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‘Between the Grave and the Stars’: Ghost Plays of the Interwar Period, 1925-1936

PhD

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Abstract

This thesis considers representations of soldier ghosts as they appear on the British, American, and European stages between the years 1925 and 1936. Across four chapters, I explore the theatrical deployment of the figure of the soldier ghost in conjunction with the history of scientific occultism. The development of a wireless imagination, born in the late nineteenth-century, gave rise to new, technologically-minded forms of spiritualism and commemoration in the first half of the twentieth-century; the use of the wireless in commemorative practices invited fantasies of disembodiment and re-embodiment, rekindling spectral metaphors in literary depictions of the workings of collective memory. I argue that the inherent spectrality of theatre inspired playwrights to engage with the contradictions of commemoration and to propose memorial alternatives; through the mobilisation of the realm of memory in the guise of the ghost, all these works display an inherent memorial impulse that both complements and disrupts the traditions and rhetoric of institutional commemoration. I consider plays by neglected playwrights including Robins Millar and Joe Corrie, alongside obscure works of more well-known authors such as John van Druten, Irwin Shaw and Reginald Berkeley. These plays have enjoyed virtually no afterlife since their inception, and some also had limited success in their day: this idiosyncratic corpus allows me to unearth the discomfort that surrounded discourses about memorial and funerary practices in the aftermath of the First World War, while offering a fresh take on ghostly figures as they appear in both modernist and theatre studies. I take an interdisciplinary approach in this study which draws on aspects of performance theory, cultural history, and Gothic studies to propose that theatre is a vital tool to investigate the ways in which the memory of the First World War continues to haunt us to this day.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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INTRODUCTION

A Shadowy Mirror

This thesis responds to a crisis in cultures of mourning. Throughout the First World War and in the years that followed, debates raged in the United Kingdom over ways to handle the remains of those soldiers who had died at the front and were laid in isolated, scattered or mass military graves. As most soldiers had lost their lives or had been reported as missing in foreign countries in Europe, British authorities were confronted with a major problem: the number of bodies to transport and house in British cemeteries was unprecedented. This led to the issuing of a governmental ban on the exhumation and subsequent re-patriation of the bodies of Imperial soldiers. The ban was due to expire at the cessation of hostilities, yet it was extended and further consolidated after the war. Indeed, in 1917, Fabian Ware, the founder of the Imperial War Graves Commission, wrote to the British government demanding that burial grounds in France and Belgium be acquired 'in perpetuity' and that 'architectural' rules be established for the creation of war cemeteries that could ensure equality of treatment and commemoration for all British dead abroad.[1] The military cemetery plan was thus approved and announced nationwide. Ware's plan was for every regiment to have a simple 'regimental headstone', and for every individual soldier to have a grave complete with a cross or a non-Christian emblem.[2] This decision encountered a good share of opposition, sparking a variety of debates that engaged both the British Government and public opinion. In his short pamphlet *The Graves of the Fallen*, written

[1] Fabian Ware, typescript of the Memorandum on the Acquisition of Burial Grounds in France and Belgium by Fabian Ware, typescript, 1917, Archive of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, WG 549 PT.1, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Maidenhead. (Hereafter cited as Memorandum, CWGC). Hereafter, the Imperial War Graves Commission (the interwar name of the current Commonwealth War Graves Commission) will be termed IWGC within the body of the text. Whenever the archive is mentioned in the footnotes, it will instead be termed CWGC archive.

[2] Memorandum, CWGC.

for the IWGC, Rudyard Kipling emphasised the enormity of the endeavour, concluding: 'In view of the enormous numbers (over half a million) of our dead in France alone, the removal of the bodies to England would be impossible, even if there was a desire for it'.[3]

As most of the conscripted had been civilians, the IWGC received irate correspondences from parents and relatives of the dead demanding that personalised commemorative statues and specific inscriptions be added to the graves. Issues that seemed related to burial practice soon became class issues. In the transcripts of one of the most heated Parliamentary debates about the question of equality of treatment, MP William Burdett-Coutts strongly criticized a *Times* article for its insinuation that 'the poor of this country are too generous to rob their fellow sufferers of the solace of the individual memorial because they themselves cannot afford to erect one'.[4] In a 1920 address to the House of Commons, he spoke in defence of the Commission, stating that 'The mourning woman in a cottage or tenement should say to herself, or have in her heart the thought – even if silent and unexpressed – "My man died the same death, made the same sacrifice, for the same cause as that one. Why should he not have as beautiful a monument"?'.[5] To prove his point further, Burdett-Coutts also placed the responsibility to defend this very ideological position on the dead themselves. On this issue, he noted, 'the dead speak from the graves where they lie'.[6] He referred to a letter by a Colonel H. Lewin, who had died in battle. The letter related the Colonel's battalion's wish that everyone should be buried according to the same rules upon their death: again, it would not be right if special commemorative monuments, personal statues or unique inscriptions were to be introduced for certain soldiers and not others. Citing the letter alone would have probably sufficed to support his plea to Parliament, but

[3] Rudyard Kipling, *The Graves of the Fallen* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1919), 15.
[4] Typescript of the Statement of Reasons on the question of the equality of treatment, 1920, Archive of the CWGC, ADD 1/1/10, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Maidenhead. (Hereafter cited Statement of Reasons, CWGC).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

Burdett-Coutts had understood that there was a great rhetorical power to be harnessed in speaking on behalf of the dead and appropriating their voices.

At the time of Burdett-Coutts' speech, Britain was confronted with a new, unsettling sense of remoteness; as Alice Kelly noted, for those who had not served at the front during the First World War, the 'experience of war death was largely one of imaginative reconstruction'.[7] Burdett-Coutts' letter-reading performance in Parliament relied precisely on such a process of reconstruction, and highlighted 'the difference between corporeal, visceral death and death related only in words': the difference, in other words, 'between matter and information'.[8] However, by conjuring both the reality of the grave and a scenario in which the dead can speak, Burdett-Coutts had evoked the materiality of death (and what comes with it: graves, cemeteries, memorial monuments, etc.), while crafting a fiction of transcendence that saw the dead as somehow capable of piercing that material veil. His intervention takes on a different dimension when considered in a literary context, alongside a growing interest in the return of the dead as dramaturgical material to be mined: like him, many authors relied on the diffuse set of popular, folkloric, and religious preoccupations that fuelled a modern spiritualism attuned to the realities of war and the possibilities of technology. For example, Leopold Bloom, in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (published just a couple of years later), would muse about what would happen if the voices of the dead could be accessed, at least semi-directly, by having 'a gramophone in every grave'.[9] Here, we are confronted again with questions of mediation and intercession: in Bloom's thought experiment, sound technology breaches the remoteness of the grave and evokes a memorial practice that is also a spectral performance, fashioning the gramophone as a medium which, in all senses of the word, brings the dead back to life. This thesis is concerned with the realm of theatre and explores the implications of dramatizing memory and performing memorialisation in

[7] Alice Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms: Women Writers, Death and the First World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 11.
[8] Ibid.
[9] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), 93.

the aftermath of the First World War: by engaging with the relationship between theatre and commemoration in the interwar period, I draw on the figure of the ghost as a lens that allows us to investigate how the mechanisms of memory are enacted in performance.

The seeds of this thesis are planted in the soil of interwar British and American spiritualism, the coordinates of which I will spell out below, but they germinate in different directions and bloom into the mid-1930s, when the intensity of 1920s spiritualism was starting to shift and eventually wane. I consider the implications of the appearance of ghost soldier characters on the interwar stage and demonstrate how the interwar fascination with ghosts was neither simply nor idiosyncratically tied to spiritualism but should be considered as a historical and social phenomenon that reflects the complex relationship between mourning and commemoration. It is certainly true that the popularity of spiritualism played a fundamental role in the crafting and maintaining of a certain popularity of the ghostly trope itself, but the ghosts I am interested in are often only tangentially related to their séance-borne cousins. Drawing on plays and performances that have now sunk into whole or partial obscurity, I explore a theatrical corpus that has remained entirely neglected in studies of modernism, war, and performance alike, and whose interconnections and affinities to the prevalent concerns of their time have thus far not been articulated.[10] Through a focus on these long-forgotten plays that revolve around phantasmic soldier characters, the thesis argues that the ghost of the soldier who died in service, on foreign land, acted as a pressing social symbol of the twilight zone of war memory, which stretches between a community's impulse to forget and its responsibility to remember. The ghost is thus a facilitator for a collective meditation on grief, and a figure bearing within itself a (self)conscious memorial impulse.

[10] There might be several reasons for the neglect and silence around these plays in the academic world: the most immediately discernible of these is that most of these plays' performance histories have been hazily recorded, and that the plays themselves have not interested the contemporary theatre scene (with a few notable exceptions).

The plays considered here were written and performed after the Armistice, but they can be defined as 'war plays' in the broader sense of the term: they are reflections on the wartime past which are either set during the First World War or force their characters (and their audiences) to look *back* into their own experience of the war and the home front. For this reason, the thesis sits in conversation with studies concerned with First World wartime as it is experienced away from the frontlines, and with the tensions that this remoteness carries within itself. Crucially, this question of remoteness concerns time, as well as space: in this sense, studying representations of war memory – that dramatize the act of *looking back* on the war – allows us to consider the ways in which war alters and disrupts the flow of time and history, both on a personal and collective level. In *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1990), Samuel Hynes reflected on the effect of the conflict on perceptions of temporality and history in British culture, and on the place that memory and commemoration held in this context. More recently, though, the field of new modernist studies has added significantly to this critical path, further illuminating the relationship between wartime and literary meditations on time, history, and the nation.[11] There is a spectral charge in this kind of enquiry, if we accept that the one function of spectral characters is often that they represent disturbances to the conventional rules that regulate the passing of time. Kate McLoughlin's A*uthoring War* (2011) and, most recently, Beryl Pong's *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime: For the Duration* (2020) have both explored the ways in which the narration of war often expresses a spectral struggle to understand and accept the rules of time keeping.[12] I keep these studies in

[11] In her recent *Commemorative Modernisms*, Alice Kelly argues that the 'new culture of commemoration' that followed the First World War in Britain, 'was a key preoccupation of, and context for, literary modernism', noting that changing attitudes towards death meant that modernist culture had to accept, and 'accommodate', a series of 'distortions' to traditional ways of thinking. See Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms*, 23, 25.

[12] See Kate McLoughlin, *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Beryl Pong, *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime: For the Duration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). McLoughlin explores spectrality precisely as a temporal rupture, an anxiety felt in relation to the categories such as past, present, and future: able to navigate all temporal categories at once, the ghost articulates well the eeriness of the time (and the space) of war. See McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 119. Other books that have explored similar questions are, for

mind, here, while re-orienting these reflections in order to emphasize the centrality of theatre, performance and communal artistic practices in the narration and memorialisation of a conflict.

While historians have produced several accounts of the state of theatre during the First World War and remarked on the popularity of pantomimes and music hall, few scholars have dedicated in-depth studies to the dramatic portrayal of a war *remembered* in the interwar years.[13] Adrian Curtin, for example, has considered plays produced in the 1920s – such as Ernst Toller's *Die Wandlung* (1919) and Vernon Lee's *Satan the Waster* (1920) –as part of larger thematic studies that advance general claims on the ways in which modern theatre deals with death.[14] Heinz Kosok's study of the theatre of the First World War in Britain and Ireland, published in 2007, remains virtually the only transhistorical study that sheds light on how the First World War blossomed into a dramatic obsession, influencing both West End and amateur theatre productions in the interwar years and beyond. As he shows, theatre performances of war plays remained widely popular despite the rise of film and music hall. He also points out that, at least in the interwar period, 'theatre provided many of the images, emblems and metaphors required to come to terms with the experience of war'.[15] In the book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell also emphasizes this point; however, in this context, the lens of 'theatre' serves him chiefly as an allegory to explore specific characteristics of the act of warfare, and as a means to

example, Randall Stevenson, *Reading the Times: Temporality and History in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) and Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[13] Gordon Williams' *British Theatre of the Great War: A Revaluation* was published in 1935. Allardyce Nicoll mentions Joe Corrie and Robins Millar's names in passing in her book on British theatre between 1900 and 1930, in a chapter about 'minority drama', which she defines as drama that was produced in repertory theatres or in regional settings outside of the London West End: see Allardyce Nicoll, *English Drama 1900 – 1930: The Beginnings of the Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 265. Another illuminating and more recent, study of the theatre of the First World War is Mark Rawlinson's anthology of First World War plays which includes one ghost play, Noel Coward's *Post-Mortem*, and documents Coward's struggles with accepting this work's flaws. However, Heinz Kosok's *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) still remains the most ambitious study of the First World War's legacy in theatre to date.

[14] Adrian Curtin, *Death in Modern Theatre: Stages of Mortality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

[15] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 10.

indicate that a certain stylistic 'theatricality' was often found in both war memoirs and fictional narrations of the experience of war.[16]

Fussell states that 'by the late thirties the habit of remembering the war in theatrical terms was so widespread among readers that by using the title *Between the Acts* Virginia Woolf could indicate the historical location of her novel between two gigantic pieces of theatre, the First and the Second': if this is true, then the neglect that theatre has received in the contexts of studies of the First World War and its memory and memorialisation comes as a slight surprise.[17] This very neglect is what Kosok's study aims to address because, as he notes, 'between the end of the First and the outbreak of the Second World War there was not a single year (not even 1929, the year of the Wall Street Crash and the ensuing Great Slump) without a war play of one kind or another'.[18] Kosok's work is comprehensive and important in its effort to catalogue, according to technique, theme and style, the various dramatic depictions of the First World War from 1919 up to the late 1990s. This thesis builds on Kosok but takes a different route, discussing a smaller range of plays written and produced between 1925 and 1936 which show remarkable thematic continuities, as well as heterogeneities. My work is an exercise in scholarly spectrality which digs its materials out of the cemetery grounds of forgotten texts: this small, fascinating corpus produced by largely non-combatant playwrights opens up potential for discussing war and modernism in a new way, not least because the plays, in spite of their similarities, exhibit radical differences in their artistic treatment of the ghost, signalling that there was a stylistic and ideological diversity at work in the ways in which playwrights and artists approached the topic of war memory in the modernist period. I thus consider plays written for various theatrical outlets and endeavours: this diversity, in turn, reflects the symbolic versatility of the war ghost, as a figure which can find a consistent space to exist and thrive within radically different artistic

[16] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 203.
[17] Ibid, 230.
[18] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 4.

landscapes. It also shows that the ghost-seeing experience can be framed in countless ways. In my chosen corpus, the ghost gestures to a web of common, shared experiences, opening avenues of communication between different conceptions of art (as entertainment, as activism, as memorial) and different perspectives on the war, that of the combatant and that of the civilian, a category which most of the playwrights belonged to. As we shall see, the ghost consistently enabled playwrights to navigate the conceptual quicksand of memory, providing a language to capture the problems of remembering and forgetting both on a personal and collective level. Crucially, the return of the ghost in these texts also allows us to understand that the unity at the heart of the collective realm - the 'civic' space, to quote Jay Winter, in which commemoration is a form of public mourning - was punctured by a variety of issues, first and foremost that of class: in several of the plays considered here, we will see that working class characters remain excluded from some of the most wholesome and positive depictions of commemoration.[19] Therefore, the realisation of the 'collective affirmation' that characterises commemoration as a participatory act or, as Winter defined it, 'an act of citizenship', is wishfully evoked in these play-texts, only to remain somewhat unsubstantiated.[20] This, to an extent, reflects the issues at stake in the debate surrounding post-war commemoration. A typewritten letter found in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's archive, dated 1920, testifies to this: here, a W. Botallack responds to a member of the public and writes, 'As I understand it, they [the Commission] have not settled the question of how to deal with the enormous number of missing men by way of commemoration. It is a most difficult and perplexing problem, but I feel quite sure that some definite record at least will be decided on with regard to these painful cases'.[21]

[19] Jay Winter. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Typewritten letter, July 24th, 1920, Archive of the CWGC, ADD 1/1/10, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Maidenhead.

This is the context in which interwar spiritualism began to spread. Before delving deeper into questions of how the figure of the ghost has been handled by criticism, it is necessary to elucidate a few points of context in relation to interwar spiritualism. While most of the playwrights were sceptics, the popularity of the spiritualist movement had an observable impact on their ghost plays. This may be down to the fact that these plays are truly concerned with the idiosyncrasies of their time: as such, references to the spiritualist movements, spiritualist characters and séances, mediums and the conjuring of spirits appear explicitly in several of the scripts, although they are rarely truly relevant to the plot and its resolution. However, the way in which most of these dramatists were willing to tackle the tropes and rhetoric of spiritualism in their work - sometimes comedically, sometimes sombrely - points us to the movement's cultural relevance. Spiritualism had many identities, and its widespread appeal rested on the idea that a connection could be established with the dead in a way that stretches beyond commemoration and traditional funerary rites; however, as we shall see, it did in some cases exist in conversation with, and did support, commemorative efforts. This is true of the most consolatory forms of spiritualist practice, which I will explore in the following section. It should be noted that, while most of the playwrights featured here were not in any way affiliated to these spiritualist circles, several of the plays considered in the thesis – especially those written in the 1920s – also display consolatory tendencies. As such, it is fair to say that the spiritualist movement at least fascinated these playwrights, who were engaged in dramatic reflections on the ways in which personal and collective mourning could best handle the difficult memory of the war dead. As this section has explored, shifts in mourning and funerary practices in the years following the First World War had started to make apparent that the commemoration of the dead was a discourse rife with tensions and ambiguities. Reflections on death, and the necessity to preserve memory, appeared in literature, popular culture and even scientific discourses. The plays considered here are part of this zeitgeist. In several of them, it is possible to sense an ambivalent and even confusing attitude

towards the implications of granting agency to the dead in spectral form: the political reverberations of the return of the ghost remain, most of the time, merely hinted at.

Towards a Consolatory Spiritualism

On 14 September 1915, the day of the attack on Hooge Hill, young Lieutenant Raymond Lodge was struck by a fragment of shell and died. Upon receiving the news, his parents Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge were grief-stricken. It was the intense sorrow generated by this news that prompted Sir Oliver Lodge to attempt 'unusual communications' with the spirit of his youngest son; the result of these experiments was translated in writing and published in a 1916 book titled *Raymond, or Life and Death.*[22] The book gained quick popularity as a 'spiritualist classic', addressing the bereaved who did not wish to let the memory of their loved ones disappear in death.[23] Lodge declared that he was inspired to write this as 'a service' to 'mourners', if they could 'derive comfort by learning that communication across the gulf is possible'.[24] Lodge's writing sought to normalize psychic communication, stripping it of its fraudulent aura and presenting it as a valuable antidote to the trauma of loss. The subtitle of *Raymond* declared: 'With Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection after Death'. Central to this statement was the assumption that séances, table turning (a form of séance in which participants sat around a table, placing their hands on it and waiting for movements and rotations to reveal a message), or

[22] Oliver Lodge, *Raymond, or Life and Death* (New York: George H Doran Company, 1916). *Raymond* did sell thousands of copies: in his 1917 attack on spiritualism, Charles A. Mercier defined Raymond's 'a sale that might be envied by the writer of the most popular of popular novels'. Other comments on the popularity of Raymond can be found in Charles A. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge* (General Books LLC, 2010), 9. Interestingly, James Mussell and Graeme Gooday foreground the 'modernity' of Lodge's approach to spiritualism and note that the consolatory communication with the dead related in *Raymond* is punctured by the nightmarish ghost of the war neurosis known as 'shell shock'. See Mussell and Gooday, *A Pioneer of Connection: Recovering the Life and Work of Oliver Lodge* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2020), 158-160.
[23] Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 15.
[24] Lodge, *Raymond*, viiii.

medium communication would channel beings that, despite existing in an after-life, were thought to retain a degree of knowledge of the world and, most importantly, the willingness to communicate with the living. In other words, part of spiritualism's creed rested (and still rests) on the idea that, if the memory of the dead is difficult to erase from the hearts of the living, so the memory of the living survives in the hearts of the dead. Why would they relinquish the possibility of gettingin touch?

Despite being a detractor of spiritualism, in March 1915 - a few months before Lieutenant Lodge's death - J.M. Barrie had felt a 'premonition' come upon him that his adoptive son George Llewellyn Davies was going to die in the war. George did indeed die on 7 March 1915, shot by a sniper. Barrie was devastated, but soon enough he received another blow. Two days after learning about George's death, he received a letter from him.[25] He remained deeply shaken by this; perhaps he had ventured to think that the person contacting him was not George while he was still alive, but rather the George who was already dead. George's death prompted him to write his 1918 play *A Well-Remembered Voice*, in which a dead soldier named Dick returns to visit his father in the shape of a spectral voice. As we read in an article from the *Illustrated London News* of 6th July 1918, the play was said to handle with 'gentle fingers' the topic of bereavement and the loss of young lives at the front.[26] Indeed, despite the painful origin of the inspiration that produced it, the play stages a sweet, moving reunion between a bereaved father and his ghostly son, a cheerful ambassador of the afterlife who constantly begs his parent to 'keep a bright face'.[27] The play's first public performance was staged on 28th June 1918, as part of a fashionable soirée organised in aid of the Countess of Lytton's new hospital for wounded

[25] Lisa Chaney, *Hide-and-Seek with Angels: The Life of J. M. Barrie* (London: Arrow, 2006), 395.
[26] "The Barrie Matinée at Wyndham's", *Illustrated London News*, July 6, 1918, ProQuest.
[27] J.M. Barrie, "A Well-Remembered Voice" in *The Plays of J.M. Barrie* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929).

soldiers.[28] Much like Lodge's writing, *A Well-Remembered Voice* produced a largely comforting and uplifting description of the soldiers' existence in the Great Beyond.

The interwar spiritualist scene offered a great deal of interpretive freedom: each medium tended to craft their spirit's personal take on what this afterlife really was like, although certain elements recurred. Barrie's play and Lodge's *Raymond* isolate at least one of these recurring notions: the widespread idea that death must wholly liberate us from the burden and physical ailments of the body. In *A Well-Remembered Voice*, Barrie's decision to subscribe to the dramatic tradition that sees ghosts staged as disembodied voices confirms this: the encounter between Dick and his father is staged so that the audience can only hear the soldier, never see him. But the play goes one step further and suggests that if the body were to be preserved in death, it would also be purged of all its wounds. The visited father, Mr Don, can clearly see his son in his entire physical shape. When Dick asks, 'How am I looking, father?', Mr Don notices that he has not changed.[29] Not only is Dick present in front of him, but he seems to have retained all his physical features, completely unaltered, even after travelling back from across the Gulf. 'Let me look at you again, Dick. There is such a serenity about you now,' he says.[30] All thoughts of war seem to have escaped Dick's mind, exactly like all physical wounds have vanished from his body. He is adamant that his father must forget all about sadness for his sake. Similarly, the writings of Oliver Lodge present the body of the dead in its full integrity, with Raymond reassuring his loved ones that that 'if a limb were lost in battle just prior to death, that limb was immediately restored upon entering The Other World'.[31] This perspective recurs in other instances of

[28] "The Barrie Matinée at Wyndham's."
[29] Barrie, "A Well-Remembered Voice", 139.
[30] Ibid, 151.
[31] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*: *Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 235.

consolatory spiritualism: spirits were called forth who pointed out that manifestations of grief from family and friends could actively 'hinder the progress of the spirit' in the afterlife. [32]

In this sense, Joanna Bourke is right in arguing that certain forms of twentieth-century spiritualism performed a similar service as the funerary practice of cremation. 'In both,' she argues, 'the body of the beloved was purified in death'.[33] There was no space for putrefaction, mutilation, or pain in the afterlife: spirits reassured the living that 'the body was a shell that was easily discarded'.[34] This was a popular belief, but it was by no means the only one. In *War Letters from a Living Dead Man*, compiled by automatic writing medium Elsa Barker, we read of X, dead man now turned 'astral being', who claims that the 'the feelings of hatred and the sufferings' engendered by the First World War had so radically altered the structure of Heaven that they had made it impossible to forget the conflict and rendered the afterlife a mightily unpleasant place to reside.[35] Spiritualist discourses are thus rife with ambiguity and contradictions, and these are often picked up by the literature that proposes to explore them. In the case of Barrie's *A Well-Remembered Voice*, we may be inclined to understand Dick's appearance as confirmation that Dick's ghost is simply made of the stuff of Mr Don's memory: the father remembers the son as he prepares to leave for war, a young, hopeful private in his shiny new uniform. However, the play is purposedly ambiguous, as Dick's girlfriend Laura also seems to feel a change in the air, a touch of the wind, a vibration of Dick's presence. The play asks us to hold on to this ambiguity, to think of the ghost as treading a path that is balanced between the volatility of memory and its very real, phenomenological effects. Despite Barrie's scepticism about spiritualism, he could certainly navigate its imaginative terrain, often characterised both by unadulterated theatrical

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[32] This belief recurs, as we shall see, in interwar literature and popular culture. Bourke describes spirits summoned in séances who could be caught attempting to direct external manifestations of mourning, instructing their relatives to get rid of the silly 'flowers and funeral bows', and to stop crying, because there was no need for tears. See Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 233.

[33] Ibid, 234.

[34] Ibid.

[35] *War Letters from a Living Dead Man,* written down by Elsa Barker (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1915), 12.

spectacle and by almost imperceptible touches, whispers and mysterious signals from a world beyond.

Spiritualism was no novel movement, of course. Arthur Conan Doyle, in his *History of Spiritualism* (1926), locates the inception of spiritualist thought in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and Edward Irving, whose experiments he terms 'disconnected and irregular uprushes of psychic forces'.[36] However, it is in the 1848 experience of the Fox sisters, who communicated with spirits in the small American hamlet of Hydesville, that he traces the beginning of spiritualism as a fully-fledged movement which later consolidated into a more or less coherent set of rules, looks, practices and conventions both in America and abroad. The Fox sisters were Margaret, fourteen, and Kate, eleven. Their parents had taken over a little house in Hydesville, which reportedly had a bit of an 'uncanny reputation': the previous tenants had been disturbed by intermitted sounds, mostly rapping noises.[37] In the fateful month of March 1848, one of the children abandoned her initial fear and decided to interact with whatever entity kept knocking on her walls, challenging it to repeat a rhythm that she set by snapping her fingers. At this point in his rendition of this tale, Conan Doyle issues a rather grand statement: 'Search all the palaces and chancelleries of 1848, and where will you find a chamber which has made its place in history as secure as this little bedroom of a shack?'.[38] Indeed, as far as chambers go, Kate and Margaret's haunted bedroom did become something of a legend. The Fox sisters had awakened a 'spiritual telegraph': they set up a psychic communication so strong and profound, and ignited a curiosity so deep in those around them, that their method of talking to spirits soon 'had swept over the Northern and Eastern States of the Union'.[39] Their spiritualism had become a brand. And soon enough, as Elizabeth Outka puts it, spiritualism developed internationally into a variety of these brands, distinct and yet interconnected: spirits began 'tilting tables, tapping

[36] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism Volumes I and II* (Pantianos Classics, 2016), 31.
[37] Ibid, 32.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 32-40.

shoulders, and playing musical instruments', but also appropriating other media, such as paper (through the practice of spirit writing), photography (which became suddenly able to capture 'ectoplasm') and the human body (with mediums enacting entirely ventriloquial communications in which their whole body was given over to the spirit).[40]

Outka notes that, after a period of waning popularity, spiritualism resurfaced at the beginning of the twentieth-century, especially in Britain and America; a need to communicate with spirits was suddenly fuelled by the grief and desperation that the war and the influenza pandemic were inflicting upon individuals and communities.[41] Conan Doyle 'packed auditoriums across two continents with his lectures on afterlife communication in 1922 and 1923'[42], while in 1923 an Anglican Reverend Dr G. Vale Owen spoke at the Boardhurst Theatre in Manhattan about the mechanisms of spiritual activity, stating 'there is hardly a house in the country in which spirits are not seeking attention,' to borrow the rather amused description of a *New York Times* reporter.[43] In his oft-cited book *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter uses the same architectural image and states that interwar spiritualism itself was 'a house of many mansions'.[44] One of these mansions, as we have seen, was clearly built on the necessity to soothe the grief of those who had lost their loved ones to the front's relentless shelling, bullets and illnesses. Looking past the spectacle and the theatrics, and past a tendency to showcase a human ability to breach the veil of death, Winter sees spiritualism as a basic coping mechanism for a new, entirely material set of preoccupations.[45] This is in keeping with his argument that post-First World War

[40] Elizabeth Outka. *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 202.
[41] Ibid, 202, 203.
[42] Ibid, 203.
[43] "Owen says spirits haunt many homes: Anglican clergyman describes a post-earth city where data are compiled", *New York Times,* January 29, 1923, ProQuest.
[44] Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 54.
[45] It is worth noting that we cannot isolate spiritualism entirely from more orthodox forms of religious worship. Many of those who dabbled with spiritualism were self-professed and devout Christians. Both spiritualism and orthodox religious creeds engage, fundamentally, with the same set of questions about state and destiny of the soul after death. The Church of England tried, during and between the wars, to contrast spiritualism with new and improved prayers for the dead (gently providing an alternative, as it were), but the Catholic Church was always adamant that attempting to communicate with the dead was a

commemorative practices were also mainly fuelled by a consolatory impulse.[46] For Winter, the spiritualist movement too sought to provide an outlet of relief for changing attitudes to burial and mourning. Winter notes that the conventions of Christian burial and commemoration had become 'irrelevant' in First World wartime: the dead were simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, especially in the context of British and American experiences of the war.[47] As soldiers fell on the Western Front, communities on their respective home fronts needed to deal with death as a quotidian experience while finding new and necessary ways to obviate to the dead body's absence. Consequently, traditional burial practices were radically altered, and mourning was affected by a new uncertainty: death and bereavement were experienced in mass, but people still craved the intimacy of private mourning practices which the war had made more and more difficult to access. As Winter observes, orthodox religious imagery struggled to address the personal within the collective: in place of divine and diabolical manifestations, ghosts swept in as supernatural entities that could link the plurality of the realities of the home front and Western front in a kind of 'spiritualist embrace'.[48]

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grave sin and did very little to concede or understand the appeal of spiritualism. This context is explored by Jenny Hazelgrove in her study of interwar spiritualism in Britain. Jay Winter, too, cites Leviticus 20:6 ('And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people') and Deuteronomy 18:10-12 ('There shall not be found among you (…) a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all who do these things are an abomination unto the LORD) to motivate Catholicism's rejection of spiritualism. British and American Catholicism were seldom lenient when it came to spiritualism, and the feeling was in some cases mutual. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, some branches of spiritualism existed in open conversation with socialist philosophy, in virtue of two 'common enemies': 'wealth and priestcraft'. See Logie Barrow's fascinating "Socialism in Eternity: The Ideology of Plebeian Spiritualists 1853-1913", *History Workshop Journal* 9, no 1 (1980): 50.

