe distance of the gaze but rather through the clumsy immediacy of their bodies…showing the shift from the visual to the tactile. (Das 7)

Das begins with an analysis of John Singer Sargent’s famous 1919 oil painting, *Gassed*, an image that condenses the Great War into a single moment of the blind leading the blind.


Sargent’s life-size canvas depicts the aftermath of a gas attack: ten blindfolded men—each touching the shoulders of the one in front—walk between other blindfolded men who are heaped on top of each other. Healthy and able figures playing soccer in the background exaggerate the wounding, trauma, and physical ailment of the men who lay blindfolded, wounded, and lifeless in the foreground. The third soldier in the line encapsulates the blinding phenomenological conditions of trench warfare, as he raises his foot excessively higher than needed to reach the platform. As Das poignantly articulates, “blindness is inscribed powerfully at a point where touch is anticipated as collision but is actually absent” (Das 1). To the right, a second row of blindfolded men file in, much like the first. Yet even as the painting focuses on the blindness of these men, it simultaneously...
emphasizes their visibility. As golden hue illuminates the painting—a stark contrast to the darkness that manifests behind the blindfolds—a faceless soldier sees and guides the sightless men.

Seeing in the Great War was literally obscured. Not only did the view from inside the trenches mean that soldiers could not see anything but the mud in front of them and the sky above them, but the downpour of rain and the use of poisonous gasses and, therefore, gas masks, made the act of seeing anything nearly impossible.7 As Modris Eksteins explains, the use of poisonous gasses not only obscured vision literally, but gas also worked figuratively in blinding soldiers from the reality of the war:

For many, gas took the war into the realm of the unreal, the make-believe. When men donned their masks they lost all sign of humanity, and with their long snouts, large glass eyes, and slow movements, they became figures of fantasy, closer in their angular features to the creations of Picasso and Braque than to soldiers of tradition. (Eksteins 163)

This disconnection between reality and fantasy is part of the blindness that soldiers experienced about the First World War. As Eksteins remarks, “Men craved some wider vision of the war. Most went through the war like blind men (174). Menial and routine duty such as repairing trenches, digging new latrines, cleaning equipment, and dealing with weather and vermin kept soldiers from ever contemplating the meaning and purpose of the war. In fact, as part of their indoctrination, soldiers were required to watch “war films” that trained them to respond to the war in a way that was engendered by particular ideas about race, humanity, and civilization. In John Dos Passos’ 1920 novel, Three

7 As Modris Eksteins explains, although the Hague Declaration of 1899 and the Hague Convention of 1907 had forbidden the use of “poison or poisonous weapons’ in warfare, the Germans, nevertheless, used gas extensively. As the technology of gas warfare developed, respirators also became more sophisticated, including the development of face covers made of rubberized fabric and eyepieces of non-splintering glass. Yet even with these masks, breathing was difficult and vision and mobility were highly restricted” (Eksteins 163).
Soldiers, for example, the narrator describes a scene of young American soldiers watching a war film at a boot camp in the United States, the first part of their required training before heading off to continue their training in France:

'[T]he movie had begun again, unfolding scenes of soldiers in spiked helmets marching into Belgian cities full of milk carts drawn by dogs and old women in peasant costume. There were hisses and cat calls when a German flag was seen…Andrews felt blind hatred stirring like something that had a life of its own in the young men about him. He was lost in it, carried away in it, as in a stampede of wild cattle…As he was leaving the hut, pressed in a tight stream of soldiers moving towards the door, Andrews heard a man say: ‘I never raped a woman in my life, but by God, I’m going to. I’d give a lot to rape some of those goddam German women.’ ‘I hate ‘em too,’ came another voice, ‘men, women, children and unborn children. They’re either jackasses or full of lust for power like their rulers are.’ (Dos Passos 27)'

In this passage, the phrase “blind hatred” stands out, as images of Germany provoke a indoctrinated response from these soldiers. That is to say, the system has stripped them of their individuality and trained them to think and function as a single unit. In order to hate, one must become blind to the being of others. Thus, these war films were used as a form of propaganda, training soldiers to “blindly hate” all Germans, no matter if they are women, children, or unborn children, simply because they are German. As Eksteins writes of André Gide’s experience at a hospital at Braffye: “[Gide’s] was stunned to hear survivors spouting the same clichés contained in newspaper reports of the battle. ‘None of them could provide the slightest original reaction,’ he complained. It was as if the soldiers had read the articles that were to be printed about the battle before they went into it” (Eksteins 174).

Thus, when I refer to “blindness” in this dissertation, I use the term within a number of literal and metaphorical contexts. On a psychical and metaphorical level, both soldiers and civilians endured an obscured seeing of the war. The seemingly detached or
“objective” perspective from which soldiers saw war through mediated visual technologies exaggerated war as an impersonal experience. Meanwhile, the phenomenological account of the person-in-the-world illustrates the impossibility of stepping outside of oneself in order to achieve a detached and objective perspective. Thus, while the eyesight of some of the soldiers that I write about remain physically intact, most of them suffer from a vision that has been figuratively wounded through literal witnessing.

This figurative blindness applies to civilians as well, due primarily to the fact that they are physically removed from the actual visual and physical experience of war. Referring to the use of propaganda in Britain, Trudi Tate remarks: “almost no one who was touched by the Great War had any reliable information about it. Casualty figures were misrepresented; defeats were presented as victories; atrocity stories were invented; accounts of real suffering were censored; opposition to the war was suppressed” (Tate 43). As Tate explains, civilians grappled with propaganda and misinformation about the war, often leading to a lack of understanding about trauma and the reality of the war. For it is the lies and omissions of truth in British newspapers that lead one of the characters in Virginia Woolf’s “The Mark on the Wall” to exclaim: “Though it’s no good buying newspapers […] Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war!” (Woolf, MT 68). Addressing civilians’ distorted perspectives of the war, Allyson Booth examines the inauthentic representation the war corpse in films such as The Battle of the Somme (1916), noting of the film’s one and only death scene: “there is no blood here, no wound—just a silent, downward slide,” adding that despite its inauthenticity, this staged representation of the war corpse constituted for civilians “one of the most widespread and
deeply memorable images of [the] war” (Booth 22). The disparity between the domestic and military spheres when it comes to the experience of war became increasingly problematic for many modernist writers for its creation of a national blindness that promoted a false sense of reality and an illusion of immunity among civilians. In Britain, blinded and badly maimed veterans were required to sit on blue park benches that were designated for them specifically, designed to segregate the blind and disfigured from the rest of the civilian public who might be disturbed by their visible wounds. Such benches emphasized the distressing visual appearance of badly maimed and blinded veterans, while also becoming ironically symbolic of a social blindness to the experience of others as they suffer in war.

As I uncover how modernist writers develop a critique of social blindness, I write alongside additional definitions and contexts of blindness that involve literal and physically obscured seeing. In addition to the temporary and psychological conditions of blindness induced by trench warfare or training films outlined earlier by Eksteins, some of the soldiers that I write about suffer from physical, permanent blindness. The nature of trench warfare and the increased efficiency of modern munitions during the First World War caused a disproportionately high number of ocular injuries because of the eye’s vulnerability to shrapnel. In fact, one study on eye injuries in twentieth-century warfare finds that, unlike previous wars, “the risk of ocular injury was significantly higher than the risk of injury to other body parts” (Wong 435). Moreover, articles in the British Medical Journal about ocular injuries among combatants became increasingly prevalent during the Great War\(^8\), as one article on 10 July 1915 reporting on cases of hemeralopia

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\(^8\) The Blinded Veterans Association was founded in 1945, shortly after the end of the Second World War.
in soldiers finds that “the disease had assumed epidemic proportions,” and another article on 22 April 1916 reports on eye injuries and blindness statistics in the German army, offering its readers advice on how to care for blind soldiers.\(^9\)

Altogether, approximately 23,000 soldiers were discharged from the British army during the Great War as a result of seriously damaged eyesight (Chisholm 464). By the end of the war, the British army had suffered over 1,300 cases of total blindness. By August 1917, the French army had reported approximately 2,400 totally blinded soldiers and the United States had approximately 450 blinded soldiers, with an additional 400 who, by 1924, had suffered some form of visual defects (Durflinger 23, 104). As the number of blinded soldiers reached epidemic levels, charitable organizations such as St. Dunstan’s\(^10\) (now called Blind Veterans UK) and the National Institution for the Scottish War Blinded were formed. Based on the numbers of eye wounds in the British army, the United States also prepared for a high number of blinded combatants, with the American Red Cross planning a special unit called the Red Cross Institute for the Blind (organized in 1917). According to Frances Koestler, the Red Cross Institute for the Blind saw its overall function as “to supply the necessary economic and social supervision of blinded marines, sailors, and soldiers, after their discharge from military service” (rpt. Koestler 281).

Through these figurative and literal incidences of blindness, we can see how the Great War became an assault on vision itself. In this context, \textit{Seeing Blindness} begins

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\(^9\) “Hemeralopia Amongst Soldiers.” \textit{The British Medical Journal} 10 July 1915, p. 64 and “Eye Injuries and Blindness in the German Army.” \textit{The British Medical Journal} 22 April 1916, p. 603-604.

\(^{10}\) Residing in Regent’s Park during the World War I era, St. Dunstan’s operation in caring for blinded soldiers and veterans was so widely recognized, Virginia Woolf writes in her diary on the 17 November 1940 that she found “the card of St. Dunstan’s” left in her door at Sussex (Woolf, \textit{Diary V} 339).
with the premise that early twentieth century modernist writers recognized blindness as an epidemic of the Great War and they take it up as a theme in their work. In Wilfred Owen’s 1917 poem, “The Sentry,” the speaker describes a wounded (and dying) sentry officer who has been horribly blinded by a German bomb. In an attempt to test his blindness, the speaker holds a lit candle to the sentry’s eyelids, making blindness visible through the haunting image of “eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids” (rpt. in Das, Touch 167). Owen’s image of seeing blindness is representative of a larger group of early twentieth century writers who make blindness visible by making it the object of examination in their work. By making blindness visible, these writers transform blindness into sight in ways that fortify seeing as an ethical and intersubjective act, as they emphasize the social need to fully and understand the individual experience of those suffer in war. In this way, Seeing Blindness is ultimately interested in how questions about seeing and blindness in First World War literature might stand at the center of a differently framed conversation about the visual in literary modernism, and might in turn guide us to notice the more dispersed attention to blindness, sight, and intersubjectivity in modernism and twentieth century literature more broadly. While modern warfare positions visuality within explosive violence and impersonality through the introduction of long-distance weaponry, modernist writers look to repair this damage through a regeneration of the visual into one embraces the ethics of seeing, recognition of other peoples’ point of view, and the beauty of art, nature, and the everyday world.
Chapter Summaries

This dissertation consists of five chapters organized into three sections. “Section I: The War Front” begins with a chapter on Mary Borden’s 1929 memoir, *The Forbidden Zone*, a text that serves as the foundation for the rest of my project in that her perspective as a World War I nurse calls into question the clear categories of experience that lose all distinction in war, including combatant/non-combatant, man/woman, and war front/home front, thus implicating everyone as a witness to and participant in war’s destruction. In this chapter, entitled “Women Witnesses to War,” I explore the ways in which double vision and the sliding between boundaries and binaries problematizes the notion of a singular perspective, especially in war. For Borden, this double vision is most explicitly embodied in the figure of the nurse who functions as a mediator between soldiers/civilians, war front/home front, and passive observer/active participant. Like the man in Sargent’s painting who sees and guides the blindfolded men, Borden’s triage nurse is responsible for “seeing” the condition of the wounded other. As I argue, it is through the nurse that Borden calls for a more ethically and socially attuned form of vision, as she meditates on war as an embodied and intersubjective experience wherein “[w]e are locked together…We are one body, suffering and bleeding” (Borden 164). Ultimately, for Borden, it is this kind of seeing that is necessary to repair the cooptation of vision by the “business” of war, which, in its focus on impersonality and profit-making, turns a blind eye to the personal suffering of the individual soldier.

The second chapter, “Private Perceptions, Social Interactions, and the Unseen Forces of Nature in Frederic Manning’s *The Middle Parts of Fortune*,” builds upon Borden’s exploration of the tension between the social nature of war and the trauma that
makes war, paradoxically, impersonal. Similar to Borden’s drawing upon her experience as a nurse, Manning’s experience as a private during the war informs his novel, as his experience equips him to faithfully represent the perception of war as a psychically blinding experience. As I suggest, war’s unknowability and its functioning as “a blind force of nature” leads to a crisis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity for Manning’s soldiers. While each soldier struggles to see and understand his own personal experience, the mystifying nature of war equally disallows for the kind of stable and intelligible conditions necessary for intersubjective recognition. However, in the last portion of the chapter, I ultimately argue that Manning’s novel insists upon recognizing war (specifically, death in war) as a social event. A powerful scene in the novel, in which a soldier makes the death of the novel’s protagonist visible to others, along with Manning’s use of Shakespearian allusions throughout the text, situates the Great War within a longer European history of tragedies.

“Section II: The Home Front,” turns to William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, two of modernism’s most canonical writers. In each of the two chapters that comprise this section, I explore novels that address the aftermath of war and the wounded seeing of ex-soldiers who return home to societies whose vision of these veterans, and of the war more broadly, is also impaired. In this section, I develop my broadest argument about modernism’s investment the visual, as I explore the ways in which these writers critique social blindness about the war, while also looking deeper into the ways they extend this blindness to encompass other socio-political issues of gender, class, race, and empire. In the third chapter that begins this section, “Beneath the Blindfold: The Scars of the Insight in William Faulkner’s Soldiers’ Pay,” I draw upon W.J.T. Mitchell’s concept of

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“showing seeing” in my reading of Soldiers’ Pay, while also extending Mitchell’s theory to include “showing blindness.” For Mitchell, “showing seeing” means “mak[ing] seeing show itself, to put it on display and make it accessible to analysis” (Mitchell 167). The scar as a visual image in Soldiers’ Pay, I suggest, illustrates Faulkner’s effort to make blindness visible, while “seeing” is made visible through Faulkner’s technique of visualization. As the reader comes to see Donald’s visualized memory of the accident that left him blinded and incapacitated, Faulkner hints at an intersubjectivity of sight—a form of seeing that, for Faulkner, holds the potential to alleviate other socio-political issues, such as gendered and racial subjugation. While Donald’s blindness and declining mental faculties render him an objectified and passive figure in the novel, I argue that intersubjective recognition from Mrs. Margaret Powers (a “dark” former war nurse whose husband was killed in the war) is finally what sets Donald free. The interlacing of Donald and Mrs. Powers’ experience emphasizes that she has the “power” to recognize Donald’s individual pain because, as a black woman in the south, and as a female nurse in the war whose husband was killed in action, she herself can identify with his victimization. As Douglass and Vogler acknowledge, communal suffering holds the potential to alleviate individual trauma: “While individual trauma confers individual identity, the function of trauma as a ‘social glue’ holds groups together on the basis of ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, disease, or handicap” (Douglass and Vogler 12). While group identity based on shared experience certainly poses a problem for those whose experience or identity does not fit seamlessly into the group dynamic, nevertheless, Faulkner remains hopeful that a more fully empathetic form of vision will help establish the “Oneness with
Something, somewhere” (Faulkner, SP 315) for which the Lost Generation desperately searches.

Building upon my reading of Faulkner’s indissoluble faith in the intersubjectivity of the visual, the fourth chapter turns to Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. As is the case for Faulkner, Woolf is indeed ambivalent about the visual insofar as it’s problematic in the will to knowledge and cultivates violence and alienating conditions through surveillance and coercion. Yet while some critics tend to read Woolf as having a “waning optimism” when it comes to cultivating “viable new forms of modern intimacy” (Mickalites 133), in this chapter, “The Way to Empathy: Intersubjective Vision in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*,” I argue that indeed Woolf’s sense of the visual is part of her solution to this problem of intimacy. Like Faulkner, Woolf holds out a promise that the ability of the visual may build intersubjective connections and serve as an alternative to the kind of limited, objectifying, and coercive forms of seeing that play a substantial role in giving rise to the horrors of total war. Thus, in my reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, I begin by laying out the ways in which, for Woolf, the visual is tied up in the homogenizing and coercive gaze of an authoritative, war-reigning society. As I establish Woolf’s social critique of the blindfolded seeing that accompanies this form of “looking,” I simultaneously uncover the ways in which Woolf establishes the visual as offering moments of intersubjectivity, which are sometimes enfolded in realizations of beauty. Ultimately, it is through Clarissa, I suggest, that Woolf makes her most powerful declaration about the intersubjective possibilities of the visual, as Clarissa’s visualization of Septimus’s suicide, near the end of the novel, offers both Clarissa and the reader a moment of seeing Septimus’s seeing.
Finally, in third section of my dissertation, “The Liminal Front,” I turn to Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, a text that, I suggest, addresses the difficulty of intersubjective connection for wounded soldiers. I call this section “The Liminal Front” because the space of “liminality” characterizes the threshold or space of crossing between the war and home fronts in *In Our Time*. Yet even more importantly, this liminal space accurately describes the ways in which Hemingway’s characters are themselves in between trauma and healing. In this final chapter, entitled “The Journey from ‘Over There’: Searching for Solace in Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time*,” I argue that, unlike Woolf, Hemingway focuses less on the collectivity of sight, as he is instead primarily concerned with the traumatized individual who must fully form himself before he can come into a community and forge intersubjective connections with others. As I draw attention to the tension between different levels of involvement and detachment in Hemingway’s narrative, I suggest that *In Our Time* is less concerned with violent images of war themselves, and more concerned with how these assaulting images are seen by an eyewitness. Thus, I illustrate how Hemingway makes the trauma of seeing violence visible by creating strains in the text, continuously vacillating between narrative points of view that are up-close and personal and points of view that are removed, detached, and impersonal. As I draw attention to his use of narrative techniques such as “delayed decoding” (Ian Watt’s term for the delay between perception and understanding), I uncover the ways in which, for Hemingway, the war’s aftereffects are that of a slow emergence, just as the journey toward healing that trauma will be a slow process. I make this argument most explicitly in my reading of “Big Two-Hearted River,” as I illustrate how, like Woolf, Hemingway looks to beauty—specifically the natural landscape—to
help repair vision after the trauma of violence and war. As I argue, unlike the other stories in *In Our Time*, “Big Two-Hearted River” transforms seeing in ways that encompass tactile sensory perception of the self, as well as the natural and object-world. Thus, for Hemingway the only way to repair war-torn vision is to develop a form of seeing that combines the war and home fronts. Yet, as I ultimately suggest, for Hemingway, this journey towards an intersubjective understanding begins with the individual, including his own moral responsibility as a witness to war.
SECTION I

THE WAR FRONT
CHAPTER 1
WOMEN WITNESSES TO WAR: MARY BORDEN’S THE FORBIDDEN ZONE

“I’ve never been so close before to human beings. We are locked together, the [orderlies] and I, and the wounded men; we are bound together…The same thing is throbbing in us, the single thing, the one life. We are one body, suffering and bleeding.”

Mary Borden, The Forbidden Zone (1929)

At the end of A Woman of Two Wars: The Life of Mary Borden (2010), Jane Conway cites the words that Borden wrote down on a piece of paper as a child: “I would like to be a help to God. I would like to be honest, brave and kind, I would like to help the soldiers in war. I would like to do something for my country” (Conway 315). When the First World War broke out, Mary Borden did just that. In 1914, she was a twenty-eight year old aspiring writer from a wealthy Chicago family, married to a British missionary, the mother of three young children, and was living as literary hostess in London. And yet at end of December 1914, when there were already half a million sick and wounded, and with the war showing no signs of ending soon, she left England, hired a caretaker for her children and, having no previous nursing experience and knowing very little French, volunteered for the French Red Cross, eventually using her own money to equip, staff, and manage a field hospital behind the lines of the Western Front where she herself worked as a nurse from 1915 until the end of the war.

As Conway explains, for a woman to single-handedly run and manage a field hospital during World War I was highly usual because “during the first year of the war political, military and social resistance to women’s involvement at the front made it extremely difficult for them to take an active role” (42). Moreover, as an Anglo-American woman, she faced resistance from the French military and French nurses who were reluctant to recruit nurses from England, doing so only out of desperation. Thus,
Borden viewed her mission in France as one of not only aiding soldiers, but also, as she writes in her World War II memoir, *Journey Down a Blind Alley* (1946), to “‘break down the prejudices’” that the French had toward Anglo-American women (41).

While, in the years leading up to the war, Borden lived in London and socialized with well-known authors such as E.M. Forster, Ford Madox Ford, and Ezra Pound, even at one point having a risqué love affair with Wyndham Lewis, she is relatively unknown among modernist scholars, and her 1929 memoir, *The Forbidden Zone*, is largely unexplored even within studies of the First World War. Borden wrote most of *The Forbidden Zone* during the war, not sharing it with the public until over a decade after the war had ended. As Jane Conway (Borden’s only biographer) indicates, with *All Quiet on the Western Front* being published earlier that same year, Borden felt that she and other writers could now tell the truth and “‘strip the glamour from modern warfare’” (149). In revising her 1917 manuscript for publication in 1929, she made substantial changes, which included rewriting some of the prose pieces, which she called “sketches”; adding an extended prologue, which took the form of a prose-poem; rewriting the preface; adding five poems, which she had previously published in the *English Review*; and adding five short stories. The end result was a book divided into three parts: parts one and two are comprised of twelve sketches and five stories, and part three consists of five poems.

One logical explanation for the lack of scholarly attention to *The Forbidden Zone* is that, until 2008, the book was out of print and was therefore inaccessible to readers.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) The recently reprinted edition by Hesperus Press has helped bring back to print this neglected work; however, their edition does not include the five poems which Borden included when she originally published *The Forbidden Zone* in Britain in 1929 and in the United States in 1930, which is why I refer exclusively to the original edition in this chapter.
However, even in the years during and immediately after the war, Borden struggled with the publication and circulation of her text. The 1929 publication received a mixed critical reception. While some critics praised the text for its blunt honesty and impersonal detachment in its portrayal of gruesome images, its publication coming at the same time as *A Farewell to Arms* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* also fueled public debates about obscenity and censorship, debates in which Borden’s text also became enmeshed. Additionally, the fact that it was written by a woman further added to the stifling of her experience, as the public was more interested in the war experiences of soldier-authors. Yet while Borden’s memoir has, for a long time, been overlooked in the field of modernist war literature, the recently reprinted edition by Hesperus Press, along with increasing breakthroughs across the board for wider minority perspectives about the First World War, has spawned a reexamination of *The Forbidden Zone* within modernist and World War I scholarship alike. As Santanu Das unequivocally describes her: “here at last is a highly conscious literary modernist” (Das, *Touch* 220).

*The Forbidden Zone* lays out the central concerns of this dissertation. Borden’s modernism is manifested in her impersonal, realistic, and photographic portrayals of the horrors and trauma of war, often without commentary or reflection—even though, as a writer, she has had the time and distance to reflect on her experience. Yet in her Preface, she is careful to note her conscious decision to keep the text as realistic as possible to her actual experience, including the limitations of herself as an eyewitness:

I have not invented anything in this book. The sketches and poems were written between 1914 and 1918, during four years of hospital work with the French Army. The five stories I have written recently from memory; they recount true episodes that I cannot forget.

[...]

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

Borden crystallizes the modernist’s embeddedness in history. As Herbert Read wrote in 1933, modernism “is not so much a revolution…but rather a break-up, a devolution, some would say a dissolution” (Read 58-59). Later critics have generally adopted Read’s definition, writing of the predominately “fragmented form” of modernist texts (Haslam 2), especially after the First World War when modernists “were more noticeable for their pessimism and their sense of a failed, fragmented society” (Childs 38). Borden’s modernist contemporaries feature a fragmented perception of the modern postwar world both implicitly and explicitly, as in T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, which famously concludes: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (Eliot 433). Yet fragmentation is not simply an abstract concept or literary technique in modernism, as it became concrete and visible in art movements such as cubism, vorticism, and futurism. Borden, too, employs fragmentation as a visual mode of the modernist aesthetic—a way of seeing after the First World War—when she supplements the term “fragments” with visual terms such as “impressions” and “sketches.”

Visual syntax like this gives support to Ariela Freedman’s reading that Borden’s “method is more imagistic than documentary” (Freedman 110). In each sketch, story, and fragment, it is as though Borden is showing something to us. This is most explicitly evident in the added prologue entitled “Belgium,” where Borden’s narrator addresses a second person “you” that may include the reader: “Come, I’ll show you” (Borden 4). What the narrator “shows” this person (and the reader) is a bombardment of graphic and
impressionistic pictures and episodes, with no clear plot or story arc to anchor these fleeting fragments. This sense of fragmentation and confusion is compounded by the narrator’s frequent address to a second person that isn’t explicitly there: “On our right? That’s the road to Ypres...Ahead of us, then? No, you can’t get out that way. No, there’s no frontier, just bleeding edge, trenches” (3). The narrator here seems to be responding to the words and gestures of another figure, though it isn’t clear to whom the narrator is responding. All Borden provides for the reader is a disembodied and silent “you” figure to whom the narrator talks, and to whom he or she “shows” things:

The king is here. His office is in the schoolroom down the street, a little way past the dung heap. If we wait we may see him. Let’s stand with these people in the rain and wait. A band is going to play to the army. Yes, I told you, this is the army—these stolid men standing aimlessly in the drizzle, and these who come stumbling along the slippery ditches, and those leaning in degraded doorways. They fought their way out of Liege and Namur, followed the king here; they are what is left of plucky little Belgium’s heroic army.

And the song of the nation that comes from the horns in the front of the wine shop...can it help them? Can it deceive them? Can it whisk from their faces the stale despair, and unutterable boredom, and brighten their disappointed eyes?...Can the noise, the rhythmical beating of the drum, the piping, the hoarse shrieking, help these men, make them believe, make them glad to be heroes? They have nowhere to go now and nothing to do. There is nothing but mud all about, and a soft fine rain coming down to make more mud—mud with a broken fragment of a nation lolling in it, hanging about waiting in it behind the shelter of a disaster that has been accomplished.

Come away, for God’s sake—come away. Let’s go back to Dunkerque. The king? Didn’t you see him? He came out of the schoolhouse some time ago and drove away toward the sand-dunes—a big fair man in uniform. You didn’t notice? Never mind. Come away. (8)

Borden does not collapse her narrator’s experience with that of the soldiers. In fact, this passage sets some clear demarcations between an “us,” which includes the narrator and possibly the reader, and a “they” which refers to the soldiers. From the start, Borden’s narrator seeks to show this other “you” figure what is left of Belgium, a destroyed
wasteland covered in mud: “Cities? None. Towns? No whole ones. Yes, there are a half a
dozens villages. But there is plenty of mud—mud with things lying in it, wheels, broken
motors, parts of houses, graves” (4). Borden’s portrayal of the visual field of this
wasteland is, to borrow Freedman’s phrasing, a “series of phantasmic
dislocations…descriptions of] the men and women of the war as displaced inhabitants of
a strange, hallucinated world…” (Freedman 110). Freedman’s characterization of the
landscape as phantasmic and hallucinatory aptly defines the schizophrenic-like quality of
the narrator who clearly hears a voice that the reader does not. Yet at the same time, the
use of the second person necessarily implicates the reader as this other silent figure, to the
extent that we become the ones who fail to see the King coming out of the schoolhouse, a
possibility Borden allows for by not giving textual space to the King’s actions. The
narrator’s questions of “Didn’t you see him?” and “You didn’t notice?” highlight this
oversight, a moment of blindness that takes on symbolic meaning because of the
episode’s interlacing with the narrator’s irony laden commentary on the “heroic” Belgian
army and its powerful nation which has been reduced to nothing but mud. Borden’s
deliberate decision to add this prologue in her revision before publication calls attention
to its significance. This moment of blindness or oversight that begins Borden’s text sets
the foundation for her critique of the individual’s denial or ignorance of the larger
geopolitical world of Kings, while also setting up her critique of a larger national and
global blindness about the reality of the war, as Borden’s shows us the truth about what
the war looks like. Moreover, as she illustrates how she, as a nurse, is not just a passive
witness to war, but also an active participant, she demonstrates the degree to which the
convoluted dismantling of the combatant/non-combatant binary in war leads to a
dismantling of other clear categories of experience that include man/woman and war
front/home front, unveiling her readers’ eyes to the difficult reality that everyone is
implicated in war.

“Seeing” in *The Forbidden Zone* takes a myriad of forms: a mystifying view of
the war zone; militarized aerial spying and bombing; a graphic and unsparing view of
war-torn bodies; a nurse’s detached and clinical view of the body that is simultaneously
not detached, but extremely intimate; the deconstruction of the male body that, for the
nurse, throws her own gender identity into irrelevance, with one half of the binary
concealing and canceling out the other; and other visual absences: the experience of the
soldiers that the nurses don’t see, the experiences of the soldiers and nurses that the
people in the villages don’t see, and what people are afraid to see. As a result, Borden
transforms the eighteenth and early nineteenth century conceptualizations of sight as
nothing other than a passive eye receiving light, resituating vision within a complicated
experience of witnessing, while emphasizing seeing as an active process of experiencing
where one slowly comes to know, understand, and gain insight. In doing so, she
simultaneously destabilizes the traditional notion of males as the sole active participants
in, and females as only passive observers of war.