[46] Winter has argued this both in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* and, with Emmanuel Sivan, in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). This position has been criticised by other scholars for its narrowness, and for putting forward a disavowal of commemoration's political potential. Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have noted that commemoration is studied too often in paradigmatic ways: in brief, it is either fashioned as a political tool of control over national narratives of the past - by Eric Hobsbawm, among others - or as a response to overwhelming grief, in Winter's view. As Ashplant et all have noted, while Winter and Sivan's approach 'does not deny the importance of the state' in the control of mourning practices, it 'downplays it', disregarding the idea that 'when people undertake the tasks of mourning and reparation, a politics is *always* at work'. See Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, Michael Roper, *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 9.

[47] Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 69.

[48] Ibid.

Yet, interwar spiritualism was not exclusively consolatory in its aims. It also carried forward a late Victorian identity of scientific and pseudo-scientific research: in this guise, it appealed to accomplished scientists (such as Oliver Lodge), who continued to attempt to push the limits of knowledge by exploring psychic phenomena with scientific method and rigour.[49] Roger Luckhurst has placed the beginnings of a certain 'technologization of the occult' in the late 1800s, when 'inventors and technologists often initiated investigations inspired by the promise of rendering 'supernatural' means of communication mechanically possible'.[50] In the early twentieth-century, this technologization of the occult was still underway, and interested several avenues of scientific research: the theory of relativity, published in 1916, opened a window onto the metaphysical implications of 'connections between light and time'.[51] X-rays, a revolutionary discovery for medical science, also held paranormal lure. They were able to affect reality at a distance, they could pass through surfaces, they were invisible: they inspired, like the wireless, fantasies of mind-reading and thought-transference.[52] In fact, nowhere was this marriage between science and occultism as successfully realised as in the field of communication technology: as Emilie Morin has noted, 'Thomas Edison's phonograph and Guglielmo Marconi's wireless were often perceived as instruments granting fruitful insights into intangible worlds that had hitherto escaped comprehension'.[53]As Leopold Bloom's grave gramophone had also suggested, the imaginative worlds opened by disembodied, recorded and acousmatic sounds

[49] As Mussell and Gooday argue, there are still differences between what Jay Winter calls 'the Victorian conjectures on the nature of the spiritual world' (which include the scientific fascinations with the connections between spirituality and science) and interwar spiritualist discourses that engage science: the destructive effects of new military technology on soldiers' psyches did in fact cast a rather bleak and quintessentially 'modern' shadow on the topic of the endless possibilities of scientific research. See Mussell and Gooday, *A Pioneer of Connection*, 159.

[50] Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135.

[51] Katherine Ebury, 'Science, the Occult and Irish Drama: Ghosts in Yeats and Beckett' in *Science, Technology and Irish Modernism*, ed. Kathryn Conrad, Cóilín Parsons, and Julie McCormick Weng (Syracuse University Press, 2019), 232.

[52] See Simone Natale, "A Cosmology of Invisible Fluids: Wireless, X-Rays and Psychical Research around 1900", *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36, no. 2 (2011): 268.

[53] Emilie Morin, "Beckett's Speaking Machines: Sound, Radiophonics and Acousmatics", *Modernism/modernity* 21, no 1 (2014): 5.

proved endlessly fascinating for artists seeking to engage in reflections about ways to defer and circumvent the finiteness of death.

One of the major and most active institutions in this rising field that married spiritualist, psychological and scientific enquiry was the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in 1882 under the presidency of Henry Sidgwick. Pamela Thurschwell argues that 'psychical research', as the Society understood it, was the 'scientific study of the occult'.[54] In virtue of this scientific mission, the Society distanced itself from the realm of Theosophy, the occultist doctrine based on the theories of Madame Blavatsky, and from other established spiritualist groups, claiming that psychical research was too tricky a field to be investigated without the aid of 'the habit of thought engendered by science'.[55] Luckhurst also notes that the SPR proposed a rather controversial research method, claiming that it was not even necessary to be a believer in spectral forces to work effectively as 'a psychical researcher'.[56] Among the various names associated with the society, that of Frederic Myers stands out: a popular member of late Victorian high society, Myers was responsible for much research into the field of 'subliminal consciousness', and became notorious for his theoretical synthesis of our modern understanding of thought-transference as 'telepathy'.[57] Telepathy, the occult, psychical communication: the idea that the mind should display such powers was a prospect which, from the beginning of the twentieth-century, also resonated with and complemented the heterogenous concerns of the modernist movement, from Rebecca West to W. B. Yeats through to the French Surrealists. The mysteries of the unconscious, and the existence of mental states so powerful that they could induce trances, ventriloquial episodes, and telepathic connections, all appealed to the modernist penchant for literary, scientific, and philosophical 'investigations of the limits of consciousness'.[58]

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[54] Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.
[55] Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, 52.
[56] Ibid, 57.
[57] Ibid, 60.
[58] Ibid, 262.

Among all spectrally charged technological inventions, the wireless merits a few words of presentation in this introduction. Since the *fin de siècle*, wireless communication had been framed as potentially able to breach the endlessly contended border between the rational and irrational, the finite and the eternal, the material and immaterial; within many different strands of the quest for knowledge, this was regarded as a highly exciting prospect. Yet, Jeffrey Sconce has noticed how, together with promoting a sense of inclusion and belonging, the wireless also presented an unpredictable 'phantom realm' which put the listeners at the total mercy of the 'etheric ocean'.[59] Sconce flags up a disturbing side to radio communication, for the oceanic metaphor conjures an idea of the 'electronic message as a small boat tossed about on the waves', just as 'many citizens found themselves adrift on the new century's turbulent social waves'.[60] Indeed, radio provided a new way to extend the symbolic power of popular ritual to the new plane of mass communication, a concept exploited by internationalist organizations as well as the nascent Nazi regime in the 1930s.[61] It was also used for commemoration; in Britain, it became a fundamental outlet for the celebrations and events associated to Armistice Day, established in 1919. Armistice Day was initially characterised by the institution of a two minute silence to be observed throughout the British Empire on 'the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh

[59] Jeffrey Sconce, "A Voice from the Void: Wireless, Modernity and the Distant Dead", *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 1, no 2 (1998): 214.
[60] Ibid.
[61] In fact, throughout the 1930s, anxiety grew around the wireless's ability to manipulate and infiltrate people's minds: as Europe tumbled towards political radicalism and authoritarian governments were established in Italy, Germany and, later, Spain, the use of the wireless for internationalist, pacifist propaganda gave way to a different kind of propaganda which echoed rising nationalist discourses. It is worth noting that Joseph Goebbels became propaganda minister of Germany in 1933: he was renowned for his open appreciation of the radio as a political tool. Brian Currid reflected on the role of the radio in early Nazi Germany, noting indeed that the regime often publicly self-reflected (through the distribution of posters depicting spellbound crowds standing in the shadow of giant radio apparatuses, for example) on its own reliance on the radiophonic medium for the implementation of a well-rounded 'national publicity'. See Brian Currid, *A National Acoustics: music and mass publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 23. In Irmgard Keun's novel *Child of All Nations*, also set in the 1930s, 10-year-old narrator Kully summarises well the importance of the wireless for the rising National Socialist regime when she candidly states that 'Germans are not supposed to speak out, they are supposed to listen to the radio instead'. Irmgard Keun, *Child of All Nations* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 127.

month'.[62] The significance of this celebration, later renamed Remembrance Day, hinged on its ability to unite all those who observed the two minute silence into a collective act of remembrance in which 'time and space were obliterated'.[63]

As Stevenson has noted, this two minute silence might have felt short or long, depending on the ways in which human imagination stretched the fabric of war memory; the minds of civilians and former soldiers might have wandered further than the memory of the death of their loved ones or the noises of the battlefields, to imagine 'happier days preceding 1914' or the unexplored planes of what a lost life might have looked like in the future.[64]Armistice Day thus allowed for a moment of suspension when spatial and temporal divisions collapsed and the time of history, as well as the remoteness of the warzone, succumbed to the workings of memory. Radio stood out as an ideal channel for this, due to its democratising identity as a medium fit to speak to the masses, but also because of its formidable effectiveness in bringing people together that were previously separated by insurmountable distances. In an article from *Radio Pictorial* written in view of the 1936 Armistice Day wireless celebration, for example, we read: 'In the barren lands of Canada men who fought in the War will be rising early to take part, while Anzacs in the Bush will delay their evening meal to listen. In Africa the sun will be high in the sky, and Britons outdoors will not bare their heads, but they will listen and say: 'Thank you".[65] In this sense, radio's ability to shorten divisions across space and geography makes it an ideal companion to the philosophy of remembrance at work behind Armistice Day. I thus understand the interwar period as a time during which the experience of the disembodied voice – a device that theatre knows and cherishes - becomes more and more commonplace.[66] Crucially, the very

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[62] Randall Stevenson, "Time and Space Obliterated: Remembrance and Relativity in November 1919", *Modernism/Modernity PrintPlus* 5, cycle 2 (2020).
[63] *The Times* in Stevenson, "Time and Space Obliterated".
[64] Ibid.
[65] See John Trent, "The Silent Broadcast", *Radio Pictorial* 147, November 6, 1936. Warm thanks to Emilie Morin for passing on this article.
[66] Studies that explore this new ghostly identity of sonic modernity include Timothy C. Campbell's *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), and Helen Sword's *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio*

popularity of radiophonic transmission between the wars led to a heightened appreciation of the two minute silence, when even what was defined as 'radio's *giant* voice [my emphasis]' was silenced to 'pay tribute to the voices that were stilled in the Conflict'.[67] This thesis recognizes the spectral effect (and affect) of technology's influence on cultural production: the acousmatic voice, when featured in plays concerned with the memory of the war dead, generates a simultaneous fiction of both absence and presence, and operates in conversation with a set of new commemorative practices that had started relying on the imaginative freedom granted by radiophonic transmission.

The Guises of the Ghost

The ghost has been, and still is, a valuable critical tool for a variety of critical fields, spanning from psychoanalysis to queer historiography. Interdisciplinary studies of spectrality owe much to Jacques Derrida's book *Spectres of Marx*, which explores how political philosophy has engaged with, and attempted to exorcise, the spectre. Derrida theorises the spectre precisely as 'the future', that 'which is always to come', which presents itself 'only as that which could come or come back'.[68]As conceptualised by Derrida, the existence of the spectre is a nagging thought for both Marxists and their detractors: Marxists (and Marx himself) are as obsessed with the spectre as they are disturbed by it and wish to substitute the volatility of the ghost with 'real presence', 'living effectivity'.[69] Those who feel 'haunted' by Communism, on the other hand, live in fear of the spectre's eventual substantiation.[70] I will not necessarily engage with this aspect of Derridean

and the Avant-Garde, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992) explores the various uses that avant-garde movements and artist of the twentieth-century made of the wireless, both physically and metaphorically.

[67] Suzanne Evans, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 117.

[68] Jacques Derrida. *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 48.

[69] Ibid, 57.

[70] Ibid, 57.

thinking about spectrality here, as my concern with the ghost takes a different route; however, it is worth noting that performance was never far away in Derrida's thinking. In fact, while writing about the 'spectres of Marx', Derrida also writes of a certain performativity inherent in the attempt to exorcise the spectre. He argues that exorcising evil (in this case, 'a dreaded political adversary') is an action ruled by formulae and incantations which make up 'a performative that seeks […] to reassure itself by assuring itself', because 'nothing is less sure than [that] what one would like to see dead is indeed dead'.[71] The exorcism repeats the formulae to itself, like lines from a script: the spectre is gone, it has disappeared, it will never come back. In this, Derrida finds a paradox: whenever one attempts to certify death, that imaginary certificate is often 'the performative of an act of war', 'the restless dream of an execution'.[72] Something material of the spectre – a remnant, a trace – remains embodied in that death certificate. Derrida's reflection has implications for performance studies, especially in the context of theatre's unique relationship with death, with the body and with its remains.

Beyond Derrida, though, studies of the ghost and spectrality have developed in a variety of different trajectories, and often have stretched across disciplines.[73] Investigations of the cultural and historical currency of ghosts are mostly to be found in studies of the Gothic, a field that has also paid particular attention to the ghosts of war. Julia Briggs' *Night Visitors* (1977) tackled the ways in which the First World War contributed to altering the guise of the ghost story after the first half of the twentieth-century.[74] 'The realisation that man had used science to

[71] Ibid, 59.
[72] Ibid, 60.
[73] See, for example, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) in the field of cultural theory, Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) in the field of sociology, or the introduction of *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, in which Jeffrey Weinstock attempts to pin down the reasons for the 'spectral turn' undergone by 'popular culture and academia' in the early 2000s. See *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination,* ed. Jeffrey Weinstock (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 5.
[74] Julia Briggs, "Ghosts Troop Home: The Great War and its Aftermath" in *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977).

create a hell for himself' writes Briggs 'was inescapable on the battlefields of Flanders'.[75] The First World War had given rise to a 'new nightmare', wholly shaped by technology, and a new kind of death: the Gothic offered some representational solutions for such a novel, and yet entirely humanly crafted, horror.[76] Gothic studies has also paid particular attention to the ways in which post-First World War horror stories newly popularized the figures of the revenant and the monster, in order to conceptualise the deadliness of the modern conflict: examples of critical works of this kind that have been relevant to my corpus and its Gothic aspects include Marie Mulvey-Roberts' *Dangerous Bodies: Historicizing the Gothic Coporeal* and Andrew Smith's *Gothic Death 1740-1914*.[77] Andrew Smith's recent *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma 1914-1934* offers an account of the ways in which the frame of the Gothic can be used productively to read and interpret the fascination with ghosts that pervades much literature of the First World War. Here, Smith emphasizes the centrality of the ghost as a figure necessary to express, and eventually manage, trauma: even if First World War ghosts 'appear as Gothic figures devoid of traditional Gothic intent', Smith argues that the Gothic notion of the 'divided self', which also engages the Freudian paradigm of the uncanny (and the psychoanalytic process more generally), allows us to better understand the ways in which ghosts in First World War literature 'help to contain what otherwise appears as unfettered anxiety and trauma'.[78]

Crucially, Smith notes that, alongside a wartime ghost who ultimately aids trauma's resolution, some literature of the First World War, typically produced in the aftermath of the conflict, also engages with a 'malevolent' form of ghost; this ghost signals, in Gothic fashion, that 'the past is not quite so easy to leave behind'.[79] This is a type of ghost that fashions the

[75] Briggs, *Night Visitors*, 165, 166.
[76] Ibid, 166.
[77] For an account of the intersections between the Gothic and modernist sensibilities, see *Gothic and Modernism: Essaying Dark Literary Modernity*, edited by John Riquelme (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008).
[78] Andrew Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma 1914 – 1934: The Ghosts of World War I* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 2, 3.
[79] Ibid, 161.

realm of memory as prone to periodical hauntings, which impede the visualisation of a future finally free from the traumatic reverberations of war. Smith's reading of this 'malevolent' Gothic ghost is relevant to this project because it illuminates both the intersections between the figure of the ghost and the realm of memory, and the very essence of the relationship between theatre and ghosts. This relationship is memorial in kind and will be a crucial point of inquiry throughout the thesis. An exemplary scene in relation to the affinities between the act of performance and the memory process is found in the ghost play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), in which Frank McGuinness imagines that the ghosts of the wartime past are coming back to haunt old ex-soldier Pyper. Together with him, these ghosts haunt the entirety of the Northern Irish consciousness, which is, like Pyper, unable to shed the memory of the carnage of the Somme.[80] At the sight of them, Pyper says: 'Again. As always, again. Why does it persist? What more have we to tell each other? I remember nothing today'.[81]But the ghosts, of course, ensure that he does remember: Pyper here gestures to this experience of haunting as a recurring event, which forces him to disclose, reveal and re-visit his past endlessly. In other words, this scene foregrounds the act of haunting as a counterpart to the act of performance itself (unsurprisingly, this is the opening scene of the play): it is an act of embodied remembrance, that already contains the prospect of its return. This is not simply telling of the relationship between performance and haunting: this scene also functions as a commentary on commemoration. What if commemoration implied a form of perpetual haunting? In Pyper's case, this is true: the haunting of his dead companions perdures outside of his insistence that he is losing his memory. In *Remembering,* where he engages in a reflection on commemoration, Edward Casey notes that commemorating goes beyond the action of 'paying tribute', beyond the expression of gratitude

[80] Jonathan Evershed has used the lens of spectrality to explore the relevance of the Battle of the Somme in Northern Irish history. See Jonathan Evershed, *Ghosts of the Somme: Commemoration and Culture War in Nothern Ireland* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).
[81] Frank McGuinness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), 19.

for 'honourable actions undertaken in the past and at another place'.[82] Instead, he writes, it 'constructs the space, and continues the time, in which the commendably inter-human will be perduringly appreciated'.[83] *Observe the Sons of Ulster* is a reflection on the theatre as such a space of ritually 'constructed' space and time. However, in the depiction of Pyper's haunting, the play also fashions commemoration as a recurring punishment that forces Pyper to look inward, as well as outward, to the fact that the war has survived beyond itself. The playwright thus considers the shifting guises that First World War commemoration has donned through time, and, through the depiction of haunting as penance, lays bare its most troubling self.

Performing Ghostliness, Ghostly Performances

Notably, spectrality holds a place of particular importance in scholarly debates about the mechanics of performance. Peggy Phelan's famous notion that 'performance becomes itself through disappearance', foundational to theatre studies, has been long haunted by its own spectre.[84]According to Phelan's view, performance is defined by its transience, and leaves no trace: within this framework, there seems to be no place for the ghost as revenant, for that which returns. However, as Diana Taylor has written, performance can also 'make visible', albeit for a brief and transient moment, 'that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life'.[85] Recent developments in theatre and performance studies have indeed seen an increase of scholarly interest in the spectral dynamics that govern the performance act. This spectrality is often informed by the idea that the theatre is a keeper of memory: as Marvin Carlson has noted in *The Haunted Stage*, 'the physical theatre, as a site of the continuing reinforcement of memory by surrogation, is not surprisingly among the

[82] Edward Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 252.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance.* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146
[85] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 143.

most haunted of human cultural structures'.[86] Carlson argues, in his study, that the act of repetition and reappearance, so integral to performance, render the theatre a 'memory machine': as a 'repository of cultural memory', the theatre is art, but it is also a 'social institution', and it crafts a channel for the reappearance of collective memory, which continues to be acted, enacted and re-enacted.[87]

In this view, performance is not just defined by disappearance, but is instead a form of re-appearance that relies on disappearance for its perpetuation, and one could argue that its ghostliness mirrors the spectral dynamics of the memory process itself: as Joseph Roach writes in *Cities of the Dead*, 'memory is a process that depends crucially on forgetting'.[88] He, like Carlson, considers performance as a form of surrogation, an act of filling the 'cavities' left by 'death or other forms of departure'.[89] He thus highlights the ways in which performance mirrors memory, not merely because forgetting is an essential part of the memory process, but also because memory is an act of revisitation and substitution of 'an elusive entity' – the past, or history – which has disappeared, and can only be recalled in shadowy form.[90] In *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, then, Pyper claims that he 'remembers nothing' of the tragedy of the Somme in an attempt to wave the ghosts away: in Roach's view, it is this very forgetfulness that will never allow for his haunting to cease.[91] In this sense, one could argue that there is a spectral liveness (rather than a mere present-ness) to performance, to the theatre 'as memory machine': such liveness has been explored by Rebecca Schneider, who, in *Performance Remains*, reflects on the ways in which performance – physically and materially defined by re-enactment and repetition – is a 'mode of

[86] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 2.
[87] Ibid, 11.
[88] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.
[89] Ibid, 3.
[90] Ibid.
[91] McGuiness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, 19.

remaining' that is 'never (only) present'.[92] Performance is here foregrounded as an embodied experience, in which the body gestures to what previously was and what will come (the future), be it new histories, texts, other bodies. Actors put their body *in play* to become characters, performing something that is set to disappear, but which already bears the mark of its phenomenal successor: the body of the actor is, in Schneider's view, a live vessel 'enabling the spectre to 'stay alive', to reappear through 'the surface of live encounter'.[93] She defines practices such as performance, storytelling, visitation and improvisation as keepers of history, identifying flesh and the body as fundamental agents for the transmission of 'affect and enactment': affect, again, returns as 'impact'.[94] What Schneider means by this is that the body is, and becomes, what impacts it: in and through the body flows a kind of sensuous and eruptive collective memory.[95]

Spectrality studies, as I have previously noted in this introduction, are historically interdisciplinary, although the position of theatre and performance within such a field is still curiously marginal; while the spectre returns, again and again, to haunt the mechanics of performance theory at its very core, scholars interested in spectrality have often focused on select dramatic authors' treatment of the ghost on stage, and rarely produced overarching studies on the heterogenous ways in which the ghost has appeared on the stage throughout history.[96] In *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*, Alice Rayner has lingered on the theatrical conventions that accompany ghostly apparitions on stage, 'to counteract the sense that ghosts are no more than signs of illusion or imaginary projections'.[97] She, like Schneider, proposes that thinking of the material body of the actor allows us to trace a connection between spectrality as a

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[92] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 100, 7.
[93] Ibid, 7, 110.
[94] Ibid, 100.
[95] Ibid, 103.
[96] *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) collects several essays that explore instances of handling ghosts on stage.
[97] Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xii.

mode of conceptualising theatre and the various levels of specific spectrality at work in theatre and performance. Writing about Herbert Blau's performance practice, Rayner explores his conviction that the actor's work is a form of 'ghosting', of 'making visible what is otherwise invisible'.[98] 'The missing person is recurrently there insisting that his story be told' writes Blau describing his work with the experimental theatre group KRAKEN.[99] The actors collect and nurse this request, working to 'unforget the presence of something absent'.[100] This 'ghosting' is thus understood as a retrieval, through the body, of what is missing at the heart of any story, character, text, or history. In the context of this study, which engages with the memory of the First World War, this retrieval of the missing – this act of naming – gains a new significance and foregrounds the memorial potential of theatre.

John van Druten writes an exemplary scene, in this respect, in the play *Flowers of the Forest*. Here, the voice of a soldier-poet takes hold of the body of a young man named Leonard in order to be able to speak, several years after his death during the war. In Chapter Two, I will explore the significance of the playwright's choice to make Leonard, who is soon to face an untimely death due to illness, the ideal ventriloquial channel for the spectre; for now, it is enough to note that through the living body, the soldier speaks, and reiterates, his name. The possession of Leonard is an act of naming, and it benefits from a historicised form of analysis: it is not just a metaphor for the act of performance, but also the nodal point in which performance encounters memorialisation and the absent dead of the First World War can gain a material body. This ventriloquial performance is thus an embodiment of the tension between what is visible and what is invisible, the real body and the memorial traces of the absent body: it is, as Dorota Sajewska would term it, a 'necroperformance', in that it displays 'the active influence of the dead

[98] Ibid, xvi.
[99] Blau in ibid, 16.
[100] Ibid, 17.

on the living'.[101] Arguing that performance is a valuable cultural lens to analyse the ways in which a conflict like the First World War continues to impact our cultural imaginary, Sajewska notes that necroperformance is realised precisely in a 'crisis of the *real* body [my emphasis]', which finds itself impacted by the *absent* body by way of what 'remains' of it, those traces of death that exceed the body. We could say that William Burdett-Coutts' dramatic reading of Colonel Lewin's letter in his Parliament speech, for example, was in all senses a 'necroperformance'.[102]

Sajewska's notion of 'necroperformance' is relevant, here, because it suggests that a study of theatre is often also a study of the ways in which communities strive to represent the memory of death. In my chosen corpus, death does not just signify the sense of finiteness that always pervades the performance act, which must end (although, as we have seen, it must also return): instead, the plays stage interactions between the living and the dead to explicitly reflect on the process of memorialisation, illuminating theatre's relationship with mourning and, specifically, with mourning as an experience that does not simply concern the individual. At the beginning of the introduction, I have written that this thesis responds to a crisis in cultures of mourning: by way of expansion, I would also argue that the staging of the ghost, within these plays, points to the realm of death as Olga Taxidou has defined it in the context of her study of tragic traditions and modernity, namely to death as 'a site of struggle between the secular/civic and the metaphysical'.[103] As such, as we shall see, the scenic dynamics that govern the ghostly apparitions

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[101] Dorota Sajewska, *Necroperformance: Cultural Reconstructions of the War Body,* trans. Simon Wloch (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2019), 40.

[102] Ibid.

[103] In her study of the tragic form, Taxidou builds on this idea of a 'struggle between the metaphysical and the civic', and notes that 'tragedy's claim over the dead' and the act of mourning cannot be taken into consideration without keeping in mind that the state had 'jurisdiction' over the same categories. This is how she conceptualises the struggle between the metaphysical, abstract and aesthetic categories of death and mourning, and the state's use of them for the formation of an 'official state logos'. For this purpose, she brings forward the example of Pericles' 'epitaphios logos' in honour of the dead of the Peloponnesian war: this, she argues, 'claims the absent bodies of the dead for the purposes of constructing the identity of the new Athenian and democratic citizen'. While I am not concerned with the Greek tragic tradition in this thesis, I am nonetheless reading my central texts as responses to the questions of the mourning and remembering of the dead of the First World War. For this reason, I also must consider that, even where death can be read and represented as a 'transcendental' category, and mourning conceptualised as a

in my corpus echo the mechanics of repetition and recollection at the heart of commemorative rituals; through the appearance of the ghost, audiences, like the haunted characters, are made to participate in necromantic acts of remembrance that constantly address the fissures between individual and community, and between the memory of the war dead and the ways in which it is mobilised after the conflict.