Throughout Part One of *The Forbidden Zone*, Borden plays with the audience’s
perspective through a juxtaposition of multiple contradictory vantage points, thus
complicating the reader’s orientation within the binaries that govern their perception. In
“Bombardment,” for example, Borden provides the reader with a focalization of an aerial
view of a quiet village before it’s woken up in the middle of the night by an aerial
bombing. From the airplane, Borden’s narrator sees the “dwellings of men who had put
their trust in the heavens and had dared to people the earth” (7-8), and then expands that image to see “the human ant hill” and “distracted midgets swarm[ing] from the houses: this way and that they scurried, diving into openings in the ground” as the blasting commences (10). One of the most striking aspects of this aerial description is the way in which this attack takes place without the combatant ever fully seeing his victims. As these people flee from their homes, they are viewed as “ants” and “midgets” and “vermin” from above: “The white beach was crawling now with vermin; the human hive swarmed out onto the sands. Their eyes were fixed on the evil thing flying in the sky and at each explosion they fell on their faces like frantic worshipers” (10-11). While the passage does reference the victims’ perception of the airplane, the focus here is on how these figures are viewed from above. The figures are not individuals with distinctive psyches; instead, they are, together, a faceless hive.

However, in the fragment that follows “Bombardment,” “The Captive Balloon,” Borden reverses this point of view, instead positioning the narrator and reader on ground, looking up at an observation balloon, balloons that, during the First World War, were frequently employed by the military to gather intelligence about the tactics of the enemy: “There is a captive balloon in the sky, just over there. It looks like an oyster floating in the sky” (13). While the observation balloon implies perception from above, the narrator immediately adjusts the audience’s viewpoint to that of the ground view by telling them that it looks like an oyster floating in the sky. Highlighting the tension between these two perspectives, the narrator quickly draws a clear distinction between her own limited ground perspective and the aerial perspective of the man inside the balloon, explaining: “They say that a man lives in the balloon. They say that from the balloon you can see the
enemy’s trenches and the country behind that is held by the enemy, but from here we can see nothing, only trees and farmhouses and carts going along the road, and the captive balloon” (13). The narrator’s limited visual perception serves as an impetus for a voyeuristic gaze at the balloon, extending itself into an imaginative perception about what the man inside the balloon sees, that is, presumably the kind of destruction and carnage that was seen in “Bombardment.”

Thus, within these first two adjacent sketches, Borden introduces the reader to some of the complexities of what it means to be a spectator to war. In this way, the term “captive” takes on a double meaning. On the one hand, the balloon (as a machine of war) is a captivating spectacle for those who view it from down below; yet at the same time, the man inside the balloon is himself a captive, is himself subjugated as a prisoner of war. By sliding between these two perspectives, Borden emphasizes the need to fully see the experience of the other, while also highlighting the extent to which visual fields overlap in war zones.

Borden’s narrators are our visual tour guides into the violent and monstrous underworld of war. Their ability to slide between viewpoints gives them a kind of double vision that is often situated in their physical position. As Lily Briscoe reflects in Virginia Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse*, “So much depends…upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us” (TTL 284). With distance, the impulse to see the intersubjective experience of the other weakens, yet as Borden illustrates, distance also creates the space necessary to see the experience of the other more fully. Such is the case, for example, in one of the poems in *The Forbidden Zone*, “The Hill.” Similar to “Bombardment,” the
speaker’s view depends upon her position—her aerial view from atop a hill, which allows her to describe what the battlefield looks like down below:

From the top of the hill I looked down on the beautiful, the gorgeous, the superhuman and monstrous landscape of the superb exulting war. There were no trees anywhere, nor any grasses or green thickets, nor any birds singing, nor any whisper or flutter of any little busy creatures. There was no shelter for field mice or rabbits, squirrels or men. The earth was naked and on its naked body crawled things of iron. It was evening. The long valley was bathed in blue shadow and through the shadow, as if swimming, I saw the iron armies moving. And iron rivers poured through the wilderness that was peopled with a phantom iron host. Lights gleamed down there, a thousand machine eyes winked.

[...]
Against the sunset, along the sharp edge of a hill, a strange regiment was moving in single file, a regiment of monsters. They moved slowly along on their stomachs, Dragging themselves forward by their ears. Their great encircling ears moved round and round like wheels. They were big and very heavy and heavily armoured. They moved slowly forward, crushing under their bellies whatever stood in their way. (175)

From the speaker’s high vantage point, she has an omniscient view of the battlefield. Her odd combination of words such as “beautiful,” “gorgeous,” “superhuman,” and “monstrous” to describe the war zone immediately indicate a cheeky tone, which is soon reinforced in her description of a natural and pure world transformed to iron. The speaker’s role as a “seer” is exaggerated by the regiment’s alignment with the senses of touch (“crushing under their bellies”) and sound: “Dragging themselves forward by their ears/Their great encircling ears moved round and round like wheels./They were big and very heavy and heavily armoured./They moved slowly forward, crushing under their bellies whatever stood in their way.” The phrase “encircling ears” suggests a dominance of the sense of sound over sight for these soldiers. As the regiment is led forward by their ears which surround them, they are unable to see what humans through war have done the
natural world. The speaker emphasizes their blindness by attributing vision to their rifles or the “machines” of war: “Lights gleamed down there, a thousand machine eyes winked.” By personifying the guns, Borden highlights the degree to which the regiment’s vision is obscured by seeing through a riflescope. The speaker, on the other hand, maintains her ability to fully see how the violent potency of war has corrupted humans and the natural world, as she ends the poem with a tragic juxtaposition of nature’s peace and beauty and the human-made carnage that will continue to destroy it: “Above the winking eyes of the prodigious war the fragile crescent of the moon floated serene in the perfect sky.”

The overall structure of *The Forbidden Zone* similarly calls into question the tenability of one single viewpoint and the ways that any such claim to the be the real or most important view holds potential for war and dehumanization. The sketches and stories in the first part of text are set in what Borden calls “The North,” mostly set in villages and cities on the outskirts of the war zone, while the Part Two she calls “The Somme—Hospital Sketches.” While Borden attributes “The Somme” (or the war zone) to Part Two of her collection, the distinction between the two parts is not as clear cut as this—in fact, some of the sketches and stories in Part One do take place at the field hospital, thereby blurring the categorical structures or positions of witnessing embodied in binary constructs such as the town and the war zone, or more commonly “war front/home front.” Borden addresses this most explicitly in her sketch from Part One, entitled “The Square”: “Below my window in the big bright square a struggle is going on between the machines of war and the people of the town” (15). From her elevated window, the narrator looks down at the town square below and observes that “[t]he
business of living and the business of killing go on together” (17). Thus, Borden destabilizes any separation between “the machines of war and the people of the town,” as her narrator looks scathingly at those civilians who are blind to the locality of the war in the town square. Additionally, she highlights the war as a “business,” thus linking it to the kind of consumer culture entangled in modernity, as well as pointing to the war as a profit-making enterprise. Borden deliberately draws attention to the transformation of objects of modern American consumerism into militarized objects. Vehicles of modernity become vehicles of war: Limousines that “were made to carry ladies to places of amusement” are instead used to transport Generals in bright and shiny uniforms to buildings inside which “they hold murderous conferences and make elaborate plans of massacre” (16). And in viewing the motor cars that have been appropriated by the army, the narrator remarks: “[t]hey are not doing what they were designed to do when they were turned out of the factories” (16). On the one hand, Borden’s narrator looks critically at the “busy” “little women of the town” who “ignore the motors” and “do not see the fine scowling generals, nor the strained excited faces in the fast touring cars, nor the provisions of war under their lumpy coverings”:

They do not even wonder what is in the ambulances. They are too busy. They scurry across the shops, instinctively dodging, and come out again with bundles; they talk to each other a little without smiling; they stare in front of them; they are staring at life; they are thinking about the business of living. (17)

Yet as Borden’s narrator sees it, the “business of living” and the “business of killing” permeate one another, even while the people of the town are unaware of it. Still they go on holding their market on the cobblestone streets of the square on Saturdays. On these days, as the narrator explains, the motor cars and ambulances have to take another route
because “[t]here is no room in the square for the generals, nor for the dying men in the ambulances” (18). Nevertheless, the “women are there. They buy and sell their saucepans and their linen and their spools of thread and their fowls and their flowers; they bargain and they chatter; they provide for their houses and for their children; they give oranges to their children, and put away their coppers in their deep pockets” (18). While these women are busy thinking about the “business of living,” Borden highlights their ignorance about the severe consequences of war that envelop them. While Borden does not make an explicit statement of her criticism, her critique is implied through descriptive details that leave us feeling empathetic with soldiers who, “lying on their backs in the dark canvas bellies of the ambulances, staring at death,” cannot “hear [the women] chattering, nor see children sucking oranges” (18). These men in the ambulances “see nothing and hear nothing of the life that is going on in the square” (18). These binary visions, each unseeing of the other, are what propel Borden to address the perceptual tensions between the two.

As the categorical structure of the town and the war zone become destabilized, so too do the gender constructs embodied within it. One of Borden’s primary interests in The Forbidden Zone is the tension between male and female perceptions of war. The episode describing the isolated visions of the woman and the injured soldier in “The Square” can be understood as a prelude to “The Beach,” the sketch that immediately follows it. While “The Beach” is not one of the five short stories in The Forbidden Zone, it is one of the more fully fleshed out sketches in the text. “The Beach” describes the tensions between an injured soldier and his lover. The unnamed man and woman sit on the beach, each isolated in their own thoughts and unable to connect and fully
communicate with one another. The soldier, who has an amputated leg, sits in a wheelchair, while the young woman sits beside him. Her attention is captured by the beauty of the “long and smooth,” cream colored beach:

The woman sitting in the sun stroked the beach with the pink palm of her hand and said to herself, ‘The beach is perfect, the sun is perfect, the sea is perfect. How pretty the little waves are, curling up the beach. And the sea is a perfectly heavenly blue. It is odd to think of how old the beach is and how old the sea is, and much older than that old, old fellow, the fiery sun. The face of the beach is smooth as cream and the sea today is a smiling infant, twinkling and dimpling, and the sun is delicious; it is burning hot, like youth itself. It is good to be alive. It is good to be young.’ (45)

The woman associates the beauty of the beach and sun with youth to the extent that she surprises herself when she realizes how old these elements of nature really are. The first clause of the passage, (“The woman sitting in the sun stroked the beach with the pink palm of her hand”) aligns the woman with the youth, beauty, and passion embodied in these natural images. The implication is that the amputee soldier who sits next to her with “an ugly grimace on his face,” does not see or feel the beauty, youth, and passion that she sees and feels, and this perceptual difference becomes symbolic of the larger abyss between them. Just as neither of these characters view the landscape the same way, they simultaneously do not see or look at each other. The narrator acts as a mediator between the two, explaining to the reader that the woman “could not say [any of what she was thinking] aloud,” so she “let the sand run through her strong white fingers and smiled, blinking in the sun and looked away from the man in the invalid chair beside her toward the horizon” (46). Similarly, the man “dared not look over the arm of his wheelchair at the bright head of the woman sitting beside him” (46). Finally, though, the man steals a “timid, furtive look”: “Her hair burned in the sunlight; her cheeks were pink…[S]he was as beautiful as a child. She was perfectly lovely” (46). The description of her as
“perfectly lovely” again reaffirms her association with the flawless landscape that lies before them, while the image of her as a “child” invests her with a kind of innocence that he himself has lost due to the war.

While she is young, innocent, beautiful, and perfect, his wounding has not only deformed him physically, but psychically as well. Enamored by the beauty of the beach, she looks to her lover and “search[es] his features, trying to find his old face, the one she knew, trying to work a magic on him, remove and replace the sunken eyes, the pinched nose, the bloodless wry mouth” (47). The woman attempts to create a new visual reality for herself, imagining how she might correct his features in an effort to recognize him as the man she loves, calling him “darling” and telling herself that “he’s not a stranger” (47). Yet the phantom pain that the man experiences as a result of his amputation reminds us that his physical wound is only a visible marker for deeper invisible wounds: “He was thinking, ‘What will become of us? She is young and healthy. She is beautiful as a child. What shall we do about it?’ And looking into her eyes he saw the same question, ‘What shall we do?’ and looked quickly away again. So did she” (47). Borden highlights the intersubjectivity of sight in this moment, as the two are able to look into one another’s eyes and communicate without speaking. Yet simultaneously she illustrates the degree to which this intersubjectivity has been ruptured by the traumatic experience of war.

If the woman is symbolically aligned with the beauty and purity of the beach, the injured soldier in this sketch is aligned with the shabby houses that stand behind him on the horizon:

She looked past him at the row of ugly villas above the beach. Narrow houses each like a chimney, tightly wedged together, wedges of cheap brick and plaster with battered wooden balconies. They were new and shabby and derelict. All had their shutters up. All the doors were bolted.
How stuffy in must be in those deserted villas, in all those abandoned bedrooms and kitchens and parlours. Probably there were sand-shoes and bathing dresses and old towels and saucepans and blankets rotting inside them with the sand drifting in. Probably the window panes behind the shutters were broken and the mirrors cracked. Perhaps when the aeroplanes dropped bombs on the town, pictures fell down and mirrors and the china in the dark china closets cracked...(48)

In a passage that echoes Mrs. McNab walking through the Ramsays’ house in the “Time Passes” section of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Borden’s narrator imagines the derelict objects and furnishings that may lie in the abandoned villas. Similar to the above passage from Borden, Woolf’s “Time Passes” has an elegiac tone haunted with the resonance of war:

> The books and things were mouldy, for, what with the war and help being hard to get, the house had not been cleaned as she would have wished. It was beyond one person’s strength to get it straight now. She was too old. Her legs pained her. (Woolf, *TTL* 147).

Borden’s leg-amputated soldier and the subsequent unbearable phantom pain he feels bears a striking resemblance to Mrs. McNab’s painful legs, both of which are emblematic of the pain of a world at war. As Borden’s narrator describes the abandoned villas as a combination of “new and shabby and derelict,” so too does she show how the war has transformed young and innocent men into fragmented versions of their previous selves. In both “The Beach” and in this passage from Woolf, war is emphasized as domestic neglect, reinforcing the notion that the home front bears a responsibility in taking care of those on the war front. While Borden doesn’t explicitly state where the owners of these villas are and why these homes are abandoned, their absence implies a kind of death or loss, which is again emphasized by the dilapidation of the objects within them. Loss on the war front (the space inhabited by men) carries over into loss on the home front (the space inhabited by women). Like Woolf, Borden uses prosopopeia to show us this view
of the dead in a domestic space—while the dead are themselves invisible, the representation of the dead through these derelict domestic objects gives them a visible presence. Meanwhile, the repetition of “perhaps” in Borden’s passage exaggerates their absence, reminding us that there is no observer present and that we can only speculate what might be seen inside these haunted villas.

While the young woman imagines what lies inside the abandoned homes at the edge of the beach, she is less willing to see and understand the reality of her lover’s traumatic war experience. When spotting the casino that resides next to the shabby villas, the injured soldier tells her about the war wounded patrons who loiter there:

‘That’s the casino over there, that big thing…I don’t advise you to go there. I don’t think you’d like it. It’s not your kind of a crowd. It’s all right for me, but not for you. No, it wouldn’t do for you—not even on a gala night…You never saw such a crowd…Gamblers, of course, down and outs, wrecks—all gone to pieces, parts of ‘em missing, you know, tops of their heads gone, or one of their legs. When they take their places at the tables, the croupiers—that is to say, the doctors—look them over. Come closer, I’ll whisper it. Some of them have no faces.’

[…]

‘It’s a funny place. There’s a skating rink. You ought to see it. You go through the baccarat rooms and the dance hall to get to it. They’re full of beds. Rows of beds under the big crystal chandeliers, rows of beds under the big gilt mirrors, and the skating rink is full of beds, too…There’s that dank smell of gas gangrene. Men with gas gangrene turn green, you know, like rotting plants.’ He laughed. Then he was silent. He looked at her cowering in the sand, her hands covering her face, and looked away again. (Borden 49-51)

By the end of the passage, it’s clear that the man is having flashbacks of his war experience. Borden emphasizes the extent to which the young woman doesn’t want to hear about his experience or the devastating reality of other war wounded men: “‘Darling, don’t.’ She covered her own face, closed her ears to his tiny voice and listened desperately with all her minute will to the large tranquil murmur of the sea” (50). The
woman’s resistance to recognizing the reality of her lover’s trauma registers symbolically in the act of covering her face. And yet, the juxtaposition of her covered face to the men whose faces have been blown off in battle hints at a point of convergence where these two figures meet.

Thus, Borden shows that the gulf that divides male and female perspectives and experiences of war is not as vast as it might seem at first glance—that upon closer inspection, the world “[b]ehind the windows of the casino” where bandaged men “lie in narrow beds…in queer postures with their greenish faces turned up” is just as much her world as it is his (53). As the young woman looks around the smooth, cream colored beach, she sees “women in black and old men and children with buckets and spades [and] people of the town…[who] seemed glad to be alive. No one seemed to be thinking about the war” (52-53). Yet the people on the beach soon hear “the sound of a distant hammer tapping,” which someone immediately identifies: “‘They are firing out at sea’” (53).

Again Borden emphasizes the dismantling of the male/female experience of war within a larger unraveling of the geographical borders that divide war front and home front.

Yet at the same, Borden illustrates that these binary figures of man/woman and combatant/non-combatant must be able to see each other anew if they are to fashion a future, a vision that must encompasses the wounding and grief that has precipitated the clash between them: this vision is embodied in the figure of the nurse. In “The Beach,” the ocean symbolizes a threshold that both divides and connects the war front and the home front, just as it both divides and connects war torn countries. Similarly, for Borden, the figure of the nurse is both a literal and symbolic threshold for seeing and understanding war in such a way that does not divide along gender or frontal lines. The
figure of the nurse in *The Forbidden Zone* is one that experiences war as intimately as any soldier. The sights and sounds of war become routine for her: “The war is the world, and this cardboard house, eight by nine, behind the trenches, with a roof that leaks and windows that rattle, and an iron stove in the corner, is my home in it…War, the Alpha and the Omega, world without end—I don’t mind it. I am used to it. I fit into it” (57-58).

Borden translates the language of war into the language of domesticity. Men “lie on their backs on stretchers and are pulled out of the ambulances as loaves of bread are pulled out of the oven” (125). Atrocities of war are described in comparison to household minutiae, leaving shocking images to be routinely intermixed with banal everyday things, as in this passage from “Moonlight” where the narrative juxtaposes severed limbs with the homely act of drinking hot cocoa:

> At midnight I will get up and put on a clean apron and go across the grass to the sterilizing room and get a cup of cocoa. At midnight we always have cocoa in there next to the operating room, because there is a big table and boiling water. We push back the drums of clean dressings and the litter of soiled bandages, and drink our cocoa standing round the table. Sometimes there isn’t much room. Sometimes legs and arms wrapped in cloths have to be pushed out of the way. We throw them on the floor—they belong to no one and are of no interest to anyone—and drink our cocoa. The cocoa tastes very good. It is part of the routine. (59)

The nurses’ leisurely activity of sipping hot cocoa occurs as part of a nightly routine that necessitates discarding anonymous limbs onto the floor. In a rhythmic repetition that’s similar to Gertrude Stein, Borden’s narrator takes a detached perspective in her description of this routine act. As habit functions as a wartime mode of narration for Stein—emphasizing, in her memoir *Wars I Have Seen*, attention to “small things food and the weather (Stein 65)—so too does Borden emphasize how habit serves as a form of self-preservation for the nurses in that the ordinary habit of drinking hot cocoa masks the
chaotic and inapprehensible experience of the war. There is no expression of emotion, no horror at her circumstances; instead, the narrative becomes a recitation of fact: pushing limbs onto the floor becomes as commonplace as drinking hot cocoa.

By illustrating the degree to which these nurses are so intimately immersed in the horrors of war, “Moonlight” highlights the extent to which they are actively fighting in a ‘theatre of war’ similar to that of the soldiers in the trenches. As Paul Fussell remarks:

[T]he very hazard of military situations that turns them theatrical…is their utter unthinkableness: it is impossible for a participant to believe that he is taking part in such murderous proceedings in his own character. The whole thing is too grossly farcical, perverse, cruel, and absurd to be credited as a form of ‘real life.’ Seeing warfare as a theater provides a psychic escape for the participant: with a sufficient sense of theater, he can perform his duties without implicating his ‘real’ self and without impairing his innermost conviction that the world is still a rational place. (Fussell 192)

Like the soldiers who fight in the ‘theatre of war,’ seeing and participating in so much violence that they detach themselves from seeing it as reality, so too do Borden’s nurses necessarily fracture their identities and disassociate themselves from their own equally violent experiences. The same nurse in “Moonlight” who speaks matter-of-factly about drinking cocoa among severed limbs also describes the indifference of another nurse who is treating patients suffering from gangrene:

She goes into the gangrene hut that smells of swamp gas. She won’t mind. She is used to it, just as I am. Pain is lying there waiting for her…She is no longer a woman. She is dead already, just as I am—really dead, past resurrection. Her heart is dead. She killed it. She couldn’t bear to feel it jumping in her side when Life, the sick animal, choked and rattled in her arms. Her ears are deaf; she deafened them. She could not bear to hear Life crying and mewing. She is blind so that she cannot see the torn parts of men she must handle. Blind, deaf, dead—she is strong, efficient, fit to consort with the gods and demons—a machine inhabited by the ghost of a woman. (Borden 63-64)
Borden’s narrator describes why this nurse must necessarily “kill” her own heart—that is to say, sever herself from her own feelings and compassions—in order to effectively deal with the wounded and dying soldiers with whom she comes into intimate contact on a daily basis. As a matter of course, the nurse numbs her senses, so she can neither hear nor see the suffering around her.

Yet while Borden emphasizes the degree to which the nurse has purposefully disassociated herself as a form of self-preservation, she also highlights the extent to which this fractured identity is something that has been imposed upon her by the violent and traumatic experience of war. Borden’s nurse contends with the impact the destruction of man has on gendered identity. As the nurse sees men literally reduced to disembodied lumps of flesh, she thinks to herself:

There are no men here, so why should I be a woman? There are heads and knees and mangled testicles. There are chests with holes as big as your fist, and pulpy thighs, shapeless; and stumps where legs once were fastened. There are eyes—eyes of sick dogs, sick cats, blind eyes, eyes of delirium; and mouths that cannot articulate; and parts of faces—the nose gone, or the jaw. There are these things, but no men; so how could I be a woman here and not die of it? (64-65).

Through the nurse’s interior monologue, Borden theorizes about the way the identity of “woman” is dependent upon its binary pairing with “man.” Not only has the manly and able-bodied soldier been reduced to the “feeble whining sounds” (126) of a “mewing cat” (68), but the destruction of war has completely disrupted any sort of gender identification, or human identification, whatsoever. Man is reduced to his synecdochical parts—not only are they not men, they have been diminished through war to the states of “things.” The image of “mangled testicles” renders a literal emasculation of the soldier. As the nurse describes it, there can be no such thing as “woman” without the reciprocity
of “man.” Borden’s concern here, then, is not just for the soldier’s identity, but the impact that such a destruction of male identity has on women:

Once they were real, splendid, ordinary, normal men. Now they mew like kittens. Once they were fathers and husbands and sons and the lovers of women. Now they scarcely remember. Sometimes they call to me, ‘Sister, Sister!’ in the faint voices of far-away men, but when I go near them and bend over them, I am a ghost woman leaning over a thing that is mewing; and it turns away its face and flings itself back into the arms of Pain its monster bedfellow. Each one lies in the arms of this creature. Pain is the mistress of each one of them. (65)

Not only has pain reduced these masculine soldiers to “mewing” kittens, but pain—that “monster bedfellow”—has also replaced the sexual dynamic between women and men, rending the women insignificant “ghosts.” While the violence of the war has emasculated the man, by extension it has converted the female into a celibate nun or “Sister.”

By detailing the impact that the destruction of man has on the gendered and sexual identity of women, Borden illuminates a level of kinship of traumatic experience between soldiers and nurses. While the nurse is not a combatant in the sense that she is actually fighting in the trenches, she does inevitably deal with the ethical dilemma and tragic irony of deciding who shall live and who shall die, such as in this passage from “Conspiracy”:

This is the place where he is to be mended. We lift him onto a table. We peel off his clothes, his coat and his shirt and his trousers and his boots. We handle his clothes that are stiff with blood. We cut off his shirt with large scissors. We stare at the obscene sight of his innocent wounds. He allows us to do this. He is helpless to stop us. We wash off the dry blood round the edges of his wounds. He suffers us to do as we like with him. He says no word except that he is thirsty and we do not give him to drink.

We confer together over his body and he hears us. We discuss his different parts in terms that he does not understand, but he listens as we make calculations with his heart beats and the pumping breath of his lungs.

We conspire against his right to die. We experiment with his bones, his
muscles, his sinews, his blood. We dig into the yawning mouths of his wounds. Helpless openings, they let us into the secret places of his body. To the shame of the havoc of his limbs we add the insult of our curiosity and the curse of our purpose to remake him...

It is our business to do this. He knows and he allows us to do it. He finds himself in the operating room. He lays himself out. He bares himself to our knives. His mind is annihilated. He pours out his blood, unconscious. His red blood is spilled and pours over the table onto the floor while he sleeps. (126-127)

The vulnerability and helplessness of the injured male body generates a shift in traditional gender and sexual power dynamics. Sentences such as “We dig into the yawning mouths of his wounds” and “Helpless openings, they let us into the secret places of his body” are overtly sexual, significant for their portrayal of nurses as penetrators, a reversal of male-female intercourse. The anaphoric sequences of “we” throughout the passage establish the nurses as a unit or battalion—especially with their weaponry of scissors and knives, putting them in position of violent power similar to that of soldiers on the battlefield who also decide who lives and who dies. On the “receiving” end of this unified “we” is a nameless man who, through the nurse’s focalization, is reduced to an object. While the nurses “stare at the obscene sight of his innocent wounds,” he is “helpless to stop [them],” ultimately, his subjectivity finally being extinguished when he becomes unconscious.

In this way, Borden reflects on the degree to which nurses are conspirators in war. With a pacifist’s eye, Borden ultimately criticizes any power that women gain through the death and destruction of men in war. As suggested in “Conspiracy,” as an object of war, the wounded soldier has no agency, including the right to make his own decisions to live or die:

It is all carefully arranged. Everything is arranged. It is arranged that men should be broken and that they should be mended. Just as you send your
clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back again. You send your socks and shirts again and again to the laundry, and you sew up the tears and clip the raveled edges again and again, just as long as they will stand it; just until they are dead, and then we throw them into the ground. (124)

Borden’s narrator describes the cyclical and tragically ironic process of “mending” wounded men, only to send them back out to the front lines to be torn apart again, and sent back again to nurses for mending. The analogous comparison of nurses and laundry seamstresses once again translates the language of war into the language of domesticity. Borden’s use of the second person in this passage draws the reader into this comparison, so that we become the nurse/seamstress. By the last line, the clothing analogy fades into what is really being discussed (human bodies), while simultaneously the passage moves into first person plural voice (“we throw them into the ground.”) The language of domesticity earlier in the passage suggests a “we” that is beyond nurses, one that includes the “we” of men and women on the home front who bring sons into the world only to have them die violently in battle. In this sense, the movement from “you” to “we” necessarily implicates the audience as conspirators in war as well.

Borden’s text emphasizes that if a society is to move forward after the devastation of war, its population must develop a fuller and more socially aware form of vision, one that intersubjectively recognizes the degree to which the entire society is implicated and impacted. Perhaps nowhere in The Forbidden Zone does this message resonate as powerfully as it does in the short story appropriately entitled “Blind.” Through the focalization of a triage nurse, “Blind” describes a nurse’s memory of her overwhelming experience one evening when her hut was over capacity:

…The men were laid out in three rows on either side of the central alley way. It was a big hut, and there were about sixty stretchers in each row.
There was space between the heads of one row and the feet of another, but no space to pass between the stretchers in the same row; they touched… It was just before midnight when the stretcher bearers brought in the blind man and there was no space on the floor anywhere; so they stood waiting, not knowing what to do with him. (145)

The emphasis on space (or, more precisely, lack of space) carries with it some symbolic implications: just as there is literally no space for the blind man when he is brought into the hut, there is, metaphorically no space for an awareness of the wounded or traumatized soldier in the minds of civilians or those in power. Moreover, the individuality of these wounded men in the hut is entirely obliterated, exaggerated symbolically by the literal lack of space between them. Nameless, the men are identified by their wounds: “‘What have you got ready?’ ‘I’ve got three knees, two spines, five abdomens, twelve heads. Here’s a lung case—hemorrhage. He can’t wait.’ She is binding the man’s chest; she doesn’t look up. ‘Send him along’” (161). The men coming in on stretchers are interchangeable:

I said from the floor in the second row: ‘Just a minute… You can put him here in a minute.’ So they waited with the blind man suspended between them… while the little boy who had been crying for his mother died with his head on my breast. (145-146)

Borden creates a likeness in this story between the nurse and the wounded men that she is treating. While they have been physically and perhaps psychically wounded in battle, it becomes clear that the nurse’s experience is equally as traumatizing, as she holds the dying boy in her arms while the blind man waits to take his place:

Perhaps he thought the arms holding him when he jerked back and died belonged to some woman I had never seen, some woman waiting somewhere for news of him in some village, somewhere in France. How many women, I wondered, were waiting out there in the distance for news of these men who were lying on the floor? But I stopped thinking about this the minute the boy was dead. It didn’t do to think. I didn’t as a rule, but the boy’s very young voice had startled me. It had come through to me
as a real voice will sound sometimes through a dream, almost waking you, but now it had stopped, and the dream was thick round me again, and I laid him down, covered his face with the brown blanket. (146)

Similar to the way the nurses in “Moonlight” created a sense of normalcy by routinely drinking cocoa each night despite their being surrounded by the abnormal reality of severed limbs, the triage nurse in “Blind” describes her default dreamlike state that she maintains “as a rule.” For the triage nurse, “it d[oesn’t] do to think” because doing so would interfere with her ability to do her job:

I gave the morphine, then crawled over and looked at the blind man’s ticket. I did not know, of course, that he was blind until I read his ticket. A large round white helmet covered the top half of his head and face; only his nostrils and mouth and chin were uncovered. The surgeon in the dressing station behind the trenches had written on his ticket, ‘Shot through the eyes. Blind.’