Several scholars outside of theatre studies have noted the ways in which the act of performance can mirror the memory process, and the ways in which theatre as a social and relational art can complement acts of commemoration and memorialisation.[104] We have seen how Casey highlights that participation lies at the heart of the structure of commemoration: this participation is a natural consequence of commemoration's 'embodied' and 'emplaced' self, of the sensory aspect intrinsic to the act of remembering.[105] This sensuousness is also a characteristic of performance. Casey also notes the limitations of 'representation', connecting 'representationalism' to a kind of epistemological individualism which he sees as incompatible with commemoration.[106] 'Commemoration,' he writes, 'calls on us as strictly social beings', as participation addresses our existence within, not without, a community.[107] It is here, perhaps, that the function of commemoration and the function of theatre coalesce, as performance also targets temporary communities united in a collective responsibility to understand, participate and remember through and beyond the theatre event. In my chosen corpus, the staging of the ghost aims to find an interpretative language that captures the experience of mourning, breaching trauma's irrepresentability, but it also highlights theatre's capacity to call into question the limits

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metaphysical experience, the practice of commemoration does rework them through a political, 'civic' lens. Olga Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 8-9.

[104] Cultural historians, as well as theatre scholars, have lingered on the conceptual parallels between performance and memory. See, for example, the 2010 inquiry into the cultural relevance of performative ritual in investigations of historical identity titled *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe,* edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

[105] Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 250.

[106] Ibid, 252.

[107] Ibid, 251.

of representation. The ghosts we will encounter are intimately bound up with the stuff of memory, but they are also pressing social agents, presences that encourage social exchange and wishfully conjure social change: by appearing on stage, ghosts codify the theatre event as memory's double while simultaneously exposing the performativity inherent to remembrance and commemoration.

This device is sometimes coarse, and several of the plays that I discuss have questionable artistic value, which can be ascribed to their identity as alternative, self-reflexive commemorative artefacts. Most of the texts display a tonal quality that verges on immaturity and redundancy, alongside a certain stylistic rashness. Noel Coward wrote, on his ghost play *Post-Mortem*, that he 'wrote it too hot off the grid and, as a result, […] muddled the issues'.[108] Likewise, John van Druten, in his book *Playwright at Work* (1953), looked back on his *Flowers of the Forest* with some reservations, and stated that '*Flowers of the Forest* started from a plot […], then it developed a theme, and the theme became the more important of the issues': 'the plot, when it emerged, looked strange, irrelevant and a last moment make-shift'.[109] Written as the knots, tension, grief and political ambivalences of wartime were still being untangled, the plays I examine in this thesis retain a tendency to constantly spell themselves out, a necessity to remind themselves of where they are going; their directionality testifies to the blurry area between the experience of the conflict in time and the formation of a collective notion, a history, of it. In this way, texts – war plays in particular – stand as unconscious commemorative monuments acting, as Schneider would say, as an 'archive' of their own.[110] These nuances invite us to consider the limitations of Pierre Nora's oft-cited theory of memory, particularly his notion that commemorative events are *lieux de mémoire*, 'vestiges', 'relics' in which the memory of the past is revisited with mimetic

[108] Coward in *First World War Plays*, ed. Mark Rawlinson (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 23.
[109] John van Druten, *Playwright at Work*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), 30.
[110] Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 103.

stillness.[111] No such certainties (and no such stillness) are offered in this corpus, but a restlessness which is most evident in the repeated returns of the ghost soldiers.

All the plays examined in this thesis revolve around the return of one, or more, ghosts – except Reginald Berkeley's *The White Chateau* (1925), which handles spectrality in its own idiosyncratic way owing to its radiophonic identity. Some ghosts are played by real actors, as in Millar's *Thunder in the Air* (1928), and others are left for the audience to imagine, as in Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars* (1930). But spectrality is not only a prerogative of these characters: it is a fil rouge that connects characters who are ghosts and other characters, whose entire mode of living and perceiving reality could be defined as spectral in virtue of the trauma and conflicted memories of the First World War. Thus, the ghosts' life-in-death is often a shadowy mirror, held up to the living's death-in-life. The thesis posits that the staging of the ghost is, in other words, an effort towards finding a viable language through which to articulate *and* commemorate the precarious existence shard by so many people, former soldiers and civilians alike, in the war's haunted aftermath. Perhaps, it can be said that the very identity of these plays is a spectral one, or that they too exist in a spectral limbo. During my research I have had to contend with the difficulty, and in some cases the impossibility, to retrieve photographs, notes, or records of the plays' original productions beyond the occasional newspaper review or poster. As such, my analysis necessarily relies largely on published playscripts. The absence of other materials is, however, fitting: it fits the spectral brief of the project. Ghosts exist in-between, troubling the fixity of so many conceptual categories (time, life, death, reality, dream, sanity, etc.), and this project catches materials still crystallised in a hybrid state, in between their existence as script and past and future performative selves. Such plays push any scholar or theatre-maker who may wish to tackle them to finding, in the words, the spectral echoes of the original performance and the signs of those to come.

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[111] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (*Volume I: Conflicts and Divisions)*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 6.

My title, 'Between the Grave and the Stars: Ghost Plays of the Interwar Period, 1925-1936', refers to a line spoken in Noel Coward's play *Post-Mortem;* this text also belongs, tangentially, to this alternative canon of interwar spectral plays.[112] 'Between the Grave and the Stars' is a phrase that perfectly encompasses the plays' interest in portraying the condition of constant *in-betweenness* that is shared by the living and the dead. In *Post-Mortem*, the ghost of soldier John Cavan visits his old comrade Perry, a now shunned war poet whom he catches on the verge of committing suicide. Perry reacts to John's apparition with annoyance rather than surprise; he, like so many other characters, has already become accustomed to the spectrality intrinsic to his post-war life, to the extent that a ghostly visitation appears almost commonplace. After all, he, like Leonard in *Flowers of the Forest* or Martha in Joe Corrie's eponymous play, is about to encounter death: the spectre simply foreshadows and confirms a destiny he has accepted. John is a little confused about the state of the world: he wonders, half addressing Perry, whether he has 'come back too soon'.[113] 'If your curiosity is tenacious enough, it can hold you indefinitely suspended between the grave and the stars', Perry answers.[114] Here, Perry conceptualises the ghost as caught between a tendency to reach for the stars, to embrace a rhetoric of heroism, holiness, and resurrection, or descend into the grave, to face the dark side of death, the physiology of the corpse and the finality of burial. His phrase, 'between the grave and the stars', muses on the moment in which the ghost of his old comrade will have to choose his path. However, Perry sees himself in this image of spectral suspension. He is caught between the patriotic memorial rhetoric of the newspapers' war, and the traumatic memories of his own: his writing is rejected, shunned, and criticised for spreading lies about the conflict, which the public opinion paints as glorious and just. At the end of the scene, Perry chooses death, exactly like the

[112] I say 'tangentially' because I have chosen to exclude an in-depth analysis of Cowards' play from the project as it stands. Coward is an artist whose work has been heavily explored and whose status does not entirely cohere with the partial and sometimes total critical obscurity that surrounds both the playwrights and the plays which the thesis proposes to consider.
[113] Noel Coward, "Post-Mortem" in *Collected Plays: Two* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 1999), 79.
[114] Ibid.

spectre decides to *return* to death at the end of the play. Through the thesis, we will encounter spectrality as a literal figure, but also as a general condition: the presence of the ghost will always point to other forms of spectrality at play.

The first half of the thesis (Chapters One and Two) deals with homecomings; the second half (Chapters Three and Four) deal with warzones, ruins, and landscapes of war. Chapters One and Two trace the spectral development of 'homecoming' as a popular subject for the theatre of the interwar period: plays such as A.A. Milne's *The Boy Comes Home,* J.M. Barrie's *The Old Lady Shows her Medals*, William Somerset Maugham's *Home and Beauty* or John van Druten's adaptation of Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, all attempted to picture, as light-hearted comedies or dramas, the conflicts arising from the tendency of the British public to treat a returning soldier 'as if nothing had changed'.[115] Their central concern was the depiction of a soldier's efforts to adapt to life while also struggling to cope with trauma. Chapter One thus begins by considering the implications of adding a ghost into this established discourse, through the example of Robins Millar's *Thunder in the Air*. I argue that Millar's play exists in open conversation with the haunted house trope to field an ultimately sympathetic reflection on the difficulties entrenched in the task of memorialising the dead. In the chapter, I trace the play's engagement with the Gothic as a recurring sensibility which informs, though does not fully define, much of the thesis' corpus. Chapter Two opens new directions of enquiry and focuses in depth on the experience of the female mourner. Here, I discuss Joe Corrie's *Martha* (1935) and John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest* (1934), focusing on their engagement with the dead soldier's voice as a spectral tool that ultimately leads to the visualisation of absent bodies on stage. My analysis of these plays is grounded in the context of the repatriation ban ordained by the IWGC: I argue that this framework illuminates the plays' handling of grief as an experience defined by a silence and an absence which only the voice of the ghost can fill. The focus on the spectre's voice allows me to

[115] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 43.

foreground the link between the interwar literary and spiritualist imaginations, which both engage with metaphors of wireless communication as a supernatural experience.

Chapters Three and Four consider plays that more consciously and overtly engage with specific commemorative rituals. This task is written into the very identity of Berkeley's *The White Chateau* as a radio drama for Armistice Day, or into Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars*, which directly references the 1930 rekindling of pilgrimages to the Ypres Menin Gate. The Gate, a memorial to the missing of the First World War, bears the names of more than 54,000 soldiers from all the Commonwealth nations whose grave was never found. In 1928, the ceremony of the Last Post was introduced: every evening at 9 pm, traffic in Ypres was stopped and buglers sounded the tune of the Last Post in front of the Menin Gate. *The Road of Poplars*, written in 1930s, directly dramatizes this ceremony and speculates on the spectral effects it may yield. Notably, both these plays reflect on the implications of reconstructing and rebuilding ruined landscapes, and on the ways in which the spectres of the war may survive, and continue to haunt the living, regardless of such efforts. Hans Chlumberg's *Miracle at Verdun* (1935) and Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* (1936), the subjects of Chapter Four, are international examples of experimental war drama that parts from previous works in fascinating ways. With these last two plays, I eventually venture outside the confines of Britain in terms of authorship as well as setting, and reflect on the ways in which the insular interwar ghost play begins to welcome new, expressionist concerns at the dawn of the Second World War, in contexts in which the influence of interwar spiritualism was significantly absent. These plays unapologetically display the materiality of the dead body. Here, dead soldiers reject burial, return as revenants, and actively challenge the celebrative rhetoric of institutional commemoration , which, as the plays show, is only able to mine the political power of death when the *physical* realm of death remains concealed. These plays represent a natural counterpart to the canon explored in Chapters One, Two and Three; as fears of a new conflict begin to materialise, the dead are mobilised with a sense of renewed urgency. In both *Bury the Dead* and *Miracle at Verdun*, the undead thus march together to call forth a form of active commemoration

in which the perduring memory of war may finally serve to preserve peace. Despite the heterogeneity of the concerns found in these plays, the differences in genre and style that run across them, and the various outlets for which they were written and in which they were performed, this thesis seeks to find a coherent space for them in the study of the history and literature of the interwar period. This is a space in which all these texts, in their idiosyncratic identities, can be finally recognized as belonging to a distinct genre of popular theatre writing that was chiefly concerned with exploring the possibilities, temporalities and yet undiscovered (and spectral) impact of the First World War on the collective consciousness. Read together, these plays offer us a new canon of modernist sensibility, where the ghost's spectral potential is not exhausted in, or defined by, its nods to the Gothic tradition, nor its engagement with spiritualism. These are rather ghosts that extend beyond the existing generic boundaries in which they had previously been contained, and draw their strength from their theatrical identity, which is one that relies on the theatre as a as a space that encourages collective reflection. This project thus takes a curatorial approach to the texts to uncover new modernist spectralities, and argues for the centrality of these in the context of future studies of the cultural history of First World War memorialisation.

CHAPTER ONE

Robins Millar's *Thunder in the Air* (1928) and the Haunted House of Memory

The long-forgotten Robins Millar was a prolific journalist and playwright, whose work emerged from the chaos of the First World War; for him the war had also marked the beginning of new political and artistic realisations. When the war broke out, he was looking for a career: he had poor eyesight, so he was rejected from army service, and he wanted to be a journalist. He worked as a hospital administrator in Glasgow, but in the meantime, he sent stories to local newspapers, hoping for publication. He also had a keen interest in the visual arts: he liked to draw and attended several classes at the Glasgow School of Art. Due to his artistic inclinations, his first publications ended up being satirical cartoons for the socialist newspaper *Forward*. Though his wider political stance was always unclear, Millar drew anti-war vignettes. One, from August 1914, was titled 'Death and the Profit Ghouls': as can be surmised from the title, it showed the author's predilection for Gothic tropes and the figure of the ghost. As described by Barbara Millar, it depicted a battlefield filled with corpses, on which 'a huge spectral figure of a soldier dominates'.[116] In the vignette, Millar explains, 'two well-padded, pinstripe-wearing, top-hatted gents are chatting' near the battlefield with a caption that reads as follows: 'The workers of Europe are being slain in their thousands while devastation, famine and pestilence overshadow their families in a war entirely directed for the benefit of wealthy exploiters.'[117] The vignette's clear aim was to denounce the sacrifice of working men, and the dire conditions in which their families were left to live after their departure for war, while the rich of the nation filled their pockets at home.

[116] Barbara Millar, "A True Polymath: Barbara Millar on her father-in-law, Robins Millar", *The Scottish Review,* Apr 4, 2018, https://www.scottishreview.net/BarbaraMillar424a.html.
[117] Ibid.

This specific contribution for *Forward* built on the magazine's socialist ethos and confirmed that a certain Gothic sensibility can easily merge with, and reflect, anxieties surrounding the inhumanity of the market, as Andrew Smith has shown in another context.[118] Gothic tropes, such as haunting, vampirism and the threat of the foreign, the unknown and the undead, foreground wealth and death as both material and immaterial, as revealed in Marx's own predilection for the deployment of 'grotesque' and 'fantastical' imagery in his economic theory.[119] Death, like money, possesses a phantasmic volatility: in Millar's vignette, spectrality is evoked in the figure of the phantom soldier who is surveying the battlefield. Death, like money, is disturbingly material: just as the two gentlemen's expensive, fashionable clothes serve as an embodied symbol of the economic benefit certain classes derive from war, the ghost in the vignette looks down on a battlefield littered with countless unburied bodies, and stands to signify the spectral link between the devastation of warfare and the invisible production, and accumulation, of wealth.[120] This early vignette is more than a simple drawing: it reveals an author preoccupied by the war to a deep extent and searching for representational solutions in the conventions of the Gothic. It also reveals an author well-aware of the tension between different perceptions, and experiences, of the war, keen to capture the spectral distance that separated the frontline and the home front, searching for the ghosts of war that nest closest to home. Millar displayed the same interest when he crafted one of his most challenging projects, the play *Thunder in the Air*, which premiered nearly ten years after the armistice, on 5th April 1928 at the Duke's Theatre in London. His turn to the theatre was not unexpected: before trying his hand as a playwright, he also published a great variety of theatre reviews. The theatre fascinated him so much that his colleague Mamie Crichton wrote in his obituary for the Scottish Daily Express that

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[118] Andrew Smith, "Seeing the Spectre: an Economic Theory of the Ghost Story" in *The Ghost Story, 1840 – 1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 10-31.
[119] Smith, "Seeing the Spectre", 12.
[120] This Gothicist approach to socialist critique is something that I also revisit in Chapter Four, in which I consider further implications of utilising Gothic tropes in dramatic representations of the financial interests behind warmongering.

he 'had almost certainly seen more plays and stage entertainments than anyone in the whole country'.[121]

Thunder in the Air was to become Millar's most successful theatrical venture, reportedly praised by J.M. Barrie himself, who was similarly interested in the mechanics of remembering; in fact, the play was often compared to Barrie's own ghost plays, *Mary Rose* and *A Well-Remembered Voice*.[122] The play toured in the UK, USA, Ireland, France and Belgium: it received mixed reviews, but bewitched audiences and granted the playwright a few ovations.[123] In 1928, the *Morning Post* congratulated Millar for writing a play that 'honoured' the British stage 'in an otherwise very barren time'.[124]Ashton Stevens, of the *Chicago Daily News*, predicted about the play's impact on its audiences overseas that 'mothers, even fathers, who have lost their sons, will go to *Thunder in the Air* and weep like mothers and fathers did while it played in London', but added that 'the fortunate and cynical will get their relish too', praising the playwright's penchant for mixing sentimentality and irony.[125] As a consequence of this brief popularity, a radio adaptation of the play was produced during the Second World War in 1940, and then again in 1970 in honour of Millar's death, before the story's appeal seemed to wane for good.[126] After watching the play during its 1928 British run and rather unceremoniously wishing that the idea for *Thunder in the Air* had come to 'somebody better able to explore its possibilities to the full', a reviewer of the *Daily Telegraph* begrudgingly admitted that the play was 'more interesting than the majority' in virtue of its use of 'uncanny' dramatic effects. These effects, the review stated, were a

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[121] Millar, "A True Polymath".
[122] "Mr Millar's Intentions", review of *Thunder in the Air*, *New York Times,* Nov 17, 1929, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.o. Box 5, Glasgow University Special Collections, Glasgow. (Hereafter cited as "Mr Millar's Intentions").
[123] "Mr Millar's Intentions". Other reviews from the same box suggest that the play was performed in various locations across England, Dublin, Paris, Ghent and Brussels, Chicago, New York, and a few smaller American theatres.
[124] "Duke Of York's *Thunder in the Air* by Robins Millar", review of *Thunder in the Air*, *Morning Post* in *British Periodicals*, Jan 3, 1928, 9. ProQuest.
[125] Ashton Stevens, "Thunder in the Air", review of *Thunder in the Air*, *The Chicago Daily News,* 1929*,* Robins Millar Archive, STA B.o. Box 5, Glasgow University Special Collections. (Hereafter cited as Stevens, "Thunder in the Air").
[126] Barbara Millar, "A True Polymath".

sign that this work was 'contentedly' theatrical, and unashamed to flaunt it.[127] Similarly, Joseph Adams of *The Syracuse Post* wrote excitedly about displays of 'weird reverberations, lightning flashes and heavy downpour of rain', which seemed to positively 'tug at the heartstrings' of the audience.[128] This chapter will show that the intricate mechanisms of the stage are philosophically integral to Millar's representation of the workings of memory and his notion of spectrality both. Millar was aware of the cultural weight that spiritualism had on interwar Britain, but he was no spiritualist: much like Barrie, he did not believe in ghosts, though he was thoroughly fascinated with their narrative and aesthetic potential. A 1929 *New York Times* article noted this, stating that 'the problem of bringing back the dead was for [Millar] a study in theatre technique rather than a matter of fervent belief'.[129]

Thunder in the Air is not quite as outspoken and cutting as Millar's journalism had been. Here, Millar does not turn his attention to a direct depiction of the battlefield – a reality which he had never experienced; rather, he explores the complex question of what it means to remember. As this chapter demonstrates, the play dramatizes the act of remembering the dead, even when faced with the necessity, or desire, of putting them to rest: as Smith has noted, much First World War literature suggests that upon the living's ability to lay down their ghosts depends their 'capacity to envisage a future peacetime world'.[130]*Thunder in the Air* attempts to trace the ways in which individuals relate to others in order to establish the commemoration of the war dead as a shared ritual. The play is convoluted, eccentric and difficult to read: this is worth bearing in mind, as the task of interpreting it is sometimes hindered by a series of confusing, meandering storylines, where fragments of characters' back stories, family histories and crimes committed in the past are hinted at, but never truly unearthed in the denouement. This is the treatment that

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127 "Duke of York's *Thunder in the Air* by Robins Millar", *Daily Telegraph* in *British Periodicals*, 9. ProQuest.
128 Joseph H Adams, "Thunder in the Air at the Wietling", review of *Thunder in the Air*, *The Syracuse Post*, Aug 10, 1929, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.o. Box 5, Glasgow University Special Collections, Glasgow, Scotland. (Hereafter cited as Adams, "Thunder in the Air at the Wietling").
129 "Mr Millar's Intentions".
130 Smith, *Gothic Fiction and The Writing of Trauma*, 199.

Millar reserves to the issue of class within the play's world: we sense that, even when the establishment of an effective commemorative ritual proves successful, there is an exclusionary element at the heart of it. Despite its most frustrating attributes, *Thunder in the Air* is worth considering for the way it reflects on the different identities of commemoration, and on its civic value. While he does depict individual mourning, a process which Casey has defined as 'a way of establishing an internal memorial', Millar ultimately explores commemoration as a participative, shared ritual.[131] After all, Casey has noted that commemoration can never be defined as 'wholly private', but that is rather 'trans-individual' in its scope and function; this is also Millar's verdict, and he deploys a flexible repository of Gothic images and narrative tropes to reach it. The playwright works the reality of interwar bereavement into the well-trodden paths of the haunted house genre which, while often associated with what Bailey calls a 'distinctly American resonance', is also a staple in European Gothic narratives, in which unstable-looking buildings ooze with gloom and archaism, spaces are incongruous and objects are moved by spectral forces, while invisible terrors are revealed as soon as the night falls.[132] In what follows, I argue that the play utilises Gothic tropes to channel anxieties surrounding commemoration. There is indeed a conflicting duality in Millar's conception of commemoration: while it is represented as an essential, community-making social ritual, I will go on to explore how the play depicts this ritual as both flawed and fragile, exactly like the very notion of community that it foregrounds. I will also show how the play draws on the affinities between memory and performance, as it celebrates the space of the theatre as a haunted house (Carlson's 'haunted stage'), and theatricality as a tool to recognize that the memory of the past constantly wears and sheds a series of spectral costumes and disguises. On this topic of disguise, the play has more to say: Millar places his ghosts among the material signs of wealth, embodied in the grandness of the

[131] Casey, *Remembering*, 241.
[132] Dale Bailey, *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 6.

house itself, ultimately uncovering the instability and fictionality of this comfortable 'home', which is, as we shall see, both a metaphorical and physical locus. In other words, Millar's haunted house falls into a Gothic canon that foregrounds wealth as a central issue to the manifestation of the uncanny side of life, memory, and history: as Smith has noted, often the haunted house is unsettling because one 'cannot account for why it generates such unease'.[133] In *Thunder in the Air*, we know that the house is haunted by grief, and that it plays host to a community of bereaved characters. Major and Mrs Vexted, the owners of the house, have lost their son, Ronnie, during the First World War. Ronnie was an extremely unpleasant man, who cheated on his girlfriend Pamela, stole money from the butler, and slept with the Vicar's wife. However, he was commended for bravery before his death in the trenches: whatever ill her son had done in life, his mother has forgiven him, is proud of him, and mourns his death inconsolably. She also feels guilt at the thought of having left Ronnie during his most formative years, in which her and her husband were stationed in India with the British Army. At the beginning of the play, Mrs Vexted has gathered a series of guests in the house on the night of Ronnie's birthday: the group have been holding a séance in the hope that the Corporal may want to make contact. Major Vexted, instead, seems to have no pity at all for Ronnie, no forgiveness, and no wish to contact him by spiritualist means. To his wife's numerous requests that they should put a picture of their son up on the mantlepiece, the Major has responded that he will hang his own version of such a memorial: since then, he has had a terrifying devil-shaped mask stuck in the place reserved for his son's portrait. A photograph of the 1928 performance of *Thunder in the Air* reveals this mask as an elongated, emaciated, excavated face, complete with the horns of a goat; impresario J.T. Grein, in an article for *The New York Times*, defined it 'sphinx-like', and added that 'at certain moments, it started at the audience with odiously illuminated

[133] Smith, *The Ghost Story*, 123.

eyes'.[134]'An unthinkable intrusion in a truly spiritual atmosphere' Grein concluded about the object, 'and a strange pawn taken from the crook-plays which are the order of the day'.[135] We understand that *Thunder in the Air* is caught between a tonal predilection for horror imagery and a more sentimental 'spirituality'; the play paints remembrance with light, Barrie-like touches that recall *A Well-Remembered Voice*, but it also stages a more insidious, unsettling reflection. The mask, which – as recalled by the butler Gibbs – was brought to Major Vexted after one of Ronnie's stays in Africa, is then meant to act as a substitute for the memorial portrait so dearly cherished by Mrs Vexted. One of the Vexteds' guests, Harding, points out to Gibbs that 'there's something evil' about this mask; crucially, the butler answers that he shall soon 'get used to it', because 'everybody does'.[136] This sense of evil is thus assimilated into the life of the house itself, where guests dwell with a muted acceptance of it. The meaning of this puzzling object may be deciphered in two distinct, yet interconnected ways. It is certainly meant to be an embodiment of Major Vexted's judgemental attitude towards his son, which also pollutes the memory of Ronnie after his death. Like a twisted piece of the Major's consciousness, the mask, hung in place of the memorial portrait, bestows monstrous features upon the memory of Ronnie and, doing so, also reveals the monstrous side of the Major's hatred for his son: as a consequence of this, the ghost's most vicious, aggressive self seems to inhabit it. We may also read the mask, a gift from Ronnie's

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[134] J.T. Grein, review of *Thunder in the Air*, *New York Times*, 1929, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX 5, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow. (Hereafter cited as Grein, review of *Thunder in the Air*).

[135] It is unclear what Grein means by the term 'crook-plays' in this review, and I have found no other mention of the term in records of his theatre criticism from the 1920s. However, a look at this period of his career reveals a predilection for 'serious' theatre; this is theatre that, as N.H.G. Shoonderwoerd notes in his study of Grein's work as a critic and impresario, consciously sacrificed entertainment in order to 'bring the audience face to face with some side or other of contemporary problems'. In 1925, Grein had written, in an article for *The Illustrated London News,* that 'one of the most disheartening difficulties for the sincere playwright [was] the desire of the British public to be amused and not enlightened'. Given this distaste for plays that demanded 'no efforts of concentration', it is perhaps fair to assume that *Thunder in the Air*'s flashier special effects would not have necessarily made a positive impression on Grein, who clearly otherwise appreciated the sincerity in Millar's treatment of the topic of war memory. See N.H.G. Schoonderwoerd, J.*T. Grein. Ambassador of the Theatre, 1862 – 1935: A Study in Anglo-Continental Theatrical Relations* (Van Gorcum-Assen, 1963): 262, 273.

[136] Robins Millar, *Thunder in the Air: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Samuel French, 1928), 20. All further references to *Thunder in the Air* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses.

adventures in the African colonies, as indirectly nodding to the family's colonial history, embodied in material signs of wealth and whispers of a recent past. This history foregrounds the ways in which distant deaths – not suffered but rather perpetrated – may be tied to the Vexted family and have perhaps already set the stage for the house to be haunted, a long time before Ronnie's death during the First World War. In the second part of the chapter, I will continue to explore the ways in which the mask's perceived monstrosity resonates with these implications, drawing on Gothic studies to unearth the veiled, yet troubling, presence of the colonial Other within the haunted Vexted house. Yet, the Gothic is not simply useful to probe the difficult relationship of the family with the echoes of its colonial history. *Thunder in the Air* may in fact appear to us today as an exercise in style, a theatrical translation of various generic tropes borrowed from folklore and Gothic literature: throughout its denouement, the various family guests find themselves haunted by different ghostly incarnations of Ronnie. As might be expected, the play opens on a stormy and unquiet night. After engaging in a séance, Major Vexted, his wife and their guests, including Miss Newton, a spiritualist, Reverend Stanes and Mrs Stanes, and Pamela Bentley, Ronnie's former girlfriend, find that they have conjured the spirit of the deceased Corporal and that his ghost is now set loose within the house. While sound effects suggest that a storm is raging outside, an 'oak-panelled room' becomes embedded in the darkness, faintly illuminated by the 'glow of the fire' (5). In the silence, 'the small light of an electric torch moves to and fro outside on the glass of the window' (5). Something, or someone, is trying to enter the house from the outside, but, unexpectedly, 'there is a tapping on the pane. (…) a weird fierce laugh rings through the house uncannily, falling away in a wild dying peal' (5). The scene is meant to produce a feeling of total haunting, as a mysterious force appears to besiege the house, both inside and outside its walls. But the outside menace is eventually revealed to be innocuous: it is only a stranded traveller. His name is Mr Harding, an engineer: he claims that his car is broken and that he is seeking refuge for the night. When questioned about whether he has heard the chilling laugh too, he replies, lightly: 'Why, no. The place was as silent as the

grave' (7). This comparison between the Vexted estate and a tomb is naively uncanny. The turn of phrase 'as silent as the grave' effectively fashions the house into a space that welcomes both life and death, confirming to the characters and audience that they probably *have* heard a ghost, after all, despite the sigh of relief they have just drawn.

This opening scene does not simply set the action to come but defines the play's relation to familiar Gothic tropes; at the same time, Gothic traditions do not unequivocally define the play's identity. The Gothic atmosphere in *Thunder in the Air* is inscribed into a timely reflection on memorialisation. This is in keeping with the Gothic's perceived generic flexibility; as several critics have argued, the Gothic has historically tended to be appropriated as a 'metaphor' which discloses a set of 'anxieties' that pertain to the life of the middle classes.[137] In the case of *Thunder in the Air*, the specific anxieties plaguing the Vexted family are to do with the question of memory, and are similar to those articulated in other popular dramatic depictions of a soldier's homecoming, such as John van Druten's *The Return of the Soldier,* an adaptation of Rebecca West's popular 1918 novel of the same name. This play, like Millar's, opened in 1928, in occasion of the first anniversary of the end of the war. In it, Captain Chris Baldry returns from war alive and physically unscathed, yet profoundly psychologically affected. His memory of war is gone, but so are the memories of his wife and dead child. When the doctor suggests that the only way to cure the protagonist is to present him with his dead child's toys, those who love him realise that, to give him his identity back, they will also need to force death back into his mind, in the form of his child's demise *and* in the shape of the atrocities of war, which he had mercifully forgotten. In *The Return of the Soldier*, there are no ghosts, although a level of spectrality is present, in the rendering of Chris' family as metaphorical phantoms. Chris' memories are spectral presences waiting to be recalled from a painful past that lies buried somewhere, conjured by the doctor to

[137] See James Watt's critique of the Gothic's metaphorical 'resonance' in *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15. See also David Punter's examination of the Gothic's 'awareness of mutability' in the introduction to *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 3.

rectify Chris' perception of, and his place in, the world around him. The play tackles the moral reverberations of dragging Chris back into unthinkable grief, simultaneously addressing the responsibility of civilian society in the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. In this sense, van Druten's play makes manifest the spectral echoes that are set loose in the retrieval of traumatic memory and rests upon the idea that the appearance of the ghost is often taken to signal a 'radical disembodiment of the self'.[138] In this case, family, which Chris knew and loved, now bears within itself a promise of terror and the sign of tragedy. *Thunder in the Air*'s spectrality is more explicit: like van Druten, though, Millar imagines that the return of the ghost may reveal a certain spectrality at the heart of remembrance itself. As a *Daily Times* reviewer noticed in 1929, 'his [Millar's] ghost is just as living as any of the living characters': the ghost story is, here, a way to investigate the twisted 'realism of the mind', the spectral workings of memory.[139]

[138] Smith, *The Ghost Story,* 4.

[139] Gail Borden, "Thunder in the Air", review of *Thunder in the Air*, *Daily Times*, 1929, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow.

The Hauntings of Vexted House

The haunted house is an ancient and well-worn trope. In his *Epistulae*, Pliny the Younger had already written about 'a large and spacious mansion with a bad reputation' in Athens, in which 'the spectre of an old man' appeared, 'emaciated and filthy, with a long flowing beard and hair on end, wearing fetters on his legs and shaking the chains on his wrists'.[140] Pliny included this tale, among other accounts of ghostly apparitions, in a letter to Licinius Sura, confessing to him that he was inclined to believe in ghosts as beings that 'have a form' of their own, capable of animating a house with restless 'shades' that must be exorcised.[141] Since then, haunted houses were to enjoy a rich and varied afterlife in both popular culture and literary history. In interwar Britain, 'ghost hunting' practices such as those of parapsychologist Harry Price, who rose to fame for his numerous attempts to develop scientific methods to assess a house's level of 'hauntedness', started to enjoy a rising popularity.[142] The British interwar literary canon was also enamoured with haunted houses. Already in 1911, E.F. Benson had tried his hand at the haunted house with the short story 'How Fear Departed the Long Gallery', which seems to ironize the ways in which ghosts saturated the interwar cultural imaginary as it playfully begins: 'Church-Peveril is a house so beset and frequented by spectres, both visible and audible, that none of the family which it shelters under its acre and a half of green copper roof takes psychical phenomena with any seriousness'.[143] In 1925, M.R. James published the book *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories*, which contained a tale that recounted the haunting of an exceptionally beautiful dolls' house.[144] In the same year, William Somerset Maugham was editing a volume for

[140] *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, trans. Betty Radice (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), 203.
[141] Ibid, 202-204.
[142] Harry Price was responsible for the first ever BBC broadcast from a haunted house, which aired in 1936, but had worked with the BBC for several years before. See Roger Clarke, *A Natural History of Ghosts: A 100 Years of Haunting for Proof* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 26-28.
[143] E.F. Benson, "How Fear Departed the Long Gallery" in *Collected Ghost Stories of E.F. Benson*, ed. Richard Dalby (London: Constable and Robinson, 1992), 70.
[144] M.R. James, "The Haunted Doll's House" in *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (London: Edward Arnold & Co, 1925), 9.

Macmillan titled *A Choice of Kipling's Prose*, in which he decided to include Kipling's chilling 1904 short story 'They', the tale of a stately home haunted by dead children.[145]

By choosing to subscribe to this genre, Robins Millar nods to this vast canon of popular horror writing. His play also references the spiritualist revival as its own kind of ghost-hunting practice, although the séance which is supposed to have unleashed Ronnie's ghost is granted relatively little importance. Only Miss Newton, an older friend of the family, seems unshakeably convinced of spiritualism's validity as a means to contact the dead; tapping into the stereotypical image of the female medium existing somewhat on the margins – the representative of a certain eccentric 'fringe' of society – Millar bestows upon Miss Newton the task of providing comic relief.[146] As she assures the others that, during a previous séance, she had indeed had 'a message from the Duke of Wellington in which he spoke of Waterloo' (16), Miss Newton does not appear to differentiate between the spiritualism she practices in her day to day life and the precise kind of haunting at work in Vexted House, which does not end as the séance draws to a close. Vexted House is a haunted building, macerating, rotting in sadness. Pamela describes it as 'lonely' and imagines that it even 'must feel like sighing, sometimes' (53). She is, of course, transferring her own plight onto the house: she is lonely too, affected by a long period of mourning, like everyone else around her. The house is stagnant, filled with riches but no joy: this remains one of the play's most obvious nods to Gothic tradition, which often gestures to a certain sense of moral rottenness that haunts the 'respectable' middle and upper classes.[147]

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[145] Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen, too, had a penchant for the haunted house, which appeared often in her fiction. Her short stories "The Cat Jumps" and "A Shadowy Third", for example, display her engagement with the trope. See *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Vintage Books, 1999).

[146] Jenny Hazelgrove notes, while spiritualists held a great degree of respect for their mediums, mediumship generally did not grant 'public' respect to those who practiced it. She writes: 'mediums were marginal figures in the larger community, with ambiguous status: silent-speech makers who were neither wholly Christian nor pagan, mother nor maid, experimental object nor full subject, they continually evaded classification, and thus a secure place in the order of things'. See Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*, 235.

[147] Smith notes how, during the nineteenth-century, the ghost story often addressed 'cultural assumptions about identity politics'. The ghost displayed a certain fragility of the self, which also encompassed anxieties surrounding class, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, Smith notes that the 'liminal' nature of the ghost often facilitated fantasies of displacement and class mobility; he discusses this in relation to Wilkie

Major Vexted, now retired from his career in the army, says he believes in 'God and [his] country', but his hatred for his son's memory is so overt that it is almost a sickness, fuelled by the idea that Ronnie's attributes, such as fickleness in relationships, arrogance and promiscuity, rendered him the opposite of the virtuous masculinity that would have made the Vexted name proud (17). It does not matter that Ronnie had distinguished himself for bravery on the battlefield, saving a comrade from sure death; Major Vexted is not ready to forgive a wasted life. 'Forgiveness is a woman's game, good enough for parsons,' he instructs his butler. 'Hate sin. Hate rottenness. Hate a thief' (43). Vexted House is thus filled with wealth while it festers with hate. The play does not tell why the family has so much wealth, or where it comes from (in the tradition of drawing-room drama, where the source of wealth tends to be kept secret), but it opens the door to a confused colonial imaginary. Within this context, the ghost appears in various guises: not as a single troubling presence, but as many iterations of itself. As Shane McCorristine has noted, the ghost always returns in costume: here, the costumes vary for each witness.[148] He is, for Harding – the ex-soldier whose life was saved by Corporal Vexted and who refuses to admit to the family that he knew him – 'a man in the uniform of a British officer', 'soiled with mud' (21), and, for Pamela, 'a young, clean boy of twenty-four', dressed in tennis flannels (27). Simply put, there is not only one ghost, because there is not only one memory. The

Collins' 'gendered' ghosts, which he conceptualises as 'projected realities' for middle class women. See Smith, *The Ghost Story*, 4 and 56. In the chapter "The Gothic in the 1890s", Glennis Byron discusses the question of class in relation to Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,* arguing that the Victorian *fin de siècle* introduces a Gothic novel in which 'evil is sinuously curled around the very heart of the respectable middle-class norm', instead of being attached to 'the poor and criminal classes'. See Byron in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, 191. More recently, Jack Halberstam analysed the ways in which Gothic themes also attack the 'cozy' existence of the middle classes in their discussion of Alfred Hitchock's *The Birds*. See Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 137. The Gothic has thus appealed to writers and artists concerned with class identity throughout its history; Robins Millar's hybrid drawing room play, centred on an upper middle-class family whose wealth is made up of colonial spoils, also converses with this Gothic concern.

[148] As noted by McCorristine, a ghost's clothing permitted loved ones to 'accurately discern the soul' of the deceased, and spiritualists often brought forth the phenomenon of the 'dressed ghost' as further proof that the apparition was valid and grounded in the real. Debates within the Society of Psychical Research did linger on the clothing of ghosts, linking it to questions of psychology and to investigations into the workings of memory. See Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105-111.

play shows how the mechanisms of haunting become more complex and unpredictable within a group dynamic, as each person's recollections clash with those of others. Thus the chameleonic phantom, a phenomenological agent of memory, finds a comfortable space in the house of the theatre, where disguise is welcome; in this sense spectrality is, in *Thunder in the Air*, inherently theatrical, and relies on the 'recycled body of the actor' for an effective portrayal of the ways in which each character is affectively invested in different *versions* of Ronnie's memory.[149] In fact, reviews of the first British and American runs point to only one actor ever playing Ronnie, Robert Haslam, who reportedly gave 'magnetic impersonations' of the various incarnations of Ronnie's ghostly memory: one of the play's promotional images for the press features different photographs of Haslam in different guises – his soldier costume, his tennis costume and the costume and bandages he wore at the end of Act II – superimposed onto the same set and interacting with each other in a distinct evocation of the supernatural encounter between the actor's various selves.[150]

Yet, beyond the playful realm of the visual and the multiplicity of ghostly guises, the play also includes sound as a phantasmic channel, made of resounding crashes of thunder and spectral echoes of a bugle; it is sound, indeed, that carries the code for unlocking the play's resolution and confirms that different conceptions of memory are being pitted against one another. The guests of Vexted House overtly discuss the complexity of the act of remembering and are shown to disagree about the ways in which memories endure into the present; this obsession with theorizing and defining the depths of the memory process is fertile ground for Ronnie's manifold hauntings to unfold. After the initial opening tension, Harding is given a drink and the group engages in a lengthy philosophical conversation about the nature of the afterlife. Reverend Stanes is obviously convinced of the existence of Heaven and Hell, as well as of the

[149] Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 8.

[150] This photograph was run in the *Sunday Times* in 1928, but Haslam's performance is often mentioned as one of the highlights of the production in its first tours. See various untitled and undated news clippings, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX 5, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow.

immortality of the Soul – a doctrinal position which, since the nineteenth-century, had been identified as the closest point of contact between more orthodox religious beliefs and spiritualism. 'When one believes in the Immortality of the Soul,' he accepts, 'we may be prepared to consider that in the After Life there may be means of communication between them and us' (16). Miss Newton agrees, as a staunch supporter of Spiritualism, but she subscribes to the idea that the Church is 'wrong' about Heaven and Hell: the souls of the dead are never 'locked up' in another plane of existence, but are rather constantly around to hear us, and speak to us should we wish to contact them (16). Such talk does nothing to reassure Ronnie's ex-girlfriend, Pamela, of the reality of life after death. She wonders, rather obsessively, whether death is final. Nudged by Pamela, Harding, the war veteran, confesses that he believes that memory is the only source of immortality, although this too is partial. 'They will have their After-Life, as you call it, in my remembrance' he says, thinking of his dead comrades. 'To me they are just as I saw them last – unchanged, unchanging, and timeless' (18). 'But other recollections crowd them out,' worries Pamela. At this, Harding admits that the death of memory is, indeed, 'the final death' (18). But the Corporal still lives, and Harding is the first to witness his return: Ronnie appears to him before the end of the act, when he is alone, sipping his whiskey in front of the fire, hypnotised by Major Vexted's mask.

The audience sees the ghost enter through the window with a traditional flicker of curtains. So far, nothing seems to veer from Harding's expectations: it is Ronnie as he saw him last, when he was rescued by him on the frontline. In the meantime, the stage directions reveal that the wind and rain sounds have stopped; as Harding gets acquainted with Ronnie, the silence is pregnant with suspense. 'What in God's name do you want here?' Harding asks after recovering from the initial shock. The ghost is quick to answer this: he wants, most of all, to assert his ownership of Vexted House. 'You looked at the photograph in my mother's locket and swore you didn't know me', he blames Harding, spitefully (22). The Gothic tinge of this ghost is apparent in the way that he is depicted as jealous and aggressive, obsessively protective of 'his

own house', the ancestral home in which Harding has denied knowing him (22). This ghost acts against Harding's need to forget his war experience; in this sense, he is what Smith has defined 'a malevolent ghost', 'motivated to haunt the living with their loss', even if this means condemning the living to relive a troubling past again and again.[151] This ghost also characteristically claims ownership over Pamela, whom Harding is clearly courting. Even in death, the ghost reveals that 'he never lost her': Pamela's inability to continue living is the ghost's doing (22). The maid observes Pamela walking in the garden, 'half smiling as if she were expecting someone', only attached to reality by a frail thread (26). The scene confirms what Ronnie had already suggested to Harding: Pamela is controlled by the ghost to the extent that her obsession with the memory of Ronnie blurs the boundary between reality and fiction. A similar process is explored in Elizabeth Bowen's later short story 'The Demon Lover', in which the main character, Kathleen, is under the constant impression of being pursued by a ghostly lover who had supposedly died during the war. Here, Bowen writes that Kathleen is suffering 'a complete dislocation from everything' because of her lover's haunting, which she fears. [152] In *Thunder in the Air*, Pamela's memories also cause her to take frequent leave from reality, although her experience is less one of fear than it is one of intense idealisation and desire.

While the remembered ghost is powerful, and Ronnie's influence on the people around him seems to have strengthened after death, some fears besiege him too. These fears, as Harding notices, are rooted in the terror than he may be 'obliterated' from the hearts of his friends (24). The anxiety that underlies Ronnie's existence is linked to the fact that memory is prone to decaying; if it is true that collective remembrance has 'no existence independent of the individual', as Winter has noted, the commemoration of Ronnie's life is dependent on everyone's willingness to lengthen the 'shelf-life' of his memory.[153] The natural changes in the weather, as

[151] Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma*, 159.
[152] Bowen, "The Demon Lover" in *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*, 746.
[153] *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, 16, 30.

thunderous storms and gentle sunlight alternate throughout the acts, confirm that the ghost draws strength from the memory process while also fearing its fickleness. Act II sees the Gothic ghost weaken and succumb to confusion: he does not understand why Pamela is sad, why she, who was so carefree, now talks of 'frustration', 'despair', 'nights of tears' (31). Why is his father, whom he sees in the distance, now an old man? Why does the maid, whom he addresses, completely ignore him? 'Because you do not live in her memory' Pamela explains to him (29). At this, the ghost panics: 'I feel odd in this house. What is wrong with me?' (29). Both Pamela and the audience observe Ronnie as he loses the sense of legitimacy which he had asserted so strongly in his conversation with Harding. Scholars across disciplines have written a great deal about the individual mechanics of the recollection act, attempting to chart the ways in which they transfer to the collective realm. Reflecting on commemoration, Casey laments his own confusing experience of a Memorial Day event, in which he was quick to notice that he 'was not remembering any of the war dead that were being honored'. 'That is to say' he clarifies, 'I was not recollecting them in discrete scenic form'.[154] What Casey describes, here, is a kind of 'mental vacuity', an inability to isolate an image of the war dead, a struggle of recalling them to knowledge.[155] Memorial Day, he concludes, must exceed simple recollection; his memory was differently engaged, and he still felt like he was participating effectively in commemoration. Winter has also noted that when people come together with the intent to commemorate war, 'they enter a domain beyond that of individual memory'.[156]As such, he writes, 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'; collective memory taps into the experience of personal recollection, but it is a social event, regulated by 'language and gestures filled with social meaning'.[157] Both Casey and Winter do not exclude the fundamental role of the individual in the 'performance' of remembrance that is commemoration; this performance functions because

[154] Casey, *Remembering*, 216.
[155] Ibid.
[156] *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, 6.
[157] Ibid, 6-10.

individuals participate in a spatialised social action, because they occupy 'a site associated with an event or a ritual'.[158]

Vexted House is saturated with such memorial rituals, embodied in each character's haunting. *Thunder in the Air* builds on the inherent performativity of the theatrical medium – the audience is watching a play, after all – to channel both the performativity of memory and the centrality of the collective to commemoration. Upon entering Vexted House, Harding states; 'I saw many men killed in France. I helped kill many men. I was forced to think about these things. Afterwards, I came home, and I got on with my job' (18). This version of war memory implies that he will eventually be free of the necessity to revisit the past: perhaps, denying that he ever knew Ronnie when Mrs Vexted shows him a photograph of him was for Harding an attempted first step towards this freedom. Harding soon must relinquish the idea of the war as a series of linear events to be recalled dispassionately; he has stepped through the house's doors, and he must now face the idea that the recollection of the war is not simply a personal memory, but rather a collective concern, a spectre to be shared with many others. Avery Gordon's sociological enquiry into haunting can shed light on the tensions that drive representations of spectrality; she draws on Benjamin to define haunting as that which 'captures the constellation of connections that charges *any time of the now* with the debts of the past and the expense of the present'.[159] When the maid remains completely unperturbed by the ghost, Pamela understands that the simple mechanism of personal recollection is not enough to sustain the commemoration of Ronnie's death: the 'expense of the present' is, in the world of the play, the necessity to find a common language that may allow memory to endure.

It is worth noting that the play offers a chance to reflect on the question of how collective, and how successful, this memorial language can be. For the maid, who packs her bags to leave her employers at the end of the play, Vexted House is a 'wicked' place, and not simply

[158] Ibid, 17.
[159] Benjamin in Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 142.

because of the devil-mask stuck on the wall: fortunately, she has the option to 'go home' before she goes insane (55). As we have learnt, the maid does not see the ghost; in any case, she never knew the Corporal and was too young when the war was taking place. Besides these obvious reasons for her detachment, though, the maid's exclusion from the web of relationships, histories, and hauntings of Vexted House warrants a reflection on the question of socio-economic agency in commemoration: despite her presence within the world of the house, she cannot get involved in the memorial process, and is eventually driven away. It is also relevant that the butler, the only other working-class character who features in the narrative, has a relationship with Ronnie's ghost that is entirely different from everyone else's. Gibbs, in fact, is outspoken about his hatred for the Corporal, who 'did him a very bad turn' by stealing away his 'life savings', the money he had planned to spend on his daughter's wedding (42). In a conversation with the Major, the butler overtly expresses his support for Vexted's decision to hang the mask in place of Ronnie's portrait. 'They say you're hard' he tells him 'taking his picture away and putting up that [*pointing at the idol*] in its place for a remembrance of him. My God, it's too good for him, that is' (43). Gibbs struggles to forgive Ronnie. This experience is not dissimilar to that of other characters who populate Vexted house. Differently from the rest of the house's inhabitants, however, Gibbs shows no necessity or willingness to forgive and, crucially, he is never given the chance to. When Gibbs announces to Major Vexted that the ghost of Ronnie is waiting outside, presumably to meet with his father, the Major enquires curiously whether the ghost had anything to say to the butler at all. Gibbs simply and sincerely replies, 'Nothing, sir' (43). While he does see and encounter the ghost, a channel of communication is never opened between them: to the ghost, the other characters, and the audience, Gibbs is, and always remains, the butler (43). This exclusionary singling out of working-class characters within the play's denouement alerts us to the fact that Vexted House is simultaneously a literal house, a house of the mind but also, crucially, a socio-economic microcosm, that of the upper-middle-classes. Within this setting, the ghost is a figure that can slip through the cracks of each realm,

exposing its fragile architecture: if the reality of Vexted House is meant to function as a space in which a form of collective remembrance of the war dead may eventually be reached, then the treatment of working class characters in *Thunder in the Air* suggests that there may be a darker side to this remembrance, one which is prone to remaining hidden, unspoken and unexplored.

Even bearing this in mind, the play does speculate on the possibility of a collective memorialisation of Ronnie that may bring characters together instead of generating conflict and uses sound as a channel to aid its formation. In fact, if the haunted do not see the same ghost, all of them hear it in the same way: the ghost's main sonic manifestation, which is perceived by everyone but the maid, is the sound of a child's toy trumpet. The trumpet sounds, for the first time, after Pamela has mourned the lost time of her youth in the garden and before she learns that Harding was the man Ronnie had saved on the frontline. It sounds, again, after Mrs Stanes reveals the story of her war-time affair with Ronnie. It sounds for Miss Newton, who never had any children and regarded Ronnie as her own son despite his unpleasantness. It sounds for Gibbs, the butler, and for Major Vexted, who dismisses it as the work of some 'village brat' (39). Everyone agrees that the sound is pleasant, childish and a little sad. Mrs Vexted, Ronnie's mother, is the person most attentive to it and the first to hear it, playing 'softly' in the distance. 'What is that? You heard it!' she tells Pamela. 'There are no children here' (32). From that moment, she becomes increasingly obsessed with finding the source of the mysterious noise. She is convinced that a child, whom we understand is her memory of little Ronnie, is roaming in the garden, playing away on the trumpet. Yet, she cannot see anyone: 'I looked in the orchard and thought I saw him' she says, 'but it was only the sun on the grass and a white butterfly' (39). Mrs Vexted is caught between a simultaneous awareness of little Ronnie's presence and an inability to see him, reach him: this tension resonates with her sense of guilt, which still revolves around having abandoned her son for India. The sound of the trumpet is real, however, and not simply in Mrs Vexted's head: it also reaches people, like Harding, who had never known Ronnie as a child. I argue that the trumpet in Vexted House dramatizes a collective consciousness that

surpasses divisions between exterior and interior, lodging itself not in the individual, but in the collective subconscious. The sound of the trumpet is a signal, indicating that the correspondences between minds are becoming real in the form of a definite aural phenomenon produced by a real object (the trumpet is found, eventually, in the grass – it was not simply a dream). The play's handling of sound leads us, once again, to consider the performative materiality of collective memory, which eventually causes the group to wonder: 'Have we *all* seen a ghost to-day?' (47).

In *Thunder in the Air*'s first acting edition, published by Samuel French in 1928, we read that a 'toy trumpet' is needed as a prop in Act III. In a promotional photograph of the play published by the *Illustrated London News* in 1928, young actor Freddie Strange, who impersonated child Ronnie during the first tour, is shown as he plays a trumpet which recalls the shape and manufacture of a bugle; the simplicity of the toy, in this case, echoes the relative simplicity of the bugle as an instrument.[160] The bugle was used widely in the British army and held special weight during the First World War, because buglers were instructed to accompany military burials on the Front 'at sunrise and sunset', but also because it was the sound of the bugle that marked the end of the war on 11th November 1918.[161] The distinctive sound of this instrument has since then become a fundamental sonic symbol of this war, so many other sounds of which have remained lost or unrecorded. References to the bugle abound in war literature; in the poem *Voices*, utilised by Benjamin Britten for the words to his war requiem, Wilfred Owen famously wrote, 'Bugles sang, saddening the evening air;/and bugles answered, sorrowful to hear'.[162] Since 1919, the bugle has become distinctively associated to commemorative events and it is still

[160] Untitled *Illustrated London News* clipping, undated, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX 5, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow. Accessed Apr 22, 2022.
[161] Alwyn W. Turner, *The Last Post: Music, Remembrance and the Great War* (London: Aurum Press, 2017), 48-59.
[162] Rupert Brooke's poem "To the Dead" also addresses the bugle as the ultimate commemorative instrument, as the poet writes in the first stanza: 'Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!/There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,/But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold'. See WR Martin, 'Bugles, Trumpets and Drums: English Poetry and the Wars', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 12, no 1, (1979): 31.

played today in ceremonies such as the Last Post and Remembrance Day, as well as military funerals. The toy trumpet in *Thunder in the Air* is described as producing a tune so sad and mournful, so unbearably charged with meaning, that we are instantly drawn to associate it to the bugle's distinctive lament. This specific child's trumpet would then echo the clear conventions of war commemoration: it is fair to imagine that audiences in 1928, the first year in which Remembrance Day was commemorated on the wireless reaching an unprecedently wide audience, would have made this association too. Thus, the toy bugle's spectral force extends beyond the confines of Mrs Vexted's grieving mind but is also pushed beyond the confines of the stage itself; as reviewer Gail Borden argued, *Thunder in the Air*'s 'modernity' lied in its ability to blur the boundaries between performance and truth, so that the stage eventually felt 'more real' than 'life itself'.[163]

To understand the extent to which sound within the play works to destabilise the border between individual and collective memory, it is worth remembering that the late 1920s and the early 1930s were years in which scientific discourses surrounding telepathy, which circulated widely in the late 1800s already, were still somewhat fashionable. Rebecca West published *Harriet Hume*, her novel about a telepathic pianist, in 1929, one year after *Thunder in the Air* first opened on the London stage. The year after, Upton Sinclair published *Mental Radio* and, shortly after, in 1934, Henry Parr Maskell wrote his popular guide *The Human Wireless: a practical guide to telepathy and thought transference*, based on the premise that the human mind, if correctly looked after (Maskell is adamant that the right handling of the body leads to greater receptivity of the mind), could easily establish telepathic bonds.[164]All these books, which explore the curious topic of telepathy across genres and for different purposes (entertainment, scientific research, self-care), draw on the metaphoric force of the wireless, adopting a pseudo-scientific approach to the

[163] Borden, "Thunder in the Air".
[164] Henry Parr Maskell, "Suggestions for a Physical Regime", in *The Human Wireless. A Practical Guide to Telepathy and Thought Transference* (London: C.A. Pearson, 1934), 115-122.

question of telepathy that strongly recalls the SPR's early debates around the topic. In the case of *Thunder in the Air*, the cultural weight of these debates is recognizable in the portrayal of war memory: here, the ghost's sonic manifestation recalls telepathy's function as a tool that achieves an 'inexplicable intimacy at a distance'.[165] This telepathic intimacy attempts to diminish the sense of physical and conceptual remoteness felt on the home front in relation to the war; in the case of *Thunder in the Air*, the establishment of an almost telepathic bond between the house's inhabitants allows Mrs Vexted to both understand and her process her grief with the aid of the community, and not in solitude. Even if Millar does not delve explicitly into the discourses around telepathy and telekinesis which had made such an impetuous comeback in popular culture, some of their reverberations are detectable in the ways in which everyone in Vexted House can hear this sad trumpet sound.