Did he know? I asked myself. No, he couldn’t know yet. He would still be wondering, waiting, hoping, down there in that deep, dark silence of his, in his own dark personal world. He didn’t know he was blind; no one would have told him. I felt his pulse. It was strong and steady…In his case there was no hurry, no necessity to rush him through to the operating room. There was plenty of time. He would always be blind.

[…]

I said to the blind one: ‘Here is a drink.’ He didn’t hear me, so I said it more loudly against the bandage, and helped him lift his head, and held the tin cup to his mouth below the thick edge of the bandage. I did not think of what was hidden under the bandage. I think of it now.

[…]

The blind man said to me: ‘Thank you, sister, you are very kind. That is good. I thank you.’ He had a beautiful voice. I noticed the great courtesy of his speech. But they were all courteous. Their courtesy when they died, their reluctance to cause me any trouble by dying or suffering, was one of the things it didn’t do to think about. (149-150)

While the nurse recalls thinking about the “dark personal world” of the blind man who does not yet know he is blind, she also recalls her lack of reflection about “what was hidden under the bandage.” Now, with distance from the event, she thinks about this image, though it is left out of the text. While sketches such as “Conspiracy” meditate on
the power of nurses who wield control over helpless men, the nurse in “Blind” reminds us that she is limited by her duty to triage. As a triage nurse, she is responsible for dividing the victims into three categories: those who are likely to live, regardless of the care they receive; those who are beyond help and are likely to die, regardless of the care they receive; and those who are likely to live, but only if given immediate care. Because her responsibilities are defined by this regimented, militarized structure, the nurse (now having time and distance from these events) contends that it “does not do think” about the more human and humane interactions with her patients, including the shame and guilt one is likely to feel when a dying person is apologizing to you for causing you trouble by suffering or dying.

Thus, the triage nurse maintains a kind of figurative blindness or detachment in that she ignores or represses any emotions she is feeling, focusing exclusively on exercising her objective sense of sight because it is her “business” to see which victims should go first:

I had received by post that same morning a dozen beautiful new platinum needles. I was very pleased with them. I said to one of the dressers as I fixed a needle on my syringe and held it up, squirting the liquid through it: ‘Look. I’ve some lovely new needles.’ He said: ‘Come and help me a moment. Just cut this bandage, please.’ I went over to his dressing table. He darted off to a voice that was shrieking somewhere. There was a man stretched on the table. His brain came off in my hands when I lifted the bandage from his head.

When the dresser came back I said: ‘His brain came off on the bandage.’
‘Where have you put it?’
‘I put it in the pail under the table.’
‘It’s only one half of his brain,’ he said, looking into the man’s skull. ‘The rest is here.’
I left him to finish the dressing and went about my own business. I had much to do.

It was my business to sort out the wounded as they were brought in
from the ambulances and to keep the wounded men from dying before they got to the operating rooms: it was my business to sort out the nearly dying from the dying. I was there to sort them out and tell how fast life was ebbing in them. Life was leaking away from all of them; but with some of them there was no hurry, with others it was a case of minutes… I had to decide for myself. There was no one to tell me. If I made any mistakes, some would die on their stretchers on the floor under my eyes who need not have died. I didn’t worry. I didn’t think. I was too busy, too absorbed in what I was doing. I had to judge from what was written on their tickets and from the way they looked and the way they felt to my hand… I was in a dream, led this way and that by my acute eyes and hands that did many things, and seemed to know what to do. (151-153)

The use of the term “business” removes any sense of personal emotion and emphasizes the degree to which these wounded men are commodities of the business arrangement of war. Yet at the same time, viewing this as a “business” helps the nurse bear the tragic circumstances within which she is immersed. Having just held a boy against her breast as he died while crying for his mother, the nurse turns to the visuality of material objects (her needles and syringes) for comfort, the soothing pleasure of this visual sight underscored by her presentation of them to one of the dressers (‘Look. I’ve some lovely new needles.’) However, this moment of solace is quickly interrupted by the sight of a horribly maimed man whose brain comes off in the bandage as she removes it. The deadpan tone in which the nurse describes this gruesome image suggests, once again, her need to shut down her conscious mental registration of this visual sight in order to effectively perform the duties of her job and in order to self-protect from the violent reality that she endures on a daily basis. Thus, while Borden emphasizes the degree to which the triage nurse is dependent on her sensory perceptions, she also underscoring the nurse’s need to often observe from a distance:

Sometimes there was no time to read the ticket or touch the pulse. The door kept opening and shutting to let in the stretcher bearers whatever I was doing. I could not watch when I was giving piquées; but standing by
my table filling a syringe, I could look down over the rough forms that covered the floor and pick out at a distance this one and that one. I had been doing this for two years, and had learned to read the signs. I could tell from the way they twitched, from the peculiar shade of a pallid face, from the look of a tight pinched-in nostrils, and in other ways which I could not have explained, that this or that one was slipping over the edge of the beach of life. (153-154)

The nurse’s physical distance from her patients yet again underscores her emotional detachment from them, while her inability to sometimes explain how she can know someone is dying from a far away glance is telling of her mechanized approach. As she indicates, doing this for two years, she is able to operate on instinct—a process that does not involve any conscious thinking or reflection. Yet paradoxically, the passage also underscores that the body is extraordinarily capable of “reading” other bodies, as Borden signals this underlying irony through her attention to embodied intersubjectivity.

Thus, while the title of the story refers to the soldier who has been shot through the eyes and blinded, the nurse also maintains a kind of blindness—an ironic twist given the fact that her job is dependent on seeing. Yet the nurse’s blindness becomes readily apparent when, in the hustle and bustle, she forgets about the blind man who has been waiting for treatment:

‘Sister! My sister! Where are you?’ A lost voice. The voice of a lost man, wandering in the mountains, in the night. It is the blind man calling. I had forgotten him. I had forgotten that he was there. He could wait. The others could not wait. So I had left him and forgotten him. Something in his voice made me run, made my heart miss a beat. I ran down the centre alleyway, round and up again, between the two rows, quickly, carefully stepping across to him. I could just squeeze through to him.

‘I am coming,’ I called to him. ‘I am coming.’

I knelt beside him. ‘I am here.’ I said; but he lay quite still on his back; he didn’t move at all; he hadn’t heard me. So I took his hand and put my mouth close to his bandaged head and called to him with desperate entreaty.

‘I am here. What is it? What is the matter?’
He didn’t move even then, but he gave a long shuddering sigh of relief.

‘I thought I had been abandoned here, all alone,’ he said softly in his faraway voice.

I seemed to awake then. I looked round me and began to tremble, as one would tremble if one awoke with one’s head over the edge of a precipice. I saw the wounded packed round us, hemming us in. I saw his comrades, thick round him…The light poured down on the rows of faces. They gleamed faintly. Four hundred faces were staring up at the roof, side by side. The blind man didn’t know. He thought he was alone, out in the dark. That was the precipice, that reality.

‘You are not alone,’ I lied. ‘There are many of your comrades here, and I am here, and there are doctors and nurses. You are with friends here, not alone.’

‘I thought,’ he murmured in that faraway voice, ‘that you had gone away and forgotten me, and that I was abandoned here alone.’

My body rattled and jerked like a machine out of order. I was awake now, and I seemed to be breaking into pieces.

‘No,’ I managed to lie again. ‘I had not forgotten you, nor left you alone.’ And I looked down again at the visible half of his face and saw that his lips were smiling.

At that I fled from him. I ran down the long, dreadful hut and hid behind my screen and cowered, sobbing, in a corner, hiding my face. (165-168)

The nurse’s emotional breakdown comes at a point when she awakens from her trance-like state and shares a moment of personal intimacy with the blinded soldier. Admitting to herself (though not to him) that she had, indeed, forgotten about him and left him alone to treat other more urgent patients, she opens her eyes to the loneliness and suffering of the individual whose personal pain had been lost and forgotten among the masses. In doing so, she simultaneously comes to recognize her own pain—the victims she has lost, the guilt she feels, the “things it didn’t do to think about.” Borden’s rhetoric is explicitly visual, as she describes herself looking “over the edge of a precipice” to see the light illuminating the faces of four hundred wounded men lying on stretchers, staring up at the roof. Not only is Borden’s “precipice” a frightening cliff at the edge of which the blind man stands, but it’s also an observation deck from which the nurse sees. As the vision of
these wounded men is impaired or limited by their position on stretchers, so too does Borden insist on the urgency of our need to see them. Yet the nurse’s own traumatic wounding—the visible half of the blind man’s face paralleling the hidden portion of her face as she cowers in a corner sobbing—suggests a need to see more than simply the wounded soldier—to see, as the nurse herself says: “How crowded together we are here. How close we are in this nightmare. The wounded are packed into this place like sardines, and we are so close to them…I’ve never been this close to human beings. We are locked together…We are one body, suffering and bleeding” (164).

Borden’s “Preface” to The Forbidden Zone ends with a statement about the dedication of her book: “I have dared to dedicate these pages to the poilus who passed through our hands during the war, because I believe they would recognize the dimmed reality reflected in these pictures. But the book is not meant for them. They know, not only everything that is contained in it, but all the rest that can never be written.” If the book is not meant for the poilus (French common soldiers) because they already know the “reality reflected in these pictures,” then it begs the question of whom this book is meant for. One possibility is that the book is meant for her—a self-cleansing and therapeutic release of sorts after the traumatic experience of witnessing such devastating violence. Yet upon closer inspection, Borden’s final sentence indicates a larger audience than herself. For like poilus, she too already “knows” these images and others that can never be articulated in words. Therefore, one can only deduce that Borden’s text is an attempt to render truthful images, to register the depiction of the horror of war for those who never saw it firsthand.
The limitations of Borden’s text, however, lie in the inescapability of her wartime role as a female nurse. As much as *The Forbidden Zone* complicates the categories that divide male/female and soldier/nurse/civilian experiences of war, emphasizing the degree to which we are “one life” and “one body, suffering and bleeding” (164), gender lines are not actually abolished. The nurse is still limited to her space in “the forbidden zone,” seeing more than the typical female civilian sees, though still unable to witness what the male combatant sees. While the nurses see the violent results of war, they are still left to imagine the circumstances surrounding the events of how such devastating injuries occurred. One example of this is the sketch “Rosa,” when a soldier is brought to the field hospital with a bullet lodged in his brain. The nurse is told he was shot through the mouth, which leads her to imagine that he must have foolishly been sleeping in the trenches with his mouth open. Moments later she learns that it was attempted suicide. Examples such as this illustrate what Santanu Das identifies as a peculiar predicament for First World War nurses: “the fundamental unsharability of the experience of the soldiers, and yet the juddering of the senses by serving the wounded body so intimately” (Das, “Impotence” 244). As Das further explains, this limitation is how empathy is established:

In women’s writings, empathy becomes a yoke of conscience: we are made to feel the burden of the nurse-narrator, of bearing witness to another’s pain. Called upon to serve the shattered remnants of the body, the subjectivity of the female nurse is doubly encoded—first, through the gap with the male trench experience and second, through the sheer magnitude of male suffering, an experience that can never be owned by them, either historically or ontologically…This is what makes women’s war writings often far more depressing and painful than men’s memoirs: the helplessness of the nurse is translated into the haplessness of the witness—and in turn, the reader. (Das, *Touch* 189-90)
While Borden can claim ownership over the traumatizing experience of the nurse, the authenticity of her work becomes problematic when she speaks about the personal and individual pain of the common soldier. These are the figures to whom Borden dedicates her text, and yet these are also the figures whom she does not know directly. As she writes in her poem entitled “Unidentified,” first published in *The English Review* in December 1917:

Look at the stillness of his face.
It’s made of little fragile bones and flesh,
tissued of quivering muscles fine as silk;
Exquisite nerves, soft membrane warm with blood,
That travels smoothly through the tender veins.
One blow, one minute more, and that man’s face will be a mass of matter,
horrid slime and little brittle splinters. (209)

For Borden, *looking* is imperative to repairing a postwar culture. Addressing her poem to the men of god, men of history, and men in power, whom she regards as abandoning the young soldier, Borden writes on behalf of the unidentified young man who is not there to speak for himself, attempting to paint a realistic and authentic portrait that opens her audiences’ eyes to the personal suffering of the common soldier in war: “Look well at this man. Look![…] For you have something interesting to learn/ By looking at this man. […] Watch him while he dies” (204). Speaking to the “poor blind unseeing ghosts” (210) who led the world (and subsequently, the lives of ordinary young men) into the devastating violence and chaos of war, Borden attempts to open her audiences’ eyes by creating a visceral and sympathetic picture. Yet the fact that the soldier remains “unidentified” reminds us that the speaker is limited in her knowledge about him, meanwhile also raising the question of how much one *can* identify with the bodily pain of another human being when the very nature of bodily experience does not allow it.
Certainly the experience of the nurse is distinct from the experience of the soldier, but, as we’ll see especially in *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, so too are the experiences from any one soldier to the next, or one person to the next. Yet by juxtaposing the senses of touch and sight, Borden’s text invites us to meditate on the close relationship between the two. As Peter Costello explains in his analysis of Husserl’s phenomenology: “Sight and touch bear an internal relation, actively grounded by touch but also internally deployed by sight. Touch grounds vision. But vision extends touch” (Costello 94). Because our eyes are literally openings into our bodies, seeing is always-already united with touch. And while sight is often associated with objectivity, impersonality, and distance, its overlaying with the sense of touch—a sense that is characterized by intimacy and often associated with women—invites us to rethink the way vision too can generate a kind of intersubjectivity and recognition of the other’s experience that was desperately needed after the fracturing events of the Great War.
CHAPTER 2
PRIVATE PERCEPTIONS, SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, AND THE UNSEEN
FORCES OF NATURE IN FREDERIC MANNING’S
THE MIDDLE PARTS OF FORTUNE

“Whether a man be killed by a rifle bullet through the brain, or
blown into fragments by a high-explosive shell, may seem a
matter of indifference to the conscientious objector, or to any
other equally well-placed observer…but it is infinitely more
horrible and revolting to see a man shattered and eviscerated,
than to see him shot. And one sees such things; and one suffers
vicariously, with the inalienable sympathy of man for man. One
forgets quickly. The mind is averted as well as the eyes. It
reassures itself after that first despairing cry: ‘It is I!’ ‘No, it is
not I. I shall not be like that.’ And one moves on, leaving the
mauled and bloody thing behind…One forgets, but he will
remember again later, if only in his sleep.”

– Frederic Manning, The Middle Parts of Fortune (1929)

“I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; I live in
it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all
around me, not in front of me”

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” (1964)

Whereas Borden’s role as a female nurse limits her to a certain extent from fully
identifying with the painful and traumatizing experience of the common French soldiers
to whom she dedicates her text, Frederic Manning’s The Middle Parts of Fortune more
fully illustrates how the inability to identify with the experience of the other may instead
be symptomatic of the isolating experience of war and its separation from the inherent
social and intersubjective nature of everyday life. Like Borden, Manning’s labors show
his audience, to borrow Hemingway’s words, “how things really were,” a representation
of the reality of war that critics have long praised in their assessment of the novel.12 First

12 In Men At War, Hemingway says of The Middle Parts of Fortune: “The finest and noblest book
of men in war that I have ever read. I read it over once each year to remember how things really
were so that I will never lie to myself nor to anyone else about them” (rpt. Marwil 249).
published anonymously in 1929 under the pseudonym “Private 19022,” Manning’s army number during the war, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* emphasizes Manning’s own proximity to the “anonymous ranks.” As he states in his preface:

> While the following pages are a record of experience on the Somme and Ancre fronts, with an interval behind the lines, during the latter half of the year 1916; and the events described in it actually happened, the characters are fictitious. It is true that in recording the conversations of men I seemed at times to hear the voices of ghosts. Their judgments were necessarily partial and prejudiced; but prejudices and partialities provide most of the driving power of life. It is better to allow them to cancel each other, than attempt to strike an average between them. Averages are too colourless, indeed too abstract in every way, to represent concrete experience. I have drawn no portraits; and my concern has been mainly with the anonymous ranks, whose opinion, often mere surmise and ill-informed, but real and true for them, I have tried to represent faithfully. (Manning xviii)

Manning’s preface echoes Borden’s in their shared insistence on “faithful representation” over artifice. Like Borden who saw the war from the field hospital, Manning also was an eyewitness to, and active participant in, the war. Manning experienced action with the 7th Battalion of King’s Shropshire Light Infantry at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, where according to his most preeminent biographer, Jonathan Marwil, his “primary duty was as a relay runner between the trenches and the brigade” (Marwil 166). Published anonymously under his private number, Manning gives his comrades a voice and emphasizes the subjectivity of the ordinary soldier.

*The Middle Parts of Fortune* is not a typical war novel. Beginning with the aftermath of a battle during which Bourne (the novel’s protagonist) finds himself lost from the rest of his battalion, and ending with another devastating battle, which ultimately takes Bourne’s life, most of the “action” that occurs in between takes place

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13 An expurgated edition of the novel was published a year later entitled *Her Privates We*, though still anonymously attributed to “Private 19022.” While there was some speculation among the press and public about the author’s true identity, a full public text with ascription to Manning was not printed until 1977.
behind the lines in billets, training camp, or during fatigue duty on the Somme and Ancre fronts. As Paul Fussell writes in his 1990 introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel:

This is a ‘war novel’ like no other. While observing actualities on the Western Front…Frederic Manning perceived that combat, traumatic and interesting as it is, occupies a small part of the soldier’s time and attention. Most of the time he is safe, engaged in ‘soldiering—and to dramatize the full meaning of that term is one of the tasks Manning has set himself. Thus if most novels and memoirs of the Great War focus on fighting and danger and fear and death, this one, whose subject is human nature and its moral dimension, is more concerned with thought and language, rationalism, and the attempt to understand the inexplicable. (Fussell ix)

Manning is not interested in glorifying war, nor does he turn a blind eye to its horrors; instead he shows us the war in all its reality, including its boredom, apathy, misery, confusion, unpredictability, uncertainty, and devastating destruction. A 1935 review of the novel in *The Australian Quarterly* contrasts *The Middle Parts of Fortune* to Blunden’s *Undertones of War* and Mottram’s *Spanish Farm* trilogy, stating that Manning’s is “the real record from a private’s point of view, a work not simply photographic, but with imaginative insight [that] reali[zes] and portray[s] what lay behind all happenings” (Kaeppel 48). This move from surface (“photographic”) to interiority (“what lay behind”) is, in part, what constitutes Manning’s modernism. While his authentic representation of military life has led many scholars to read *The Middle Parts of Fortune* as a realist novel, Manning’s text also shares many of the key sensibilities of modernism, especially its concern with the psychic and phenomenological experience of war, including tensions between dualistic subjective and intersubjective encounters. As Bourne and his fellow comrades struggle to fully see and understand a phenomenon that is inherently mystifying and inexplicable, Manning’s novel highlights a tension between
the soldiers’ detachment and the trauma that makes the social nature of war deeply, paradoxically impersonal.

Despite selling over 15,000 copies in the first three months of its publication and receiving praise from reviewers as “the most accurate and moving portrayal yet rendered of the common soldier” (Marwil vii), in the last thirty years, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* has received little attention from First World War or scholars of modernism. While many critics writing about First World War literature allude to *The Middle Parts of Fortune* and reference the praise it has received as one of the “great war novels,” few critics have actually discussed the novel at length.\(^{14}\) Moreover, while at the time of publication, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* received praise from “modernist” contemporaries like E.M. Forster, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Ernest Hemingway, when Manning’s novel does receive critical attention, it is often discussed in terms of its realism rather than its place among the literary modernists.\(^{15}\) The deviations from traditional war narratives, that scholars such as Paul Fussell have alluded to, have been overlooked by others, such as John Rignall, who reads Manning’s novel as “resist[ing] assimilation into modernism,” and “affirm[ing] the continuity and continuing effectiveness of conventional forms of


\(^{15}\) See Rignall. For more on the canonicity of First World War literature within twentieth century realism and modernism, see: Hopkins, Chris. “Registering War: Modernism, Realism, and the Can(n)on. *Focus on Robert Graves and his Contemporaries*. 2.5 (1996) 38-43.
narrative and novelistic practice” (Rignall 47-48). Rignall contends that while, in *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, “historical continuities are violently disrupted by the war,” the novel lacks “modernism’s sense of terminal crisis,” arguing instead that “collective life goes on, and continuities of nationality, class, and group are quietly affirmed” (48).

However, part of the problem with Rignall’s argument is an unwillingness to recognize that realism and modernism are not mutually exclusive. When Virginia Woolf asks, “But what is reality? And who are the judges of reality?” (Woolf, “Character” 426), she is not calling for a dismissal of realism, but rather a reinvention of its techniques in order to more authentically represent modern experience. By pitting modernism and realism against one another, creating a hierarchy where, in Manning’s novel, the continuity of realism’s conventional forms triumph over “the new mechanical violence of modernity,” Rignall’s argument overlooks how Manning’s novel reproduces conventions of realism, while at the same time it pushes away from them (Rignall 60).16 While critics have generally praised *The Middle Parts of Fortune* for its accurate portrayal of military life and Manning’s realistic account of the action, speech, and behavior ordinary soldiers, this view alone does not account for how the novel delves into some of the key issues of modernism, most notably a concern with the psychic and intersubjective experience of characters, as well as a dual concern with the old and new that ultimately joins other modernist writers in positioning these soldiers’ experience during the Great War within a longer history. As such, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* is a critical text to consider in

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16 In their preface, Nancy Paxton and Lynne Hapgood, editors of *Outside Modernism*, express that the essays in their book aim “to move outside the use of the term modernism as a kind of literary taxonomy and to reconceptualize the relationship between modernism and its early twentieth-century doppelganger, realism,” with the intention to trouble the perceived exclusivity of the relationship between the two. Rignall’s essay, however, doesn’t seem to fit the inclusive vision articulated in the editors’ preface.
relation to other modernist First World War literature that raise phenomenological questions about the formation of subjective and intersubjective identity within the blinding experience of war.

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In *Visible and The Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of “flesh,” or the reciprocity of one hand touching the other hand as it touches it, to illustrate his phenomenological philosophy that perception is an embodied experience. Extending the “circle of the touched and the touching” to the “circle of the visible and the seeing,” Merleau-Ponty reminds us that “the seeing is not without visible existence” itself (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 143). According to his model of phenomenological vision, we approach the visible world “by palpitating it with our look,” which ultimately extends to other bodies that we see and touch as well (*Visible* 131). This philosophy of vision is far from the Cartesian disembodied eye of perception that views the visual field from the outside: “I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me” (*Primacy* 178). The porous relationship between the interior self and the exterior visible world profoundly registers in his description of night:

Night is not an object before me; it enwraps me and infiltrates through my senses, stifling my recollections, and almost destroying my personal identity. I am no longer withdrawn into my perceptual look-out from which I watch the outlines of objects moving by at a distance…it is pure depth without foreground or background, without surfaces and without any distance separating it from me. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 330)

The darkness of the night removes all distinctions between the (interior) self and the (external) world. The viewer in this space feels its depth, but the lack of foreground or background leaves the viewer groping, lost and disoriented in the mystery of the dark.
Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological philosophy of the reciprocal relationship between the perceiver and the perceived provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the consequences of obscured seeing in warfront novels such as *The Middle Parts of Fortune*. As Manning’s novel explores how shrouded literal seeing occludes psychical seeing, so too does he illustrate that the inability to see and understand one’s own individual experience simultaneously renders intersubjective relationships with others problematic as well.

As noted earlier, Santanu Das aptly characterizes the First World War as an event that is “remembered and represented as a time of darkness” (Das, *Touch* 7). Fought primarily at night, within trenches and harsh weather conditions that further obscured vision, First World War literature introduces complicated problems of how soldiers literally and figuratively saw (or failed to see) the visual experience within which they were immersed. The opening pages of *The Middle Parts of Fortune* illustrate how the inability to see leads to a disorientation and isolation of the self. The novel begins with a description of Bourne, disoriented in the darkness of the night, while trying to keep the rest of his battalion within his line of vision:

> The darkness was increasing rapidly, as the whole sky had clouded, and threatened thunder. There was still some desultory shelling. When the relief had taken over from them, they set off to return to their original line as best they could. Bourne, who was beaten to the wide, gradually dropped behind, and in trying to keep the others in sight missed his footing and fell into a shellhole.

> By the time he had picked himself up again the rest of the party had vanished and, uncertain of his direction, he stumbled on alone. (Manning 1)

Within the first few lines of the novel, the narrator immediately creates a setting in which vision is compromised, and the inability to see leads to a disorientation and isolation of
the self. Furthermore, just as Bourne stumbles on without guidance from his men or a clear sense of his physical direction, the audience is also disoriented, as Manning begins his novel with the aftermath of a battle that the audience does not witness.

Thus, in the opening scene, the audience is limited to the blinded focalization of Bourne, only becoming aware of the circumstances surrounding this battle and his separation from his battalion later in the evening when Bourne involuntarily thinks of them. That night when a nightmare and the sounds of “convulsive agonies” from his sleeping comrades awaken him, Bourne tries to console himself with the thought that his comrades’ explosive movements and painful cries are simply reflex responses, leading him to meditate on some of the complex issues regarding the relationship between the mind and body:

Once during the night Bourne started up in an access of inexplicable horror, and after a moment of bewildered recollection, turned over and tried to sleep again. He remembered nothing of the nightmare which had roused him, if it were a nightmare, but gradually his awakened sense felt a vague restlessness troubling equally the other men. He noticed it first in Shem, whose body, almost touching his own, gave a quick, convulsive jump, and continued twitching for a moment, while he muttered unintelligibly...teeth met grinding as the jaws worked, there were little whimperings which quickened into sobs, passed into long shuddering moans, or culminated in angry-half-articulate obscenities and then relapsed, with fretful, uneasy movements and heaving breathing, into a more profound sleep.

Even though Bourne tried to persuade himself that these convulsive agonies were merely reflex actions, part of an unconscious physical process, through which the disordered nerves sought to readjust themselves, or to perform belatedly some instinctive movement which an over-riding will had thwarted at its original inception, his own conscious mind now filled itself with the passions, of which the mutterings and twitchings heard in the darkness were unconscious mimicry. The senses certainly have, in some measure, an independent activity of their own, and remain vigilant even in the mind’s eclipse. The darkness seemed to him to be filled with the shudderings of tormented flesh, as though something diabolically evil probed curiously to find a quick sensitive nerve and wring from it a reluctant cry of pain. (7)
Through Bourne, Manning reflects on nineteenth century questions and concerns of the mind and body—questions among scientists that, as scholars such as Randall Knoper have established, are concerned with whether or not “mimetic impulses, or a mimetic faculty, might be automatic and unconscious, the result of natural bodily systems that operate independently of consciousness and the will” (Knoper 3). As Bourne is unable to remember the nightmare that awakened him, he is simultaneously unable to shut down his sensory faculties from absorbing the sounds that possibly awakened him in the first place. Yet even as Manning mediates on these questions about the individual psyche that pervade nineteenth century science, his concern in this passage is not only on the ability of the senses to disassociate themselves from the mind, but also on the degree to which unconscious mimicry of other people’s gestures and behaviors establishes intersubjective relationships between people. As Bourne witnesses his comrades relive the day’s tumultuous events in their sleep, the narrator reports that “his own conscious mind now filled itself with the passions, of which the mutterings and twitchings heard in the darkness were unconscious mimicry.” Manning juxtaposes the novel’s opening image of Bourne as an isolated figure to this description of Bourne who becomes connected to others through “unconscious mimicry,” thus probing larger phenomenological questions about the formation of subjective and intersubjective experiences, especially in war.

Bourne’s realization that his senses (passive receptors of stimuli) continue to function even when his mind is unaware has significant subjective implications after his unknowingly traumatic sensory experience earlier that day of going over the top to assault the enemy:
The formless terrors haunting their sleep took shape for him. His mind reached back into the past day, groping among obscure and broken memories, for it seemed to him now that for the greater part of the time he had been stunned and blinded, and that what he had seen, he had seen in sudden, vivid flashes, instantaneously: he felt again the tension of waiting, that became impatience, and then the immense effort to move, and the momentary relief which came with movement, the sense of unreality and dread which descended on one, and some restoration of balance as one saw other men moving forward in a way that seemed commonplace, mechanical, as though at some moment of ordinary routine; the restraint, and the haste that fought against it with every voice in one’s being crying out to hurry. Hurry? One cannot hurry, alone, into nowhere, into nothing. Every impulse created immediately its own violent contradiction. The confusion and tumult in his own mind was inseparable from the senseless fury about him, each reinforcing the other. (Manning 7-8)

Interestingly, while the narrator’s description of Bourne’s recollection of this horrifying experience is seemingly internal, Manning again subtly emphasizes Bourne’s private experience as part of a social experience that includes “other men.” These terrors that Bourne recollects are “formless” in that they exist, at this moment in the novel, only in his mind (as well as in the minds of the other soldiers who are having these nightmares), and therefore, have no material reality. Yet, simultaneously, the passage also seems to imply that there was a kind of formlessness (or invisibility) to these terrors during the day, as though the sheer volume and intensity of these terrors rendered Bourne’s mind unconscious, thus “blind[ing]” him to these terrors. The use of the term “flash” suggests an incomplete and fleeting mode of perception, while the instantaneous nature of these perceptions further obscures visual clarity, thus creating what Bourne describes as a sense of “confusion and tumult in [his] own mind” (8). For four pages Manning’s third person omniscient narrator relays Bourne’s memory of the disturbing sensory perceptions that now haunt his consciousness:

He saw great chunks of the German line blown up, as the artillery blasted a way for them; clouds of dust and smoke screened their advance, but the
Hun searched for them scrupulously; the air was alive with the rush and flutter of wings; it was ripped by screaming shells, hissing like tons of molten metal plunging suddenly into water, there was the blast and concussion of their explosion, men smashed, obliterated in sudden eruptions of earth, rent and strewn in bloody fragments, shells that were like hellcats humped and spitting, little sounds, unpleasantly close, like the plucking of tense strings, and something tangling his feet, tearing at his trousers and puttees as he stumbled over it, and then a face suddenly, an inconceivable distorted face, which raved and sobbed at him as he fell with it into a shellhole. (8)

Rignall reads Bourne’s effort to make sense of his experience as a “return of control,” arguing that “[t]he problem of understanding and articulating the grotesquely fractured and terrifying experience of battle is confronted in the mind as he slowly composes his fragmented memories into a coherent narrative” (Rignall 57). Yet, although the passage establishes a sense of coherence in that now, eight pages later, we come full circle to the first paragraph that begins the novel, thus providing the reader with the narrative details that have been absent until this point in the text, this coherency is questionable given that Bourne’s recollection of what he witnessed that day is presented to the reader in much in the same way that he recalls having experienced them himself: in a kind of fragmented, relentless, perceptual chaos. The “flash” becomes the dominant mode of visual perception, reinforced stylistically through the intermittent (though rhythmic) punctuation of this lengthy sentence. As the sentence goes on, the move from the semicolon to the comma quickens the pace of the sentence, providing a quicker flash and lesser perceptible delay. As a result, it becomes difficult to distinguish between each perception. This becomes even more evident as Bourne continues to delve inward into his memory and the outside narrative voice of “he saw” slowly disappears into what seems, at times, to be Bourne’s immediate experience in the trenches. This immediacy isn’t interrupted until a number of pages later when the narrator says that “[Bourne] wished he could sleep,”
jolting us back to where the novel is presently in both time and space (Manning 11). Moreover, as the eye jumps quickly from sight from sight, the movement in the passage from distance to “unpleasant” closeness emphasizes the impossibility of seeing clearly and gaining perspective, whether visual or mental.

In *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, the limited or flawed visibility of people and objects are often addressed in the narrative by way of language and syntax. Rather than positioning Bourne (the novel’s protagonist) as the subject of a sentence who does an action that involves “seeing,” Manning instead often endows light itself with the power to make someone or something visible in some limited way. Such is the case, for example, when Bourne lights a match and the narrator says: “the light [of the match] reveal[s] a candle-end stuck by its own grease to the oval lid of a tabacco-tin” (1). After lighting this candle, Bourne is able to see details of the dugout he is in that were not visible by the weaker light of the match: “There was a kind of bank or seat excavated in the wall of the dugout, and he noticed first the tattered remains of a blanket lying on it, and then, gleaming faintly in its folds a small metal disc reflecting the light” (2). Yet even in this moment of light reflecting and revealing its own light, Bourne’s vision is compromised when mistakenly thinks that the small metal disc is the cap on the cork of a water bottle. Relying on his sense of touch, rather than sight, Bourne determines that the bottle is full based on “the feel of the bottle,” but it is ultimately his sense of taste, as opposed to his sense of sight, which accurately reveals to him that the beverage in the bottle is not water, but whisky (2).

By frequently disallowing his central character the visual acuity and agency of sight on a syntactical level, Manning calls into question whatever kind of autonomy and
power—visual or otherwise—that soldiers like Bourne have in war. Told from an omniscient third-person narrative voice, which frequently positions the audience within Bourne’s focalization, Bourne’s inability to see with his eye in the novel’s opening pages becomes symbolic of the lack of first-person narrative voice in the novel:

They moved along the battered trench silently. The sky flickered with the flash of guns, and an occasional star-shell flooded their path with light. As one fell slowly, Bourne saw a dead man in field gray propped up in a corner of a traverse; probably he had surrendered, wounded, and reached the trench only to die there. He looked indifferently at this piece of wreckage. The grey face was senseless and empty. (4-5)

Rather than positioning his soldiers as seeing subjects, Manning emphasizes “flicker” and “flash” that allow the battlefield to be seen. Yet even as this light allows Bourne to physically see the dead man, he remains psychically blinded, as this visual image doesn’t affect him in the slightest. Rather, Bourne looks “indifferently” at the dead man, finding his face to be “senseless and empty.” While on the one hand the dead man’s face is literally “senseless and empty” in that he is unconscious, and therefore, void of the faculties of hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste, and void of the capacity to think and reason, the term “senseless” also implies that there is, perhaps, a lack of meaning or purpose in the dead man’s face, as though, in this moment, the very feature which best distinguishes one person from another fails to do so, offers no explanation, and conveys no message. In this sense, Bourne’s inability to gather meaning from the face of the dead man mirrors his inability to gather meaning within the war more largely, meanwhile the third-person narration refuses the audience any insight into Bourne’s “indifference.”

Bourne’s psychical blindness finds reinforcement in war’s functioning as an unknowable and unpredictable phenomenon. While in the billets, Bourne finds a newspaper and reads it “in the hope of learning something about the war,” finding
nothing but “solemn empty phrases” and “a few colourless details from the French front” (49). As a result, Bourne concludes: “there was nothing; no one knew anything about it, it was like one of the blind forces of nature; one could not control it, one could not comprehend it, and one could not predict its course from hour to hour” (49). The description of the war as a “blind force of nature,” that is, an act of god or a kind of natural phenomenon, positions the war outside human control and outside the realm of human understanding. This seems close to Manning’s own personal experience in the War, as he writes in a letter to his close friend, William Rothenstein: “I can’t sort out and analyse my experiences yet—they’re too immediate—tedium, and terror, then a kind of intoxication…we deal not the with the experience itself but with the traces of experience” (Marwil 168).17 The “traces of experience,” or vestiges, to which Manning refers, hint at the war as a kind of supernatural or ghostly experience. This purview extends itself to Manning’s portrayal of soldiers like Bourne whose fates have already been predetermined: “[Bourne] neither knew where he was, nor whither he was going, he could have no plan because he could foresee nothing, everything happening was inevitable and unexpected, he was an act in a whole chain of acts” (9). The inevitability referred to here is the inevitability of death, which Manning alludes to in the Shakespearian epigraph from Henry VI that begins the first chapter: “By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once; we owe God a death…and let it go which way it will, he who dies this year is quit for the next” (1). Not only has Bourne’s fate been

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17 Marwil suggests that Manning’s letters to Rothenstein offer the “most poignant account of what life was like at the mysterious front” (167). It is through these letters, Marwil suggests, that the reality of the war presents itself for those not there to witness it, so that “Rothenstein should be there to paint ‘these Shropshire lads…as they come in from the trenches, weary, plastered with gray clay, in their steel helmets that are like chinese hats and the colour of verdigris,’” even in one letter, drawing attention to an actual smear of wet clay on the top of the page (167, xiii).
predetermined by God, but also by the foretelling sixteenth century epigraph from a “history” play. Furthermore, as Manning begins each chapter of The Middle Parts of Fortune with a Shakespearian quote, even drawing upon the classic English playwright for the novel’s title,\(^\text{18}\) he participates in the modernist preoccupation with the duality of old and new by situating Bourne’s experience in the Great War within a longer European history of tragedies. The novel’s title in particular, coming from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, reinforces the theme of unknowability.

Some critics have argued that Manning, unlike many of his contemporaries, is not explicitly concerned with the larger social and political issues of the war. George Parfitt, for example, argues that while The Middle Parts of Fortune certainly has social implications:

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\text{[T]he war [for Manning] is organic and morally almost neutral, and although he renders the filth, pettiness and horror, he also sees the war as providing the chance for Man to show his finest qualities and as encouraging a philosophical ripeness...which can give the individual serenity in the face of whatever the gods may serve up. (Parfitt 87)}
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Therefore, Parfitt suggests, while The Middle Parts of Fortune contains “real elements of Great War experience...[Manning] is [not] very interested in the social implications” of the war; rather, these ideas, according to Parfitt, are meant “to be explored philosophically rather than sociologically” (88). While it’s true that Manning’s novel

\(^{18}\) Both titles, Her Privates We and The Middle Parts of Fortune come from Shakespeare’s Hamlet (Act II, scene 2). In this scene, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have come to check in on Hamlet and the three friends engage in a moment of cheeky innuendo. When Hamlet asks how the ‘good lads’ are, Guildenstern replies: ‘Happy in that we are not over-happy/On Fortune’s cap we are not the very button.’
Hamlet: ‘Nor the soles of her shoe?’
Rosencrantz: ‘Neither my lord.’
Hamlet: ‘Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favour.’
Guildenstern: ‘Faith, her privates we.’
Hamlet: ‘In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true, she is a strumpet. What’s the news?’
engages in ideas and themes that lend themselves well to exploration through a
philosophical lens, this philosophical approach need not be antithetical to the social. In
fact, Manning himself positions the war (and his novel) within a social perspective when,
in his prefatory note to the novel, he writes:

War is waged by men; not by beasts, or by gods. It is a peculiarly human
activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss at least half of its
significance; it is also the punishment of a crime. That raises a moral
question, the kind of problem with which the present age is disinclined to
deal. (Manning xviii)

This language is echoed by Manning’s soldiers who try to rationalize the lives that are
lost in war:

‘C’est la guerre,’ they would say, with resignation that was almost apathy:
for all sensible people know that war is one of the blind forces of nature,
which can neither be foreseen nor controlled. Their attitude in all its
simplicity was sane. There is nothing in war which is not in human nature;
but the violence and passions of men become, in aggregate, an impersonal
and incalculable force, a blind and irrational movement of the collective
will, which one cannot control, which one cannot understand, which one
can only endure. (128-129)

While this “blind force of nature” is “peculiarly human,” it is human in the collective and
impersonal form, making it something almost inhuman, something with which the
individual cannot fully see, understand, or identify with in any personal sense. Yet at the
same time, this “collectivity” also “raises a moral question,” inviting the possibility for a
more ethically and socially attuned sense of the intersubjective experience of the other.

_Middle Parts of Fortune_ sheds light on the tension between the impersonality
of war and the trauma that makes the social nature of war paradoxically impersonal.
Manning’s soldiers speak coldly and objectively about the violent deaths of their
comrades that they witness, and even the deaths of their comrades that they don’t witness
but see by way of their comrade’s absence:
Name after name was called, and in many cases no particulars were available. Then for a moment the general sense of loss would become focused on one individual name, while some meager details would be given by witnesses of the man’s fate; and after that he, too, faded into the past.

‘Redmain’ was the name called out; and as at first there was no reply, it was repeated.
‘Has anyone seen anything of Redmain?’
‘Yes, sir,’ cried Pike, with sullen anger in his voice. ‘The poor bastard’s dead, sir.’
‘Are you sure of that, Pike?’ Captain Malet asked him quietly, ignoring everything but the question of fact. ‘I mean are you sure the man you saw was Redmain?’
‘I saw ’im, sir; ’e were just blown to buggery,’ said Pike, with a feeling that was almost brutal in its directness. ‘’E were a chum o’ mine, sir, an’ I seen ’im blown to fuckin’ bits. ’E got it; just before we got to the first line, sir.’

After a few more questions, Sergeant Robinson, calling the roll in place of Sergeant-Major Glasspool, who had been rather seriously wounded soon after Bourne had seen him in the German front line, passed to another name. (25)

Captain Malet’s exclusive concern for the “facts” encourages a repression of Pike’s emotion, though he had just seen his friend “blown to fuckin’ bits.” The narrator, too, practices this impersonal objectivity in the announcement of Sergeant-Major Glasspool’s wounding, the details about which are never provided to the audience. As this story is submerged, so is an explanation of the disappearance of someone named Mr. Halliday who is briefly mentioned in Bourne’s recollection of the battle, and not mentioned again for eighteen pages:

Bourne had seen him first with a slight wound the arm, and then seen him wounded again in the knee. Probably the bone was broken. That was in the German outpost line, and he had been left there in comparative shelter with other wounded who were helping each other. After that moment, nothing further was known of him, as they had no information of him having passed through any dressing-station. Moreover, the medical officer, after working all day, had taken the first opportunity to explore a great part of the ground, and to make sure, as far as that were possible, that no wounded had been left uncollected. (27)
Mr. Halliday’s disappearance is reinforced on a narrative level, as the audience likely has to re-read Bourne’s recollection of the battle in order to even remember who Mr. Halliday is. While during roll call, the violent deaths that the soldiers witness are reduced to “facts” before quickly moving on to the next name, the lack of certainty about what happened to Mr. Halliday becomes more disconcerting, as it suggests that “the night and shellholes may not have yielded up all their secrets” (27).

The mystery of Mr. Halliday’s disappearance is emblematic of the kind of fleeting and unstable relationships between people that Manning’s novel illustrates are symptomatic of the blinding experience of war. On the one hand, a battalion’s inherent uniformity registers an inextricable bond; yet as The Middle Parts of Fortune shows, the bonds between people in a time of war are not only problematic, but tragically ironic: while war creates intimate ties—many of which transcend barriers of class, race, and national region—paradoxically these ties are forged only to be destroyed by war’s militaristic gaze, as well as its violence and destruction. Manning’s descriptions of men include: “blown to fuckin’ bits” (25), “vague shadows in the mist” (224), “disappear[ing] into the fog” (226), and being “almost indistinguishable from the mud in which they lived” (222)—phrases that render an entire obliteration of the visibility of human subject within the violent, mysterious, and blinding conditions of war. The literal invisibility of bodies in The Middle Parts of Fortune—by way of darkness, fog, mud, or some unknown reason altogether—become symbolic of the intersubjective limitations in war with which Manning’s novel ultimately wrestles.

Defining the kind of relationships that are possible in the unstable, incomprehensible, and destructive conditions of war, Bourne finds that, in war, “good
comradeship takes the place of good friendship…No, it’s not friendship. The man doesn’t matter so much; it’s a kind of impersonal emotion” (94). However, we ought to be skeptical of Bourne’s emphasis on “impersonality,” including his notion that “the man doesn’t matter so much,” because it yet again attempts to rationalizes the war as an inhuman (and therefore, asocial) force—a paradoxical notion given that The Middle Parts of Fortune, as a novel, is celebrated for its realistic (and therefore, human) portrayal of ordinary soldiers: their individual regional accents, personalities, and habits. As Manning’s novel illustrates, “impersonality” is instead a symptom of the trauma that these soldiers experience. One feels the emotional stress underneath the text, for example, in the scene where Bourne stands behind a tent and overhears two soldiers, Pritchard and Martlow, discussing the death of another named Swale. Pritchard begins:

‘…both ’is legs ’ad bin blown off, pore bugger; an’ ’e were dyin’ so quick you could see it. But ’e tried to stand up on ’is feet. ‘’elp me up,’ ’e sez, ‘’elp me up.’—‘You lie still, chum,’ I sez to ’im, ‘you’ll be all right presently.’ An ’e jes gave me one look, like ’e were puzzled, an’ ’e died.’

Bourne felt all his muscles tighten. Tears were running down Pritchard’s inflexible face, like raindrops down a windowpane; but there was not a quaver in his voice, only that high unnatural note which a boy’s has when it is breaking; and then for the first time Bourne noticed that Swale, Pritchard’s bed-chum, was not there; he had not missed him before. He could only stare at Pritchard, while his own sight blurred in sympathy. ‘Well, anyway,’ said Martlow, desperately comforting; ’e couldn’t ’ave felt much, could ’e, if ’e said that?’ ‘I don’t know what ’e felt,’ said Pritchard, with slowly filling bitterness, ‘I know what I felt.’ (18)

The emphasis here is not just on Swale’s morbid end, but on Pritchard as an eyewitness to this horrifying and deeply personal experience. Despite Bourne’s claim for “impersonal emotion,” the emotion in this scene (while not explicitly stated) is felt heavily (by both Pritchard and Bourne) as though it’s going to break through the surface.
Swale’s empty bed makes his absence visible to Bourne whose eyes well with tears in commiseration with Pritchard’s emotional (though paradoxically, stoic) pain.

Bourne experiences his own breaking point finally in the moments after Martlow (his own comrade) is killed by a German sniper bullet. Bourne’s immediate response to Martlow’s death is filled with an ambiguous combination of feeling and indifference:

They had only moved a couple of yards from the trench when there was a crackle of musketry. Martlow was perhaps a couple of yards in front of Bourne, when he swayed a little, his knees collapsed under him, and he pitched forward on to his face, his feet kicking and his whole body convulsive for a moment. Bourne flung himself down beside him, and, putting his arms round his body, lifted him, calling him.

‘Kid! You’re all right, kid?’ he cried eagerly.

He was all right. As Bourne lifted the limp body, the boy’s hat came off, showing half the back of his skull shattered where the bullet had come through it; and a little blood welled out into Bourne’s sleeve and the knee of his trousers. He was all right; and Bourne let him settle to the earth again, lifting himself up almost indifferently, unable to realise what had happened, filled with a kind of tenderness that ached in him, and yet extraordinarily still, extraordinarily cold. (263-64)

Martlow’s death is highly visually charged, seen both with a perspective from afar and up close. Thus, Manning emphasizes the extent to which Bourne is an eyewitness to Martlow’s death: not only does he see Martlow collapse and convulse from afar, but he sees the backside of Martlow’s shattered skull when the boy’s hat falls off and “shows” it to him, and he even sees and feels Martlow’s blood as it soaks into his own clothing. Yet even as the passage focuses on what Bourne sees, the visibility of the inside of Martlow’s skull (and therefore, both sides of his eyes) symbolically registers insight into what Martlow must have seen as the bullet entered him.

In one sense, Martlow’s death is just part of the routine of war. The next morning, news of Martlow’s death, as well as the deaths and injuries of others become part of the everyday morning routine of roll call, where Bourne has to give Captain Marsden “details
of Martlow’s end of Adam’s; and then…describe Minton’s wound. Pritchard told about Shem’s wound, and corroborated Bourne’s evidence on some points about the others. It was a long, disconsolate business…they were all indifferent; it was a matter of routine” (274). However, in spite of this all being “a matter of routine,” the “tenderness that aches” in Bourne is indicative of his personal pain—the intense grief that he feels for the loss of his comrade. In fact, moments before Bourne’s own death in a night raid at the end of the novel, he thinks to himself that he will never be able to dispel the image of Martlow from his mind because he “would always see those puckered brows, and feel the weight of him” (283).

The image that Bourne holds of Martlow in his mind is deeply personal—for it is literally an embodiment of Martlow’s body. In fact, Bourne considers the way Martlow was killed to be highly personal, reflecting that the personal way he died is what disturbs him the most: “a sniper’s bullet has too definite an aim and purpose to be dismissed from the mind as soon as it is spent, like the explosion of a more or less random shell. Even a machine-gun, searching for possibilities with a desultory spray, did not have quite the same intimate effect” (276-277). What seems to trouble Bourne most about Martlow’s death is that it was not a result of chance, it was not an act of God, nor a “blind force of nature,” but an act of human will. Thus, it is this eminently personal and social experience of war with which Manning’s soldiers must deal, even as, paradoxically, their trauma renders them dissociated, detached, and “impersonal”:

[T]hough the pressure of external circumstances seemed to wipe out individuality, leaving little if any distinction between man and man, in himself each man became conscious of his own personality as of something very hard, and sharply defined against a background of other men, who remained merely generalised as ‘the others.’ The mystery of his own being increased for him enormously; and he had to explore that
doubtful darkness alone, finding a foothold here, a handhold there, grasping one support after another and relinquishing it when it yielded, crumbling, the sudden menace of ruin, as it slid into the unsubstantial past, calling forth another effort, to gain another precarious respite. If man could not be certain of himself, he could be certain of nothing. (223)

While Manning demonstrates how the soldiers function as a single unit with a single mind, the passage simultaneously highlights the intensely isolated and private nature of their war experience. The language slips between the private and the social, as the passage describes each man climbing through the darkness alone, yet grasping “a handhold” for “support” and letting go of that hand when it crumbles. Moreover, Manning’s use of the term “mystery” describes not only the limited and impersonal (yet, fundamental) relationship soldiers have with one another, but also the puzzling and opaque relationship they have with themselves. Hinting at an ego formation represented in the Hegelian model for subjectivity, the sharply defined “personality” of each man (the very quality of being a person) hinges upon the blurriness of “other men” in the “background.” Yet even as subjectivity is defined against the background of others, the passage also insists on the limitations of that subjectivity. The rhetoric of blindness—“grasping” in the “doubtful darkness” for something solid, something that one can grab hold of and use to ground oneself in a solid way—suggests a kind of instability and uncertainty when it comes to a sense of self. Thus, the final line of the passage, “If man could not be certain of himself, he could be certain of nothing,” registers a cyclical pattern wherein one’s personal blindness initiates an occluded seeing of others.

On the one hand Manning’s novel positions the First World War as, above all, a highly private and individual experience, with soldiers realizing that “each must go alone, and that each of them already was alone with himself, helping the others perhaps, but
looking at them with strange eyes, while the world became unreal and empty, and they moved into a mystery, where no help was” (255). Yet “looking at [others] with strange eyes” implies a lack of recognition of the other, the novel’s representations of death remind us time and time again that war is by definition a social event—that while “a man might rave against war…war, from among its myriad faces, could always turn him towards one, which was his own” (221). Thus, just as Martlow dies in Bourne’s arms, Bourne dies in the arms of another as well, a soldier appropriately named Weeper:

Weeper turned his head over his shoulder, listened, stopped, and went back. He found Bourne trying to lift himself; and Bourne spoke, gasping, suffocating.

‘Go on. I’m scuppered.’
‘A’Il not leave thee,’ said Weeper.

He stooped and lifted the other in his huge, ungainly arms, carrying him as tenderly as though he were a child. Bourne struggled wearily to speak, and the blood, filling his mouth, prevented him. Sometimes his head fell on Weeper’s shoulder. At last, barely articulate, a few words came.

‘I’m finished. Le’ me in peace, for God’s sake. You can’t…’
‘A’Il not leave thee,’ said Weeper in an infuriate rage.

He felt Bourne stretch himself in a convulsive shudder, and relax, becoming suddenly heavier in his arms. He struggled on, stumbling over the shell-ploughed ground through that fantastic mist, which moved like an army of wraiths, hurrying away from him. Then he stopped, and, taking the body by the waist with his left arm, flung it over his shoulder, steadying it with his right. He could see the wire now, and presently he was challenged, and replied. He found the way through the wire, and staggered into the trench with his burden…

‘A’ve brought ’im back,’ he cried desperately, and collapsed with the body on the duck-boards. Picking himself up again, he told his story incoherently, mixed with raving curses. (300)

Death in battle is once again emphasized as a social act. Not only is Weeper a witness to Bourne’s death, feeling the weight of his body become heavier as he dies, he laboriously carries the body back to the trenches, thus bringing the others into the traumatic experience. Perhaps to combat the unsettling experience of living among figures like Mr.
Halliday who simply disappear without a trace, Weeper’s act of bringing Bourne’s body back (accompanied by his own “incoherent” story) shows everyone exactly what happened to Bourne. Yet even as Weeper makes Bourne’s corpse visible to others, figures such as Sergeant Morgan, who responds: “What are you gibbering about…’Aven’t you ever seen a dead man before?,’” are blind to both the personal tragedy of Bourne’s death and the subsequent pain that aches in Weeper, having just literally and symbolically carried the weight of Bourne’s dead body on his shoulders.

While Sergeant-Major Tozer is more sympathetic and is willing to lend Weeper a listening ear, the major’s response is still to have Bourne’s body moved because “it wasn’t a pleasant sight”:

Bourne was sitting with his head back, his face plastered with mud, and blood drying thickly about his mouth and chin, while the glazed eyes stared up at the moon. Tozer moved away, with a quiet acceptance of the fact. It was finished. He was sorry about Bourne, he thought, more sorry than he could say. He was a queer chap, he said to himself, as he felt for the dugout steps. There was a bit of mystery about him; but then, when you come to think of it, there’s a bit of mystery about all of us. He pushed aside the blanket screening the entrance, and in the murky light he saw all the men lift their faces, and look at him with patient, almost animal eyes. Then they all bowed over their own thoughts again, listening to the shells bumping heavily outside…They sat there silently: each man keeping his own secret. (301)

If one is a mystery to oneself, it seems that one would be a mystery to someone else as well. The novel’s final image of men sitting silently, each keeping their own secrets, points to the intensely private nature of the war experience. And yet there is clearly a strain in the passage between the private and the social expressed in the transition from Tozer’s own private thought that “there was a bit of mystery about [Bourne]” to the narrator’s assessment that “there’s a bit of mystery about all of us.” The “secret” that each of the soldiers keep is actually the same secret and therefore a shared “secret.”

94
By highlighting this strain between the private and the social, Manning’s text hints that the social nature of war goes beyond the particular experiences of Bourne and his fellow comrades. As Manning portrays the blinding psychic experience of the Great War for soldiers such as Bourne, Shakespearian epigraphs that begin each chapter make the old new by positioning the Great War within a longer history, thus also situating Manning among his modernist contemporaries. In collecting war stories for his anthology *Men At War*, Hemingway said that his purpose was to show those about to enter World War II what others have done before them. “I would have given anything for a book,” writes Hemingway, “which showed what all the other men that we are a part of had gone through and how it had been with them…nothing could happen to me that had not happened to all men before me. Whatever I had to do men had always done” (Hemingway, *Men* 6). Not only then is each war its own social event—an event involving men who are “a part of” other men—but, as Hemingway frames it, a social event within the patterns of history. *The Middle Parts of Fortune* invites us, thereby, to examine the war experiences of others beyond the Somme and Ancre fronts of Manning’s soldiers, including other positions from which war is seen, such as the home front.
SECTION II

THE HOME FRONT
“It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them: the ragged and starving troops without shoes, the gaunt powder-blackened faces looking backward over tattered shoulders, the glaring eyes in which burned some indomitable desperation of undefeat…he could see it; he might even have been there. Then he thought No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain.”

—William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (1936)

When Quentin Compson envisions an episode from the Civil War and declares that his imagined reality of it is more clear and vivid than if he were to have actually witnessed the war in real life, he hints at the extent to which soldiers were psychically blinded in war—a motif that powerfully manifests itself in a literal way in Faulkner’s first novel, Soldiers’ Pay. Born thirty years after the Civil War, and into a family with a strong patriarchal military history, when the United States entered the First World War, Faulkner attempted to achieve a war experience that he could call his own. When the armistice was signed before he could complete his pilot training, Faulkner made up stories about his time in France, even going so far as affecting the pose of a wounded veteran by walking with a limp and posing for photographs in an officer’s uniform that he purchased: a “blue belted tunic, Sam Browne belt, two styles of trousers, two kinds of caps, a trench coat complete with flaps and equipment rings, and a cane and a swagger stick. On the left breast glittered a pair of wings…and on the shoulders the pips of a lieutenant” (Blotner 66). Faulkner scholars have long debated about the significance of comparing “the actual” and “the apocryphal” (Blotner 192) in his fiction, but few scholars have addressed the significance of Faulkner’s preoccupation with making his
fictional war experience *visible* on his body.¹⁹ These details from Faulkner’s biography become especially interesting when juxtaposed to his effort in *Soldiers’ Pay* to make the blindness of his protagonist (a WWI veteran named Donald Mahon) visible through the invocation of a scar across the veteran’s brow. Through a series of ironic moments in the text, Faulkner’s use of the scar shows blindness in ways that lead to showing seeing, thereby pushing up against the limitations of vision. Ultimately, for Faulkner and, as I will argue in the next chapter, for Woolf as well, the visual holds promise for its capacity to generate intersubjectivity—a more empathetically and socially aware form of vision that might correct the damaging consequences of privileged perceptions embedded in the socio-political power dynamics of race/gender/class/empire that hold potential for the kind of violence and objectification that war inspires.