This telepathic function of sound within the play also exposes the relationship between psychoanalytic theories and what we may term scientific occultism. On this topic, Pamela Thurschwell notes that, since the turn of the century, 'the mind [was] imagined as inhabited, unified, dispersed and communicating in specific ways which are influenced by a nexus of scientific, literary and popular discussions': we can read the trumpet's sonic ghostliness in *Thunder in the Air* as an homage to these discussions, which lurk behind the play's denouement.[166] In her essay about a more famous haunted house, Shirley Jackson's Hill House, Jodey Castricano singles out the episode in which the novel's protagonist, Eleanor, and her roommate Theo are persecuted by ear-splitting knocks on their bedroom's walls. We are supposed to read these as a manifestation of Eleanor's guilty conscience, as they remind her of the time in which she purposely ignored her ill mother's knocking, leading to her death. Nonetheless, Theo hears the knocking too, though she has no relation with Eleanor's mother. Using this episode, Castricano

[165] Jennifer Spitzer, "'I Find my Mind Meeting Yours'": Rebecca West's Telepathic Modernism", *Studies in the Novel* 50, no 4 (2018): 550.
[166] Thurschwell, *Magical Thinking,* 20.

argues that the novel troubles the notion that 'individual human brains house only a personal conscious and unconscious psyche'; this idea, the core of the rift between Freud and Jung, was at the heart of the debate about telepathy which, fuelled by scientific discourse at the turn of century, went on to interest the field of psychoanalysis throughout the twentieth-century.[167] Turning to Jung, Castricano imagines that Theo hears the same knocks as Eleanor because she is experiencing a moment of synchronicity, defined as the 'coincidence of a psychic state […] with a simultaneous, objective, external event that corresponds to the psychic state or content'.[168] In *Thunder in the Air*, the bugle seems to behave similarly to the knocks on Hill House's walls, allowing us to recognize the ways in which the haunted house in fiction can act as a spatial signifier for the haunting of the mind.

Moreover, the spectral bugle introduces a timely reflection on the processes, still *in divenire* in 1928, that led to the formation and construction of a collective memory of the First World War; by 1936, journalist John Trent would write in *Radio Pictorial* that 'it seem[ed] odd that nine short years ago they would not have the microphone at the Cenotaph', gesturing to the way in which the bugle's commemorative call would have been projected into the listeners' homes worldwide through the wireless, allowing them to synchronise in memory.[169] Relying on the tension between the visual and aural manifestations of the ghost, *Thunder in the Air* thus reflects on the ways in which memory and commemoration can influence, break, and shift collective bonds. However, the play eventually imagines that the remembered ghost could function as mediator between individuals and their existence within their social structure, the microcosm of Vexted House; in this sense, this kind of haunting has a sociological function, much like that theorised by Gordon, who also sees haunting as mediation, linking 'an institution and an

[167] Jodey Castricano, "Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House and the Strange Question of Trans-Subjectivity", *Gothic Studies* 7 (2005): 90.
[168] Jung in Castricano, 91.
[169] Trent, "The Silent Broadcast".

individual, a social structure and a subject, a history and a biography'.[170]All of the characters are more than they seem – even Harding, as we have seen, was much more than a simple stranded traveller. The ghost pushes them, one at a time, towards the acceptance of a rawest and more honest version of themselves; reviewer Hannen Swaffer noticed it too, when in 1928 he wrote on the *Sunday Times* that through 'the glimpses into the rematerialized self' of the ghost, the other characters 'look more deeply into the past', 'think of each other a little more kindly', 'are made a little less selfish', and 'behave to each other with greater charity'.[171] As Reverend Stanes notices in Act III, the faces of those who have seen Ronnie have 'sadness' upon them; yet, as Harding realises, through the encounter with Ronnie they have all learnt the 'truth about themselves' (49). The ghost's apparitions thus become a way to render manifest the complex, uncomfortable side of remembrance as a process of sometimes painful self-recognition and self-discovery that looks to the larger healing of social relations: the echoes of Casey's theory of commemoration as the generator of 'new forms of sociality' could not be more resounding (although, in the economy of Vexted House, these new forms of sociality are not for everyone to benefit from, and are inherently exclusionary).[172]

As we have seen, the spectral memory process as it is enacted in *Thunder in the Air* can thus blur the boundaries between two realms, one phenomenological and one wholly psychological: as such, the bugle is both real sound and synchronic thought. Alongside the bugle-trumpet, the titular thunder can also be read as a sonic reverberation of memory. However, where the toy trumpet was most definitely linked to Mrs Vexted's grief, the resounding peals of thunder that puncture the play's various acts are finally revealed to be synchronous with Major Vexted's complex inner world of unresolved mourning, even if they are, once more, perceived by all. Crucially, Major Vexted is the last to see the ghost, and the rest of the play is constructed

[170] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 19.
[171] Hannen Swaffer, "A New British Dramatist", *Sunday Times*, Apr 8, 1928, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX 5, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow.
[172] Casey, *Remembering*, 251.

around the suspense generated by this delayed event; this technique of tension building must have worked, because reviewers of the play's first British and American runs noticed that, when the 'climax' arrived, audiences were left 'breathless' and 'spellbound' and that 'some were crying silently', 'some sobbing aloud'.[173] When Gibbs announces to the Major that Corporal Ronnie Vexted would like to see him at the end of Act II, the Major has, like the audience, been expecting the ghost's arrival for quite some time. Ronnie enters, a soldier still carrying his rifle, bandaged around the jaws. Uncharacteristically, he is silent: with slow movements, he raises the gun, puts the rifle in his mouth and shows his father how he killed himself. As the Major breaks down, crying 'My son! My son!', the ghost exits, dragging the rifle behind him, from the window (45). The revelation of Ronnie's suicide affects Major Vexted deeply. A storm is announced in the distance by the peal of thunder; to the Major, this sound finally morphs into gunfire. Each crash of thunder marks a new resurgence, within his mind, of the horrific memory of war and of the grief of losing Ronnie to it; the louder the thunder peals, the more intensely his grief envelops him. When the thunder peals at its loudest, the lights go out and the stage is dark, except for a light emanating from the mask on the wall. The thunder gives birth to 'a wild, haunting laugh' (45).

The eerily silent re-enactment of Ronnie's suicide gives way to peals of thunder so loud that they almost drive the Major to his madness: we observe once again that the play's world-structure is built on a complex interplay between interior and exterior phenomena of which the ghost is the main architect. Ronnie's silence performs the silence inherited by a generation shaped by loss, affected by a war fought miles away and faced with the need to remember unprecedented numbers of soldiers who were missing or reported killed in action, whose bodies were never found. The aural phenomena, then, are the sonorous release that follows an absence

[173] See Adams, "Thunder in the Air at the Wietling" and Amy Leslie, review of *Thunder in the Air*, *Chicago Daily News*, 1929, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX 5, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow.

of language, as they work to emphasize, and eventually resolve, an inability to control and properly articulate manifestations of post-traumatic memory. They accomplish what the visible memory-ghost had failed to, in that they collectivise a language of grief which had, so far, been shrouded in so much confusion that the ghost himself could not understand it: hence Act I young Ronnie, dressed in tennis flannels, wonders what he can possibly have to do with all the odd and mournful people who inhabit his old house. Didier Fassin notes that 'collective memory possesses a sort of latency'; in *Thunder in the Air*, spectrality is foregrounded, theatrically, as the only paradigm that may bring it to light.[174] Far from presenting itself as a coherent burst of enlightened acceptance, the collective memory of war unearthed by haunting is, in the play, composed of a complex system of interconnected layers. In the section that follows, I explore the final of these layers, which lands us, once again, on Gothic shores. The haunting laugh that mocks the Major's grief at the end of Act II emanates from the mask stuck on the wall, a testament of the family's confused colonialist history and an unlikely memorial erected by Major Vexted to his son. Is this a whole new kind of spectrality, or simply a mischievous mirror that aims at both reflecting and distorting the ghost's memorial work? Is it just an unfortunate choice, on the playwright's part, to borrow cheap staging techniques from the 'crook-plays' that J.T. Grein so despised? In a play that is heavily concerned with bridging the chasm between individual and collective, the puzzling mask serves, perhaps, as an embodiment of those instances in which memory is monumentalised: the crystallisation of the poisonous ties between an individual and their toxic social structure. Such a memory – the play seems to plead – must be readily exorcised.

[174] Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: an Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, translated by Rachel Gomme (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 17.

Gothicised Memorialisation

In Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which collected *fin-de-siècle* fascinations with psychological and scientific research, and with philosophical enquiries into the devious nature of the human mind, we read of Dr Jekyll, a respectable surgeon, who drinks a concoction by means of which he turns into his disgusting, despicable double, a repugnant little man named Hyde who commits heinous crimes at night. 'I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man,' states Jekyll in the novel, 'I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both'.[175] A man, then, can be both a gentleman and a devil. *Thunder in the Air* develops a similar view on the relation between good and evil, following an apparently marked Gothic framework, but eventually complicates it through its focus on the memory of war. Before the first, effective appearance of the spectre, there is much contention among the characters regarding Ronnie's nature and, consequently, the disposition of his ghost. The laugh which everyone has heard, apart from Harding and the maid, is described as 'almost devilish' (8). When Major Vexted joins the conversation, wearing the hatred for his son on his sleeve, it becomes clear that Ronnie's personality had been somewhat divisive in life, as it is proving to be in death. We understand that he was, as a reviewer put it after the 1929 New York performance, 'a grotesque combination of cad and hero, of boyish freshness and moral decadence'.[176] This adds a level of complexity to the play's engagement with remembrance, introducing the question of whether remembrance also implies forgiveness. 'He was killed in the war, Mr Harding,' explains Mrs Stanes of Ronnie. 'We all know him'. As her husband adds, timidly: 'We all loved him', Major Vexted barks: 'Stanes, don't be humbug! We all loathed him while he was alive. Are

[175] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Weir of Hermiston* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.
[176] N.S.K., "An Arresting Theme", review of *Thunder in the Air*, *Wall Street Journal*, 1929, Robins Millar Archive, STA B.O. BOX 5, University of Glasgow Special Collections, Glasgow.

you trying to make a saint out of him? Saint Ronnie! He was a scoundrel!' (10). Major Vexted is convinced that attempting to contact the dead is a form of 'devil-worship'; this seems to echo the official stance that the Church had taken on spiritualism in the years after the war, but the Major is not concerned with the offense that God may take out of his guests' spiritualist séances. It is more troubling than this: the Major specifically defines the attempts to communicate with *his son* as devil-worship, actively and overtly embarking in a crusade against his memory.

Mrs Vexted is infuriated by this stance and accuses her husband of fearing his son's memory and of attempting to drive his spirit away with 'brutality and hatred' (13). 'You have no right to hate the boy,' she points out 'He was you, as much as me' (13). By reminding her husband that Ronnie resembled him when he was alive, Mrs Vexted reveals that the Major's contempt for his son's memory may find its roots in a deeper discomfort of his own. The mask stuck on the wall, of course, is central to this dynamic. In her discussion of the treatment of fathers in the literature of the First World War, Laura Ugolini has found the 'hyper-patriotic middle-aged father' to be a classic, if not recurring, character.[177] This figure, even when bereaved, displays a crystallization of stereotypically masculine traits like the need to show control over one's emotions, blatant patriotism, and the distancing from pain through cynicism and rationalism. We may be reminded of J.M. Barrie's *A Well-Remembered Voice*, in which the father figure, Mr Don, is shown to be thoroughly out of touch with the grief he feels following the death of his son, and even deems himself unworthy of his son's ghostly visitation. Millar carries this stereotype to its extreme in *Thunder in the Air*: by conflating his son's debatable moral standards with the supreme evil represented by the devil himself, Major Vexted exposes the hyperbolic absurdity that characterises his belief system, in which grand values such as God and Honour leave no space for grief, weakness or forgiveness. We know, then, that the Major intends the idol of the wall to be a kind of metaphoric memorial, not indeed to his son's bravery

[177] Laura Ugolini, "Middle Class Fathers, Sons and Military Service in England, 1914-1918", *Cultural and Social History* 13, no 3 (2016): 358.

but, rather, to his own active commitment to separate his own self from that of his devilish offspring; in turn, the mask, which appears animated by an unknown spectral force, shines as a Gothic mocking of the Major's attempt. The Major's memory of Ronnie is othered and displaced into a token which is heavily reminiscent of his own colonial past: with the introduction of such a prop, the play underscores a distrust with ideologically charged monumentality, foregrounding a preoccupation with processes of memorialisation that point to the most toxic side of what Achille Mbembe would term 'necropolitics'.[178]

'Necropolitics' is theorised by Mbembe as a mode of thinking about death that is primarily concerned with the power imbalances at the heart of funerary, monumental, and memorial practices; Mbembe writes about colonies, for example, as 'zones where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of civilisation' and death can be wielded by the sovereign with no fear of repercussion.[179] Any form of monumentality is invested with an intrinsic tendency to celebrate, and perpetuate, the dominance of the sovereign's life over the life of the colonial subject. The function of the mask within *Thunder in the Air* is perhaps illuminated by this theoretical framework. Since the Major was, before retiring, a representative of the English elite stationed in India, the mask offers the audience a chance to reflect on such 'necropolitical' undertones to memorial practices. In other words, Major Vexted feels a peculiar sense of power that derives from displacing his own toxic relationship with Ronnie into such an object, which in turn persuades him that he maintains a sense of control over the realm of death. Perhaps for this reason, this mask inspires a mixture of fear and desire. This tension lies at the core of Major Vexted's relationship with the idol, which he guards jealously against other people's interference, refusing to swap it for his son's portrait at the cost of being hated by his own wife. Thus, the shadow of colonialism hangs (quite literally, in mask form) over Vexted House's inhabitants, who cannot divert their eyes; alone in the living room, Harding fiddles

[178] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 66.
[179] Ibid, 77.

around, changes his position on the settee, moves from right to left of the mantelpiece, smokes and drinks his whiskey, yet he cannot stop looking at the mask. The stage directions reveal that 'his eyes wander again to the uncanny object on the wall' (21). It should be noted, too, that the play ventriloquizes the effacement of colonial identities by proposing a colonial imaginary that is loose and unspecific, so that the true history and cultural underpinnings of the object remain obscure; this choice itself echoes the imperialist overtones that rule discourses of war memory.[180]

The mask thus works to counteract the ghost's constructive, chameleonic haunting by providing the Major with a fixed and unmovable *lieu de mémoire* for Ronnie, and thus leaves no room for a resolution of the traumatic reverberations of bereavement, precisely because it serves to symbolise the absence of grief, and the fantasy of omnipotence that follows. If the mask is the embodiment of Ronnie's immorality, and therefore monstrous, it is also a place of corruption – or rather, the physical locus where the Major seeks to confine, but also showcase, corruption. A symbol of Ronnie's savage impulses, the mask thus evokes both colonialist fears and fantasies surrounding the primitive and the 'exotic', while ventriloquising a Gothic sensibility which often seeks to 'other' the foreign body into threatening and monstrous vessels.[181] As explored by Halberstam, this idea of monstrosity proposes that 'crime is embodied within a specifically deviant form – the monster – that announces itself (de-monstrates) as the place of corruption'.[182] In a necropolitical framework, as Mbembe has articulated, this Other is also perceived 'as an attempt on [one's] life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger', and this is 'one of the many imaginary dimensions characteristic of sovereignty in both early and late modernity'.[183]

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[180] The contribution of colonial soldiers and colonial battalions to the British campaigns during the First World War has stayed spectral for many years, although recent scholarship has made significant steps towards exorcising this spectre. See, for example, Santanu Das' *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Also, Patrick Deer's *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire and Modern British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), which draws on canonical modernist works to unearth the haunting legacies of imperialism on depictions of the home front in the interwar period.

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[182] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 2.

[183] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 72.

Therefore, while the mask is supposedly there to (however twistedly) memorialise Ronnie, it is mostly taken by Reverend Stanes to embody a fundamental negation of the values of British middle-class respectability: the Reverend is horrified by the 'paganism' attached to the idol's confused colonial provenance (80). The idol is a Gothicised memorial which foregrounds grief as aberrant, deviant and yet *controllable* precisely because it is Gothicised – othered and separate from the self.[184] This form of othering, performed by the Major to the detriment of his own son, embodies the difficulty that the Major feels in accepting, embracing and processing his own grief at the thought and manner of his son's death: the confinement of this grief to the idol symbolically places the Major in a different memorial space than other characters, and separates him from a collective effort to heal. The toxic effect that the swapping of the portrait for the mask unleashes in Vexted House exposes the fragility of the family structure in ways reminiscent of van Druten's *The Return of the Soldier*, but it also evokes Britain's conflicted relationship with the colonial other, by bringing forth the instability at the heart of *home* as a rhetorical concept that evokes a sense of comfort and security. It could be argued that the destabilisation of the home, the quintessential site of the 'homely', is in fact the very heart of the ghost story's predilection for domestic settings: as Smith has noted in relation to Freud, 'the uncanny represents an anxiety that the home becomes ghosted by its dead and is shaped by concerns about how helpless the domestic world feels in relation to that prospect'.[185]

Only the ghost's re-enactment of his own suicide causes the Major to abandon the grudge against his son: through unmediated witnessing, the Major eventually bears testimony not only to his son's suicidal desperation, but also to his own grief. As he turns violently inward, thunder shaking the depths of his pain, he promises he will 'burn' the mask and 'put [Ronnie's]

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[184] In *Skin Shows*, Halberstam elaborates on the relationship between Freudian psychoanalysis and the Gothic, noting that 'gothicization' – under the psychoanalytic framework of Freudian inception - is a process can be defined as the 'identification of bodies in terms of what they are not'. See Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 19.

[185] Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma,* 4.

portrait up' (61). Yet we never see this happen; at the end of the play, we are left with the Major and his wife, reconciled, accompanied by an image of two of Ronnie's spectral bodies – his twenty-four-year-old self and his boy self – ascending the stairs of Vexted house, hand in hand. Mrs Vexted pleads to her husband, 'Think of him, dear, as you liked him best. In his uniform, when he got his commission' (41). But the Major responds that he prefers to picture his son when he was 'young and clean and fine', 'just a boy, playing tennis' (41). Thus, he advocates for a rejection of those ideological markers that severed his relationship with Ronnie when he was alive, conjuring a personal, affective memorial of stark simplicity. The war recedes into the distance, as the language and visual symbolism associated with the conflict – the uniform, the commission – make room for the retrieval of memories in which the Major and his son were 'close together' (41). It is a happy ending. Yet, the Major has not attended to swapping the mask for the portrait: perhaps audiences would have left the theatre with a knot at the back of their stomachs at the thought that he may never do. Perhaps a haunted house always remains a haunted house. But by refusing to let his characters remove the cursed mask from the oak-panelled walls, the playwright also recognises that memory can be locked inside a representational frame, be it the frame of the family drama, the frame of the theatre or the frame of the nation. *Thunder in the Air* puts forth the notion that memorialisation is a spectral process, which may imply circular hauntings and returns, and which may remain mysterious and contradictory.

Commenting about the circulation of ghost stories during the Victorian period, Julia Briggs notes that the habit of gathering around the fireside to exchange tales about spectres foregrounds Christmas and Hallowe'en as 'traditional times for ghosts to appear'.[186] There is perhaps something productive about considering an interwar ghost play such as *Thunder in the Air* as existing in open conversation with such a framework; the play opened on 1928, on the ten

[186] Briggs in Punter, *A New Companion to the Gothic*, 180.

year anniversary of the end of the conflict, a year in which new commemorative practices such as Remembrance Day had started to lay the groundwork for enduring traditions of war memorialisation in Britain, some of which still persist today. The popularity of a play that so distinctly proposes an artistic conversation with the realm of the Gothic, suggests that commemorative dates, which actively address the mysterious and often uncanny mechanics of memory, can also begin to be understood as 'traditional times for ghosts to appear'; in virtue of this, a study of the various guises of the ghost play throughout the interwar period will allow us to understand how spectral and Gothic discourses can productively illuminate the contemporaneous exchanges between theatre traditions and commemoration. Briggs only spends a few words about the twentieth-century in this chapter on the ghost story, noting that ghosts featured, in First World War lore, as 'mythologies' – ghostly battalions descending from the heavens to lead their comrades to victory, or saints appearing to save lives on the front.[187] However, a study of the interwar ghost play is only concerned with the mythologies of the front as they are filtered by another kind of ghost, one whose aim is to disrupt the layers of remoteness that expose the incongruities and complexities at work in the memorialisation of the war on the bereaved home front. This dynamic, as Briggs argues about some Victorian ghost stories, also relies on both the confirmation and destabilisation of a notion of 'home'; 'home' signifies domesticity, safety and comfort, but it is also uncovered as a vulnerable terrain, easily infiltrated by 'an unknowable world of death', such as the home front can be conceptualised as a zone affected by war in indirect yet crucial ways. [188] As such, operating similarly to the more consolatory forms of spiritualism, a play such as *Thunder in the Air* works to complement commemorative efforts. However, it also works to suggest that war memory is haunted, and so are the mythologies of war: ghosts always puncture the temporal and ideological dynamics of the

[187] Ibid, 185.
[188] Ibid, 181.

memorial, foregrounding spectral performativity as a valid counterpart to the 'unchanged, unchanging and timeless' construction of war in the collective memory (18).

CHAPTER TWO

'Somewhere in the Fields of France': Grief and Absence in Joe Corrie's *Martha* (1935) and John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest* (1934)

Thunder in the Air confronts us with a theme often present in narratives about the First World War and war more generally, and one that certainly features prominently in this thesis' corpus: the idea that women are the true gatekeepers of grief. In contrast with the dramatic portrayal of men (Major Vexted, for example), who embrace their grief slowly and laboriously, women are pictured as naturally in touch with their pain and with the pain of those that they have lost. This idea is traceable in other ghost plays, too: in Barrie's *A Well-Remembered Voice* Dick's spirit declares that he has chosen to reveal himself to his father chiefly because 'mother doesn't need [him] as much [he] does'.[189] His mother, Dick knows, can already master her suffering in ways unknown and mysterious to her husband. This reminds us of wider social dynamics that, before, during and after the First World War, saw women as 'linked with the death (and life) of another person', and this trope as a fundamental 'part of war ideology'.[190] In fact, just in the context of studies of First World War literature, men's writing has been more commonly taken to testify to the 'true', active experience of the battlefield, while women's writing was traditionally perceived as an emotional testimony to the war's traumatic aftermath, due to the fundamental role of the female subject in cultural depictions of grief and bereavement.[191] As Kelly has noted, women were essentially entrusted with the 'symbolical' work of mourning, which made them 'predominantly responsible for the *emotional* labour of the war [my emphasis]'.[192] True enough,

[189] Barrie, "A Well-Remembered Voice", 160.
[190] Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms*, 3.
[191] This discourse of 'truth' appears in much theatre of the First World War too: see Kosok, "Nothing but the Truth" in *The Theatre of War*, 157-160. See, also, James Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism: the Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism", *New Literary History* 30, no 1 (1999): 203-215.
[192] Ibid.

women were essential to the war effort in various ways: before the lists of war casualties had started to grow, recruitment efforts had harnessed the power of female figures, especially mothers, to stir soldiers away from shirking or desertion. In the context of pre-war propaganda, women were invested with a responsibility to safeguard, and protect, a man's 'honour': one of the pamphlets for a British organisation named 'the Mothers' Union' featured the propagandist message, 'Not enough men are sent out and this largely because not enough mothers say to their sons, as one did lately, "My boy, I don't want you to go, but if I were you I should go".[193]

Even after a son's death, mothers were instructed to bear their pain proudly, because they could be safe in the notion that his sacrifice had been virtuous not just in the eyes of the state, but in the eyes of God also.[194] For example, in his 1919 speech to Parliament on the subject of the equality of treatment, Burdett-Coutts praised British women for their strength as silent bearers of grief and for their courage in the face of bereavement, concluding that 'classic story has no examples of mingled resignation and pride comparable to that shown, in all classes, by British women of the twentieth-century of the Christian era'[195]; it does not seem entirely surprising that the interwar period also saw a fervent resurgence of the cult of the Virgin Mary, to whom mothers were encouraged to speak in the face of adversity 'as one mother would talk to another'.[196] This rhetoric was not only popular in Britain: as Claudia Siebrecht has explored in her study of women's art in wartime Germany, a mother's sacrifice was 'understood to be the purest, most selfless, and most final sacrifice'.[197] Mothers were thus the ultimate example of virtuous mourning. Much scholarship has shed light on the insufficiency of the dichotomies that oppose male and female experiences of war: Alice Kelly, Angela K. Smith, Claire M. Tylee and

[193] Evans, *Mothers of Heroes*, 85.
[194] For more on the ways in which religious references to Christ's sacrifice on the cross were exploited for war propaganda in Britain and Canada, see Chapters One and Two of Evans, *Mothers of Heroes*.
[195] Burdett-Coutts, "Statement of Reasons", 5.
[196] Ibid, 82.
[197] Claudia Siebrecht, *The Aesthetics of Loss: German Women's Art of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 104.

Lucy Noakes, to name a few, have researched the ways in which women's writing actually navigates the experience of war from all angles, and have investigated the contradictions at the heart of gendered depictions of grief and bereavement in literature and beyond.[198] In *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, Tylee emphasises the centrality of focusing on female accounts of the First World War for the purposes of understanding the development of a memorial 'imagination' of it: women, Tylee notes, participated to the war effort in many ways, and had to come to terms with the image of men as killers, and with the 'dehumanising effects' of a militarism that required soldiers to bestow death upon others.[199] Tylee's work is interesting because it shines a light on the ways in which women articulated, and explored, notions of their own guilt and responsibility in relation to the war effort. While it is true that many women had campaigned in favour of the war, and participated in propaganda, Tylee writes, 'many women tried to get their sons out of the army', while 'others were agitating to prevent conscription', or 'working for a negotiated settlement to the War'.[200] This important pacifist context will also resurface later in this chapter. While the ghost plays featuring here are not written by women, they feature female characters who also, in different ways, strive to imagine, and connect with, the figure of the soldier: this soldier, whose material body is missing, cannot be conceptualised if not as spectral presence. Kelly notes that the years after the end of the First World War saw the development of a memorial discourse that 'privileged the mother as the mourner'; both plays considered in this chapter, Joe Corrie's *Martha* and John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest*, feature images of lost, or mourning, motherhood that must rely on ghosts to contend with the difficulty of mourning the absent, and with the impossibility of filling the epistemic gap that separates female characters from their male loved ones' experiences of the war.[201]In the same fashion as

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[198] See Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). Claire M. Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-1964* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990). Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998).
[199] Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 253-259.
[200] Ibid, 257.
[201] Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms*, 218.

most plays in the thesis' corpus, the plays at the centre of this chapter's analysis, Joe Corrie's *Martha* and John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest*, do not explicitly challenge the cultural tropes about motherhood mentioned above, but their interest in spectrality allows us to read and register, retrospectively, crucial contradictions and idiosyncrasies as they naturally surface at the heart of certain stereotypes.

The chapter thus considers the ways in which gendered portrayals of bereavement intersect with discourses surrounding the formation and narration of a British memory of the First World War in the 1930s. The efforts of some mothers to convince the IWGC to repatriate the bodies of the war dead in the early interwar years form an illuminating framework here: this specific political battle over the handling of burial shows how the exceptionality of wartime bereavement actively disrupted the traditions and histories of mourning which see women, especially mothers, as stoic bearers of a silent grieving consciousness, and proud, 'uncomplaining' parents to martyrial sons.[202] Research into the waves of protest and resistance that British women led during and after the First World War reveals that in May 1919 Mrs Sarah Ann Smith, whose son had died of wounds in 1918, wrote to the British government and initiated a petition that encouraged every woman who had lost a loved one during the Great War to sign with their names and the nature of their relation to the deceased person they wanted re-patriated.[203] The petition was signed by hundreds, providing the momentum for the formation of the British War Graves Association. Founded in Leeds and steered by Mrs Smith, the Association is not to be confused with the War Graves Commission, which was a governmental body.[204] In fact, Smith's War Graves Association aimed to persuade the War Graves Commission

[202] Evans, *Mothers of Heroes*, 89.

[203] There is not much written about Mrs Smith's efforts. Kelly mentions the British War Graves Association in passing in *Commemorative Modernisms*, 19. Noel Reeve researched this for the University of Leeds' *Legacies of War* website. See Noel Reeve, "A Leeds Woman's Story: The British War Graves Association", *Legacies of War,* 2022, accessed 6th October 2019. A Leeds Woman's Story: The British War Graves Association : Legacies of War.