The fact that Faulkner made such a strong effort to make war visible on his body is indicative of his larger investment in making the invisible visible. As with Hemingway, scholars have longed recognized Faulkner as a visual writer, analyzing the drawing of the eye in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), or the image of the coffin and the use of the blank space between words in *As I Lay Dying* (1930). And yet, despite Judith Sensibar’s assertion that Faulkner’s illustrations in *The Marrionettes* demonstrate his belief in “the intimate relationship between vision and artistic creativity” (Sensibar 133), there is also a clear ambivalence about what Thadious Davis calls “the epistemology of the visual” (Davis 112) in Faulkner’s fiction. Recently, scholars such as Thadious Davis and Ted Atkinson have built upon Eric Sundquist’s pioneering argument about “problems of race visibility” (rpt in Atkinson 131) in Faulkner’s work, by exploring how this racial visual

experience is filtered through techniques of contemporaneous visual technology. Davis, for example, explores Faulkner’s use of “specularity” and “cinematic descriptions” (Davis 108) in Light in August, as she traces the “consequence[s] of overreliance on the visual as a determinant of character and place marker of [racial] identity” (112). As she details the ways in which the characters in Light in August are “projected onto a screen,” she uncovers how, for Faulkner, “the seen can undermine the hidden essence or substance of human beings, and how for some that very essence is so distorted that it cannot be adequately recognized or accessed” (109). Along with Davis, Ted Atkinson, in “The Impenetrable Lightness of Being: Miscegenation, Imagery, and the Anxiety of Whiteness,” historically situates Faulkner’s writing within the context of the rising image culture, paying particular attention to the double-vision of the stereopticon (as image and technique) in Go Down Moses, a motif that Atkinson suggests helps Faulkner work through the problem of the black/white binary. As Atkinson argues, while the manipulated image of the stereopticon seemingly provided viewers with “a sense of power afforded by a privileged perspective…similar to the white gaze” (Atkinson 130), Faulkner’s deft control of imagery actually lays bare the ways in which double-vision engenders “a dynamic struggle of domination and resistance waged in large measure through sensory perceptions that influence individual, familial, and social relations” (139). Both Atkinson and Davis situate the pervasive instances of visual experience within social structures of cultural meaning, thereby reinforcing what Peter Lurie calls “a connection between visual experience and changes in social…reality” in Faulkner’s fiction (Lurie 170).
This chapter explores the role of visuality in the search for understanding and intersubjectivity in the aftermath of violence and war, while also uncovering how Faulkner extends the scope of social blindness about the war to include “old” views about other social issues such as race and gender. Scholars have, for a long time, remained suspect of Faulkner’s representation of the socio-political issues of race and gender. Stereotypical portrayals of black characters as “happy” servants to whites in Faulkner’s fiction indeed underscore his position as a white male southerner. As Riché Richardson argues of *Soldiers’ Pay*:

In Faulkner’s novel, the alienation of blacks from American democracy is patently clear. To whatever degree the raced, classed, and gendered ideology of the southern gentleman which had emerged in the antebellum era was attainable across the range of male subjects classed as white in the South, it wholly rejected and alienated black men. In some ways, this classic and coveted notion of the southern gentleman was contingent on the obverse of a degraded, disfranchised, and subjected black masculinity in the region... *Soldiers’ Pay* examines the lingering effects of subordination and subjection within the military on soldiers, particularly after the war, and the residual impact of war on the community, which is, in this case, mainly the South. But the conflicts and distinctions within the military...as they play out in the larger social world, exist exclusively among white men, the only soldiers represented. A view of blacks as a subordinate and excluded class in the South is evident in this novel. Blacks make marginal appearances as porters, maids, errand boys, and gardeners, and the novel emphasizes psychological struggles related to white masculinity...One would not imagine from reading *Soldiers’ Pay* that black soldiers participated in the First World War. (Richardson 75)

Richardson is right about the stereotypical representation of black male characters in *Soldiers’ Pay*. One of novel’s earliest portrayals of a black character is the figure of the train porter who “with the instinct of his race” carefully places pillows behind the heads of some of the military officers, “forcing them with ruthless kindness to relax” (*SP* 23).

Yet while, on the one hand, this portrayal of the porter seems to reinforce the depiction of black servants who were eager to please their white masters, it also remains ambiguous in...
the text whether this portrayal of the porter can be regarded as Faulkner’s own racial ideology. In fact, the racial dynamics in this scene become even more convoluted when Joe Gilligan (a drunk veteran on board the train) repeatedly asks the porter for drinking glasses for himself, as well as for the young cadet Julian Lowe, though he is told that there is no drinking allowed in this particular car:

‘Claude,’ he told a superior porter, ‘bring us two glasses and a bottle of sassperiller or something. We are among gentlemen to-day and we aim to act like gentlemen.’
‘Watcher want glasses for?’ asked Lowe. ‘Bottle was all right yesterday.’
‘You got to remember we are getting among strangers now. We don’t want to offend no savage customs. Wait till you get to be an experienced traveler and you’ll remember these things. Two glasses, Othello.’ The porter in his starched jacket became a symbol of self-sufficiency. ‘You can’t drink in this car. Go to the buffet car.’

[…]

Private Gilligan turned to his companion. ‘Well! What do you know about that? Ain’t that one hell of a way to treat soldiers? I tell you…this is the worst run war I have ever seen.’ (SP 20)

While Gilligan jokingly calls the porter “Claude” and “Othello,” Faulkner’s decision to invoke these particular references at this early point in the novel hints at an intersecting of his own experience with the experience of the porter. While Claude recalls Shakespeare’s soldier, Claudio, in Much Ado About Nothing, it is the Othello reference that is most striking: for Othello, the “moor,” is an embodiment of the soldier who is also a foreigner, a stranger in a strange land. Gilligan’s racial attitude toward blacks in the novel (“‘Git up dar boy, Dat white man talkin’ to you’” (SP 298)) indicate that he is entirely unaware of the extent to which returning soldiers like himself and Donald Mahon will feel like outsiders when they arrive home. Thus, while Richardson is right to point out that Soldiers’ Pay “emphasizes psychological struggles related to white masculinity,” his analysis does not fully address the complex intersections of experience that Faulkner
is highlighting. Most importantly, Richardson’s analysis focuses exclusively on Faulkner’s representation of black male characters, which therefore overlooks, arguably, one of the most important characters in the novel: a black war widow and former Red Cross nurse named Mrs. Powers. As I will argue, Faulkner’s creation of the character of Mrs. Powers allows him to extend the critique of social blindness about the war to include other social issues on the home front such as race and gender.

Thus, while Faulkner certainly demonstrates a level of ambivalence about the visual, he also emphasizes the critical role of the visual in the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as well a potential that the intersubjectivity of sight might address the racial tensions reverberating out of the South in these postwar years. As Faulkner recognizes the limitations and problematic nature of the visual, he simultaneously asks us to look at our vision by repositioning vision as the object of vision in Soldiers’ Pay, thereby putting into practice what W.J.T. Mitchell has called “showing seeing” (making the invisible practice of ‘seeing’ visible). As I will argue, this kind of seeing invites the possibility of redefining the visual outside the lens of violently war-torn bodies and controlling societal surveillance, a definition of vision that might be best understood through Martin Jay’s thematization of le regard. Commenting on Foucault’s discussion of this theme, Jay notes: “With characteristic ascetic rigor, Foucault thus resisted exploring vision’s reciprocal, intersubjective, communicative potential, that of the mutual glance. Le regard never assumed for him its alternative meaning in English as well as French: to pay heed to or care for someone else” (Jay, Downcast 414). “Perhaps the real task these days is,” Jay writes, “to probe the ways in which the sense of ‘looking after’ someone is as much as a possibility as ‘looking at’ them in le regard, and ‘watching out
for someone’ is an ethical alternative to controlling surveillance” (Jay, “Visual” 89). Jay’s use of *le regard* sounds most similar to Faulkner, Borden, and Woolf’s approach to vision, as it reminds us that perceiving the other, and apprehending that the other also perceives, is made possible by the inherently reflexive nature of seeing.

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Most of the plot of *Soldiers’ Pay* occurs after the war has ended. Unlike Borden and Manning’s texts which present the war from the close proximity of the war zone, the war itself in *Soldiers’ Pay* is only present through the visual scar on the face of Donald Mahon (a blinded and dying World War I aviator), as well as a brief flashback to his final moments in combat. Most of the novel’s action concerns the perceptions and behaviors of the townspeople when two strangers, Joe Gilligan and Margaret Powers, observe the blinded, physically scarred, amnesiac, and generally incapacitated aviator on a train, and take it upon themselves to bring the dying man home to his hometown of Charlestown, Georgia. Thus, Faulkner’s novel introduces the relation of the “home front” to the “war front.” Both Gilligan and Mrs. Powers (strangers to one another) have ties to the war, which seems to be what propels them to take care of this man who they do not know: Joe Gilligan is a soldier who is on the train drinking in celebration of the armistice, and Mrs. Powers is a “dark” war widow, with a mouth “like a red scar,” who worked as a nurse for the Red Cross. In addition to these characters, Julian Lowe, a young cadet for whom the war ends too soon, is also aboard the train. (He drops out of the novel’s main plot after the first chapter, only re-appearing briefly in the form postcards to Mrs. Powers, with whom he has convinced himself he is in love despite the fact that only met her briefly on the train.) Once Mrs. Powers and Gilligan bring Donald home, the rest of the novel
details the ignorance of the civilian community in Charlestown, especially Donald’s father and the young Cecily Saunders whom Donald was planning on marrying once he returned from the war. Cecily is horrified both by the scar on Donald’s face and the very fact that a “black, ugly woman” (SP 135) has brought him home. She breaks off the engagement and, in the meantime, neither Cecily nor Donald’s father seem to be aware that Donald is blind, let alone that he’s dying. Mrs. Powers, whose husband (Richard Powers) was killed in the war, feels a sense of guilt that she had fallen out of love with her husband before he died. Similar to the ways which Borden’s nurse functions as a threshold between the binary structures of the war front and the home front, Mrs. Powers’s war experience situates her in a liminal space that allows her to intersubjectively recognize Donald’s suffering—a suffering that is reinforced by her position within a history of being marked by racial violence. Her intersubjective recognition of Donald manifests itself in her eventual marriage to him, a marriage that she hopes might give him the will to live. Shortly thereafter, Donald dies, but not before he has a brief moment of lucidity, as he remembers his wartime experience and the events surrounding the moment when his plane was shot down in France.

Soldiers’ Pay is certainly an apprentice work and scholars have generally treated it as such. It is often left out of the canon of First World War novels and, for scholars of modernism, the work pales in comparison to Faulkner’s well-known masterpieces. While the novel hints at Faulkner’s modernism (multiple narration and stream of consciousness), these modern techniques are oddly juxtaposed to a plot that verges on Victorian romance. As Daniel Singal argues, “Although filled with up-to-date literary techniques borrowed from Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, Anderson, and Conrad in a self-conscious
effort to appear modern, [Soldiers’ Pay] is still essentially post-Victorian in its basic orientation,” especially in terms of its handling of sexuality (Singal 61). Moreover, critics have noted the novel’s seemingly disconnected and ghostly written cast of minor characters: “Soldiers’ Pay fails to interrelate its cast of characters persuasively, as though there remain ghostly unwritten materials behind the palpably written ones” (Weinstein 28). Secondary plotlines that involve minor characters include Januarius Jones, a lustful Latin Professor who makes unwanted advances toward every female character in the novel, including the father’s housekeeper, Emmy, with whom Donald once had an affair. Singal observes “Faulkner’s puzzlement and hesitation about the cultural transition” (Singal 63) between the old Victorian culture and the modern, pointing to examples such as the contrast between Donald’s status as a living corpse, which allows him to maintain sensuality without corruption despite having had a sexual encounter with Emmy, and Januarius Jones’ ravenous sexual appetite which shares similarities to the provocative sensualities of the jazz age. With a strain between the old and the modern, along with disconnected characters and storylines, scholars have commented on the extent to which Faulkner tries to do too much in Soldiers’ Pay, or as Olga Vickery puts it: “using a steam shovel to lift a grain of sand” (Vickery 2).

While Soldiers’ Pay is by no means a perfect novel, and while it’s obvious that Faulkner, at that point in his career, had yet to perfect his craft, it’s also worth considering that these limits of the novel may be part of Faulkner’s narrative strategy. For it’s clear that one of the ways in which critics have been frustrated with Soldiers’ Pay is for its lack of character development, particularly when it comes to Donald. As a minor character, Januarius Jones’ only purpose, as Singal argues, is “to serve as a spiritual
counter to Mahon” (Singal 66). Yet as Vickery points out, “If the novel was meant to be built around the dramatic tension between these two figures, then it fails, for Donald’s complete passivity is an insufficient foil for Jones’ rampaging vitality” because Donald is entirely oblivious to Jones’ existence: “the two of them never meet nor establish any direct awareness of each other” (Vickery 2). Yet while the passivity of the novel’s central character is certainly a narrative difficulty, it is also a narrative choice that allows Faulkner to play with transforming the subjectivity of seeing into an object of perception itself. Meanwhile, Donald’s passivity unsettles traditional notions of masculinity in war—traditions in war which Faulkner himself never lived up to in his own family’s patriarchal lineage. As Donald’s father is unable to recognize the devastating reality of his son’s condition, Faulkner highlights the ways in which war breeds a masculine inheritance that not only generates war and dissociation, but also creates blind spots between the war and home fronts.

As Singal and Vickery have established, Januarius Jones functions as a foil to Donald Mahon, particularly in their vitality and passivity, respectively. This contrast is manifested most notably in their sexual appetites, which Faulkner links to their visual sense. Thus, the blinded vision of the wounded, impotent, and dying Donald contrasts to the “clear obscene eyes” (SP 85) of Januarius Jones. While Donald’s blindness and head injury leaves him generally incapacitated, or as the doctor in the novel says, living in a “body [that] is already dead” (SP 151), Jones is entirely wrapped up in bodily desires, as evidenced by his lasciviousness throughout the novel: while at a jazz club, Jones puts his arm around Cecily “as though it were attached by suction, like an octopus’ tentacle” (SP 203). The phallic imagery of Jones’ unrelenting “tentacle” serves as a foil to innuendos
about Donald’s sexual impotence. Mrs. Burney (the mother of one of Donald’s friends who was killed in the war) asks Mrs. Powers: “He’s all right, ain’t he?” I mean for marriage. He ain’t—it’s just—I mean a man ain’t no right to palm himself off on a woman if he ain’t—” (SP 254). Mrs. Burney hints at the question of Donald’s impotency, and while this question remains somewhat ambiguous in the novel, Freud’s association of blindness and castration in his 1919 essay “The Uncanny” suggests a close relation between the two: “A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is often a substitute for the dread of being castrated” (Freud 139). With eyes that are often described as “clear and yellow, obscene and old in sin as a goat’s,” Jones’ dominant male gaze assaults women by objectifying them through his vision, thereby serving as a foil to Donald whose status as a living corpse renders him an objectified figure as well (SP 63). On the one hand, we might read the figure of the goat as it is often interpreted biblically, as a symbol of sin. Certainly Faulkner characterizes Jones’ gaze as evil and degrading in its obscenity. At the same time, however, Jones’ “goat-like” vision also emphasizes Jones’s abilities as a seer: the horizontal slit-shaped pupils that goats (and other animals with hooves) share increases their peripheral depth perception, allowing them to see nearly all around them without having to move their body or head. In this sense, Jones’ “goat-like” vision becomes synonymous with the all-seeing eye of surveillance, as the narrator describes how “under [Jones’] eyes [Cecily] walked mincing and graceful, theatrical with body consciousness to the desk” (SP 66). This panoptic gaze is so strong that it nullifies the gaze of others, particularly in moments where Emmy and Cecily have to resort to looking away from him in an effort to avoid his eyes (SP 65).
In terms of the novel’s structure, Jones plays a minor role and, as Olga Vickery has established, the lack of character development (of both Donald and Jones), along with their isolated storylines, does not allow their apparent contrast to ever fully materialize. However, the brief appearances of Jones are significant because they highlight the kind of objectifying vision that victimizes Donald himself. While Donald is the novel’s central character, his war wounds also render him the most underdeveloped and ghostly character in the novel. Other characters observe him, talk to him, and talk about him, but his identity is entirely enmeshed in the (mis)perceptions and insensitivity of those around him.

To a certain degree, Donald’s scar (as a visual image) carries out what might be understood as Faulkner’s critique of the visual, in the sense that it exemplifies the problematic role that the visual plays in the marking of people as other and the limitations of the visual in signifying that which is hidden beneath the surface. Much in the way that Faulkner felt the need to affect a visible limp in order to “prove” his war experience (however fictional it may be), in Soldiers’ Pay Faulkner attaches a scar to the face of his protagonist to visually signify for his invisible wound of blindness. Throughout the novel, the scar functions as a gruesome spectacle others either gaze upon with curiosity and excitement or turn away from in disgust and horror. The young cadet, Julian Lowe, is jealous of Donald’s scar, viewing it as a symbol of heroic glory (SP 21); young girls in Charlestown are curious enough “to look upon his face” but then turn “quickly aside in hushed nausea” (SP 145); young boys in the neighborhood gather around to see the “show,” only “to go away fretted because he wouldn’t tell any war stories” (SP 144-45); and the brother of Donald’s fiancé, Robert Saunders, is so curious to see the visibly
wounded soldier that he climbs over a fence one night and shines a flashlight into
Donald’s window in order to catch a glimpse of “what his scar looks like” (SP 97).

In effect, the scar becomes a metonymic replacement for Donald himself,
therefore stripping the wounded veteran of his subjectivity and rendering him an
insensate object. This is already evidenced in the reader’s first introduction to Donald’s
character. On board a train, Julian Lowe is drinking whiskey along with Joe Gilligan and
others in celebration of the armistice. Through Lowe’s focalization, the narrator tells us
that Lowe “saw a belt and wings, he rose and met a young face with a dreadful scar
across his brow” (SP 21). The position of the scar on Donald’s brow (or forehead)
indicates a wound to the frontal lobe, the part of the brain that is responsible for behavior,
learning, personality, and voluntary movement—essentially the key elements that make
a person. As Donald’s war wound unsettles his subjective identity, Lowe’s objectifying
perception of him intensifies his fragmentation and alienation. Alcohol has impaired
Lowe’s vision, leading him to see Donald metonymically, seeing not the man himself but
pieces of the man, the scar and uniform insignia that stand in for the man and the image
of the virile soldier more largely. He reads his scar and uniform insignia as symbols of
heroic glory, thinking to himself jealously: “Had I been old enough or lucky enough, this
might have been me” (SP 21). Donald’s condition—his “puzzled gaze” (SP 106) and
confused mental state—leaves Lowe to attach these meanings onto him without any
recognition or validation from the man himself. A cadet for whom the war ended too
soon, Lowe’s inexperience has left him with an idyllic and naïve understanding about
war, as he feels envious of the marks that the war has made on Donald—a kind of
figurative blindness that is mirrored symbolically in his own “glassy-eyed” (SP 33) vision
as a result of drinking too much whiskey. Even as it “shows” Donald’s war wounds, the
scar’s ability to convey meaning comes undone when others misperceive it. Unlike Mrs.
Powers and Gilligan (both of whom had firsthand experience in the war), the
townspeople in Charlestown misperceive the scar when they fail to see the invisible
wounds behind it, namely Donald’s blindness and supposed brain injury. Only seeing the
visual marks and symbols, and interpreting them through an already indoctrinated point
of view, Lowe’s perceptions become representative of a larger group of characters who
simply “see” with their eyes, failing to reflect upon their act of looking, paradoxically
turning the scar into a signifier for the blindness of, not Donald, but the civilians
themselves.

By turning the visuality of the scar into a signifier for the invisible process of
seeing/not seeing, Faulkner turns the visual on its ear, making the process of vision itself
the object of perception. Faulkner emphasizes the visibility of the scar by never
describing it to the audience but, instead, focusing on giving the audience a sense of its
visibility by limiting our perception to the perceptions others have of the scar. Much in
the way that the sights of war were visually traumatic to some soldiers, the sighting of the
scar becomes a similar form of trauma, with characters in Soldiers’ Pay suffering a
similar form of shock. In this way the war carries over from the battle zone and Faulkner
thus calls readers beyond their blindness by displaying the effects of looking away. This
is illustrated when Donald’s fiancé, Cecily, sees his scar for first time:

They heard swift tapping feet crossing a room and the study door opened
letting a flood of light fall upon them and Cecily cried: ‘Donald! Donald!
She says your face is hur----oooooh!’ she ended, screaming as she saw
him. The light passing through her fine hair gave her a halo and lent her
frail dress a fainting nimbus about her crumpling body like a stricken
poplar. Mrs. Powers moving quickly caught her, but not before her head had struck the door jamb. (*SP* 90)

While for Lowe, the scar signifies the heroic glory that he was never able to experience himself, for Cecily, and other civilians in Charlestown, the visibility of Donald’s disfigured face brings the war home, displacing the propaganda by making the war visible in their own American homes and public streets. Meanwhile, for the audience, instead of making Donald the object of vision, when the door opens, Faulkner turns the lens upon Cecily and the other civilians. While the assumption is that Cecily is about to say, “your face is hurt,” the abrupt ending of the word not only signals an inability to empathize, but also an inability even to identify the visual sight, which we as readers are also unable to do as a result. Ironically Cecily hits her head on the door jam, likely inflicting a wound on her own head. Afterward, she refuses to marry Donald, pleading to her parents that if they “could have seen his face” (*SP* 98) they would understand her refusal. Donald’s literally blinding head wound in turn prompts Cecily’s figuratively blinding head wound: thus does Faulkner trace the infectious power of the war’s blinding effects, including as literal and figurative, or social, forms of blindness interact.

Although Donald is virtually blind, for a good portion of the novel his civilian friends and family fail to recognize this, an oversight that stands in assumptions about Donald’s identity as a manly and able soldier. When we first meet Donald’s father, an elderly clergyman who thinks his son has been killed in action, he gazes upon a picture of Donald taken before he left for the war. When Mrs. Powers arrives and informs him that his son has returned, the photograph becomes, for Donald’s father, a symbolic image of the son who will be returning home to him. Despite Mrs. Powers’ admonition that Donald is not well, Rector Mahon holds onto the belief that once Donald marries Cecily, he’ll be

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his old self again (SP 77). Thus, Donald’s father wishes for a certain kind of blindness in Cecily so she will marry Donald, a different kind of blindness from the one she exercises, though still accumulating toward a larger social blindness. This is particularly unsettling given Rector Mahon’s vocation as clergyman, as he symbolically becomes a blind spiritual guide leading others into oblivion. With most of the characters viewing the visibility of Donald’s scar as the sum of his injury and the reason for his inactivity and loss of cognitive abilities, the injuries that are not visible on the surface (his blindness and impending death) are left unknown.

The blindness of the Rector and the other civilian characters generates an entire discourse of blindness and seeing in the verbs of the novel. While Mrs. Powers thinks that “[a]nyone could look at [Donald]” (SP 113) and know the gravity of his injuries, the notion that Donald’s injuries might go deeper than the scar doesn’t even enter the Rector’s mind. Failing to “look” at Donald, Rector Mahon is blind to his son’s blindness, evidenced when uses visual rhetoric to explain how Donald’s seeing of others will help him get well. Rector Mahon tells Cecily’s father, for example, that Donald “will be glad to see an old friend” and “surely Donald can see [Mr. Saunders] at any time (SP 110-111, emphasis mine). As readers we are aware that Donald’s scar is a visible mark that points to more serious invisible wounds, including blindness, yet Rector Mahon oddly doesn’t realize this until more than halfway through the novel, when a specialist, Dr. Gary, tells him: “Boy’s blind. Been blind three or four days. How you didn’t know it I can’t see” (SP 163). Faulkner’s use of visual rhetoric in this passage is key, as Dr. Gary cannot “see” how Donald’s father could not “see” that all this time his son has not been able to “see.” Mrs. Powers and Gilligan are fully aware all along that Donald has been blind and
try to comfort Rector Mahon with the hope that Donald’s vision might eventually be restored, telling him: “Let’s get him well and then we can see” (SP 164). As a transitive verb, the word “see” takes on the implied direct object of Donald’s blindness, in the sense that they will get him well and “see” if his vision improves. Yet the syntax of the sentence also suggests that “see” could be read as an intransitive verb, suggesting that their own sight might be restored if Donald’s condition were to improve. Thus, there is a sense in which Donald’s blindness and impending doom disrupts the community’s cohesion and the comfort they take in their ignorance to the reality of war.

Though Donald is the only character is who is actually blind, other characters in the novel suffer their own forms of literal and figurative blindness as well: Januarius Jones is “temporarily blind[ed]” and “stumble[s] violently over an object” after staring straight into the sun without blinking (SP 60-61); Cecily’s white dress is described as having an “unbearable shimmer” when the sun hits it, blinding those who look at her in the direct sunlight (SP 85); Cecily, herself, has trouble looking at Donald’s scar, covering her eyes and burying her face when she sees him (SP 133); Donald’s father used to spend his time reading, but now gardens because his eyes are too poor to read (SP 104); and Mrs. Burney (the mother of one of Donald’s friends who was killed in the war) has an illusion about her son’s heroism in the war that is mirrored in descriptions of her taking or doing things “blindly” (SP 177, 180). Additionally, Faulkner’s narrator speaks with harsh post-war disillusionment when he describes “solid business men interested in the Ku Klux Klan more than in war, and interested in war only as a matter of dollar and cents, while their wives chatted about clothes to each other across Mahon’s scarred, oblivious brow” (SP 145), possibly referring to the moral blindness of politicians and...
munitions makers who were accused of prolonging the War for their own personal profit.²⁰

The community’s failure to see Donald’s blindness, and by extension their failure to see his impending demise, escalates Donald’s status as an object. For Emmy, in particular, Donald’s former lover before the war, Donald’s failure to “look” at her is especially hurtful, as she cries at one point: “‘But me, me! He didn’t even look at me!’” (SP 106). Donald’s inability to “look” at Emmy plays out as a Hegelian dialectic in which not-seeing and not-being-seen multiply, with neither Emmy nor Donald being recognized. Remembering an evening they spent under the stars, Emmy recalls their symbiotic relationship, noting that “he was beautiful” and that his loving made “her feel beautiful, too” (SP 270). Emmy’s need for an answering gaze and an affirmation of her own visibility operates intersubjectively with Emmy’s identity being encapsulated in Donald’s blinded vision. Without Donald’s recognition, Emmy becomes invisible. And while Donald’s blindness and declining cognitive condition makes recognition and desire of Emmy impossible, paradoxically, by not seeing that Donald cannot see, Donald is also not being recognized, thereby undercutting the conditions of her own intersubjective orientation.

It’s not surprising, therefore, that receiving recognition from another visually and psychologically marked subject, Mrs. Powers, is finally what momentarily reestablishes Donald as a seeing subject. While Cecily is rendered as the angelic white young girl, often described as basking in the joy of the sunlight, “as though she were the daughter of light,” (SP 80) the first description of Mrs. Powers is that she is “dark” (SP 27). With

²⁰ Alexander Watson confirms this, explaining that “[o]n both sides, suspicion grew that politicians and profiteers were prolonging the war for their own benefit” (Watson 75).
dark skin, dark hair, dark clothes, and a “mouth like a scar,” (SP 36) Mrs. Powers is linked to a kind of invisible pain and suffering that is similar to Donald’s. As a young woman whose experience as a nurse allowed her to see the violence of war, and as someone who lost her husband while he was fighting in France, she “know[s] all the terror of parting, of that passionate desire to cling to something concrete in a dark world” (SP 32). Just as Cecily misunderstands Donald, she also misperceives Mrs. Powers and assumes that she’s his mistress: “He’s got that black woman” (SP 138). Complex coordinates of race and gender collide when Mrs. Powers sees it as her calling to give herself up in sacrifice by marrying Donald:

‘What is he waiting for? He is practically a dead man now. More than that, he should have been dead these three months were it not for the fact that he seems to be waiting for something. Something he has begun, but has not completed, something he has carried from his former life that he does not remember consciously. That is his only hold on life that I can see.’ (SP 150-151)

Much in the way that soldiers like Donald and Dick sacrificed their individual identities for the public good, Mrs. Powers gives herself up in sacrifice by marrying Donald, an act that symbolizes the ultimate form of recognition of the other. However, this marriage does not easily fit within the literary tradition of the marriage plot—a tradition made popular by eighteenth and nineteenth century writers such as Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, and George Eliot—whereby the union of a man and a woman at the end of the novel solves all of the narrative’s conflicts. Rather, the union of Donald and Mrs. Powers expresses this symbolic “seeing” and this is what finally sets Donald free, for it is only after marrying her that he momentarily regains his vision and memory and dies peacefully. Thus, Faulkner’s modernism in Soldiers’ Pay manifests in his insistence upon the reality of the war as a matter of perspective. While the scar functions as an image that
shows blindness throughout the novel, the momentary restoration of Donald’s vision and memory functions as a moment of showing seeing, as Faulkner reestablishes Donald as a subject who sees because his physicality is fully, intersubjectively seen—as opposed to being simply a passive object that is only partially seen.

Although in its final scenes, the narrative presents Donald as remembering something about the events leading to his injury, his recollection remains largely obscured to both the reader and, presumably, to the other characters in the novel, as well. Faulkner writes the account of Donald’s memory of the injury as largely sensory and impressionistic (i.e. the feeling of shocks at the base of his skull and the way his vision flickered) because his purpose is not to tell us what happened to Donald. Instead Faulkner forces us to participate in Donald’s limited vision and memory—to see that limit and acknowledge the damage inflicted by war on the human body and psyche. The presentation of Donald’s memory of that day is revealed to readers in the narrative’s third-person narration of Donald’s dream, as indicated by Gilligan, Mrs. Powers, and Rector Mahon who are watching him sleep in the garden. Donald’s memory begins with the only moment of direct discourse from him: “I never knew I could carry this much petrol, he thought” (SP 289). This invocation of the first person narrative voice is followed by the narrative’s description of Donald’s routine in the cockpit. Yet as the scene comes closer and closer to the moment of the accident, narrative clarity gives way to narrative obscurity and information about what exactly happened to Donald is left out:

Then, suddenly, it was as if a cold wind had blown upon him. What is it? he thought. It was that the sun had been suddenly blotted from him…Sight flickered on again, like a poorly made electrical contact, he watched the holes pitting into the fabric near him like a miraculous small-pox…Then he felt his hand, saw his glove burst, saw his bare bones. Then sight flashed off again and he felt himself lurch, falling until his belt caught him
sharply across the abdomen, and he heard something gnawing through his
frontal bone, like mice….His father’s heavy face hung over him in the
dusk…He knew sight again and an imminent nothingness more profound
than any yet…‘That’s how it happened,’ he said, staring at [his father].
(SP 290)

With the utterance of “I” comes a restoration of the “eye,” as intersubjective connection
re-establishes Donald as a seeing subject. This intersubjective connection manifests itself
symbolically in a union with Mrs. Powers, but also in the visual recognition from his
father whose “heavy face [hangs] over him in the dusk.” As in Jean-Paul Sartre’s “I see
myself because somebody sees me,” (rpt. in Jay, Downcast 289) Donald’s self-
consciousness and subjectivity are located in the look of another. The momentary
restoration of Donald’s vision exists on two levels: first, there is the visualization within
Donald’s mind of his literal vision at the time of the accident, and secondly, there is
Donald’s literally regained eyesight after the visualization, manifesting itself in the form
of a “stare” at his father’s face. The four words of direct dialogue at the end of the
description of Donald’s visualization (“that’s how it happened”) are the only words
Donald ever says aloud in the novel, and while the words spoken to his father are meant
to function as an explanatory phrase, they reveal very little to Rector Mahon (or us)
because the antecedent for “that” (the facts or information) is not articulated out loud and,
moreover, what’s narrated to readers is not necessarily a explanation of what happened to
Donald, but rather a subjective, fragmented, impressionistic account of Donald’s sensory
and psychic experience. Therefore, the phrase “that’s how it happened” carries meaning
only for Donald himself, as intersubjective connection has reinvested him with
subjectivity, autonomy, and the privacy which the self inherently entails.
On the one hand we might read the representation of Donald’s memory as a rhetorical and ethical decision that Faulkner makes in order to resist converting Donald’s private, psychological pain into a story that satisfies the morbid curiosity of onlookers who desire to know what the scar signifies. Yet at the same time, for Faulkner, it’s not a matter of seeing the war story so we can know what happened; it’s a matter of the injured subject coming to terms with his own experience. Though this act of “showing seeing” gives the reader access to Donald’s subjective vision, Faulkner gives readers the occluding and impressionistic account of the accident because it establishes Donald’s subjectivity as the other who cannot be fully known. Yet by showing Donald seeing, the way his “sight flickered,” his view of “holes pitting into the fabric near him,” his perception of his “glove burst[ing],” and the sight of “his bare bones” exposed, Faulkner hints at a new form of vision, whereby seeing is not merely seeing the other visually, but metaphorically seeing as the other sees and intersubjectively recognizing the other’s unique and private experience.\footnote{Clifford Wulfman points out that the referent for Donald’s words here are “uncitable” and that the phrase “that’s how it happened” essentially means “‘that is how I died,’” which is in itself an “unspeakable phrase.”}

Not having any firsthand experience in the war himself, Faulkner writes the war from the perspective of the home front and aligns the violence of the visually marked soldier with the violence of being racially or sexually marked. However, while recognition from Mrs. Powers (now Mrs. Mahon) is, in part, what finally sets Donald free, she is conveniently left “married, and never [having] felt so alone” (SP 275). Donald’s death makes her twice a widow and although Gilligan confesses her love for her at the end, she denies him because she’s “too young to bury three husbands” (SP 302). Visually marked by her race and gender, and emotionally and psychologically marked by
her experience in the Red Cross and the death of two husbands to the violence of war, Mrs. Powers is left unable to love. Yet even as we might question what’s to come of Mrs. Powers, the novel still ends with Faulkner’s unimpeded faith for the future—in his words, “All the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something somewhere” (SP 315). As Donald’s father and Gilligan stand outside a black church, they hear the ‘good news’ of gospel music: “They stood together in the dust, the rector in his shapeless black, and Gilligan in his new hard serge, listening, seeing the shabby church become beautiful with mellow longing, passionate and sad...and they turned townward under the moon, feeling dust under their shoes” (SP 319). For Faulkner, this “oneness” is rooted in an intersubjectivity of sight fused together with spirituality and beauty, as “listening” to the experience of the other engenders a visual transformation, and ultimately, the possibility of a social reformation of the eye. As the next chapter will consider, for writers like Virginia Woolf, the “oneness” and collectivity of seeing, along with its inherent reflexivity, carries with it the connotation that the visual may be able to regenerate itself through itself, with the aesthetic qualities and intersubjective nature of the visual serving as an antidote to the visual’s other more violent and objectifying forms.
CHAPTER 4
THE WAY TO EMPATHY: INTERSUBJECTIVE VISION
IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S MRS. DALLOWAY

“As Standing by the cupboard in the corner he saw her reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, their bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass.”
—Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (1941)

As many scholars have established, moments of seeing in Woolf’s fiction are often characterized as moments of oppression and violence, or as moments of misperception. Referring to the opening pages of Woolf’s posthumously published Between the Acts, which describe Bart Oliver’s aerial view of the scarred landscape “plainly marked” (BTA 3) by the history of war, Sarah Cole underscores Woolf’s representation of Britain as a place that has “very literally [been] marked by violence” (Cole, Violet Hour 270). Meanwhile, when the visual is not wrapped up in physical and psychical violence in Woolf’s fiction, it fails to provide epistemological certainty about the visible world. As James Harker has argued, “moments of looking or noticing,” in Woolf’s fiction, “are not important for information about the real world but rather for the thoughts that they inspire” (Harker 1). Some of Woolf’s earliest writings illustrate Harker’s point, such as “The Mark on the Wall,” a short story that records the epistemological uncertainty of the narrator who sees “a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece” (Woolf, MT 59). As the narrator attempts to identify the visual sight, she takes the audience on a narrative journey led by the associative thoughts that the mark elicits. Like Bernard in The Waves, for whom, “the surface of [his] mind slips along like a pale-grey stream, reflecting what passes,” (W 113) in “The Mark on the Wall,” the narrator’s “thoughts swarm upon a new
object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it’’
(MT 59).

Based on these observations, Woolf’s approach to the visual may seem unfavorable at the very least, and yet paradoxically her writings continuously resist a denunciation of visual experience. In fact, Woolf’s war fiction—her writings that most thoroughly grapple with visual violence and the physical and psychical blindness that subsequently emerges from such torrential upheaval—illustrates an intense faith in the visual as its own force of regeneration. Thus, in Between The Acts, when Lucy Swithin and William Dodge’s eyes make contact in the mirror, Woolf manipulates the violence of subjectification that Dodge suffers as a figure of alterity and the verbal abuse that Lucy suffers in her damaging relationship with her brother by severing Lucy and Dodge’s eyes from their bodies (which is itself a violent image) and transforming that violence into a moment of empathy and intersubjective recognition. While giving Dodge a tour of Pointz Hall, Lucy (reflecting on her own thoughts) momentarily forgets Dodge’s name, however she ultimately recognizes her ethical responsibility to him as a social human being—a realization that Woolf underscores symbolically through touch and a mutual look in the mirror:

‘But we have other lives, I think, I hope,’ she murmured. ‘We live in others, Mr….We live in things’

She spoke simply. She spoke with an effort. She spoke as if she must overcome her tiredness out of charity towards a stranger, a guest. She had forgotten his name. Twice she had said ‘Mr.’ and stopped. […]

She had lent him a hand to help him up a steep place. She had guessed his trouble…Standing by the cupboard in the corner he saw her reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, at their eyes in the glass. (49)
Lucy’s capacity to “guess [Dodge’s] trouble” carries with it the connotation that she senses the trauma he suffers as a result of his painful history of sexual abjection. As Woolf severs Dodge and Lucy from each of their bodies, (which, for Dodge in particular, is a source of judgment and subjectification), she in fact severs them from a history of a violence and performance and hints at a new form of vision that embraces unity and genuine intersubjectivity.

Looking ahead to the coming of the Second World War, Between the Acts is a befitting indicator of Woolf’s philosophy throughout her career, especially in her earlier war novels. In fact, as Woolf’s First World War fiction builds upon the attention to blindness and visuality addressed by other modernist writers, we can see how the assaults on vision in a war-ravaged world prompted her to cultivate new forms of looking that both acknowledge and repair the violence. Thus, while Woolf’s critique of the visual in Mrs. Dalloway registers her commentary on the social blindness of a culture caught up in visuality only as commodity, fetishism, spectacle, and power—social structures and values that were responsible for the war’s events in the first place, her novel also illustrates an investment in the visual insofar as it has the capacity to repair the violence and social blindness. Rather than abandoning the visual, Woolf joins other modernists in transforming it through recognition of the intersubjectivity of sight, as well as embracing the beauty that is entangled in intersubjectivity, generated in part by its being shared. However, in order to fully appreciate Woolf’s reparation and valorization of the visual, we must first attend to the ways that she depicts it as problematic and damaged, especially in a time of war.
The first scenes of collective vision in *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrate how it can operate dangerously as a vehicle of interpellation by an authoritative and war-generating culture. As the novel opens, Clarissa is running errands on the streets of post-war London, getting ready for her party that evening. As critics have noted, even though “the War [is] over,” it is still on the minds of many during the novel’s one ordinary day in June: Mrs. Foxcroft mourns the loss of a boy who was killed (*MD* 5); Clarissa recalls the moment when Lady Bexborough receives a telegram informing her that her favorite, John, was killed (*MD* 5); and Miss Kilman, who was dismissed from her teaching position because of her German nationality, thinks of how the war ruined her career (*MD* 12). These lingering effects of the war permeate the shared consciousness of the community and are brought to the forefront once again when the noise of a car backfiring registers in Clarissa’s mind as the sound of a gunshot (*MD* 13). Woolf renders this auditory moment as a communal one when the third-person omniscient narrator reveals to us how other characters responded to the sound:

The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Miss Pym go to the window and apologise came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry’s shop window. Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey. (*MD* 13-14)

Audition converges with visuality here, as the car’s sound calls attention to the car itself as a material and visual object. And while the brevity of the sound means that perhaps only Clarissa, Miss Pym, and other immediate bystanders experience this moment of simultaneous perception, the visibility of the car remains long after the sound has disappeared, so that a manifold of perspectives registers among the ever-increasing
Sentences such as “For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way” and “Every one looked at the motor car” establishes visual perception as a unifying experience (MD 16-17). Thus, the movement from audition to vision is an indication of Woolf’s sense of the way all physical experiences can be caught up in a wish for communal meaning or belonging.

Yet even as the crowd is unified in their congruous perception, Woolf illustrates their inability to see clearly through the social vision of hegemonic paradigms. When the figure inside the car draws the window blind, leaving “nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey” upholstery, this creates curiosity in the onlookers who together interpret this symbolic signifier and speculate about the car’s occupant. As the narrator explains:

[R]umors were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson’s scent shop on the other, passing invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, *veil-like* upon hills...[M]ystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the *voice of authority*; *the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight* and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales’s, the Queen’s, the Prime Minister’s? Whose face was it? Nobody knew. (MD 14, emphasis mine)

While the car doesn’t necessarily contain anyone important, the onlookers, without communicating with another, unanimously endow the vehicle with official importance because of their inability to see inside of it. Though disputing whether it is the Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister, they all agree, “there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within” (MD 16). Woolf illustrates how the blind belief of the spectators parallels

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the opaque vision of civilians looking for information about the war. Much in the way that news about the war often came to English citizens in the form of myths, lies, and propaganda, rumors about who is hidden behind the blind flow through the shared consciousness of the crowd. Unable to escape their presuppositions, the gazers are left at a distance, unable to penetrate the blind spot that conceals truth. Woolf’s metaphorical image of “veiled” seeing captures what Trudi Tate describes as the “fog of ignorance” that gathers around what is “not seen, or seen only partially” (Tate 1). With “eyes bandaged tight,” the crowd heedlessly follows the “mysterious” “voice of authority,” a concept that is especially suspect for Woolf insofar as it conscripts one into the literal and emotional violence of war. Similar to the way that Peter Walsh impulsively feels an idealized sense of pride and love for England when he sees “[b]oys in uniform, carrying guns, marching with their eyes ahead of them” (MD 50), the crowd’s indoctrinated point of view causes them to romanticize what is hidden behind the window blind. As “rumours pass invisibly” and “inaudibly” among the crowd, Woolf emphasizes the shared consciousness of her spectators, as though they all see through the same bleary eyes (MD 14).

Moments later, Woolf introduces the skywriting scene as another visual moment that problematically unifies subjectivities. Like the episode with the automobile, the scene with the skywriting airplane also begins with a violent auditory sound, “boring ominously into the ears of the crowd” (MD 19). As Paul Saint-Amour, Sarah Cole, and others have established, by the mid-1920s, the airplane had built itself to be a major technological weapon of war. Thus, through the modern advertising technique of skywriting, Woolf builds upon the symbolism of this image—a symbolism alluded to
Borden’s “Bombardment” and in Faulkner’s blinded and dying aviator—and continues her social critique introduced in the automobile scene by symbolically linking commercial enterprise to war. Once again the visual sight connects subjectivities:

“Everyone look[s] up” as the airplane lets out “white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky!” (MD 20). Similar to the spectators’ captivated view of the figure behind the window blind, in the skywriting scene, the visual sight of the letters become mystified images that signify different things to different characters:

[A]n aeroplane…fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then…began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps? ‘Glaxo,’ said Mrs. Coates in a strained, awestricken voice, gazing straight up…”Kreemo,” murmured Mrs. Bletchley…All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. (MD 19-20)

This moment of communal perception becomes a critique of the visual, as characters assume that what they see can be read or easily decoded. Woolf’s choice of phrasing at the end of the passage (“looking up into the sky” as opposed to “looking up at the sky”) suggests a kind of depth and mystification in this visual image that renders it unknowable, a notion aided by the description of the letters refusing to “lie still.”23 The words that the characters read in the sky are all similarly ridiculous, thereby hitting upon Woolf’s social critique of the readiness to seek meaning from visual impressions that are

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23 The skywriting scene also foreshadows the mystifying experience of witnessing a total eclipse of the sun in 1927, an event that became a kind of celebration, with people all across England gathering together to see it. As Woolf writes in her diary entry on 30 June 1927, “the astonishing moment” came when the world went dark for twenty-four seconds, and then, “as if a ball had rebounded…the light came back” (Woolf, D III 143). Four years later, when one of her characters in The Waves inquires, “How then does light return to the world after the eclipse of the sun?,” the only available answer is: “Miraculously” (W 286). This “astonishing moment” had a clear impact on Woolf, forming a recurring motif in her writing of the sky as an unknowable visual canvas—or more accurately, a visual orb—for mystifying, yet collective, perception.
unreadable with any certainty and/or are merely linked to a commodity economy of selling. As many Woolf scholars have noted, the skywriting scene in *Mrs. Dalloway* is a reference to the first actual instance of commercial skywriting in London in June 1922, when an airplane spelled out the name of a newspaper (*Daily Mail*), which happened to be the same newspaper to report on the event. In shifting from newspapers to toffee, Woolf exaggerates the worthlessness and self-aggrandizement of commercial media in postwar society, while also criticizing the notion that a culture of commodity can restore a war-ravaged world.

While the skywriting immediately captivates and unifies the crowd, linking everyone from Buckingham Palace to Regent’s Park, this unification is limited by divisive interpretations of what is seen. While there is general disagreement about what the skywriting says, nearly all of the spectators participate in reading the letters (or what they think to be the letters) aloud. Yet notably, Rezia and Septimus who see the skywriting from Regent’s Park do not read the letters themselves: instead, a nursemaid tells Rezia that the airplane is advertising toffee and then proceeds to spell out the letters into Septimus’s ear (*MD* 21). Seeing the skywriting, then, becomes a problem of literacy inevitably enmeshed in divisions of class separating those who can read the advertisement (and buy the advertised product) and those who cannot. Thus, does Woolf establish Septimus’s marginalization from London society not only by his status as a wounded war veteran, but also by his and Rezia’s class status:

> “Septimus Warren

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In *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (2003), Holly Henry traces the ways in which Woolf’s personal interest in astronomy became part of her “global aesthetic” of forming narrative strategies that deploy “not a god’s eye view, but multiple and complex perspectives” (Henry 92).

I will come back to this idea about class later in my discussion of Septimus and Dr. Bradshaw, but for now it’s worth noting that issues of class are a significant point of contention among
Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which the look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too” (MD 14). From the outset, Woolf positions Septimus on the margins of London society and Clarissa’s world of bourgeois parties. This first physical description of Septimus not only emphasizes his “shabby” appearance (how others look at him), but also the apprehensive “look” in Septimus’ eyes that colors his perceptions—a way of seeing that not only differentiates his vision from others, but a form of seeing that others are too apprehensive themselves to see. Thus, while Woolf critiques the cooptation of vision into blind belief, especially as sights and sounds are shaped to serve an empire and a war, Mrs. Dalloway ultimately works against this tendency by lifting the veil to reveal what is behind Septimus’s seeing.

The passage from Robert Hichens’ “In The Dark,” discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, helps to illuminate the different dimensions of seeing and blindness as portrayed in Septimus, the veteran in Mrs. Dalloway. The piece is worth quoting again:

> A question that has come to some of us in connection with this war is this: Are we in England going to live in the dark when the war is over? I think that perhaps if we could look into the minds and souls of the blinded soldiers we should find that they see more than we do, that they discern horizons which are as yet far beyond our vision. Perhaps upon the battlefields from which they have returned they, who, like many us, have walked in darkness, have been allowed to see a great light. And by that light they may see us, not as we wish to seem to them and to all the soldiers, but as we are. They may even feel, some of them, that we are more in the dark than they are. (Hichens 18)

While Septimus is not one of the literally blinded, he nevertheless represents the men whose vision has been figuratively wounded through literal witnessing. Indeed, Septimus...
sees illusions or hallucinations (e.g. the morphing of a dog into a man; seeing through bodies; seeing himself fall into flames), yet he also sees beyond what others see. For he recognizes the beauty that violence threatens to destroy. Though often violent, Septimus’s hallucinations equally offer moments of sublime pleasure and artistic beauty, such as in ordinary moments of “watch[ing] a leaf quiver in a rush of air” (MD 68) or seeing a beam of sunlight dance and make shapes upon the wall (MD 136). So it is with the skywriting:

[B]ut it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! (MD 21)

Septimus’s romanticization is a symptom of his mental illness, but it is also more flexible than the straining of others to decipher the letters. He appreciates the skywriting in its pure visuality: “one shape after another” that has no particular meaning aside from being something beautiful to observe. Taking pleasure in the sight of letters “melt[ing] into the sky,” Septimus’s vision indicates a privileging of image over language, as though visuality can articulate meaning for traumatized soldiers (and a traumatized nation) more successfully than language. As Sarah Cole points out, the airplane (now for the first time being used on a massive scale during war) “showcases just how intricately the life of violence has been absorbed into the civilian sphere” (Cole 249). Yet while Woolf endows Septimus with a keen ability to see this intricate pattern, Septimus also keeps in play the possibility of recovering beauty from its captivity under war. Woolf thus encourages us to join in Septimus’s different kinds of seeing—seeing both the violence and the beauty of everyday life that violence extinguishes.
Woolf is not only concerned with representing what Septimus sees, but she is also concerned with representing how Septimus’s seeing is seen. While she encourages her readers to see how he sees, she also reveals how he must grapple with his culture’s simultaneous rejection and surveillance of his seeing. Indeed, insofar as Septimus’s hallucinatory visions are understood as pathological, he becomes further marginalized. First, in quiet ways, Woolf marks off his seeing as different: “Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked” (MD 15). On the one hand, witnessing the automobile is a moment of connection in the sense that “everyone” participates in the act of looking, yet the syntax of the passage also creates a split within this otherwise communal moment. The addition of the sentence “Septimus looked,” immediately following the all-inclusive sentence, “Everyone looked,” implies that Septimus is not part of “everyone.”

Septimus’s position as an outcast reflects Woolf’s concern that vision functions as an agent of surveillance and control in relationships between the observer and the observed. For it is the fear of the scrutinizing and critical eyes of others that leads Rezia to hide Septimus in the park, as she thinks to herself: “People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way…She must now take him away into some park” (MD 15). Moments like this clearly suggest Woolf’s ambivalence toward the visual. Rezia, already feeling like an outsider as an Italian in London, feels doubly isolated now that her husband is slipping farther and farther into illness, and feels powerless as a woman who is told time and time again by
doctors that “there is nothing the matter” (MD 22). Rezia’s embarrassment about the visibility of her husband’s madness and his inability to conform to the norms of English society is evident in her desire to conceal him by taking him into the park, an act that makes her a participant in restoring the blinded vision of post-war culture. For even in his post-traumatic state, Septimus is acutely aware of his position within a scopic regime of surveillance:

[T]his gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to surface and was about to burst into flames…It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at, was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? (MD 15)

Septimus’s phantasm of a “horror” rising to the surface, ready “to burst into flames” is reflective of the annihilating effects of war. Yet while the passage begins with Septimus’s own visionary madness, the looking soon turns upon the looker, as Septimus stands outside the spectacle, observing the observers rather than relinquishing himself to the blind collective and idealized vision of the other passersby. In this sense, the visibility of Septimus—if Septimus were to be truly seen—“blocks the way” to a national post-war culture of blindness.

While moments of seeing in Woolf’s fiction, such as the skywriting scene, often fail to render any particular absolute meaning, these moments nevertheless become part of Woolf’s technique of using vision as an organizing force in her fiction, as characters come together as individuals and share a common visual experience. Near the end of the Night and Day, Ralph Denham, unable to find the words to convey to Katharine Hilbery what he feels for her, begins drawing on a piece of paper abstract figures and doodles meant to represent the entire universe. Commenting on the drawing of the “little dot with
flames around it,” Katharine says: “Yes, the world looks something like that to me too”

(ND 420). Published six years before Mrs. Dalloway, Katharine’s statement, in Night and Day, anticipates Clarissa’s sharing of Septimus’s vision and the subsequent ways in which we, as readers, come to see how recognition of the intersubjectivity of sight, as well as embracing the beauty of visual art, might aid in the possibility of recuperating a severely blinded postwar culture.

For Woolf, the shared experience that seeing offers is central to reframing the role that visuality plays after the Great War. This potential of the visible world is epitomized when, just before his suicide, Septimus and Rezia engage in making a hat for Mrs. Peters. Just as Ralph and Katharine share their deepest selves through images rather than through language, so too do Rezia and Septimus connect in this moment of visual, artistic creation. As the scene begins, Rezia sits at the table sewing, while Septimus watches her:

Through his eyelashes he could see her blurred outline; her little black body; her face and hands; her turning movements at the table, as she took up a reel, or looked (she was apt to lose things) for her silk. She was making a hat for Mrs. Filmer’s married daughter, whose name was—he had forgotten her name. ‘What is the name of Mrs. Filmer’s married daughter?’ he asked. (MD 138)

Septimus’s inquiry indicates a rare moment of lucidity, though he is reluctant to fully open his eyes because “real things were too exciting” and could cause him to go mad (MD 138). Septimus grounds himself in the reality of this visual moment by cautiously opening his eyes and focusing on the inanimate objects in the room which Rezia has gathered so artfully: “the sideboard; the plate of bananas; the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort; at the mantelpiece with the jar of roses. None of these things moved. All were still; all were real” (MD 138-139). Septimus’s comfort in the visible beauty of such ordinary objects offers him a temporary relief from his recurrent
state of confusion. When Rezia enters and amplifies this process by inviting him to assist her in making Mrs. Peters’s hat, he is momentarily able to interact with her in a lucid way:

He shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it. But no, there she was, perfectly natural, sewing, with the pursed lips women have, the set, the melancholy expression, when sewing. But there was nothing terrible about it, he assured himself, looking a second time, a third time at her face, her hands, for what was frightening or disgusting in her as she sat there in broad daylight sewing? (MD 139)

Septimus reapproaches Rezia the same way he does moments earlier with the objects in the room. As Septimus slowly restores his vision by slowly moving his hand to widen his shaded view, simultaneously does Rezia participate in a kind of reparation as she stitches the pieces of the hat together. That is to say, not only is the making of the hat a moment of artistic visual creation, but Rezia’s sewing is also an act of mending and reparation, one that parallels Clarissa’s mending of her party dress and the restoration of vision encouraged by Woolf in Mrs. Dalloway more broadly.

In this way, Rezia and Septimus’s making of the hat serves a function similar to Clarissa’s hosting of the party. Much in the way that Clarissa takes pleasure in artfully arranging various colors and types of flowers for her party, Rezia pulls out ribbons, beads, tassels, and artificial flowers for Septimus and he begins “putting odd colours together—for though he had no fingers, could not even do up a parcel, he had a wonderful eye” (MD 140). Rezia’s recognition of Septimus’s “wonderful eye” indicates her recognition of Septimus as a seeing subject—one who sees not merely in the form of hallucinations, but in the form of a talented and intuitive artist. As Septimus uses his visual sense to design the hat, Rezia stitches it together, being very careful “to keep it just
as he had made it” (*MD* 140). Thus, the making the hat becomes a moment of intersubjective connection and reparation, as Rezia and Septimus come together and share a mutual vision.

The notion that intersubjectivity and artistic creation could potentially offer a healing antidote to pain and trauma suffered from the war stands in stark contrast to Dr. Bradshaw’s proposed treatment of the rest cure, a treatment based on Bradshaw’s insistence that Rezia and Septimus “must be separated” because “[t]he people we are most fond of are not good for us when we are ill” (*MD* 143). However, the rest cure Bradshaw intends for Septimus conveniently pushes him away from the civilian population of the city, for fear that he may somehow infect others with his wounded “seeing,” a notion that becomes more about protecting (or “blinding”) the community than it is about restoring healthy sight to a wounded veteran.26 Thus, Woolf satirizes Bradshaw’s insistence on “proportion”: “Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion” (*MD* 97). The image of Bradshaw as the heroic figure who leads England to prosperity and protection becomes even more ironic given the sacrifices Septimus has made for England. As Lady Bradshaws waits for her husband in the car and thinks about “the wall of gold that was mounting between” herself and her husband’s patients, Woolf underscores that aristocratic figures like the Bradshaws now

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26 Karen DeMeester adds: “Because war veterans’ testimonies threaten the community’s social equilibrium and order by challenging its fundamental cultural and ideological assumptions, the community may avoid and deny the truth of the veterans’ testimonies. The testimonies may create a sense of instability and confusion in the community, and consequently cause it to suffer the same feelings of disorientation the veteran himself suffers” (DeMeester 660).
benefit as war-profiteers due to the imbalanced economy after the war.\textsuperscript{27} Meanwhile, Bradshaw’s narrow view is also the antithesis of Woolf’s aesthetic of a multiplicity of complex perspectives, or in Lily Briscoe’s words, “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with…Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough…” (\textit{TTL} 198). Instead of seeing Septimus as an individual with a unique subjectivity, Bradshaw reduces Septimus to “the patient,” a one-dimensional perspective like the photographs his wife so admires.\textsuperscript{28}

Though Rezia and Septimus share a brief moment of connection, their intersubjectivity is ruptured by the bodily aggression of Dr. Holmes, who forcibly enters their home. While Rezia tells Holmes that she “will not allow [him] to see [her] husband,” Woolf carefully portrays Holmes as a coercive force:

He could see her, like a little hen, with her wings spread barring his passage. But Holmes persevered.

‘My dear lady, allow me…’ Holmes said, putting her aside (Holmes was a powerfully built man). (\textit{MD} 145)

The language of domesticity is striking in this scene: not only is Rezia like a mother hen protecting her fowl, but Holmes’s name reifies him as the place of residence—as if to suggest that Septimus must \textit{live within} Holmes’s definitions and categorical structures.

Septimus’s final thoughts make clear that his suicide is not a direct result of

\textsuperscript{27} Carey James Mickalites offers a poignant discussion of this in \textit{Modernism and Market Fantasy: British Fictions of Capital 1910-1939}. In his reading of this particular scene, Mickalites situates Bradshaw’s “psychological and social devotion to ‘proportion’” against Woolf’s layered critique that includes “property disproportionately amassed against the dispossessed” (Mickalites 152). I generally share Mickalites’ analysis of this scene, yet where I depart from him significantly is in his overall argument that Woolf’s oeuvre illustrates a “waning optimism” and a “failure to imagine viable new forms of modern intimacy” (133) that might “significantly challenge the alienating effects of property driven capitalism, laissez-faire individualism, and the horrors of global war they give rise to” (169). As I argue, while moments of intersubjectivity are often fleeting in Woolf’s fiction, they nevertheless establish a pattern of optimism and attunement to the possibility of social reformation.