[204] The Commission's work, under the supervision of Fabian Ware, had been underway for a while, since the very beginning of the war, but the Commission was officially approved as a governmental body on

to modify their laws on the exhumation and re-burial of British soldiers.[205] The Government and the IWGC never conceded; their opposition to the Association's efforts was driven, among other things, by anxieties surrounding the necessity to provide the dead and their families with equality of treatment in burial. Yet, the Commission's archives hold several letters of protest, sent by mothers throughout the whole of the United Kingdom.[206] In these letters, several women present their plead for re-patriation as a necessary vindication of their natural right, as mothers, to gain compensation for the sacrifice of their children to the state. In the book *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, Lindal Buchanan argues that 'maternal rhetorics do employ traditional assumptions about women— for example, that they are more concerned with home and children than with the polis and politics— but those assumptions can be remarkably effective at certain times, in certain places, with certain audiences'.[207] Such letters confirm that female rhetors did also, in fact, defy the rules of 'essentialized identity', however, utilizing motherhood as a successful, powerful and persuasive device, against the very system that generally enforces its stereotypes.[208]

Some of the letters sent to the IWGC do rely on highlighting the difference between the ways in which men and women, especially mothers, experience grief. More importantly, some suggest that the steering committee of the IWGC should not be able to claim the right to police a mothers' grief. One of the letters wonders if the Commission might indeed discriminate against the author's request *in virtue* of her identity of 'bereaved mother', effectively putting the all-male committee of the IWGC in active opposition with her own identity: 'I beg you will not take refuge to save yourself behind the fact that I am a deceased soldier's bereaved mother whom you

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13th April 1917. See Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: a history of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2013), 27.

[205] Reeve, "A Leeds Woman's Story".

[206] Most of these letters are currently only accessible through the Commission's online exhibition titled "Shaping Our Sorrow", and only a few are available for consultation at the Maidenhead archive. "Anger", part of the *Shaping Our Sorrow* exhibition, *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, 2018, accessed Feb 20, 2019, Start – Shaping our Sorrow (cwgc.org).

[207] Lindal Buchanan, *Rhetorics of Motherhood* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 22.

[208] Ibid.

wish you spare'.[209] Rather than adopting a patriotic stance, some of these letters generally support what Lisa Mastrangelo defines as the 'essentialised motherhood' rhetoric: the idea that mothers are protectors of peace and would have been unwilling to allow their children to participate in the war effort.[210] This position is also noted by Angela K. Smith, who writes that at the outbreak of the war 'many women felt that morally they could only oppose the conflict', acknowledging that the political decision to participate in the war effort was entirely taken out of women's hands, but also due to the sense that 'the destruction of human life' was incompatible with a mother's 'nature'.[211] At the end of the war, several mothers disapproved of the militaristic uniformity of the war cemeteries that the Commission financed: one Florence Cecil, writing to *The Times*, defined them as 'regiments of stone' and concluded that they 'perpetuated the military ideal which our sons sacrificed themselves to crush'.[212] The strong rhetorical charge contained in the letters that civilians, especially mothers, were sending the Commission and the press throughout the 1920s confirms motherhood's 'Janus-like capacity to generate compelling persuasive means while buttressing restrictive gender roles'.[213] Taking into consideration this contextual framework, this chapter focuses on the figure of the female mourner, the expression and repression of female – especially maternal – grief, and the importance of spectrality for an investigation of both; the two long-forgotten plays, Joe Corrie's *Martha* and John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest*, respond in various ways to the ban on the re-patriation of corpses, and to the controversial questions about the traditions and meanings surrounding bereavement that it posed.

[209] Untitled letter, the *Shaping our Sorrow* exhibition, *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, 2018, accessed Feb 20, 2019, Start – Shaping our Sorrow (cwgc.org).
[210] Lisa Mastrangelo, "Changing Ideographs of Motherhood: Defining and Conscribing Women's Rhetorical Practices During World War I", *Rhetoric Review* 36:3 (2017): 221.
[211] Smith, *The Second Battlefield*, 9.
[212] Elizabeth Stice, "For Kin and Country: reader responses to uniformity of British war graves in The Times & civilian practices of wartime citizenship", *First World War Studies* 11, no 2 (2020): 143.
[213] Buchanan*, Rhetorics of Motherhood*, 6.

As previously noted, the history of the female subject in war literature is bound up with images of characters in mourning. Yet, this chapter also aims to reach beyond this, to trace the ways in which female characters participate in discourses surrounding the preservation and, most importantly, the narration and perpetuation of war memory. To do so, I consider *Martha* and *Flowers of the Forest* as dramatic works which, like *Thunder in the Air*, fulfil a commemorative function, revealing how artistic responses to the war searched for ways to conjure spectral voices and visualise dead bodies through living bodies, in a manner that only the medium of theatre makes possible. Both plays imagine and stage worlds in which grief is inextricably linked to spectrality: their soldier ghosts shed light on the contradictions inherent in the jarring experience of mourning absent bodies, infiltrating the private realms of grief of which the woman was stereotypical symbol. Kosok's study of the theatre of the First World War mentions both these plays as ghostly variations on the theme of the returning soldier.[214] In this chapter, I show that considering these plays as illustrations of the returning soldier paradigm is only partially productive. Through deepening an analysis of the spectral dynamics of these texts, I argue that the return of the ghost soldiers here encompasses hidden personal histories and runs against the effacing of female and civilian wartime experiences from narratives of war. This chapter thus discusses histories of grappling with absence, of waiting, of yearning for the ghostly that populated the imaginary of interwar Britain and that complicate the rhetoric, tropes and popularity of frontline and battlefield narratives. Building on the work done in Chapter One, Chapter Two looks at the space of the home to explore the complexities at the heart of the wartime uncanny.

To do this, the section on Joe Corrie's *Martha* introduces the ghost not as memory agent, but rather as an omen of death. In *Martha*, the home represents a liminal portal between life and death, and the appearance of the ghost allows the main character to choose to follow him in

[214] Kosok, 112, 113.

death. In *Flowers of the Forest*, instead, the home is a space populated by the acousmatic echoes of the war: the section will examine the play's engagement with various sound technologies and the metaphoric connections it stages between these and the body. Naomi's home in *Flowers of the Forest* is constantly infiltrated by not just the memory of her own past, but also by the memory of the war as it perceived and narrated by others: this memory surfaces in sensory ways through haunted technology and ventriloquial possession, and as such allows us to explore the anxiety surrounding the ways in which the memory of the conflict was being narrated and adapted in the interwar years.

Through their engagement with spectrality, both plays conceptualise the haunted 'home front' as a locus for an imagined breaching of the separation between male and female experiences of war. Like in *Thunder in the Air*, the return of the soldier ghost is characterised by markedly sonic qualities; this time, however, it is also inscribed more explicitly into the debates and anxieties surrounding the development and popularisation of wireless technologies. Wireless communication surfaces again, at this point, as a productive metaphor for the destabilisation of boundaries - temporal, spatial and transcendental. As Simon Potter notes, as radio became the dominant mass medium during the interwar years, it displayed the ability to 'carry people to far-off places': both Corrie's and van Druten's plays reference, in different ways, this powerful imaginative quality associated to the wireless.[215] In this sense, this chapter builds on Sara Danius' argument about the ways in which 'categories of perceiving and knowing' are reconfigured, in the modernist period, to recognise that 'technological devices are capable of storing, transmitting and reproducing sense data, at the same time articulating new perceptual and epistemic realms'.[216] I would argue that, while it is true that technology opened up possibilities for the articulation of such realms, an analysis of the plays considered in this chapter – and in this thesis as a whole –

[215] Simon Potter, *Wireless Internationalism and Distant Listening: Britain, Propaganda and the Invention of Global Radio, 1920-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.
[216] Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: technology, perception and aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 3.

alerts us to an interwar discomfort with the relationship between memory, knowledge and time. While technologies such as the gramophone, the cinematograph and the wireless were being creatively probed as sources of inspiration for new ways to conceptualise, and engage with, the senses, this chapter will argue that *Martha* and *Flowers of the Forest* engage the sensory realm of technology to capture the destabilising effect of the First World War on the epistemology of memory; in other words, the plays employ technological metaphors to call into question the straightforward relationship between the collectivisation of the memory of war and the formation of a shared image of what a post-war future might, and should, look like. In this context, the ghost, in *Martha* and *Flowers of the Forest* both, serves to conceptualise not just the absent body of the dead, and the gulf in knowledge that separated civilian and combatant experience, but also a typically modernist anxiety surrounding futurity: as a figure suspended between life and death, the ghost can simultaneously signify the absence of a future beyond war, or the endless possible futurities which post-war commemoration can warrant. This chapter is thus indebted to Paul K. Saint-Amour's notion of '*tense future*' and argues that both plays' deployment of spectrality responds to an essential tension about futurity and the 'wounds' it may bring with it.[217] The ghost, here, is the marker of a 'tense' time, an anxious time, and one 'stretched out of its usual modes', as Saint-Amour puts it.[218]

It is worth noting that while explicit mentions of sound technology inform much of the plot of *Flowers of the Forest*, *Martha* only tangentially evokes fantasies of technological communication, which indirectly resonate with interwar discourses surrounding the spiritualist method of the 'direct voice'. However, the technological metaphors (either implicit or explicit) within the plays are worth lingering on for a moment in this introduction, because they are inscribed into larger interwar discourses surrounding the ways in which technology could either mirror, or augment, the functioning of the human mind and memory. In 1929, the NBC studios

[217] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 23.
[218] Ibid.

in New York funded a programme titled *Ghost Hour,* in which paranormal researcher Joseph Dunninger sent his thoughts into the airwaves, asking the listeners to tune in with his thoughts and call back with guesses about what he had been thinking about.[219] The *New York Times* reported that Dunninger told his radio audience that 'mental telepathy' was 'no mystic or supernatural affair, but merely a matter of thought waves radiating from one mind to the other'.[220] The following year, Upton Sinclair published his book *Mental Radio*, prefaced by none other than Albert Einstein: it was a para-psychological account of telepathic research, based on the real life experiments conducted by Sinclair himself and his wife Craig, and it used the radio as the most effective metaphor to describe mind-to-mind connection.[221] Einstein wrote of it: 'in no case should the psychologically interested circles pass over this book heedlessly'.[222] In his book, Sinclair also ventured a comparison between 'mental rays' and X-rays, asking: 'Shall we say that brain vibrations affect material things such as paper, and leave impressions that endure for a long time, possibly forever? Can these affect another brain, as in the case of a bit of radium giving off emanations?'.[223] The answer was clear: 'It seems to me correct to say that, theoretically, it is inevitable'.[224] From these examples, we notice that technology was inscribed in more or less successful attempts to rationalise extreme and almost supernatural feats of the human mind; this chapter will argue that the receptivity of certain characters to channelling or hearing the voices of the war dead grants them near-technological qualities, and that these qualities are associated to portrayals of illness or death. In other words, these characters can channel, hear or see ghosts, but they are also sick, or condemned to die. This references the supernatural fantasies of connection that technology evoked in the modernist period, and the dark side of such

[219] Richard Noakes, "Thoughts and Spirits by Wireless: Imagining and Building Psychic Telegraphs in America and Britain, circa 1900-1930", *History and Technology* 32, no 2 (2016): 137.
[220] Joseph Dunninger in "Thoughts Broadcast in Telepathy Test", *New York Times,* Jul 12, 1929, 27. ProQuest.
[221] Upton Sinclair, *Mental Radio* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1930).
[222] Einstein in ibid, viii.
[223] Ibid, 134.
[224] Ibid.

connection: the plays seem to suggest that, while civilians *can* become vessels for a direct communication with spectral voices of dead soldiers, this form of bending of time and space must come with deadly consequences. The relationship between the future event of the civilians' death and their mediumistic abilities allows these sensitive characters to become representatives of a larger interwar discomfort with the idea that the wounds of war, both physical and abstract, might be essentially incurable. In Chapter One, I have noted how the portrayal of the wireless and telepathy in literature during the modernist period served to craft wishful images of intimacy and shared connection. As I have argued, *Thunder in the Air* utilised the telepathic metaphor, expressed via the sound of the trumpet, to frame the wish for a shared remembrance of the dead. In this chapter, I argue that characters who take on more or less explicit technological traits – acting as *wirelesses* for the voices of the dead or displaying a high level of receptivity to their hauntings – are also conceptualised by the playwrights' as spectral.

'I Hear Every Word He Says as Plain as Life': Spectrality, Motherhood, and the Uncanny in Joe Corrie's *Martha* (1935)

In *The Aesthetics of Loss*, Claudia Siebrecht discusses a lithograph by German artist Sella Hasse, produced just one year before the end of the war in 1917. The lithograph is titled *Der Gram (Die Entbehrung)* and it depicts the shattering physical effects of grief on the female body with markedly expressionist sensibility. Hasse's subject is a woman pulling her own heart out of her chest, while she holds her own head with the other hand, her face disfigured with pain. Siebrecht notes that the lithograph seems to link grief to 'self-harm' because this woman is portrayed as having an active hand in the tearing out of her own heart; however, she also concludes that 'the composition gives the impression that the physical and emotional pain of grief and sorrow could

be so intense as to be life-draining, the impact of bereavement being almost too much to bear'.[225] Hasse's work is an affecting depiction of the grief of loss, which foregrounds the ties between psychosomatic stress and bereavement. It also speaks strongly to the central concern of this section, Joe Corrie's play *Martha*, in which the homonymous central character, a grieving single mother, is finally visited by the ghost of Jimmy, the last of her children to die at the front, and eventually follows him in death.

Of all the dramatists that feature in the thesis, Fife-born miner Joe Corrie is perhaps the most notorious in the interwar amateur theatre scene. Corrie was first and foremost a poet, but he was also a prolific journalist and playwright, whose art was greatly influenced by local popular culture, 'folksong' and the 'popular melodramas of the penny geggie'.[226] Concerned with the struggles of mining communities, he had started to write dramas in 1926, after realising that there was a certain political power intrinsic in dramatic form: the General Strike of 1926 turned his attention to the ways in which short, effective dramatic sketches could easily be incorporated into concerts and larger political events.[227] If the 1920s and 1930s saw a gradual 'professionalisation' of Scottish theatre companies, a process that followed the model of the English professional theatre scene, Corrie always remained a stark supporter of Scottish 'People's Theatre', which he wrote in vernacular, as a vehicle for the exploration of political and social issues.[228] Corrie wrote *Martha*, his short ghost play, with an eye to the life of working-class Scottish mothers who had remained most affected by the First World War: the play won the Scottish Community Drama Festival in 1935. In their research about lone motherhood in Scotland during the First World War, Annemarie Hughes and Jeff Meek have documented the

[225] Siebrecht, *The Aesthetics of Loss,* 88, 89.
[226] Donald Smith and Ksenija Horvat, "Twentieth-Century Scottish Drama" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 63.
[227] *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 118.
[228] Ibid. Corrie's Scottish vernacular is not Scots Gaelic – rather it is a form of English that incorporates Scots dialect.

state's approach to providing aid for female single-headed households, the number of which was increasing throughout the entirety of the conflict, also due to the high death toll that affected Scottish troops.[229] This research established that the system of allowances put in place by the Scottish state, even when it managed to allow women to run their households comfortably, relied on a high level of surveillance; as a consequence of this, women's behaviour was highly controlled, and allowances could be, and were, withdrawn for many reasons, including 'immorality', 'neglect of children', 'lack of cleanliness', and 'drunkenness'.[230] This surveillance was upheld by parishes and charity associations, as well as by the state. As Hughes and Meek have noted, within this context, 'working-class' women were often 'treated with suspicion' and 'subjected to a demonising rhetoric' which resulted in a harsher treatment when it came to the subject of wartime allowances.[231]

Research into Corrie's journalistic work after the Second World War uncovers that he was aware of the economic and emotional difficulties in which single working-class mothers incurred during the conflict: in 1955, he published the short story 'The Bad Yin', about a woman, named Annie, who lost her three 'laddies' in the Second World War. Annie is left 'alone in the little whitewashed cottage, alone with her memories and shattered hopes', and eventually becomes an alcoholic, as the community around her alienates her, and the minister 'remonstrates' with her about her drinking.[232] 'No one knew that she was ill,' writes the all-knowing narrator, pointing to Annie's drinking as an ailment that afflicts her, an inescapable consequence of her condition.[233] Annie dies alone, sitting in a chair inside her cottage, 'a faint

[229] Annmarie Hughes and Jeff Meek: 'State Regulation, Family Breakdown, and Lone Motherhood: The Hidden Costs of World War I in Scotland', *Journal of Family History* 39, no 4 (2014): 372.
[230] Ibid, 366.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Joe Corrie, typescript of the short story "The Bad Yin", n.d., Corrie Archive, MSS.26553-60, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Henceforth cited as Typescript, "The Bad Yin"). Accessed April 23, 2022.
[233] Typescript, "The Bad Yin".

smile on her lips', and everyone in her village calls her Tipsy Annie.[234] Guiltily, the narrator remarks that he had forgotten everything about Tipsy Annie 'till years after, at the unveiling of the war memorial'.[235] It was then that she re-appeared to him, like a ghost, 'the dreamy haze of drink in her eyes', standing by the memorial: a silent victim, spectralised by a monument which did not bear her name. [236] Tipsy Annie is Corrie's second working-class mother to die of drink and heartbreak. Martha represents an earlier iteration of the same concern – but the endurance of this character, who relives performatively, again and again, in Corrie's fiction and across different media, is a testament to the dramatist's preoccupation with issues of mental health, illness and deprivation that impacted Scottish working-class women during both wartimes. The play, like the later story, indirectly echoes the debates surrounding the state's mishandling of Scottish allowance laws, while aiming to offer a rare dramatic representation of the isolation that afflicted single mothers during the First World War.[237] On the background of both Martha and Annie's stories are the conventions of commemoration: whether they are bagpipes sounding in the distance, or the unveiling of a war memorial, these communal practices act as insufficient, hazy counterparts to the condition of the bereaved, who lives in the twilight zone between life and death already. *Martha* is an intimate short play, which only features four characters (with two of them exiting the play in the first scene) and revolves around a very simple premise: a son returns home from war to his mother, who has prepared a feast for him with the little money she has, and is ready to welcome him with open arms. Of course, as we shall see, the son returns as a ghost, but he returns nonetheless, and the sweetness of the mother and son reunion remains a defining and important feature of Corrie's simple script. The playwright offers no detailed backstory for Martha or her family, although the stage directions indicate that 'a large

[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] For more on this see, for example, the article by Annmarie Hughes and Jeff Meek: 'State Regulation, Family Breakdown, and Lone Motherhood: The Hidden Costs of World War I in Scotland', *Journal of Family History* 39, no 4 (2014).

photograph of a soldier' should hang on the backwall of the cottage.[238] We assume that this might be Martha's husband, and that she might indeed be a widow, but this is never explored throughout the play's denouement. We are told by Martha herself that she used to work 'in the fields', and that after the hard days' work she only lived for 'the sicht o' [her] bairns' (12). The play offers no information about the village in which Martha lives and does not even name the First World War. Like most of Corrie's plays, it is written in Scottish vernacular; this is one of the most overtly political choices on the playwrights' part, within a play which does not contain explicit reflections on the wartime experience of the Scottish working-class. However, as Trish Reid has noted about another one of Corrie's plays, *In Time O' Strife* (1926), the playwright's quiet radicalism was often established by his 'asserting communal bonds between stage and audience', achieved via 'a shared vocabulary of language and lived experience'.[239] Crucially, *In Time O'Strife*, albeit a longer and more complex play, also was a family drama. While *Martha* does engage explicitly and overtly with the philosophies of pacifism or socialism, both of which Corrie endorsed, it is a coherent and powerful document of working-class theatre history, which relies on an intimate setting and a specific language to transform the theatre space into a mirror for Scottish individualities and communities to establish, reinforce and recognize their wartime history and identity.

In 'the last of the War years', mother of four Martha has already lost three sons at the front, and an initial exchange between two of her friends, Maggie and John, reveals to the audience that her remaining son, Jimmy, has also recently been killed. 'Puir auld Martha' John says, as he prepares to break the news to her, 'God kens hoo she has came through it a'. Three strong, bonnie laddies lying somewhere on the fields of France – and noo the fourth yin' (6).John's words emphasize immediately the tragic distance that separates Martha and her

[238] Joe Corrie, *Martha* (Glasgow: Brown, Son and Ferguson Ltd, 1935), 5. All further references to *Martha* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses.
[239] Trish Reid, "Scottish Drama: The Expanded Community" in *Community in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. Scott Lyall (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 147.

departed sons, who lie 'somewhere on the fields of France': like many other parents during the First World War, Martha is mourning the missing. Yet, John and Maggie fail in revealing Jimmy's recent death. As they enter the cottage, they notice that the table is set for two and that Martha has managed to purchase chocolate biscuits, which she has laid out on the table with pride. Martha surprises them while they examine the scene and greets them, explaining that she has prepared a wonderful feast because 'Jimmy's coming hame the nicht' (8). At Maggie's perplexed retort, she confirms: 'Ay, and he's never gaun back to the war again. I'll have him with me noo till the end o' my days' (8). John and Maggie, uneasy, know that this is impossible because Jimmy has died, but they do not grasp the subtlety of Martha's statement, which is more literal than it seems. By mentioning 'the end of [her] days', Martha suggests that Jimmy's approach coincides with the approach of death itself. But her friends are puzzled: they ask her whether Jimmy has written to her about his return. 'He didna write' Martha responds. 'He just speaks to me and I hear him' (8). What Martha describes is effectively the visitation of a ghostly voice, a sort of auditory hallucination that occurs mostly at night, when she 'canna sleep' (8).

Yet, Martha's excellent receptivity when it comes to intercepting the thoughts of her son may be read as more than a hallucinatory experience. Indeed, it recalls the interwar discourse around the 'direct voice': this was a technique for spirit communication, heavily influenced by the development of auditory technologies, in which mediums placed devices such as 'speaking trumpets' or even 'phonograph horns' in a room and waited for them to materialise the pure sound of the voice of the spirit, which spoke without relying on the medium's own 'vocal organs'.[240] The 1930s even saw the publication of a journal titled *The Direct Voice*, in which technical advice was sometimes offered to all those interested in experimenting with these kinds of psychic phenomena. Maina L. Tafe, editor of the journal, notes: 'You may have a very wonderful radio set and by tuning to any given number on the dial, you are able to 'tune in' and

[240] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 364, 365.

listen to almost anything that is being broadcast, but if your radio is out of good working order, or if there is too much static in the air, what you hear is disconnected and most of the time you hear imperfectly. Now that is just exactly the same operation of the psychic machinery through which the messages of our loved ones come'.[241] In Martha's case, there is no chance of imperfect communication: she has a psychic machinery so refined that she is able to hear 'every word that [Jimmy] says *as plain as life* [my emphasis]' (11).In *The Direct Voice*, Tafe had also enjoined readers to think of the 'psychic line of communication' as if it were 'telephone call'; where Martha and Jimmy clearly communicate without a telephone, Martha's description of the act of making contact with her son evokes a sense of technological, and even telephonic, wonder.[242] 'We've been speakin' to each ither every nicht for a long time', Martha tells John: she does not need to read letters when she can hear her son's voice (8). Her remarkable ability to converse with Jimmy, both before and after his death, resonates with what Connor has explored in relation to the ties between technology and spiritual communication, namely 'the idea that […] appliances and instruments are not only useful for making contact with spirits, but are also a feature of life beyond death'.[243] Martha's psychic connection with her dead son plays into the spiritualist rhetoric that technological metaphors can give us a glimpse into the 'evolving continuity of *psyche*', which can easily reach into the afterlife.[244]

Martha's friend John cannot help but expressing his doubts about all this: 'But hoo can that be, Martha? The war's no' finished yet?' (11). Martha's response is simple: 'He's coming hame because I asked him. I have gi'en three laddies for oor King and Country, is that no' enough?' (11). Crucially, she also ascribes the clarity with which Jimmy's voice is able to reach her to her motherhood, pointing out to Maggie that 'men folk canna understand a lot o' things we mithers can' (9). In this sense, *Martha* undoubtedly resonates with stereotypical portrayals of

[241] Ibid, 368.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.

motherhood, and with a maternal rhetoric that is remarkably reminiscent of the letters of protest to the IGWC which resented and questioned the state for asking mothers to blindly accept the sacrifice of their children in the name of the country. Some mothers, like Amy Beechey from Aberdeen, did not shy away from admitting to the authorities, royals included, that the death of their sons was no sacrifice: 'I did not give them willingly' Amy had written in response to the Queen's letter of condolence.[245] It is interesting, then, that Corrie would stage a scenario in which Jimmy the soldier decides to desert the war effort to respond to his mother's summons, because this suggests that, at least in the world of the play, familial bonds surpass in importance the calling of the nation. The audience know that Jimmy is returning a ghost: however, his return remains rebellious when it is considered alongside the British ban on the re-patriation of corpses, in which a soldier's return was prohibited even in death. For this reason, more than other plays that feature in this thesis, *Martha* sits in conversation with an ancient theatrical canon, for the portrayal of the (undoubtedly gendered) tension between state and family enacted in the spectral world of Corrie's drama gestures to the tragic struggle between Sophocles' Antigone and her uncle Creon; in both instances, the act of mourning is foregrounded as a 'battle over death' that allows us to glimpse theatre's potential as a site for the negotiation and re-negotiation of the fraught norms of polis and politics.[246] *Martha* thus plunges us into an affective world, sternly held against the coldness and futility of war as a pointless and exploitative undertaking. In contrast with stereotypes of heroic masculinity, Martha reveals to Maggie that Jimmy is not a fighter, but a 'mither's laddie' (11). 'Puir Jimmy!' she cries 'He wasna fitted for the sodgers, and all this fetchin' and killin'. He's a hame bird' (11).

As Maggie and John worry for her health, debating whether they should be calling the doctor and then renouncing that design, Martha fusses around the room, checking that

[245] See the *Shaping Our Sorrow* exhibition, *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, 2018, accessed Feb 20, 2019, Start – Shaping our Sorrow (cwgc.org)
[246] Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, 8.

everything is in order in view of Jimmy's homecoming. When her friends depart, she sits and waits, eventually dozing off, until the arrival of Jimmy's ghost wakes her. His ghostliness is not explicitly recognized, but rather hinted to by the mechanics of lighting that accompany his apparition. While Martha is asleep next to the fireplace, the stage directions note that 'slowly the lights come up again in a soft-blue dream light, revealing Jimmy, a young, kilted soldier standing by the table looking at Martha' (13). The soft-blue dream light gives the scene a surreal tone, which is nonetheless immediately contradicted by the mother and son reunion that follows. Their encounter is embodied and uncompromisingly material:

> Martha: (waking up) – Jimmy! (rises: they embrace and kiss*)* So you're hame at last!
>
> Jimmy: - Hame at last, Mither.
>
> Martha: (anxiously) – Never to go back again?
>
> Jimmy: - Never to go back again.
>
> Martha: - Oh Jimmy, I'm glad. (She buries her head on his shoulder) (13, 14).

Everything seems to suggest Jimmy's effective return: words and actions point to a real physical encounter; Martha can embrace him and finds solace in his physical presence. Nonetheless, a soft blue light envelops the scene to remind the audience that, despite what they are witnessing, this is a realm in which everything may not be what it seems. The theatre confirms itself an effective medium for the staging of haunting, as it captures the subtleties and duplicity of a ghostly apparition that hovers between impossibility and routine, reality and imagination, materiality and immateriality, and even between life and death. The soft blue light, described by Corrie as a 'dream-light', leaves us wondering if Martha may be sleeping, if she may be dreaming of her son. Maggie herself, conversing with John, explains Martha's odd convictions that her son may be returning from war with the words: 'It's the hope o' getting her only laddie back again. She's been dreaming, and dreaming, and dreaming, till she thinks her dreams are true' (10). Here, Maggie speculates that the depths of Martha's grief have the power to alter the real, and that the

work of mourning is akin to work of dreaming. However, I argue that the reason why Martha could hear her son 'as plain as life' all along, even before his apparition, is that Corrie constructs the character of Martha as a presence as spectral as the ghost himself.