\textsuperscript{28} “…interests she had…in plenty; child welfare; the after-care of the epileptic, and photography, so that if there was a church building, or a church decaying, she bribed the sexton, got the key and took photographs, which were scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals” (\textit{MD} 92-93).
psychological trauma caused by his experience in the war, but instead a result of coercion and societal pressure. As the narrator explains, “He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did they want?” (MD 146). The social and political forces embodied in Bradshaw and Holmes occupy Septimus’s mind as he makes the conscious decision to “fl[ing] himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings” (MD 146). Significantly, Septimus’s violent death takes place at home, rather than on the battlefield; the visual violence of his suicide brings the visual violence of the war literally to the streets of London, demanding to be seen.

Yet even in this intensely visual moment, Septimus is still left unseen. While Mrs. Filmer “hide[s] her eyes in the bedroom,” Dr. Holmes calls Septimus a “coward” and thinks it was “a sudden impulse, no one was in the least to blame,” a statement that is representative of a larger population’s figurative blindness, a population who “could not conceive” “why the devil he did it” (MD 146). Peter, though having never met Septimus, demonstrates his own blindness in this moment as well when he hears the sirens of the ambulance transporting Septimus’s body and thinks it “one of the triumphs of civilisation…the efficiency, the organisation, the communal spirit of London” (MD 147). The irony of Peter’s pride in the modern and “communal spirit of London” is that it is precisely the failure of the community that causes Septimus to leap out the window. However, while Septimus is left literally and figuratively unseen in the eyes of characters such as Peter, Mrs. Filmer, Dr. Holmes, and Dr. Bradshaw, most importantly, Woolf does dramatize a seeing of Septimus in this final moment: first an old man across the way “stop[s] and stare[s] at [Septimus]” before he jumps. Then after Septimus’s fatal jump, Rezia runs to the window to see him: “Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood”
Through the neighbor and Rezia, Woolf hints at the intersubjectivity of vision wherein “seeing” leads to compassion and understanding.

Much in the way that Rezia sees Septimus’s “wonderful eye” in his making of the hat and sees his choice to die, Clarissa will also share Septimus’s vision when she visualizes his suicide. The neighbor’s glimpse of Septimus anticipates Clarissa’s glimpse of her neighbor through the window of the building opposite her. While Clarissa often watches her neighbor and thinks that the lady is “quite unconscious that she [is] being watched,” on the night of her party, Clarissa is surprised to see the lady “star[ing] straight at her” (MD 124, 181). Clarissa’s astonishment about the reflexivity of the gaze is indicative of her initial limits as a “seer.” Certainly, Clarissa takes pleasure in bringing separate people from different worlds together and she believes that it is her offering to life, yet her reaction to the announcement of Septimus’s suicide indicates that not everyone is welcome—that Septimus is not welcome—that, indeed, Clarissa’s initial concern is to assemble a superficial image that meets the expectations of her upper-class acquaintances. Clarissa’s party as “image” is reaffirmed by Peter’s view of the party as a “cold stream of visual impressions” (MD 161) and Clarissa’s own admission that, though none of her guests were talking, “[t]hey looked; that was all. That was enough” (MD 173). As Clarissa repeatedly greets her guests with the phrase “‘How delightful to see you!’” (MD 163), it becomes clear that this superficiality of seeing (for which Peter criticizes Clarissa) is, in effect, the kind of “blindfolded seeing” that Woolf, too, is criticizing. As Clarissa thinks to herself: “What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?” (MD 179).
For Clarissa, the neighbor was, at first, emblematic of the soul’s privacy, as she would often see the woman “gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background” (MD 123). Yet while Clarissa’s gaze of the neighbor remains limited and one-sided throughout the novel, their mutual gaze on the night of her party leads Clarissa into a larger mediation on the intersubjectivity of sight that echoes Septimus’s mutual gaze with the old man. While moments earlier Clarissa considered it impertinent that Septimus’s death encroached upon the beauty and pleasure of her party, her transformation comes when now sees that he belongs there and that she is linked to him:

Always her body went through it first…her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud, in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. (MD 179)

Clarissa’s vision resumes where Septimus’s vision ends, as she suddenly feels “somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself” (MD 182), recognizing her own complicity in his suicide and yet empathizing with his pain.29 The passage has striking similarities to Donald’s remembering of the events leading up to his death in Soldiers’ Pay. What is at first narrated as information to the reader (that Septimus “flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings”) is now, through Clarissa’s visualization, something intensely visceral and sensory, as she feels it within her own body and envisions it in her mind. Much in the way that Faulkner’s impressionistic account of Donald’s sensory and psychic experience reaffirms Donald’s subjectivity by establishing him as a seeing subject, Woolf’s passage reinvests Septimus’s factual death

29 I follow Alex Zwerdling’s reading here, particularly his point that “Septimus had managed to rescue in death an inner freedom that [Clarissa’s] own life is constantly forcing her to barter away,” as well as his point that “Septimus is Clarissa’s conscience, is indeed the conscience of the governing class, though only she is willing to acknowledge him” (Zwerdling 137-8, 141).
with his own subjectivity by emphasizing the corporeality of his body through Clarissa’s. The phrase “up had flashed the ground” implies a visualization of Septimus’s own vision as he fell from the window, while the phrase “suffocation of blackness” implies an image of Septimus’s own vision at the time of his death. This moment of seeing Septimus seeing leaves the “it” of the final sentence (“So she saw it”) to have a triple meaning: first, Clarissa sees Septimus’s suicide from an outside perspective, seeing that “through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes”; second, she sees his suicide from his perspective, visualizing all that he saw as he fell to his death; and third, her witnessing of his vision continues Rezia’s seeing of Septimus as a seeing subject, inviting the reader, too, to participate in this moment of seeing Septimus seeing. With Septimus finally being seen, so too is Clarissa. For finally does Woolf leave readers with the image of Clarissa seen through Peter’s eyes, “where is Clarissa…for there she was,” (MD 190) visible, seen—maybe in a sense for the first time—prompted by the “art” of her party. While the aesthetic nature of the party is indeed part of Clarissa’s art, Woolf emphasizes that it is the party’s social sense of everyone seeing together—the collective vision—that may potentially eventuate empathy and alleviate the individual wounding of the traumatized self.
SECTION III
THE LIMINAL FRONT
Chapter 5
THE JOURNEY FROM ‘OVER THERE’:
SEARCHING FOR SOLACE IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S IN OUR TIME

“What Hemingway went for was that direct pictorial contact between eye and object, between object and reader. To get it he cut out a whole forest of verbosity. He got back to clean fundamental growth. He trimmed off explanation, discussion, even comment; he hacked off all metaphorical floweriness; he pruned off the dead, sacred clichés; until finally, through the sparse trained words, there was a view.”

–H.E. Bates, The Modern Short Story

In November 1957 Hemingway published two lesser-known stories in The Atlantic Monthly, explicitly preoccupied with seeing and blindness: “A Man of the World” and “Get a Seeing-Eyed Dog,” paired together under the title “Two Tales of Darkness.” While these were the last stories Hemingway published during his lifetime, “Two Tales of Darkness” is largely regarded a failure, paling in comparison to Hemingway’s other seminal works. The first portrays a blind man whose eyes are gouged out in a barroom fight, and the second depicts a blind writer who has been read as a thinly veiled portrait of Hemingway himself. What “Two Tales of Darkness” does offer us, however, is a clue into Hemingway’s personal and complex relationship to visuality. In 1949, Hemingway suffered a case of erysipelas that caused both of eyes to swell shut for a period of time, and, as biographer Kenneth S. Lynn postulates, for Hemingway, this experience led to a very significant fear that he might one day lose his eyesight (Lynn 575). Yet it’s quite possible that Hemingway’s angst about blindness and, by extension, his enduring investment in the visual, goes back farther than 1949—that perhaps Hemingway, as a volunteer ambulance driver in the First World War, as a reporter on the Greco-Turkish war, as a correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance during the Spanish Civil War, as a reporter on the Second World War, and as a writer and
American citizen living in the war-ravaged world of the early twentieth century, had long been a writer whose work was necessarily concerned with visual assault.

The vision of the assaulted eyewitness is illustrated in the very structure of *In Our Time* (1925), particularly its fragmented form and continual de-centering of any form of perspective. That is to say, if there is anything unifying the stories and italicized, numbered inter-chapters throughout *In Our Time* it’s the act of witnessing visual violence and the ways in which characters seek solace from this trauma. Unlike the witness in the texts of Borden of Manning, Hemingway’s observer is relatively safe in the sense that he is “back home.” Yet, as Hemingway illustrates, this removed position does not necessarily terminate suffering; trauma reverberates within the individual even after they have left that violent space—a consequence that is reinforced by the portrayal of violence creeping into the “safe space” of “the home front” in the text itself. In this sense, the violent image itself is not necessarily the subject of *In Our Time* in as much as it is the experience of the individual who sees the violent scene. As Dr. Adams says in “Indian Camp,” about fathers who have to watch the women they love scream in pain during childbirth, “[t]hey’re usually the worst sufferers in these little affairs” (*IOT* 18). And yet, *In Our Time* also troubles this assertion when the narrative point of view moves between observer and sufferer. As such, Hemingway’s war fiction, especially *In Our Time*, engages in the complexities of blindness and sight as they interact in bearing witness to violence, as he labors to make disassociated or fragmented vision visible by destabilizing narrative point of view through liminality.

Scholars and critics have long recognized the intensely visual nature of Ernest Hemingway’s writing, specifically the influence of the Imagist principles of cutting,
omitting, and compressing, of “us[ing] absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation” (Lamb 38). In his 1935 essay on the techniques of writing, “Monologue to the Maestro,” Hemingway himself emphasized his reliance upon the visual, stressing the need to see his experience and to “write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too,” later reiterating this with a statement that a writer “writes to be read by the eye” (Seed 74). Contemporaneously, Wyndham Lewis notoriously referred scathingly to Hemingway’s “cinema in words” as he called it, and more recently, Hemingway scholars have continued to consider the surface and observational nature of his reportage style. Hemingway’s attention to the image, together with his stripping away of excess words and metaphors, creates a visual immediacy in his writing. Additionally, Hemingway’s sentences tend to be short and declarative, often following the simple subject-verb-direct object structure, and in cases where conjunctions are used and sentences become longer and more complex, he often chooses parataxis: conjunctions such as “and” or “and then” rather than more complex conjunctions such as “because” or “for this reason”—apparently presenting the objective facts to the reader as an impartial witness would, but leaving the connections among facts, and the significance behind the facts, to be guessed by the reader. While this objective, observational, visual immediacy has frequently been discussed among critics, the tension between the complex intermingling of subjective and objective coordinates—inevitably tied to Hemingway’s own experience as a witness to war—has been less widely examined. When the United States entered the First World War, Hemingway was too young to enlist and suffered

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30 *Men Without Art*, 33.
from poor vision in his left eye, which would have nevertheless caused him to be turned down by the military. Still eager to participate, he volunteered as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross up until he was severely wounded while handing out canteen supplies at the front during an Austrian attack. Though Hemingway never actually engaged in combat during the war, his experience as an ambulance driver and, later, as a reporter of war impacted his writing in ways similar Borden and Manning. Like Manning, Hemingway recognizes the inherently private nature of war experience and the personal trauma that sometimes accompanies it, and like Borden, he knows firsthand that being partially removed from war does not insulate one from the bloodshed of its attack.

The structure of *In Our Time* reflects the push and pull of detachment and immediacy emblematic of trauma. One of the most peculiar features of *In Our Time* is that, while often read and understood as a piece of World War I literature, the war itself is only peripherally present in the text. As the text makes reference to a number of wars, while also portraying violence on the home front (for example, in the form of bullfighting, suicide, execution of criminals, and a caesarian section without anesthesia), the juxtaposition of these different scenes of violence create a sense in which war is recognized, seen, and felt without necessarily being visible on the page. In other words, while Hemingway’s style “appears to relish in surface description” (Narbeshuber 13), his investment in visuality does not reach its extent at merely surfaces, but also includes that which is submerged in the text and only half-perceptible in its absence, namely the events of the Great War. Recently, critics such as Jim Barloon have persuasively argued that Hemingway’s “miniaturization” of the Great War in *In Our Time* offers readers glimpses of the war instead of placing it the forefront because “[w]ar precludes a privileged,
panoramic view; all a viewer can do is offer brief, disconnected glimpses, a series of miniatures” (Barloon 15). Yet at the same time, this “minaturization” of the war is representative of the tension between varying degrees of distance and closeness symptomatic of bearing witness to war—a strain in the text that Hemingway explained was intentional, as indicated in a letter he wrote to Edmund Wilson on 18 October 1924, this difficulty is intentional:

Finished the book of 14 stories with a chapter…between each story—that is the way they were meant to go—to give the picture of the whole between examining it in detail. Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coast line, and then looking at it with 15X binoculars. Or rather, maybe, looking at it and then going in and living in it—and then coming out and looking at it again. (Selected Letters 128)

Hemingway’s analogy of the continuous alternation between normal perception and telescopic vision aptly describes the visual movement from the stories to the italicized, numbered-interchapters, but also the movement within some of the stories and interchapters themselves.

Thus, it is not only that war “precludes a privileged, panoramic view,” as Barloon argues, but also that Hemingway aims to make disassociation visible by vacillating between narrative points of views that are incredibly close and points of view that are incredibly distant. Moreover, by couching this movement32 in moments of violence, Hemingway recreates the immediacy of disassociation for his readers, who breeze past

32 My argument about shifting points of view builds upon Zoe Trodd’s argument about the combination of the single-shot “camera-eye” aesthetic and the multi-focal “film-eye” aesthetic in Hemingway’s fiction. In her article, “Hemingway’s Camera Eye: The Problem of Language and an Interwar Politics of Form,” Trodd suggests that the combination of these camera-eyes allowed Hemingway to address “language’s depleted capacity for expression” after the war, while also “rejecting all apparent coherent and exclusive ways of perceiving the world” (Trodd 8-9). As Trodd focuses on contextualizing Hemingway’s camera-eye aesthetic against “more overtly politicized writers,” she positions his writing alongside those of Dos Passos, Orwell, Koestler, and Agee, and her article does not address how this camera-eye functions in In Our Time.
these scenes as the narrative propels them forward. This movement is illustrated in the rapid shifting of the witness’s focalizing eye in the second inter-chapter, for example.

The scene describes the Thracian evacuation, which Hemingway witnessed while reporting on the Greco-Turkish war for The Toronto Daily Star. While the episode begins with a focalizing eye’s stand-still distant glimpse of the landscape, it quickly opens to a sweeping panoramic view of people, animals, and objects in a moment of utter chaos:

Minarets stuck up in the rain out of Adrianople across the mud flats. The carts were jammed for thirty miles along the Karagatch road. Water buffalo and cattle were hauling carts through the mud. No end and no beginning. Just carts loaded with everything they owned. The old men and women, soaked through, walked along keeping the cattle moving. The Maritza was running yellow almost up to the bridge. Carts were jammed solid on the bridge with camels bobbing along through them. Greek cavalry herded the procession. Women and kids were in the carts, crouched with mattresses, mirrors, sewing machines, bundles. There was a woman having a kid with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it. It rained all through the evacuation. (IOT 22)

Hemingway’s technique of omission positions the narrator of this inter-chapter at a distance from the historical context in which this evacuation is actually embedded. The scene consists of short, declarative, visually observational sentences that are in-line with Hemingway’s reportage style. The first three sentences, especially, reveal an objective, surface description of the landscape. This seeming objectivity is reinforced by the narrator’s physical distance from the scene: the fact that the narrator can see that “carts were jammed for thirty miles along the Karagatch road” suggests that the narrator is far enough away from the road to see that stretch. Yet this apparent objectivity collides with subjectivity when two sentence fragments (“No end and no beginning” and “Scared sick looking at it”) turn the eye from the surface inward, breaking the rhythm and halting motion temporarily. The first fragment functions as a rupture in the supposed objectivity
of the narrator’s perception, calling attention to the fragmenting experience of witnessing this procession, which Hemingway described as a “horror” in his 1922 article “Refugees from Thrace,” published in *The Toronto Daily Star*:

In a comfortable train with the horror of the Thracian evacuation behind me it is already beginning to seem unreal. That is the boon of our memories.

I have described that evacuation in a cable to the Star from Adrianople. It does no good to go over it again. The evacuation still keeps up. No matter how long it takes this letter to get to Toronto, as you read this in the Star you may be sure that the same ghastly, shambling procession of people being driven from their homes is filing in unbroken line along the muddy road to Macedonia. A quarter of a million people take a long time to move. (“Refugees” 322)

More than an objective image, “No end and no beginning” simultaneously hints at the long lasting aftereffects for the seemingly detached narrator, as well as the rippling effects for refugees whose lives were entirely uprooted and are still moving, according to Hemingway. Moreover, the evacuation is “behind” Hemingway in the sense that he is physically elsewhere, but “the evacuation still keeps up” in the sense that it continues to haunt him. The horrific nature of this scene is conveyed in the second sentence fragment (“Scared sick looking at it”), the inter-chapter’s most explicit statement of personal pain. Coming before a moment of a woman giving childbirth, while a crying young girl holds a blanket over her, the fragmented phrase “Scared sick looking at it” is ambiguous enough in that it could refer to the girl frightened and crying at witnessing the violence of childbirth, as she looks to protect herself by hiding her eyes under a blanket, or it could refer to the reader or third person narrator’s perspective of this scene of human vulnerability in this moment of chaos and expulsion. In either sense, the sentence “Scared sick looking at it,” for the first and only time in the scene, tunnels inward to convey a traumatized and subjective point of view, before ultimately zooming outward once again,
in the final sentence ("It rained all throughout the evacuation,"’) to report objective banal data. As such, it becomes a representative example of the sliding between the impersonal and personal, and the objective and subjective, while also serving as a manifestation of the kind of the fragmented vision that is emblematic of “our time,” as Hemingway puts it. Moreover, the conflation of these perceptions, and the ambiguity of whom exactly is “scared sick,” is a telling hint that the violence of war permeates into civilian life.

The traumatizing vision of the woman giving birth during the evacuation serves as a symbolic image of the threshold between the war front and the home front, as Hemingway juxtaposes the pain and violence of war to the pain and violence of childbirth. On the one hand, this image emphasizes what it takes to bring life into the world—perhaps to dramatize what it means when life is so easily discarded—and yet, at the same time, it brings women and children into a scene of war and violence, a space from which they are usually shielded. Thus, the young girl who cries at the sight of the woman giving birth in the evacuation scene echoes Nick’s traumatizing vision of the Native American woman’s labor in “Indian Camp.” In the story “Indian Camp,” a young Nick Adams witnesses and assists his father use a jack-knife to perform a Caesarean on a Native American woman, with no anesthesia, an experience that becomes an initiation of sorts into a world of visual violence. The narrator sets the scene by describing Nick Adams, Nick’s father (Dr. Adams), and Nick’s Uncle George in rowboat, following another boat with Native Americans, heading off into the darkness. Blind in the darkness of the night, touch and audition are the dominant senses in the story’s opening paragraphs, as the narrator remarks that the water is cold and Nick “hear[s] the oarlocks of the other boat quite a way ahead of them in the mist” (IOT 15). Shortly after, Nick
utters a question to his father that speaks to his curiosity about the unknown: “Where are we going, Dad?” (IOT 15). This question, however, is not only Nick’s, but the reader’s as well, as we too, in the opening paragraphs of “Indian Camp” (and throughout In Our Time, more largely) are left disoriented in the dark, unable to see what is submerged in the text. Upon finally reaching the shore, they make their journey to the camp, following an Native American man who carries a lantern that he blows out upon reaching the road. When they come around the bend of the road, the narrator reports that “ahead were the lights of the shanties where the Indian bark peelers lived…In the shanty nearest the road there was a light in the window. An old woman stood in the doorway holding a lamp” (IOT 16). The transition from the darkness of the journey on the boat to the light at the destination of the Indian camp represents a shift from the invisible to the visible, from imagination and adventure to grim reality, from childhood innocence to adult responsibility. For the lamp light inside the shanty illuminates, for Nick, an Native American woman laying on a wooden bunk, screaming in pain, having tried to give birth to her baby for two days, while her husband lay on the bunk above her with an injured foot, smoking a pipe. The other men in the camp, the narrator says, had “moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke out of the range of the noise she made” (IOT 16), suggesting that the blindness of the darkness serves as a protective shield to the sensory violence of the human subject in pain.

While the Native American men of the camp have fled away from this moment of visual and auditory violence, Nick is immersed in this highly corporeal and sensory experience. Nick is overwhelmed by the woman’s cries, as he asks his father, “can’t you give her something to make her stop screaming” (IOT 16), while Dr. Adams doesn’t
“hear [the screams] because they are not important” and urges his son to try to do the same (*IOT* 16). In his role as a doctor, Nick’s father treats the situation as though he’s teaching one of his students, even at one point jokingly calling Nick an “interne” while he has him hold out the basin (*IOT* 17). Yet even as a Doctor, he displays little to no bedside manner towards his patient, paying no attention to the woman’s cries or her husband’s distress, let alone the ways in which his own child might be suffering throughout this ordeal. In fact, the woman appears merely an object of case study for Dr. Adams, who calls the experience “one for the medical journal” (*IOT* 18).

The scene is highly visually charged and violent, and Nick’s own perceptual disassociation in this perceptually traumatic moment is evident in his seeing his father, not as a whole person, but in the synecdochal image of “hands scrubbing each other with the soap” (*IOT* 17). Moreover, the father’s visual rhetoric, his repeated use of the word “see” in an effort to educate Nick, pushes the child deeper and deeper into himself during this traumatic situation:

> ‘This lady is going to have a baby, Nick,’ he said. 
> ‘I know,’ said Nick. 
> ‘You don’t know,’ said his father. ‘Listen to me. What she is going through is called being in labor. The baby wants to be born and she wants it to be born. All her muscles are trying to get the baby born. That is what is happening when she screams.’ 
> ‘I see,’ Nick said…
> ‘You see, Nick, babies are supposed to be born head first but sometimes they’re not. When they’re not, they make a lot of trouble for everybody.’ (*IOT* 16-17)

Nick’s father takes a didactic tone here, as “seeing” becomes synonymous with understanding. After the baby is delivered, Nick’s father once again employs visual rhetoric in speaking to his son: “See, it’s a boy, Nick” (*IOT* 17). But Nick doesn’t “see” because, as the narrator tells us, “[h]e was looking away so as not to see what his father
was doing” (*IOT* 17). The sentence that immediately follows puts the reader in the same unseeing position as Nick: “‘There. That gets it,’ said his father and put something into the basin” (*IOT* 17). Vague words like “it” and “something” replace specific, concrete words of the corporeal body because Nick doesn’t look. And similarly, when his father tells him that he is going to sew in the stitches, the narrator reports: “Nick didn’t watch. His curiosity had been gone for a long time” (*IOT* 17). The word “curiosity” harkens back to Nick’s earlier inquisition about where they were going. While readers have no access to Nick’s interiority, one can rely on his decision to not look as an indication of what’s going on emotionally and psychologically with Nick in this moment, as it appears that now that his curiosity has been indulged, he wishes to be back in the protective innocence of the darkness.\(^{33}\)

While Nick attempts to self-protect by not looking at the violent surgical procedure, Hemingway’s juxtaposition of the husband’s suicide to the woman’s violent birth suggests an inescapability of bearing witness and, therefore, a dialectical linkage between the war front and the home front. Violence automatically becomes part of Nick’s

\(^{33}\)“Indian Camp” is often cited by feminist critics who have argued that Hemingway is a misogynist (a view largely initiated by Judith Fetterley) and as an example of how, in *In Our Time*, violence is often inflicted on “disenfranchised others” (Tyler 37). As Lisa Tyler argues, “*In Our Time* is a work about men’s responses to violence and their capacity for empathy... ‘Indian Camp,’ like several of the vignettes in *In Our Time* centers on... female suffering” (Tyler 37). According to Tyler, while Nick does ask his father whether he can give her anything to stop the screaming, he ultimately defines his masculinity alongside his father’s by “deem[ing] her screams unimportant” (38). “Nick makes his choice,” Tyler argues, “He will not choose to empathize with women and die, as the Indian husband did; he will reject empathy and triumph as his father did” (39). Focusing, primarily on the white male-Indian male interactions in the text, Amy Strong, in her essay “Screaming Through Silence: The Violence of Race in ‘Indian Camp’ and ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’” considers the caesarian scene to be that of a question of imperial power: “Certainly we cannot say that ‘Indian Camp’ here depicts a rape; the doctor and the men holding this woman down are attempting to deliver a baby and save the mother's life. But what we can see, and perhaps more importantly, what the Indian husband sees, is a woman's body as a territory under complete control of white men” (Strong 23). Thus, even though Nick is indeed a witness, he is also a removed witness in the sense that he is white and the doctor’s son.
world. While his father tells him that he “can watch [him put in the woman’s stitches] or not,” Nick has no choice but to see a “good view” of the woman’s husband, as Dr. Adam’s pulls back the blanket from the husband’s head and, with the aid of a lamp light, Nick sees that the man had cut his throat from ear to ear with a razor:

‘Ought to have a look at the proud father. They’re usually the worst sufferers in these little affairs,’ the doctor said. ‘I must say he took it all pretty quietly.’

He pulled back the blanket from the Indian’s head. His hand came away wet. He mounted on the edge of the lower bunk with the lamp in one hand and looked in. The Indian lay with his face toward the wall. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets. (IOT 18)

The scene offers a moment of “delayed decoding,” a term that Ian Watt coined to describe a marked delay between the textual presentation of an effect and the textual presentation of the cause of that effect, as the narrator first tells the reader that he [Uncle George] first feels wetness on his hand before looking at his hand in the lamp light to see that the wetness is blood. The narrator reveals information slowly to the audience, allowing us to experience this moment just as Uncle George and Dr. Adams do. This occurs throughout In Our Time, such as in the sixth vignette when the speaker presents us with an image of Nick’s “legs st[icking] out awkwardly,” before telling us that Nick “had been hit in the spine,” or moments later when the speaker tells us that Nick’s “face was sweaty,” before telling us that “the day was very hot” (IOT 63). By reversing this cause and effect, Hemingway creates a narrative structure that enmeshes seemingly objective matter-of-fact observations with the impressionistic slippages inherent to subjective experience, let alone the distorted and fragmented perceptions that accompany bearing witness to violence and war.
The use of delayed decoding in *In Our Time* subtly hints at the extent to which, as a child, Nick is naïve about the impact that this violence will have on him—a realization that slowly emerges in *In Our Time*, as well as in his reappearances throughout Hemingway’s writing. This slow emergence is mirrored in Nick’s submergence and re-emergence in this world of violence within the text of *In Our Time*. As Nick drops out of the text and reappears suddenly, it is as though he and the reader are being blindsided and unwittingly transported into moments of unanticipated chaos and confusion. Thus, the unexpected physical violence Nick witnesses in “Indian Camp,” he also experiences in “The Battler,” when a brakeman lures him in before throwing him off a train. Nick scoffs at his own gullibility, thinking to himself, “what a lousy kid thing to have done” (*IOT* 53). As Nick “touch[es] the bump over his eye with his fingers,” the narrator says that he squats down near a slope of water to clean up, adding: “He wished he could see it. Could not see it looking into the water though” (*IOT* 53). The black eye further marches Nick into the world of pain and violence inaugurated in “Indian Camp” and later established in war. While, as a young child, Nick intentionally turned his eyes away from the violence of the caesarian section in “Indian Camp,” as a young man he desires to see the violent wound even though his surroundings disallow him the transparency of that purview. Hemingway’s symbolism is clear: not only has violence literally assaulted Nick’s eyes, but it has assaulted them in such ways that Nick cannot even see. This metaphor extends to the invisibility of the war itself, including the slow emergence of its aftereffects.

The wounding that marks Nick’s vision is made manifest in other moments of disassociated seeing in *In Our Time* where his physical absence remains submerged in the text. An unnamed British soldier’s perspective of war in the third inter-chapter, for
example, illustrates a clear suppression of the personal and subjective, even though it is one of the few inter-chapters to include first-person point of view:

We were in the garden at Mons. Young Buckley came in with his patrol from across the river. The first German I saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and fell down into the garden. Then three more came over further down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that. (IOT 28)

Conveying dissociation in the cold and casual language of “potting,” Hemingway situates this impersonal report within a first-person (and therefore, personal and subjective) point of view. The structure of witnessing the killing is singular, though the killing itself comes in the form of a “we.” On the one hand, the first-person plural aids in the overwhelming ease with which the killing takes place, while also aiding the narrator in his ability to speak about it impersonally. The narrator’s dissociation in describing the killing is furthered by the removal of himself from the act of killing itself, as he references the German’s heavy equipment which helps him fall down over the wall, thereby removing the narrator of any personal responsibility in the German’s death. On the other hand, however, the first-person singular emphasizes the personal and private nature of bearing witness, including the narrator’s ability to intersubjectively see the men. In the three sentences that describe the killing of the first German, the narrator is able to see that “he looked awfully surprised.” Yet as the passage continues, the killing of three Germans is reduced down to two sentences, while the recounted killing of all subsequent Germans occurs in the passage’s single and final sentence, rendering in a diminishing of intersubjective seeing that is reflected in the paucity of textual space used to describe it.

While Hemingway experiments with narrators who experience oscillating levels of involvement and detachment throughout In Our Time, he engages the question of the
entangled and dissociative experience of war most explicitly in the story “Soldier’s
Home.” The story describes the experience of World War I veteran, Harold Krebs, who
has been unable to reintegrate into civilian life since he returned to his home in Kansas
after the war:

By the time Krebs returned to his home town in Oklahoma the greeting
of heroes was over. He came back much too late. The men from the town
who had been drafted had all been welcomed elaborately on their return.
There had been a great deal of hysteria. Now the reaction had set in.
People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting
back so late, years after the war was over. (IOT 69)

Krebs’ belated return from the war echoes earlier moments of delay in In Our Time, as
Hemingway again implies that trauma (in this case, Krebs’) will be that of a slow
emergence. The tension between soldier and civilian perspectives collide in this narrative
as the narrator explains that:

His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities.
Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done
this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about
it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in
because of the lies he had told…Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to
experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration, and when he
occasionally met another man who had really been a soldier…he fell into
the easy pose of the old soldier among other soldiers: that he had been
badly, sickeningly frightened all the time. (IOT 69-70)

According to this passage, Krebs’ “truth,” is that he had not “been badly, sickeningly
frightened all the time,” and that this untruth is actually what causes his nausea. Thus, the
narrator implies that Krebs’ trauma stems not from his experience in war, but from the
divisiveness of Krebs’ actual experience of the war and the civilians’s understanding of
the reality of war based on atrocity stories they heard. The reality of Krebs’ experience is
represented in the description of photographs that open the narrative:
There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture. (*IOT* 69)

Significantly, this photograph is not romanticized. The girls are not beautiful and the river is not flowing romantically in the background. Yet because the photograph is not idealized, it therefore makes an uninteresting picture to the people in Krebs’s Oklahoma hometown. In order to feel accepted, Krebs must “pose” for a new “picture,” thus creating an inauthentic and propagandized portrait of himself based on “things other men had seen, done or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers” (*IOT* 70).

While Krebs’s functions as an object of scrutiny in “Soldiers’ Home” in the sense that others look at him with expectations for how he ought to behave, Hemingway complicates this reading by simultaneously positioning him as one who gazes at others:

> Nothing was changed in the town except that the young girls had grown up. But they lived in such a complicated world already defined by alliances and shifting feuds that Krebs did not feel the energy or the courage to break into it. He liked to look at them, though. There were so many good-looking young girls. Most of them had their hair cut short. When he went away only little girls wore their hair like that or girls that were fast. They all wore sweaters and shirt waists with round Dutch collars. It was a pattern. He liked to look at them from the front porch as they walked on the other side of the street. He liked to watch them walking under the shade of the trees. He liked the round Dutch collars above their sweaters. He liked their silk stockings and flat shoes. He liked their bobbed hair and the way they walked. (*IOT* 71)

Though the narrator indicated earlier that Krebs’ existential nausea stemmed from the pressure he faced at home to shape the memory of his war experience as it was expected to have been rather than how he actually experienced it, Krebs’ behavior suggests the war has indeed impacted him emotionally and psychologically. Significantly, Krebs watches
the girls from the porch, where he can gaze upon them from a distance. As the narrator explains, while Krebs likes watching the girls from the porch, “[w]hen he was in town their appeal to him was not very strong. He did not like them when he saw them in the Greek’s ice cream parlor. He did not want them themselves really. They were too complicated” (IOT 71). The choice of the term “see” in this passage is significant, as it implies a sense of understanding and apprehension—an intersubjective recognition of the girls—which Krebs finds “too complicated.” Instead, he prefers to “look” at them and “watch” them from the porch, terms which entail the kind of dissociated, militaristic gaze Krebs would have been accustomed to in the war: keeping a look-out, searching the field, etc. As the narrator remarks, “He did not want them themselves really.” Krebs’ gaze turns into that of fetish, as his eyes focus on the girls’ sweaters, shirts with Dutch collars, and silk stockings. Thus, Krebs’s impersonal gaze shows his dissociation, while the at the same time Hemingway makes the reader attune to Krebs’s personal subjective truths through a limited omniscient narration.

Krebs’ struggle manifests in the difficulty of reconciling his life as a soldier overseas with his life as a son in an Oklahoma small town. Yet the details of Krebs’ wartime experience are, true to Hemingway’s “iceberg” technique, submerged in the text, leaving the reader to only speculate why Krebs can’t fully connect with others. In a conversation with his mother, Krebs describes the difficulty of articulating the issue:

‘I don’t love anybody,’ Krebs said.
It wasn’t any good. He couldn’t tell her, he couldn’t make her see it. It was silly to have said it. He had only hurt her. He went over and took hold of her arm. She was crying with her head in her hands.
‘I didn’t mean it,’ he said. ‘I was just angry at something.’ (IOT 76)
The phrase “he couldn’t make her see it” is particularly striking, as it comes only moments after his mother “take[s] off her glasses” and presses him about God’s work (IOT 75). While Krebs tells his mother that he can’t pray, she continues to prod him, blind to the ways in which her son’s sense of God might have been fundamentally changed by his wartime experience. Krebs poses for his mother, by “try[ing] to be a good boy for [her]” (IOT 76), just as “he had been a good soldier” in the war (IOT 72), but nevertheless feeling “sick and vaguely nauseated” (IOT 76), a symptom from telling lies, as he described earlier. The truth or reality of Krebs’s experience remains submerged underneath the surface, as readers can only speculate what Krebs is angry about, and why he is unable love, or pray, or integrate himself back into the life he had before the war. This speculation is mimicked by the verb “would” in the final paragraph: “He would go to Kansas City and get a job and she would feel all right about it. There would be one more scene maybe before he got away. He would not go down to his father’s office. He would miss that one. He wanted his life to go smoothly…” (IOT 77). This shift into the language of the past tense and past participle of “will” makes it ambiguous as to whether these things actually happened, or whether they are merely an expression of desire and intent, or imaginative happenings. Readers are not certain of Krebs’s wartime experience because he isn’t clear about it himself: “He sat there on the porch reading a book on the war. It was a history and he was reading about all the engagements he had been in…Now he was really learning about the war” (IOT 72). On the one hand, we might interpret Krebs’s reading of history books as part of Krebs’ effort to socially perform. Yet at the same time, Hemingway seems to be addressing the problem of separating subjective and objective accounts of war, or as Tim O’Brien will later articulate, the difficulty of
“separat[ing] what happened from what seemed to happen [because] [w]hat seem[ed] to happen becomes it own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed” (O’Brien 67-68).

In this sense, the liminal status of war requires a form of representation that accounts for the intermingling and conjoining of visual locations, as well as a shifting between seemingly polarizing levels of emotion. As critics such as John McCormick, John Limon, and others have noted, for Hemingway, witnessing violent death in bullfighting was a substitute for witnessing violent death in war. Moreover, bullfighting becomes a lens through which to see and study the push and pull of life and death, as well as the cruelty of the spectator who participates in the act of looking at violence without feeling the pain of violence themselves. While most of the inter-chapters in In Our Time are narrated through a voice of detached, cold objectivity, the sixteenth inter-chapter, describing the death of Maera the matador, stands out from the others because of its acute focus on the subjectivity of Maera at the time of his death:

Maera lay still, his head on his arms, his face in the sand. He felt warm and sticky from the bleeding. Each time he felt the horn coming. Sometimes the bull only bumped him with his head. Once the horn went all the way through him and he felt it go into the sand. Some one had the bull by the tail. They were swearing at him and flopping the cape in his face. Then the bull was gone. Some men picked Maera up and started to run with him toward the barriers through the gate out the passageway around under the grandstand to the infirmary. They laid Maera down on the cot and one of the men went out for the doctor. The others stood around. The doctor came running from the corral where he had been sewing up picador horses. He had to stop and wash his hands. There was a great shouting going on in the grandstand overhead. Maera felt everything

getting larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then it got larger and larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then everything commenced to run faster and faster as when they speed up a cinematograph film. Then he was dead. (IOT 131)

There is a surprising level of intimacy in the representation of this violent death, as the reader comes to inhabit both the visual field and the tactile sensations of the bullfighter as he is dying. While the passage begins with Maera as a passive and immobile object that the reader sees externally, by the end of the passage, we become a viewer of Maera’s contracted vision, and the scene ends when he does. At the end of the passage, Hemingway’s reference to “a cinematograph film” calls attention to the impersonal spectator point of view, especially as he redefines that perspective by reinstating it with subjectivity through a likening of it to Maera’s own vision at the time of his death. Significantly, this inter-chapter comes immediately before “Big Two-Hearted River,” a story which I argue is about returning to the visual in order to repair oneself and see the world anew after the visual violence of war. Thus, while the earlier stories and inter-chapters of In Our Time make traumatized vision visible through their shifts between degrees of dissociation, the death of Maera, along with the final story in In Our Time, hint at Hemingway’s hope for a new kind of vision by intermingling the sensory with the visual.

While for Faulkner and Woolf, this redefinition of the visual manifests itself in the intersubjective seeing of others, Hemingway’s In Our Time insists upon the individual’s journey toward healing. Thus, the image of the train that opens “Big Two-Hearted River: Part I” recalls Nick being beaten and thrown off a train in “The Battler,” underscoring Nick’s personal journey into a world of violence, war, and pain. Unlike the transportation of the rowboat in “Indian Camp,” on which the young Nick “trailed his
hand in the water…fe[eling] quite sure that he would never die” (*IOT* 19), the railway train symbolizes modernity. The train, or more specifically, visual perception through a train window, embodies that fragmented, relentless succession of visual sights associated with the chaos and violence of war and urbanization in the twentieth century more broadly.35 Moreover, the image of train recalls the nineteenth century notion of “railway spine” as an early step to identifying and understanding mental shock. As Nicholas Daly explains, a “unique quality of the railway accident” was that “even those passengers who appeared to suffer little or no injury as a result of collision frequently suffered profound psychological distress *afterwards*” (Daly 42). Railway accidents were particularly traumatizing because, as Ralph Harrington remarks, “It denied its victims any chance of controlling their fate; it crystallized in a single traumatic event the helplessness of human beings in the hands of the technologies which they had created, but seemed unable to control…[I]t was arbitrary, sudden, inhuman, and violent” (Harrington 36). Thus, while the events of the Great War remain submerged in “Big Two-Hearted River,” the symbolism of the train as a paradigmatic site of the anxieties of war and modernity draw the event of the Great War closer to the surface. For this is the violent visual field from which Nick has just departed. Yet, the opening sentence of “Big Two-Hearted River: Part I” indicates a transformation of this visual field—a shift from one visual field to another: “The train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burning timber” (*IOT* 133).

As the train moves “out of sight,” a new visual landscape emerges. However, the departing of the train is not an immediate departure of visual violence. Nick’s new visual

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35 Critics such as Martin Jay and Wolfgang Schivelbusch have discussed the disorientation and diminishment of vision when perceiving velocity, specifically the ways in which images violently intersect and collide with another, producing spatiotemporal shocks to passengers.
field is his old, familiar fishing terrain in Seney, Michigan, yet this landscape, having been destroyed by a fire, has also been the site of violence and bears resemblance to a war zone. Where Nick looks for elements of the familiar (houses, the town’s saloons, the Mansion House hotel), the only things that remain are the railroad tracks and the river. Hemingway emphasizes Nick’s visual sighting of the trout in the river:

The river was there…Nick looked down into the clear, brown water, colored from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again. Nick watched them a long time. (*IOT* 133)

In the three paragraphs that describe Nick’s watching of the trout, Hemingway uses visual words such as “looked,” “watched” and “saw” a total of eleven times. With the terrain of his hometown demolished, the fact that “the river was there” fills Nick with happiness. For it’s the sighting of the trout in the river that gives Nick “all the old feeling” because “It was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout” (*IOT* 134). Thus, a shift in his visual field serves as an impetus for a remaking of himself, especially as this visuality intermingles with touch. As Nick sees the trout, he feels his “heart tighten,” and then, looking into the stream, he sees its shape and texture: “It stretched away, pebbly-bottomed with shallows and big boulders and a deep pool as it curved away around the foot of a bluff” (*IOT* 134). A new and refreshing vision of the beautiful natural world—a vision that encompasses the sense of touch—contrasts to the bleaker and more violent visual experience of Nick’s past and hints at a possibility for intersubjectivity in the future.

Thus, the image of the railway train, which earlier symbolized the shock and traumatic wounding of modern war, now, for Hemingway, becomes symbolic of a
possible future—a new destination. In “Big Two-Hearted River” Nick searches for this destination quite literally. On his way to set up camp, Nick feels happy and like “he had left everything behind” (**IOT** 134). While the fire has demolished much of Seney, Nick feels optimistic that “it could not all be burnt,” (**IOT** 135) and sets off in search for uninjured terrain:

The road ran on, dipping occasionally, but always climbing. Nick went on up. Finally the road after going parallel to the burnt hillside reached the top. Nick leaned back against a stump and slipped out of the pack harness. Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain. The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills. On ahead islands of dark pine trees rose out of the plain. Far off to the left was the line of the river. Nick followed it with his eye and caught glints of the water in the sun. (**IOT** 135)

Nick climbs up hill, literally in search of a new field of vision, and he finds this new visual field once he reaches the top of the road. Particular qualities of light help to emphasize the renewal: glints of sunlight reflecting off the water contrast the darkness of the burned country and the range of hills that stop off at the left. This new brighter, beautiful, and more natural visual field extend beyond the pine trees and the river, as Nick observes “the far blue hills that marked the Lake Superior height of land” (**IOT** 135). The shift towards this new and expanding visual field is not instantaneous, as the narrator explains that Nick could hardly see the hills, “faint and far away in the heat-light over the plain,” adding that “If he looked too steadily they were gone. But if he only half-looked they were there, the far-off hills of the height of land” (**IOT** 135). The emphasis here on how Nick sees underscores the slow individual transformation that Nick must undergo before he can come into a community and forge intersubjective connections with others. Facing the obstacles of climbing uphill, in the sweltering sun, with a backpack that is much too heavy, Nick ascends, both literally and metaphorically.
“Big Two-Hearted River” foregrounds minute visual details, including the variegated coloring of a grasshopper, the movement of trout in the river, and descriptions of trees—the shapes and sizes of trunks, the direction and spacing of branches, and the amount of foliage, along with other seemingly trivial aspects. Nick avoids “the need for thinking” by focusing on these minute visual details because it is only through this new, more natural, visual field that he can begin to heal the recent combat images that haunt his mindscape. At the end of the day, Nick takes of his heavy backpack and lays down in the shade. The narrator reports:

He lay on his back and looked up into the pine trees. His neck and back and the small of his back rested as he stretched. The earth felt good against his back. He looked up at the sky, through the branches, and then shut his eyes. He opened them and looked up again. There was a wind high up in the branches. He shut his eyes again and went to sleep. (IOT 137)

This passage contrasts to a moment in another story featuring Nick, “Now I Lay Me” published in Hemingway’s 1927 short story collection, *Men Without Women*. In “Now I Lay Me,” Nick expresses his fear of going to sleep, explaining that he “had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way…ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and then come back” (CSS 276). When the eye is silenced in the darkness of the night, Nick’s mind’s eye retreats to the war scenes that plague his consciousness. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” when Nick closes his eyes, and then opens them to see the branches blowing in the wind, before closing his eyes once again, he literally re-looks at this image in an effort to rebuild the image of the real world in his mind’s eye.
The act of shutting his eyes, opening them, and then shutting them again corresponds to the kind of slow and rhythmical actions Nick engages in throughout “Big Two-Hearted River,” including his tactile process of setting up camp—all of which he, of course, learned to do as a soldier: leveling out the ground, smoothing the sand, spreading out the blankets, cutting the tent pegs, raising the canvas. These slow and deliberate tactile movements create a sense of order for Nick, as he quite literally, rebuilds a home for himself in a new visual space. As he unpacks various objects from his backpack to put at the head of the bed, he takes comfort in the smell of the canvas and the sight of the light coming through it, feeling that there is something “homelike” about it:

Nick was happy as he crawled into the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. (IOT 139)

The emphasis on the word “made” in this passage (“He had made his camp” “He was in his home where he had made it”) suggests that by setting up camp, Nick is re-making himself and his world. Camp in the military sense of where troops lodge has now been made and transformed into a “good place,” with a field of view of Nick’s choosing, one that “overlook[s] the meadow, the stretch of river and the swamp, […] where] he could see, the trout were rising, making circles all down the surface of the water” (IOT 138). Nick is most happy in the morning, when the sun casts its warm light upon this new space, as in at the beginning of “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II,” for example, when Nick wakes up and crawls out of his tent “to look at the morning,” and observes that “[t]he sun was just up over the hill. There was the meadow, the river and the swamp…” As
Nick watched, a mink crossed the river on the logs and went into the swamp. Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river” (*IOT* 145).

It’s important to note that this new field of vision that Nick creates is not entirely Edenic. Moments of violence seep through the narrative, for example, when Nick baits the grasshopper: “His antennae wavered. He was getting his front legs out of the bottle to jump. Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the slim hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last segments of his abdomen” (*IOT* 148). The specificity of anatomical terms in this passage diverts considerably from the vagueness of language describing the caesarian section in “Indian Camp,” rendering an even more violent image despite the fact that it centers around an insect rather than a human. Yet, interestingly, Nick also demonstrates an ethics of violence when he carefully and skillfully un hooks a small trout and releases it back into the river. Thus, there is a sense in which, readers are reminded that there is something unnatural about the assaulting sensory experience of the warzone, as nature, then, offers a return to a more natural vision. Yet at the same time, this new vision is not a rejection of violence, as Hemingway determines that violence is part of his contemporary reality.

In *Being Geniuses Together*, Robert McAlmon recalls how, while on a trip to Madrid in 1924, both he and Hemingway saw a dead dog lying on the road in a horrible state of decay. McAlmon admits that he looked away from the gruesome sight, at which point Hemingway reacted by saying that “we of our generation must inure ourselves to the sight of grim reality” (rpt. in Eby 174). Later, McAlmon reflects that Hemingway must have “seen in the war the stacked corpses of men, maggoteaten in a similar way. He advised a detached and scientific attitude toward the corpse of the dog” (174). This, to
McAlmon, was an example of Hemingway’s “self-hardening,” but for Hemingway, *looking* was imperative for his ethics of vision as a writer. While Hemingway’s advice to take a “detached and scientific attitude toward the corpse of the dog,” may certainly represent Hemingway’s own traumatic wounding, it also sheds light on his larger aesthetic aim as a writer and his belief about the moral responsibility of a writer to convey visual violence authentically. For Hemingway, a writer must resist the natural urge to self-protect by turning a blind eye to violent death because those who are present for such violence have a moral responsibility to convey how that violence is seen. Thus, the fragmented form of *In Our Time*, including its collisions of the personal and impersonal, allows Hemingway to subjectively represent the perception of those who bear witness to pain and suffering. For it is only once those perceptions are recognized that a renewal of vision can be possible.
CONCLUSION

“My task,” famously writes Joseph Conrad, “is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is before all, to make you see.”36 A central question that has guided this dissertation is: what does the writer make us see? And secondly: how do they make us see it? Indeed Conrad’s often-quoted epithet refers to a kind of “seeing” that goes beyond physical eyesight, including a definition of seeing that is akin to perception and understanding—a seeing with the mind’s eye. Yet, as I have established in this study, this figurative kind of seeing is not mutually exclusive from physical seeing. In fact, twentieth century writers and thinkers became acutely aware of the inextricable relationship between the two, especially after the First World War.

One of the main arguments of this project has been that, for modernist writers, human relations depend on the visual; the visual carries with it the capacity to lead to intersubjectivity, and if we fail to see the importance of this possibility, we will continue to be torn asunder by the horrors of total war. Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of “face-to-face encounter” demonstrates how intersubjectivity leads to ethical responsibility: “But this facing of the face in its expression—in its mortality—summons me, demands me, claims me: as if the invisible death faced by the other…were ‘my business’” (Levinas, Entre-Nous 145). Thus, for Levinas, “the face signifies to me ‘thou shalt not kill’ and consequently ‘you are responsible for the life of this absolutely other’” (168). Such claims for responsibility strongly echo Borden’s “Look well at this man. Look!...Watch him while he dies” (Borden 204). Modernist writers, then, make this face-to-face encounter visible, particularly as they highlight the face, eyes, and bodies of the other

36 Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’: A Tale of the Forecastle (1897)
whom, as Shoshana Felman phrases it, “have been historically reduced to silence…and made faceless” (Felman 13), or in other words, have been dehumanized.

Thus, while the texts discussed in this dissertation focus on characters who suffer their war-trauma in silence and the ways in which authoritative social structures oppress their subjectivities, postcolonial literature about the First World War may very-well lead to an even stronger preoccupation with these concerns. For instance, Mulk Raj Anand’s *Across the Black Waters* (1939), a novel about a group of sepoys fighting for the British Imperial Army in the First World War, shares a certain resemblance to *The Middle Parts of Fortune*:

Lalu stared wide-eyed into the distances beyond the open stretch of desolate fields, beyond the wooded hills into the danger zone, to see where they were going, but his gaze returned empty of content and turned inwards, baffled by the experience he was going through, this strange enterprise to which his destiny had goaded him as if according to a prearranged plan. (Anand 87)

Not only do Anand’s sepoys share Bourne’s struggle to “see” physically, but there is also a sense in which the turn towards “destiny” and fate in this passage recalls Manning’s “blind force of nature,” or war as an inherently unknowable phenomenon. Yet while Manning’s war front novel depicts the psychically blinded war experience of European soldiers and the ways in which the lives of these soldiers were so easily discarded, *Across the Black Waters* offers another dimension to the category of war front novels in that Anand’s sepoys are doubly blinded by the very nature of them being sepoys:

There was no afterglow in the twilight of France, and they had to be wary as they groped in the darkness and the mist, trying to keep clear of enemies. For their idea of war was still of the campaigns on the frontier, where hungry tribesmen often came into villages dressed as goats, sheep or crows, looted rifles and ammunition and made off into the hills. The Germans might surprise them like the Afridis: from the loud detonations of guns, the village seemed to be very near the front. (79)
Not only do the sepoys lack the training and experience for modern war, but for nearly a third of the novel, they remain largely removed it physically, which necessarily complicates their ability to know what it looks like and how it will affect them.

For the first hundred pages of the novel both the sepoys and the reader look for signs of war in this “war novel.” The dominating questions of location and mapping within the first few pages of the novel point to a sense of blindness and confusion among the sepoys: “‘Where is France?’ ‘Is that England?’ ‘Where is the enemy?’ ‘How many miles is it from here?’ … ‘Is the war there?’” (8). The black waters to which the title refers become symbolic of a larger metaphorical “unknown” into which these Indian soldiers physically, mentally, and emotionally advance, as Anand repeatedly illustrates how “Nobody knew….nobody knew anything” (65). Unable to see the war from where they stand literally, they rely on their other senses to help confirm its location: “‘Boom! Zoom!’ The guns thundered from somewhere on land. ‘Oh, horror! The war is there!’ ‘To be sure!...’ ‘The phrunt!’ The sepoys burbled gravely, looking ahead of them, fascinated, in wonder and fear, intent” (9-10). The literally obscured vision of these sepoys is illustrated through Anand’s emphasis on sound and darkness. Unable to see the war, the sepoys rely on audition to help confirm its existence and their geographical position to it. However, it immediately becomes clear that the sepoys are mentally blinded as well: one officer corrects them, explaining that what they’re hearing are not the sounds of war, but of the guns of the warships saluting them. Anand’s playfulness with Indian pronunciation in this passage and throughout the novel adds another dimension to the figurative blindness of these sepoys whose illiteracy further distances them from understanding facts and information about the war.
One of the curious aspects of Anand’s novel is that, though *Across the Black Waters* is the only novel written by an Indian about the First World War, Anand himself never directly witnessed the war. Even more interestingly, most of the novel was drafted in 1937 while Anand was in Spain, volunteering as a journalist during the Spanish Civil War and was revised and finalized when he was in England in 1939. As a result, one can’t help but wonder why Anand would decide to base his novel on the events of the First World War, a different war from the one in which he was currently an eyewitness.

One possibility is that Anand recognized the events of this particular war as offering an opportunity to look closely at the way Empire treats its colonized subjects. Empire and war overlap in *Across the Black Waters*, as the sepoys interact with Europeans in ways they never did back home:

Lalu was full of excitement to be going along in this city. The march through Marseilles had been merely a fleeting expedition, and he was obsessed with something which he struggled to burst through all the restraints and the embarrassment of the unfamiliar, to break through the fear of the exalted life that the Europeans lived, the rare high life of which he, like all the sepoys, had only had distant glimpses from the holes and the crevices in the thick hedges outside the Sahibs’ bungalows in India.

(30)

Significantly, Anand uses rhetoric of visuality to describe the economic, cultural, and social barriers that divide the local British community from the Indians back home. While the sepoys would peer through holes and crevices to catch glimpses of how the British lived in India, now that they are in Europe, Lalu views his position alongside the British as an opportunity to “burst through” the barriers that define him as a subjugated other. Yet Anand is careful to show that any such romantic glimpses of this dreamland are merely illusions within the authoritative regime of empire. In Anand’s novel, the officers show no compassion for these men: in addition to assigning them to fatigue duty on a
regular basis, the officers often making hasty and arbitrary decisions without explanation, and even put the sepoys in battles without the weapons necessary to defend themselves. As one sepoy exclaims: “Where are our guns? Where are our guns?—We haven’t got any guns!...Support of big guns…I tell you, if we had had big guns and more big guns, we could have silenced the opposite tornado of shrapnel and bullets” (121). Without the guns to match the strength of the artillery of the Germans, they don’t stand a chance, and Lalu ultimately sees many of his comrades die violent and lonely deaths as a result.

Thus, Anand’s social critique registers in his highlighting of the paradox of the Allied nations using their colonial subjects as cannon fodder to ensure their own democracy and civilization, thereby putting colonial subjects in the position of ensuring their own dehumanization and subjugation.

It’s clear that the Great War prompted modernist writers to address other social issues. Therefore, another direction that this dissertation might lead is to an examination of seeing and blindness beyond the war front. Certainly, following Alex Vernon’s claim that “for veterans turned writers…the war experience surely infiltrates their nonwar texts as well” (Vernon 19), one might turn to the other works of these writers that don’t necessarily hinge upon war. But if Vernon’s statement is true for writers who are in a war, the same could be said for writers who lived through a war and saw the war through a blinding haze of fear, confusion, myths, and lies.

Thus we might revisit a range of figures of blindness and visuality, such as the episode of the blind stripling in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, where Leopold Bloom participates in an intersubjectivity of blindness, as he charitably helps a blind stripling cross the street and then imagines the deeply intimate sensory perceptions of the blind
man. While at first Bloom’s thoughts exhibit condescension when he observes, “Stains on his coat. Slobbers his food, I suppose…Have to be spoonfed first. Like a child’s hand, his hand” (U 8.1096-1097), as the scene continues, Bloom’s interaction with the stripling reflects a genuine empathy, as his thoughts move from looking at the blind man to imaginatively perceiving the world through the stripling’s blind eyes: “something blacker than the dark” (U 8.1109). Bloom’s ability to imagine the blind man’s seeing extends itself into a broader willingness “to see ourselves as others see us” (U 8.662), even when that self-reflexive vision is uncomplimentary: “Perched on high stools by the bar, hats shoved back, at the tables calling for more bread no charge, swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food their eyes bulging, wiping wetted moustaches…Am I like that?” (U 8.654-8.662).

Similarly, Stephen Dedalus’s more mature mind in Ulysses moves beyond his childhood fear of having his eyes clawed out by Dante’s eagles, now philosophically pondering the “ineluctable modality of visible” (U 3.01), including his own inescapability from the scrutinizing eyes of others. Thinking about whether others see him as he sees his sister, Stephen ponders: “My eyes they say she has. Do others see me so?” (U 10.865). In depicting Bloom and Stephen’s preoccupation with “see[ing] ourselves as others see us,” Joyce transliterates the Scottish lines from Robert Burns’ poem: “O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us / To see oursels as ithers see us! / It wad frae mony a blunder free us, / An’ foolish notion: / What airs in dress an’ gait wad lea’e us, / An’ ev’n devotion!” While Burns’ poem implies the impossibility of ever seeing ourselves as others see us, Joyce’s Ulysses, along with other modernist novels, labor to engage with the complexities surrounding the intersubjectivity of vision, as they make seeing and blindness visible.

37 “Pull out his eyes, Apologize, Apologize, Pull out his eyes” (Portrait 8)
Clarissa’s culminating moments in *Mrs. Dalloway* restores her vision by encompassing that which is painful to see, that from which her world encourages her to avert her eyes. This, of course, is also Woolf’s mode of narration in the novel, as well as a technique employed by others such as Borden and Hemingway—as their narrators move seamlessly from viewpoint to viewpoint, training us to see others seeing. The epigraph to Wallace Stevens’ “Evening Without Angels” affirms the modernist author’s affinity for the visible world: “the great interests of man: air and light, the joy of having a body, the voluptuousness of looking.” Yet even while modernism embraces the joyous pleasures of the visual, First World War literature illustrates that we can only fully arrive at this “voluptuousness” once we have worked through our resistance to, and fear of, *seeing others seeing.*
BIBLIOGRAPHY