Corrie's ambiguous lighting allows him to locate the encounter between Martha and the ghost in a uniquely uncanny realm. Between the conditions of dream and reality lies haunting, the apparition of a ghost who hovers on the margin. The blue light that envelops the scene does not then signify sleep as much as it points to the spectralisation of Martha's every-day, realised in the tension between her wish to see her son again and its impossible fulfilment: the light materialises Martha's trauma while simultaneously placing it in the realm of the dream, the ultimate port of the unknown. The play negotiates sleep as a gateway to death because sleep both conjures and exorcises death: Jimmy's return is curative insofar as it placates Martha's insomnia, but it also cements the precarity of Martha's life by propelling her into a spectral plane. This duplicity at the heart of the ghostly apparition also challenges usual understandings of haunting as uncanny and unfamiliar, by conflating the idea of homeliness with the figure of Jimmy, the returning soldier. Gordon's understanding of haunting is useful here, as she suggests that the term 'haunting' is most often used for 'those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction'.[247] This, to an extent, reflects Freud's conception of the *Unheimlich* as the 'familiar becoming unfamiliar', an experience of disorientation so profound to appear terrifying.[248] Yet, interestingly, for Martha, home is only familiar when the ghost returns. Jimmy's homecoming neutralises Martha's fear, 'that awfu' fear that came to [her], when [she] lost [her] other laddies', the terrible fear that does not allow her to sleep at night (11). The appearance of Jimmy's ghost – whose solidity I have already discussed – reconfigures Martha's loss by emphasising haunting as presence, as a reaction against a reality that normalises invisibility, absence, and doubt. Thus, the ghost's arrival provokes in her the

[247] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.
[248] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 78.

wildest experience of joy: 'D'ye ken', Jimmy says, 'I havena seen ya look sae happy since the day when I was just this size' (17). A stark departure from the haunted Vexted House in *Thunder in the Air*, home in *Martha* is foregrounded as the only safe space, isolated from a war-torn world in which the beauty of the Scottish landscape has turned 'as black as nicht' (18). Jimmy himself does everything in his power to confine the war to the outside: 'I was gaun to say something aboot the warmongers, but I'll hauld my tongue', he promises (17). The mention of the warmongers is significant here precisely because of Jimmy's reticence about elaborating on what his experience of the war was like. Where the 'warmongers' hover in the background of his own history of the war, they are refused entrance into the dynamic of the play, which ventriloquises Martha's experience of Jimmy's spectral return. The web of political associations tied to the evocative word, 'warmongers', is thus left unexplored: this way, the ghost is less a soldier than he is a son, Martha's 'hame bird', and as such seems determined to protect the gentleness and intimacy of the scene. He thus acts as a fierce protector of the home, as well as of Martha, whom he haunts, actively challenging the Freudian notion that what is familiar, friendly and *Heimlich* is also 'free from ghostly influences'

The play is unique in its treatment of haunting precisely because it relies on a certain tonal instability. While the audience does see Martha joyously fulfilling her desire of having her son back home again, they also witness her follow the ghost into death. Martha's greatest moment of joy is thus also revealed to be the point of her demise, as she dies in her sleep when the ghost of her son, after kissing her on the brow, 'glides softly into the darkness', not before making 'a beckoning gesture towards' her (19). The play ends with this affecting scene: both Martha and Jimmy are leaving this world together and, almost asleep, Martha welcomes the idea that she can finally rest. 'I thoucht I was gaun to be left wi' nane', she says, as she makes the effort to imagine what her life would have been like if the last of her children had not returned (19). But she immediately corrects herself: 'But Jimmy's hame noo, and he's never gaun to leave me again' (19). There is no need to even consider the grief and anxiety that the idea of a future

would have posed: she is now safe in the (uncanny) knowledge that Jimmy will always be by her side. This scene is significant in its portrayal of death as sleep and it resonates with another modernist re-imagination of the dead soldier, found in Katherine Mansfield's *Journal*. Christine Darrohn includes a significant passage from the *Journal* in her work on Mansfield's memorialisation of her brother: 'perhaps because I went to sleep thinking of him' Mansfield writes, 'I woke and *was* he [my emphasis]'.[249] Mansfield describes sleep as a portal for the shifting of her identity: when she wakes again, she is no longer her mourning self, but rather feels a deadly communion with her brother. The passage re-imagines the pervasiveness of grief through the metaphor of sleep. Darrohn notes that it also 'suggests that the role ascribed to women in the postwar world – to mourn and to remember the dead young soldiers – puts their own identities at risk'.[250] In *Martha*, Corrie goes one step forward. We know that mourning has affected Martha through bouts of incurable insomnia: when she finally does succumb to sleep, the time of death, encompassed in Jimmy's beckoning gesture, begins. We understand that the ghost has appeared, from the beginning, as the signifier that this future, this no-time of death, was already written into Martha's mourning.

As Martha draws her last breath, bagpipes sound in the 'far distance': Corrie's use of disembodied sound contributes to bringing the traditions and conventions of commemoration to Martha's cottage, but, differently from the bugle in *Thunder in the Air*, the bagpipes are rather like a faint afterthought. The staging of Martha's death only means that the play looks obliquely to the question of commemoration, preferring to focus on Martha's newfound, if deadly, peace. In this case, the bagpipes only commemorate Martha's death because they are mediated by the theatre event. I read the bagpipes as a complication to the treatment of futurity in the play. Through granting a cathartic quality to Martha's death, the playwright gracefully removes her

[249] Christine Darrohn, 'Blown to Bits!: Katherine Mansfield's The Garden Party and the Great War', *Modern Fiction Studies* 44: 3 (1998): 518.
[250] Ibid.

from the necessity to partake in the cycle of grief, remembrance, and commemoration of her dead that the war has already partially put her through. This cycle has been making her ill: as the ghost of Jimmy notices about her, she has 'come through hell' (19). As such, haunting is not a way to propel Martha further into the realms of grief, or memory, but rather a sign that she has already entered the realm of death. The bagpipes, then, are fashioned more as an injunction to the audience, and cement *Martha*'s identity as a memorial play. If it true that, as Casey has put it, 'commemorating is capable of transforming' an ending 'into a re-living presence', then Martha's ending is, in virtue of the audience's presence, not truly an ending.[251] The play's complexity, however, lies precisely in its portrayal of Martha's cathartic death: in her case, death is firmly conceptualised as the only 'inescapable future', to borrow Saint-Amour's words.[252] The faintness of the bagpipes' song within the play alerts us to an attempt to bring commemoration into picture: the ending of *Martha* may then be an injunction to look ahead, but what does its faintness imply? Who are the bagpipes for? We are reminded of the guilt that plagued the narrator of 'The Bad Yin' when, standing by the memorial monument, he glimpsed the ghost of Annie in the distance. This ending, too, revealed the author's sense of uncertainty about how to best represent the value of commemoration itself, and deal with the exclusionary side of such remembrance: in this case, the story was structured as a companion piece, designed to prepare readers to integrate information about Annie's forgotten history into the partiality of the commemorative event. The faintness, and remoteness, of the bagpipes in Martha may be seen to fulfil a similar function.

John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest,* a flamboyant play which premiered in 1934 at Whitehall Theatre in London's West End, could not be more different. Yet, the narratives offered in these two plays also illuminate each other: they both turn their dramatic eye to the experiences of women in mourning, to the ways in which the grief deriving from wartime losses

[251] Casey, *Remembering*, 256.
[252] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 28.

(of which there are several types) would have moulded, destroyed, and defined women's lives. Both plays are attentive to histories of motherhood, which is naturally *Martha*'s focus, but which also lies, as a half-hidden ghost, haunting and worth conjuring, within *Flower of the Forest*'s pages. As I demonstrate here, looking at the fights of real-life mothers supports a deeper reading of *Martha* as a text in which echoes of the re-patriation ban come rushing to the fore; *Flowers of the Forest*, despite being more generally imbued with classic stereotypes of war literature, is also concerned with distance, absence and motherhood as themes that highlight and justify the need for an urgent turn to the spectral. There are also many ideological differences between these two plays, and these are reflected in their style, and in their authors' backgrounds. Joe Corrie was a working-class dramatist who wrote for a working-class audience. His plays toured mining villages and were staged by amateur companies in working men's, mining clubs and village halls, as well as the occasional country theatre. Most of them were written and performed in vernacular. They were commentaries on how wide patterns of capitalist and conservative politics affected the private lives of Scottish citizens; as Alexander Reid wrote in *The Scottish Bookshelf,* 'the basis of both his realistic tragedies and comedies is usually – as it is in his poems – a sharp sense of the incongruities which exist between the reality and the myth, whether private or public, and no other playwright in Scotland has caught "the accent of the mind" of the Scottish industrial worker anything like so well'.[253] The specificity of the dialect Corrie has scripted for *Martha* highlights his mission to craft channels of representation for Scottish individualities and situates him in a small group of interwar playwrights, of which Sean O'Casey is also a member, that have been deeply concerned with regional identities and have strived to express them through language.

[253] Alexander Reid, 'Poetry, "Plays and Pacifism: A Note on the Life and Work of Joe Corrie", clipping from *The Scottish Bookshelf*, Corrie Archive, M626551, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Accessed February 5, 2022.

Unlike *Martha*, *Flowers of the Forest* was an expensive and glamorous production, boasting a bedazzling cast which included celebrated actors of the time such as Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Henry Oscar and Barry Barnes.[254] It was the 'commercial' product of a middle-class playwright who, at least in this case, wrote for the upper and middle-class crowd of theatre goers of the West End.[255] Its protagonists live fashionable, comfortable city lives, dabble with art auctions, and collect rare war poetry books. While *Martha* was set in 'the last of the war years', *Flowers of the Forest* is set in its present, the 1930s. It bears witness to a time in which commemoration had already learnt its rhymes and its refrains, had refined its modular and affecting language and picked its favourite songs, its favourite literature. In other words, it reflects a time in which popular culture had absorbed the war, in which it was unclear whether the gramophones that were blasting war records were doing so sombrely or nostalgically. This is certainly one of the plays' concerns, as it strives to reflect on the context of its own production, the mechanisms of memory and the ways in which it involves narrative, and ultimately the insufficiency of modular commemoration for the healing of war trauma: these points of concern are important to keep in mind, as the chapter turns to *Flowers of the Forest*. I started this chapter with a letter to the IWGC from 'one of those bereaved mothers,' which stands as a powerful testimony to the idea that grief could, in the period following the First World War, be silenced by the very commemorative practices that addressed it. In these plays, grief does not disappear with the dead as much as it is not resolved by their commemoration. Enter, then, the ghost. Through staging spectral encounters, both plays strive to break the silence. The repetitive nature of theatre would have aided this process, by enlivening and re-conjuring these stories, performance after performance.

[254] Few scholars who have shown academic interest for John van Druten's work have actually been interested in *Flowers of the Forest*. Jordan Schildcrout includes an interesting chapter on *The Voice of the Turtle* in his book *In the Long Run: A Cultural History of Broadway's Hit Plays* (London: Routledge, 2019). For a discussion of *The Voice of the Turtle*'s fortunate Broadway history, see Schildcrout, 228.
[255] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 46.

'No Future we can Count On': Retrieving the Voice of the Dead in John van Druten's *Flowers of the Forest*

When *Flowers of the Forest* premiered at Whitehall Theatre in London in November 1934, John van Druten was one of the most popular playwrights in the West End. He would soon leave for New York, where he would then settle and enjoy an extremely successful career in Broadway as a playwright and screenwriter: his play *I am a Camera* (1951), adapted from Christopher Isherwood's Berlin stories, would eventually inspire the hugely successful musical *Cabaret*.[256] Known primarily as a writer of romantic and comedic fiction, van Druten was also author of three war plays: *The Return of the Soldier*, adapted in 1925 from Rebecca West's 1918 novel, *The Voice of the Turtle*, a 1943 comedy set during the Second World War, and our *Flowers of the Forest*. While the first two were very popular, to the extent that *The Voice of the Turtle* became one of the longest-running shows in Broadway history (it ran from 1943 to 1948), *Flowers of the Forest* was not quite as well received as van Druten's usual theatrical efforts: it was in fact deemed stylistically inconsistent and, as a consequence, has not been performed frequently after its first 1934 and 1935 runs in London and New York, where it ran for about 40 performances in 1935.[257] Its author does not seem to have thought of it highly, and later described it as a curious creation, born out of a plot that refused to take shape, then took over every nook and cranny. Another reason for the relatively lukewarm reception that audiences and critics granted it might have been that the play was moralistic and unequivocally anti-war: its 'moral position', Kosok conjectured, might have meant that it was 'far from welcome to part of the audience' it sought to address.[258] The play is chiefly fascinated with the ways in which war takes on literary form. This is revealed in its male protagonists' fondness for war literature: Richard is a war poet, Leonard is

[256] Tony Aldgate, 'I Am a Camera: Film and Theatre Censorship in 1950s Britain', *Contemporary European History* 8, no 3 (1999): 426.
[257] J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1930 – 1939: A Calendar of Productions, Performers and Personnel* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 397.
[258] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 46.

obsessed with war literature, Lewis collects books of war poetry. Most importantly, the title, *Flowers of the Forest*, was borrowed from a Scottish song composed in 1513, commonly used to commemorate the war dead. The song was originally written as a lament, describing the situation of grief-stricken women and children after the loss of their loved ones in battle, and is never actually mentioned in van Druten's play-text. The playwright rather uses it as a mediumistic vessel, a widely known transhistorical vehicle that effectively introduces the notion of traumatic memory, focusing on civilian grief.[259]

The time of the action too is removed from the war years, settling on 'to-day', 1934. The main protagonist, Naomi, is a former war nurse, who currently lives in London with her rich husband Lewis, an ex-soldier turned art collector. Their lives revolve around the cult of beautiful things; their house is 'furnished with great taste, expense and an eye for beauty', they have comfort and status.[260] When Naomi's sister Mercia arrives from the countryside, bearing the last possessions of their recently deceased father, Naomi finds herself thrust into a world of remembrance, and is forced to revisit the trauma of having lost her first love, budding poet Richard Newton-Clare, to the First World War. The appearance of Mercia, an intransigent and sentimental woman, serves to highlight Naomi's strangely dispassionate approach to war memory. As Mercia criticises her sister's marriage with the detached Lewis, suggesting that Richard would have made her much happier, Naomi points out that Richard would have never remained 'the young, romantic poet he was in 1914'. 'He'd be over forty, probably rather dreary, living in the country … I expect he'd have been unfaithful to me, several times …' she ponders (21). At this, Mercia is shocked, and reproaches her: 'You revolt me, when you talk like that. Richard was the best thing in your life. And whether you loved him or not, you can't blaspheme

[259] For more about the history and uses of the folk song "Flowers of the Forest", see Corey Gibson, 'The flowers of the forest are a' wede away': the Dispersal of a Familiar Refrain', *Scottish Literary Review* 11, no 1 (2019).
[260] John van Druten, *Flowers of the Forest. A Play in Three Acts* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934), 9. All further references to *Flowers of the Forest* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses.

against his memory like that' (21). Mercia's character still ventriloquises a war rhetoric which rests on crafting an entirely idealistic version of the past, and she is shown to hold on to a propagandist vision of war which, as Act II will later show, was widely shared by many at the start of the conflict. In this sense, Mercia's words are often imbued with the patriotic echoes of certain wartime newspaper pieces, described by Robert Graves as speaking a 'language of propaganda' that, after the war, could be deemed positively 'foreign'.[261] Naomi, instead, seems to stand at the opposite end of the spectrum from her sister: 'I don't think of [Richard] from one year's end to the next anymore' she assures Mercia (21).

However, this first mention of Richard proves to be the first of many. The evening after her first conversation with her sister, Naomi welcomes her secretary, Beryl, and her boyfriend, young bookseller Leonard Dobie, into her library. Leonard, a passionate pacifist, denounces the survival of Mercia's brand of war rhetoric into the 1930s, calling into question the responsibility and forgetfulness of all of those who contributed to the war, even the nurses. Talking about war survivors, he states: 'Most of them would tell you they had a damned good time' (28). He then adds: 'If the dead ones could talk, it might do some good' (28). As the day closes, Naomi sits with Lewis, surveying a box of old letters that she and Richard had sent each other in wartime, all salvaged by her sister after their father's demise. 'They aren't upsetting you, are they?' asks Lewis, tentatively. 'These?' Naomi responds 'No. But it's queer. (…) How right that boy was. What a lot one has forgotten' (41). It is this apparent ease of forgetting that Leonard had criticised during his pacifist rant, and that motivated his wishful hypothesis that 'if the dead ones could talk', they might say something that could rectify the general war-related amnesia. His spectral idealism is constructed upon the notion that there is an open gap in knowledge that renders the discourse around the war stilted, false and inadequate – a gap that may only be filled by looking back and conjuring the voices of those who have departed. The wish for an

[261] Evans, *Mothers of Heroes*, 88-90.

opportunity to interrogate the dead is the core of the play's spectral preoccupations. *Flowers of the Forest* asks: how *do* we speak to the dead? Can we do that by reading war books, playing the gramophone, collecting memorabilia? All characters seem to have been affected by the war, albeit in different ways, and find shared memories in familiar objects. And yet, there is a layer of memory – which is buried, like the dead – that remains hidden and untouched. As such, the whole of Act I nurtures a sense of unfinishedness, suggesting that there might be something of Naomi's past that we are not being told. The roots of her uneasiness start to become apparent in Act II, set in her childhood home in rural Sussex.

At first, the play portrays the climate of blind cheerfulness and nationalism of 1914, in which the First World War is envisioned as a God-sent mission to fight 'the German devils' (47). We are introduced to Richard, a young patriotic poet, thoroughly incensed with feverish excitement at the prospect of serving at the front. His poetry celebrates the conflict as an adventure to protect the future, to shape 'what comes after us' (62). We witness the start of his and Naomi's love story, kindled by youth and heroic idealism, while we are also made privy to the breakdown of Mercia's relationship with her own boyfriend, who, like Richard, is a soldier, but who, unlike Richard, is also gravely aware of the war's futility. Naomi herself reveals that she wants to get to France as soon as possible, that she wants to 'mean something' (61). When Naomi and Richard part ways, promising each other love, he confesses: 'I'd hate to die without have had a son – to go on after me' (62). But the war soon shows its real face. In the second part of Act II, set in 1916, Naomi, now a nurse, is sent home on sick leave. The shocking and traumatic nature of nursing care on the frontline have started to push her towards disillusionment: 'God's hands have failed a lot of people', she points out to her father, who, as a vicar and representative of the religious order, feels the need to continue to support the conflict (73). Naomi herself retains an idea of 'a certain kind of service' that she is performing for a better future: this is also motivated by her discovery that she is carrying a child, Richard's child.

When she meets him on leave, though, Richard has become an entirely different person: the war has not turned him into a pacifist, but into a profoundly nihilistic soul.

His idea of futurity has also mutated: 'Do you remember how I talked? I said the thing I wanted most was to have had a son. For what? To let him share the joke? It isn't good enough. […] Or for the future? There's no future we can count on. There's the present that we know, and don't trust. […] If I thought there was a child of mine alive […] I'd say destroy it' (78). Naomi's revelation that she is indeed carrying a child does nothing to soften Richard's position. There is no future they can count on: his idea of the child's birth as an entirely futile event contributes to disrupt Naomi's own affective investment in the future, rendering even the passing of time as hopeless and traumatic. 'Their time is out of joint', to borrow Derrida's (and Shakespeare's) words; their whole history dismantled.[262] Feeling shocked, and coerced, Naomi decides to end her pregnancy. Thus, Naomi is haunted by at least one ghost: the ghost of her unborn child, which similarly haunts the play's denouement. Richard's war-borne nihilism has been the cause of Naomi's renunciation of the very future that had sustained her during the horrifying times of her war service. The core of Naomi's struggle does not then begin with Richard's death, but rather with the loss of her child. In Act III, she finally reveals to Mercia the truth about her abortion, shattering Mercia's self-assured assumptions about her sister's relationship with Richard. Naomi explains that, after Richard's death, she had attended several séances in the hope to be able to speak with him again. 'There was something I wanted to know,' she reveals. 'Something that Richard had left unsaid. […] You know I got there too late to see him. But I talked to a man who was in the next bed to him and he told me that Richard was talking all time and quoting poetry he wanted someone to write down, only they thought he was delirious' (84, 85). Richard's last words thus become, for Naomi, an epistemological obsession. As Richard played an important part in the annihilation of a future in which she had strongly

[262] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx,* 21.

invested, the realisation that, due to his death, she has missed the utterance of a new 'conviction he wanted to express' is enough to spark within her a strong desire to pursue Richard's spirit right into the afterlife (85).

Richard's last words are haunting because they represent another route out of Naomi's impasse, only to remain lost. Crucially, though, we know that they were words of poetry: this is important because it recalls Cathy Caruth's reflection on the pastness of trauma, the unconscious ways in which the past may affect the present. As Richard was dying, the poetry he composed on his deathbed was taken to be nothing but the delirious rant of a dying man, unworthy of being recorded. However, the play suggests that such lost words somehow weigh on the present, precisely when Naomi is hit by the notion that remembrance implies forgetting: 'what a lot one has forgotten', she had said as she revisited Richard's early poetry and his letters. Naomi's problem is not that she did not get to *see* Richard's dead body, but rather that she could not hear his final words. The entirety of Naomi's life has become defined by this absence. In her analysis of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Caruth writes that the unnamed protagonist of the film, having missed the moment of her lover's death, 'is unable to recognize the continuation of her life'.[263] As she confesses to her sister, Naomi has long abandoned her faith in mediums: she does not seek comfort, she does not want to hear the tapping of Richard's spirit on the medium's table, she does not need reassurance that he has made it to heaven. What she searches for is an impossible encounter with the very moment of Richard's death, which his last words stand to signify. In the absence of this knowledge, she retreats into a comfortable, wealthy life while remaining quietly aware that there is 'no future [she] can count on' (78): in other words, she remains haunted by the ghost of the unknown, which she cannot exorcise.

[263] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 39.

As a darkly ironic reminder that she is surrounded by a useless aural cacophony which does not include Richard's voice, van Druten sets Naomi's story in a mansion that rejoices in its sonic modernity. An expensive gramophone rests on the cabinet and Matheson and Beryl, the butler and secretary, are constantly in charge of sifting through telephone calls. A first inkling of the central role that sound plays within the script occurs at the beginning of the first act, in which Naomi receives a telephone call from Richard's father and mistakes him for his son:

> Matheson: A Mr. Newton-Clare telephoned.
>
> Naomi: He couldn't have. He's dead.
>
> Matheson: Well, he telephoned, madam. (11, 12)

This Mr Newton-Clare can naturally only be Richard's father, rather than Richard himself, yet Naomi describes the episode as having given her 'the oddest feeling', as if she was part of 'a ghost story' in which her ex-lover had really decided to contact her from the afterlife by means of the telephone. 'I never thought of his father, stupid old man,' Naomi says, 'why should *he* want to ring up?' (12) Paradoxically, Naomi seems to find it more plausible that dead Richard would call, rather than his very alive father; clearly, memories that seemed buried out of sight are still potently evoked by the simple thought of a telephone call. This episode confirms the evocative characteristics of telephony and other sound transmission devices and suggests that it facilitates and inspires a newly aural form of ghostly visitation. Naomi's surprising confusion regarding the identity of her caller reflects Connor's effective description of the telephone as an object that would 'make speaking to another the image and relay of speaking to oneself', for 'one's interlocutor is at once thousands of miles away and almost inside one's head'.[264] It is due to this new notion of telephonic spectral proximity that Naomi temporarily associates the telephone with the spectral resurgence of the past and, with it, her own traumatic memories.[265]

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[264] Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 362.

[265] As James Mansell notes, the metaphoric and otherworldly function of the telephone was picked up by spiritualists too, who 'believed that the voices of ethereal spirits could be heard in the crackle of the

Similarly, she is particularly affected by the gramophone, which both Mercia and Lewis dismiss as entertainment. In Act III, as she listens to the war records that Mercia has salvaged from her late father's country house, Naomi reproaches her husband for thinking them 'just funny old records' (82). ' Isn't it queer,' she muses, 'to think of all those sounds lying dead in those black things … just waiting for a needle to … bring the past back to life?' (82). Naomi acknowledges the strangeness of recorded sound, the ability of sound technology to change people's attitude to death and bereavement by turning records into sonic repositories of the past, which can be then temporarily resurrected at will: this qualifies the gramophone within the play as a machine which, like Edison's phonograph had been, is 'capable of tracking down the voices of history'.[266] Van Druten may be self-reflecting on his choice of title, here, as 'Flowers of the Forest' - the folk song – shapeshifts and resurrects under the new guise of the performative event which bears its name: in this sense, the theatrical event is an alternative archive that testifies to the sonic and affective history of warfare. In any case, it is interesting that Naomi would conjure an image of sounds 'lying dead'; through this personification, Naomi confers a certain humanness to sound, and shines a spotlight on the crucial role that sound played in shaping modernist attitudes towards death in the first half of the twentieth-century. Jonathan Sterne is right that the relationship between sound technology and death was not simply a one-way exchange; as he argues, not only did recorded sound 'transform the experience of death' (introducing a way to preserve the voice for posterity) but it was death itself which 'explained and shaped the cultural power of sound recording'.[267]

The voice rising from Naomi's gramophone is at the same time familiar and unfamiliar, embodied and disembodied. The disembodied voices resurrected by the gramophone record

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telephone' and trusted that the development of sound technology could produce instruments that would significantly enhance the spiritualist experience. See James Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 35. See, also, Sara Danius's fascinating *The Senses of Modernism: technology, perception and aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

[266] Ibid, 358.

[267] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 290

become sonic ghosts, conjured by technology: a fully secularized form of human induced, and human operated, haunting. The impression is that, by performing the resurrection act through the working of the gramophone needle, Naomi is gaining active agency in her own experience of haunting: this, she complains, 'is a little too like biting on a sensitive tooth, for the fun of making it hurt' (81). She eventually resolves to stop the gramophone. This encounter with these sonic ghosts of the past, the play seems to suggest, is as inconclusive as it is humanly manipulated; as Elodie Roy observes in another context, as much as it appears 'engulfing and present', recorded sound cannot but produce 'an illusion of authenticity', which ceases to exist at the removal of the needle from the record's surface.[268] The illusionary quality of recorded sound translates into a sense that the past is being summoned without being confronted or conversed with – at least not by choice. Roy mentions that 1920s England promoted the use of records for the 'taming' of traumatic war memories; this form of 'taming' is ultimately rejected by van Druten's play.[269] Naomi's experience of listening to records is queer and unsettling, for its very inconclusiveness reminds her that there is a large part of her own traumatic past that has not yet been reckoned with. The play eventually argues for a more solid, resolutive, live encounter with the past when it consigns to Leonard's body the mediumistic ability to relate Richard's words. Even as 'sound recordings enable a mobility of emotions across time, binding people from various generations', van Druten would rather employ the live theatrical medium to work towards a more immediate, authentic kind of spectral encounter, in which the co-operation of body and voice returns as an essential part of the haunting process.[270] The queer gramophone then remains a precursor for the spectre's return, an eerie pointer to what is to come and a reminder that traumas of the past can be conjured, but not exorcised, by the playing of a record.

[268] Elodie Roy, 'Worn Grooves', *Media History* 24, no 1 (2018): 38.
[269] Ibid, 40.
[270] Ibid.

'The Hertzian Waves of Tuberculosis': Wireless Metaphors, Illness and Embodiment

Richard's lost words are finally unlocked by none other than Leonard Dobie, who had previously wished for an illuminating conversation with the dead. The play's last scene features the disclosure of Richard's last poem when his voice takes hold of Leonard's body in Naomi's presence. Through Leonard, Richard finally manages to recite his last, pacifist poem. He also attempts to establish a conversation with Naomi, asking her for forgiveness for having destroyed their future:

> You against whom I sinned, denying life,
> Forgive me in your mercy when I cry
> Out of the darkness 'It was Death, not I
> The whole world's Will to Death that drove the knife
> Into your heart and laid our Love to waste'. (104)

With this possession scene, van Druten inserts *Flowers of the Forest* into a literary canon that relies on spiritualist metaphors to reflect on questions of authorship, narrative control, and the functioning of memory. In *Ghostwriting Modernism*, Helen Sword remarks on the similarities that have been drawn between the act of writing and mediumship, arguing that, in the same way that 'writers of poetry' function as 'spirit mediums' in several ways, mediumship itself 'has been closely allied with authorship', especially in its later iterations of 'automatic writing' and 'trance speaking'.[271] Sword continues to note that, especially in the first years of the twentieth-century, the spiritualist metaphor has provided, for several authors, a way to reflect on the concept of authorship, and on the 'inscrutability of poetic inspiration'.[272] I would argue that the representation of mediumship in *Flowers of the Forest*, despite engaging this notion of inscrutability

[271] Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 2, 7,8.
[272] Ibid, 35.

in superficial ways, ultimately looks critically to it: as we shall see, the play points to the necessity to think clearly indeed about the far from inscrutable role of literature in processes of collective remembrance. Given the long history and shape-shifting quality of the titular song, it is not surprising that *Flowers of the Forest* should experiment with inter-textuality. The playwright's choice of using the song as an inter-textual frame for his own exploration of the theme of war and its memory seems like a self-conscious reflection on the boundaries and limitations of authorship, and, as I continue to explore later on in this section, may even signify a burgeoning anxiety about how the uses and functions of war literature morph throughout time.

Some aspects of the play also recall an earlier text: Rudyard Kipling's short story 'Wireless,' published in 1902 in *Scribner's Magazine.*[273] This was an early exploration of the mysteriousness of wireless technology, and of the implications of transcendence that the concept exuded. The narrator of the story visits a chemist friend and finds that his friend's nephew, a wireless enthusiast, is organising an attempt to connect with another wireless operator situated in Poole. During the visit, the narrator befriends and cares for Mr Shaynor, the shop assistant, who suffers from tuberculosis. The story juxtaposes the moment in which a faint wireless connection is realised between the two stations and an inexplicable episode in which Mr Shaynor enters a trance and recites several verses of Keats, a poet he claims he had never read before. The narrator, while witnessing Shaynor's exploit, remains electrified at the thought that the old man's mind – in the atmosphere created by the attempted wireless connection – might have been receptive to Keatsian 'Hertzian waves'.[274] He defines these 'the Hertzian waves of tuberculosis', striking an interesting parallel between wireless communication, possession and illness *as* possession.[275] If it true, like Connor has argued, that images of possession, demonic or spiritual,

[273] Rudyard Kipling, "Wireless" in *Scribner's Magazine,* 32, no 2 (1902), 129. Hathi Trust.
[274] Ibid, 140. Hertzian waves, another name for electromagnetic waves, are named after Heinrich Hertz, who was the first to experiment in the last years of the 19th century with the idea that electrical waves could 'energy across space without the aid of a physical connection'. See Séan Street, *A Concise History of British Radio 1922 – 2022* (Tiverton: Kelly Publications, 2002), 13
[275] Ibid.

'show the extreme vulnerability of the human being to invasion', Kipling's story relies on the connection between the shared illness of tuberculosis and the mediumistic act to rework wireless communication as a mysterious, potentially dangerous and unpredictable form of invasion that may well prove damaging to the human body.[276] Probably inspired by this short story, van Druten's play borrows several elements from Kipling to fully engage in an occultist discourse that has interiorised the language and history of scientific and technological development, as well as the peculiar tropes connected to certain illnesses and their relation to mediumship.[277]

About 'Wireless', Sword notes that 'Kipling uses the spiritualism/technology analogy to remind us that poetic inspiration, like the misdirected Morse code messages and scrambled poetry fragments in his story, can arrive via unseen channels from often inscrutable sources'.[278] Interestingly, one reviewer from the *Manchester Guardian* observed that, in *Flowers of the Forest*, the ventriloquist experiment was not so much 'spiritualism', but rather 'delayed telepathy', echoing Dunninger's views about the essentially scientific nature of thought-transference.[279] Van Druten certainly had Kipling as a firm point of reference when designing Leonard's doomed character, who, in the words of his girlfriend Beryl, has an ability to tune into the echoes of the voices of the dead just like 'a wireless' (35). This is because Leonard, like Mr Shaynor, happens to be affected by later stage tuberculosis and a form of brain tumour which causes him to suffer from fits and migraines. By bestowing these terrible illnesses upon him, van Druten subscribes to a rather old-fashioned idea of mediumship, for which mediums and psychics (generally female) were often affected by hysteria, excretions, swellings or tumours. Due to these foreign forces taking hold of their bodies, mediums found themselves facilitated in their access to forms of

[276] Steven Connor, "Towards a New Demonology", 5. Conference paper presented at *Becoming Human*, Birkbeck College, London, 1998. Towards a New Demonology (stevenconnor.com).
[277] Jeffrey Sconce explores this theme in the chapter "Medium and Media", although he focuses on representations of hysteria: see Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 50-56.
[278] Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 36.
[279] I.B., "Mr Van Druten's New Play: Flowers of the Forest", review of *Flowers of the Forest*, *Manchester Guardian*, Nov 21, 1934, ProQuest.

superior knowledge.[280] This resonates with the historical romanticizing of consumption as a disease that brings within itself experiences of 'transcendence', frantic passion, higher sensitivity and a kind of 'spiritual refinement' that was considered inspired and almost becoming to its bearer.[281] According to this particular trope, Leonard is characterized by van Druten as 'pale, thin, under-nourished' but also 'eager, fierce, shy, ingenuous and resentful by turns' (25). When Beryl brings him into the house to meet Naomi, she apologises to her for Leonard's fieriness, and adds 'I agree about the war being wrong, of course […] Only, he does catch fire so, from almost everything, that it's hard to keep up. And he wears himself out with it all' (34). The idea of Leonard 'catching fire' because of his passions is in keeping with the metaphors surrounding tuberculosis as a disease of 'inward burning': as Susan Sontag explains, the tubercular was often understood to be someone 'consumed by ardour', love or political passion, 'that ardour leading to the dissolution of the body'.[282]

Beryl also confesses to Naomi that Leonard's headaches cause him to behave strangely: 'You know, he doesn't know what he's doing sometimes when he has these pains in his head. He talks and goes on and sometimes doesn't remember afterwards' (34). The X-rays will later confirm that Leonard suffers from a brain tumour which causes him to momentarily lose consciousness, forgetting himself and entering a sort of trance. Thus, both of Leonard's illnesses bear a metaphorical weight, and echo traditional conceptions of mediumship, filtering them through the technologically-informed discourse on telepathy that is explored explicitly in the play-text. In fact, all the conversations that Naomi and Beryl have about Leonard's tragic condition explicitly rely on the analogy between wireless and telepathic communication, and

[280] See Connor, "Hoc Est Corpus" in *Dumbstruck,* 105, 106.
[281] In the book *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* Susan Sontag fields an in-depth analysis of the metaphors associated with tuberculosis. To prove the twistedness of the 'positive' conception of tubercolosis that characterized the 18th and 19th centuries, Sontag reports the alleged incident in which Byron, looking at himself in the mirror, exclaimed: 'I should like to die of a consumption, (…) Because the ladies would all say: 'Look at that poet Byron, how interesting he looks in dying!'. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (Location: Penguin Books, 1978), 32.
[282] Ibid, 21.

function as explicit signposts, hints that a communication of this kind might occur later in the play and, this time, be shown on stage. Indeed, the scene in which Leonard channels Richard's voice resembles the functioning mechanism of the radio, which can tune into different wireless stations almost seamlessly. The scene is engineered so that the audience's chances to discern Leonard's figure are inhibited; this way, Leonard is shrouded in darkness, isolated in an aural, rather than a visual, dimension, where he mostly exists as voice.[283] However, the audience knows that his body is present: the scene blurs the boundaries between the aural and the visual realm, and it is only through meta-theatrical embodiment that we finally access Richard's voice in its most shattering and effectual form. In a way, the fact that Leonard's dramatic body *is* present but shrouded in darkness points to the haunting and suggestive power of wireless technology while simultaneously resolving the problem of absence, which sound technology itself fails to tackle.

This scene also testifies to the spectrality inherent to the actor's craft: in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity* we learn that 'there are many actors that think of themselves as mediumistic vessels and who have a paranormal understanding of themselves as "channelling" a force which is outside them'.[284] The eeriness and uncanniness of theatre performance has roots in the imaginative terrain of ventriloquism, defined as the practice of acting as vessel to 'give voice' to someone else or something else; *Flowers of the Forest* highlights and builds upon this dynamic by fashioning Leonard's body as a surrogate of the actorial body, but also by conceptualising Richard's poetry as script – theatrical spectrality come full circle. However, it is also worth noting that the correspondence between Richard's and Leonard's experiences of suffering is not only a way to reflect on the idiosyncrasies of telepathic occultism or a form of theatrical self-reflexivity. Leonard's role as medium rather evokes a kind of

[283] Beryl and Leonard are visiting Naomi and Lewis' house to examine some books when Leonard gets a migraine and needs to lie down on Naomi's couch. The lights are turned off in the room to facilitate Leonard's recovery and the stage directions relate: 'the stage is lit only by firelight, where Naomi is standing. Leonard and the couch are in darkness' (100).
[284] *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity,* 15.

powerlessness in the face of a certain corporeal condition that designates him as the ideal channel for memories of suffering to resurface into the present. We know that Richard's pacifist poetry, composed on his deathbed during wartime, has failed to be recorded. Thus, Leonard's body functions as a means for Richard to connect with 1930s Britain, where much about the war has already been forgotten, glamorized, or exploited, while simultaneously providing a means for the playwright to warn us of the dangers that all these attitudes to war memory pose for the preservation of peace. It is not Richard's poetic words as such, but rather the violence of their re-appearance through Leonard's body that cause a disruption in 'the overarching continuities embodied by nation or tradition', symbolised by the war narratives that Leonard, Lewis and Mercia consume daily.[285] This violence foregrounds the collective trauma of war as a 'reverberation of the past catching up with its history', to quote Trigg: despite the complexity of its denouement, *Flowers of the Forest* attempts to field a reflection on the ways in which narrative and narration affect collective memory.[286]

The scene then betrays a latent anxiety that the forms of cultural production that engaged with the First World War in the 1930s were one of the main vehicles for the memory of the war to endure; as Andrew Frayn argued, war literature was one of the crucial agents for tracing and crafting patterns of 'social remembering' in the aftermath of the conflict.[287] This was likely on van Druten's mind, as Richard's message from the afterlife is a poem, although, we are told, it diverges from Richard's previous wartime corpus, which had charted a shift from a discourse of heroism to one of disillusionment. In this sense, through the possession of Leonard, Richard adds one more literary text to the already saturated war-literature market; it would make sense to read this play as a self-reflexive commentary that references the recent 'War Books Boom' of the

[285] Gibson, 'The flowers of the forest a' wede away', 1.
[286] Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 210.
[287] Andrew Frayn, "Social Remembering, Disenchantment and First World War Literature, 1918-1930", Journal of War and Culture Studies 11, no 3 (2018): 196, 202.

years 1928-1930.[288] Interestingly, we already know that the playwright felt a level of discomfort with his own play, and so did a few critics: a journalist of the *New York Times* agrees with a colleague who felt 'that the play unendurably misses the whole significance of those closely remembered happenings'.[289] For another reviewer, the play was 'fairly good Theatre, but very poor drama', for it often failed to 'paint an accurate picture' of the 'hopes and fears' that surrounded the conflict.[290] In a similar way, Noel Coward felt that he had 'muddled' the extremely serious issues of the war in his 1930 *Post-Mortem* in his keenness to enter a discourse with the more successful war plays of the time.[291] The portrayal of mediumship within *Flowers of the Forest* thus plays with notions of directness and indirectness that this context illuminates. The voice of Richard is dictating, but Leonard is his vessel: this gestures to the playwright's own inability to relate the experience of the front first-hand, while also testifying to the diverse ways in which the war was increasingly becoming a subject in literary and popular culture.

The scene of Leonard's possession may seem to respond to the gnostic discourse that predicated that the voice of the soldier (poetic or otherwise) was the only truthful account of the war experience: as I have already noted, the communication between Richard and Leonard is perhaps lamenting this impossible directness.[292] However, there is more to say about the ways in which the playwright relies on the theme of illness to make the play's moral message manifest. Capsizing traditional spiritualist tropes, van Druten grants the role of medium to a man; for Naomi, the central character, he reserves the task to productively interpret the message of the

[288] Ibid, 192.
[289] "War Problem Play by van Druten Opens: London Audience Sees Premiere of 'Flowers of the Forest' at Whitehall Theatre', review of Flowers of the Forest, New York Times, Nov 21, 1934. ProQuest.
[290] Russell Gregory, "Poor Drama", review of *Flowers of the Forest*, *The Saturday Review,* Dec 1, 1934. ProQuest.
[291] Rawlinson, *First World War Plays*, 22, 23.
[292] It should be noted that the process of fictionalisation of the war was one that ex-soldiers writing about the experience of the front, like Robert Graves, also participated in: Paul Fussell has explored the case of Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, in which the author claimed to have 'mixed all the ingredients that [he knew] are mixed into popular books', in Paul Fussell, "Theater of War" in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 204.

spirit.[293]After the encounter with Richard's voice, Naomi is dragged out of her quicksand, as she finally realises: 'You *can* stop war, if you'll admit that it's an evil, like disease' (108). We understand that Naomi's final realisation, which cements a sense of anti-war 'morality' that Kosok also identified as a fundamental feature of the play, is not simply prompted by Richard's poetic hymn to life: it is as much inspired by Richard's ghostly influence as by the act of witnessing Leonard's suffering. The urgency of Leonard's physical condition thus mirrors the urgency of Richard's message, evoking a connection between a death that was and one that is to come, but also, as tensions began to increase in 1934 Europe, between a person's sickness and a sickness that might befall society in its entirety, should it not be averted. Far from afflicting Leonard alone, illness becomes the signifier of war as epidemic, as collective ailment. Relying precisely on this allegory, the play aims to shine a light both on the destructiveness of the violent impulse that drives warfare and on the absurdity of its celebration, which can take shape in the realm in the narration and commemoration of war.

Naomi had been surprised when, upon their first meeting, Leonard himself had likened the war to an epidemic: in that instance, he had ventured to imagine how surreal it would be to 'put up statues' to such a thing, and how ridiculous it would be to proclaim oneself proud 'to die of … cholera or smallpox, of whatever it is' (31). The playwright thus draws on what had appeared a simple thought experiment on Leonard's part to suggest that war is, indeed, a sickness, although this sickness is not simply endured, but also crafted, by people. Richard's poem presents war as 'the whole world's *Will* to Death [my emphasis]', foregrounding the ways in which human responsibility, even an element of human desire, lie at the heart of warfare. The play thus suggests that within the handling of the memory of this war lie the seeds of the malady's perpetuation, as well as the potential for a cure: if it is true, as Sword has put it, that 'the

[293] For a discussion of spiritualism's gendered dynamics, see Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 4. Jenny Hazelgrove also discusses this topic at length in *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars*, where she notes that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 'male mediums did exist, but they were often perceived by onlookers as 'feminine' or 'effete' in character'. See Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars*, 80.

dead live not just in our memories but also and especially in our words', then the play bids its audiences to think carefully about the ways in which the memory of the war dead is preserved and commemorated (although, as we have seen, this message is not without its hypocritical tinge).[294] Naomi, however, has unlocked a form of spectral knowledge, as the encounter with a new Richard, one who finally asked her for forgiveness, has propelled her out of an a-temporal limbo, allowing her to look onwards, into the future. Richard's final message is a 'vibrant fragment in praise of living', as one reviewer defined it: this fragment allows Naomi to finally exorcise the spectre of her lost motherhood, and she resolves to be the bearer of a new form of remembrance, focused on crafting a better future for herself and 'others' (108).[295] This realisation is pitted against the fate of Leonard, who Saint-Amour would call a 'futureless character' attempting to 'undoom the future of the world'.[296] The play is thus charged with palpable epistemic anxiety about the shape of the time still to come, an anxiety which it expresses through images of uncontrollable, urgent and violent forays into different temporalities. Indeed, temporal spectrality lies at the crux of *Flowers of the Forest*'s identity and is explored not simply through the ventriloquising of the voice of the dead, but also through the many windows into the past opened by the characters' interactions with various types of sound technology. For all the passion contained in Leonard's pacifism, he is a doomed character, and his coming death implies that he will never be able to continue his mission of 'obviating future wars'.[297] Leonard's possession channelled the dead's wisdom. The future, the playwright seems to suggest, lies in the hands of those who are willing to translate the message. We are left with Naomi expressing such willingness: she vows to fight for life, and peace, after a long period of impasse. However, *Flowers of the Forest*'s ending remains open: we are asked to believe her but are not offered solutions

[294] Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 39.
[295] Brooks Atkinson, "The Play: Katherine Cornell in John van Druten's Anti-war Drama, Flowers of the Forest', review of *Flowers of the Forest*, New York Times, Apr 9, 1935. ProQuest.
[296] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 303.
[297] Ibid.

beyond her words. Where *Martha* had left us with the sound of feeble bagpipes in the distance, signalling an anxiety about the weakness and ineffectuality of commemorative rituals, *Flowers of the Forest*, as I have argued, engages in a self-conscious reflection about the role of war literature in the making of a post-war future.

So far, I have considered the ways in which spectral echoes of the war have been portrayed, in interwar theatre, as spectres ready to surface at the heart of domesticity: I have dedicated two chapters to depictions of remembering and grieving on the home front. These depictions necessarily allow us to examine what Agamben would call the 'historicity' of the ghosts of the war, while also shining a light on a more contemporaneous need for such spectres, foregrounding spectrality as a form of dialectics.[298] We have seen, for example, how the depiction of a haunted house in *Thunder in the Air* put forth a pressing reflection on the performative mechanisms at the heart of communal commemorative practices. We have also seen, in both *Martha* and *Flowers of the Forest*, that the context of the ban on the re-patriation of corpses and the debates surrounding equality of treatment in death allowed interwar dramatists to resurrect discourses around pacifism, and the management of grief. In both chapters, we have encountered ghosts of war that besiege the home as apparitions that exist on both a visual and auditory level. For this reason, I have argued that theatre is a valid addition to a host of interwar memorial traditions (such as the broadcasted Armistice Day celebration or the two minute silence, for example) that tapped into memory's identity as a bodily, participative, and sensory phenomenon; as such, I have discussed various instances in which depictions of spectrality thrive off the inherently theatrical interplay between body and voice. In the chapters that follow, I turn my attention to the warzone as memorial space, as a physical, geographical extension of the remembering self. Agamben writes that spectres are made 'of signs, most precisely of signatures,

[298] Giorgio Agamben, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living with Spectres" in *The Spectralities Reader*, 474.

[…], those signs, ciphers and monograms that are etched onto things by time'.[299] As such, he identifies the spectre as something which 'carries with it a date wherever it goes'.[300] The spectres of the First World War also carry their date with them, but this is a date that, read through the lens of memorialisation, looks beyond itself and into the future embodied by those whose task is remembering. In what follows, I am interested in establishing the ways in which Reginald Berkeley's *The White Chateau* (1925) and Vernon Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars* (1930) attempted to uncover the inherent spectrality of the warzone: how does theatre represent the battlefield as a liminal space between history and memory? What specific language allows us to decipher those 'ciphers' of the dead which remain 'etched', as Agamben put it, in war-torn landscapes?

[299] Ibid, 474.
[300] Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

Staging the Spectral Warzone: Reginald Berkeley's *The White Château* (1925) and Vernon Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars* (1930)

In a passionate essay about the decay of Venice, Agamben notes that there is a spectral reflection one can make about language – 'dead language' is language that is not spoken, and yet 'quivers, hums and whispers in its own special way'.[301] This kind of language, he argues, mirrors the state of Venice: it speaks of Venice as ruin because it is itself a ruin, because it reaches outside of time, encompassing the weight of a history that lies beyond immediate understanding. This chapter draws on Agamben's sense that the ruin always speaks, in its own way, particularly when it has been restored and is revered. It focuses on the dramatic depiction of the warzone as ruin and of the ruin as memorial. Within this framework, I propose to explore how the warzone is narrated and memorialised in two central texts, Reginald Berkeley's radio drama *The White Château* and Vernon Sylvaine's stage drama *The Road of Poplars*. Both plays are concerned with the landscapes of Flanders, in which the British army and Commonwealth troops were heavily stationed throughout the entirety of the conflict: indeed, Dominiek Dendooven reminds us that 'every division in the British army had served' in Ypres and the surrounding area.[302]After the war, Flanders had thus become immensely significant in the narration of the British experience of the war: as noted by Dendooven, an opinion circulated in the European press during the interwar period that the ruins of the city of Ypres were deemed of equal, if not greater, significance that those of Pompeii.[303] As such, descriptions of Flanders feature in a huge variety of war narratives, and the plays considered here retain some elements of the treatment of the Flemish landscape typical of other genres, such as war poetry and the memoir: in both, we see a certain

[301] Ibid, 276.
[302] Dominiek Dendooven, *Menin Gate & Last Post: Ypres as Holy Ground,* translated by Ian Connerty (Koksijde: De Klaproos Editions, 2001), 57.
[303] Ibid, 12.

mythologisation of Flanders as a place pervaded with an uncanny, magical energy.[304] In what follows, I examine the ways in which *The White Château* and *The Road of Poplars* depict Flanders (and Ypres, specifically, in the case of Sylvaine's play) as a locus that speaks to a collective British memory of the First World War. For this reason, I posit that these are memorial plays because they point to the affinity existing between theatre practice and commemoration, which are both foregrounded as relational and participative rituals.

However, I am also interested in how the ghosts that appear throughout their denouement allow both plays to forge a uniquely spectral notion of what constitutes a memorial. Crucially, both plays build on the idea that memory is tied to place in spectral ways: in *The Road of Poplars*, a spectral battalion crosses the Menin Road every day at the same time, when the bugle tune of 'The Last Post' plays at the Menin Gate. The battalion then lingers in front of the window of a café, from which the utility man – ex British soldier Charley – witnesses their passing. In *The White Château*, the acousmatic voice of an unnamed 'Chronicler' narrates the story of the destruction of a beautiful chateau in Flanders, until the voice of the house itself surfaces from its ruins to warn a visitor of the dangers that future wars will pose to civilisation and the environment. As can be surmised, acousmatic sound features once again as a central element in this chapter, in virtue of its ability to conjure an impression of presence *in* absence and to invite a journey into a realm of representation that is spectrally aware of its own time and space-bending qualities. In fact, in narrating experiences of haunting so deeply rooted in landscape, both plays qualify Flanders as a place where time and space are subject to spectral laws that render it 'both

[304] British poetry of the First World War, for example, is often built around uncanny pastoral images. The ancient trope of the pastoral, as Ann P. Linder has noted, is often employed in the poetry of the First World War to achieve an ironic description of the landscapes of France and Belgium, where the wretched ruins of battle are considered alongside images of blooming flowers, gentle moonlight and natural fertility. See Ann P. Linder, "Landscape and Symbol in the British and German Literature of World War I", *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, no 4 (1994): 354. Beyond this ironic usage of the pastoral, Kate McLoughlin has also noticed that the pastoral's insistence on the experience of 'rural retreat' has affinities with the 'psycho-geographical experience of the war zone'; 'the zone emerges' McLoughlin writes 'not so much as anti-pastoral' but rather as 'inverted pastoral', as it requires productive entry instead of withdrawal, while still producing 'a special consciousness'. McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 84.

Heimlich and *Unheimlich*, vividly known and constantly strange', to borrow McLoughlin's words.[305] In both cases, phantoms are landscape-borne, attached to specific locations where 'the sediment and strata of historical experience emerge' through haunting.[306] This brings to the fore the link between haunting and ruination, especially within dramatic literature that concerns itself with the aftermath of a conflict. This link is realised in the ruin's existence outside conventional time and space: 'the spectre becomes visible as the environment establishes a portal between the past and present'.[307] The ruin, in its most spectral definition, is that which 'becomes possessed by a past that cannot be reconstructed in a conventional narrative' and thus sits outside it, in the twilight zone between dream and reality.[308] It is thus material and intangible at once, much like a phantom: like Agamben's 'dead language', the ruin 'hums and whispers' continuously until we manage to tune into its frequency and hear its voice in its full resonance. In both *The White Château* and *The Road of Poplars*, ghostly characters – whether they are sonic or visual - are the playwrights' attempt to translate the idiosyncratic voice of the ruin, to find an intelligible way to codify its spectral speech.

In different but interconnected ways, both playwrights reflect on what it means to narrate the history of a place that is at once a physical geographical location and an ambiguous zone of memory embodied in geography: the ruined warzone is an eerie space, temporally and spatially incongruous, and entering it – both physically and imaginatively – means confronting this incongruity. What is specific about the warzone is that it does not exhaust its identity in its geographical features. Rather, it continues to signify after the event of battle, as a place that warrants both physical and imaginative returns. Berkeley's and Sylvaine's plays reflect on the possibilities of theatre to encompass this notion: how shall such a place be narrated to British audiences? In another context, Marc Augé reflects on the terminology used to defined

[305] McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 86.
[306] Martyn Hudson, *Ghosts, Landscapes and Social Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2018), xvii.
[307] Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 241.
[308] Ibid.

geographical locations. If 'place' is, as he suggests, strongly defined by the 'possibility of journeys made in it, discourses uttered in it and language characterising it', 'space' is, rather, more transient and defined by the act of 'passing'.[309] His definitions resonate with the problems posed by the ruin in the plays discussed here and support my reflection. I argue that these plays create a portal to the recent war past that encourages the recognition of Flanders as 'place', ever relevant to British audiences despite its perceived remoteness. And, as Pereen and Blanco have noted, 'places are simultaneously living and spectral, containing the experience of the actual moment as well as the many times that have already transpired and become silent – though not necessarily imperceptible – to the present'.[310] Here, the memory of the past is conceptualised as a dormant hum that echoes, faint and yet perceptible, in space.

If memory is, as Patricia Yaeger has stated in another context, somehow 'encrypted' in place and geography, I argue that both plays explored in this chapter aim to provide a dramatic channel to vocalise and ventriloquise place *as* memory.[311] To do this, they choose to use ghosts, who allow us to look beyond geography, pointing instead to the 'unspoken histories' of trauma that lie dormant at the heart of certain locations.[312] As such, the plays imagine that, even after reconstruction and rebuilding, a ruin may remain ever ruinous for a traumatised subject, foregrounding ghosts' attachment to place as a fluid one, capable of surpassing geographical specificity in favour of highlighting a place's spectral doubles, the countless iterations which it can gain within individual and collective consciousness. The function of ghostly figures in this framework is accompanied by a heavy use of acousmatic sound, which is here, among other things, a stylistic choice made to tackle the problems of remoteness and representation. These are problems better understood when we consider that there were not many war-torn landscapes

[309] Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), 85.
[310] *The Spectralities Reader*, 396.
[311] *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Yaeger (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 25.
[312] Ibid.

or battlefields in Britain: catastrophe was not immediately visible, and to witness the materiality of war's destruction on the landscape required performing either a mental or a physical journey. The war had been fought abroad: even if, as Kelly notes, the geographical distance between front and home front was not particularly vast – 'a popular truism ran that officers could be in the trenches in the morning and eating at their favourite club in London in the evening' – she still recognizes that the 'disjunction' between these two places was often conceived as an insurmountable 'gulf in experience'.[313]

As has already been explored in Chapter Two, this question of remoteness had been one of the most contentious aspects of interwar political discourse in Britain due to the controversies over the repatriation of the dead. It was only during the Second World War that ruination and physical devastation became an everyday reality in Britain, forcing people to witness a newly battered landscape where the past seemed to have been 'bombed out of people's lives', generating the dreaded sense that the warzone was all-encompassing and inescapable.[314] The remoteness of First World War combat had, instead, prevented interwar Britain from having to attend to the destruction of its urban and non-urban landscapes, although we shall see later on that the British government did have a significant say in laying out the project of reconstruction of war-torn areas in Flanders, the city of Ypres in particular. One way that civilians in Britain approached and commemorated the conflict was by turning to home front landscapes to which they had more immediate access. Melanie Tebbutt has studied the wartime significance of British

[313] See Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms*, 4.

[314] Beryl Pong, *For the Duration*, 185. Note certain locations in Britain were bombed and raided during the First Word War, in the first ever strategic bombing campaign put in place by the German army. These bombings killed at least 556 people according to Historic England. However, they were no match to the destructive scale of the Blitzes and bombings of the Second World War. More about the damage provoked by First World War raids and bombings in Britain, particularly in the East Coast and Hull areas, can be found in Michael Reeve's article 'Are we downhearted? NO!: representing war damage and destruction following bombardment on the First World War 'home front''. Here, Reeve notes that there are no surviving postcards of Hull's 'damage following Zeppelin raids'. However, postcards relating the damage inflicted to Whitby and Hartlepool were produced and imitated largely the 'before and after' format of postcards depicting the destruction of Ypres on the Western Front. See Reeve, "Are we downhearted? NO!: representing war damage and destruction following bombardment on the First World War 'home front'", *Critical Military Studies* 7 (2021): 409.

landscapes such as the Yorkshire Moors, the Lake District, and the Dark Peak in the Peak District. The conflict helped intensify the emotional resonance of certain landscapes, such as the Kinder peat trenches, which began to be infused with 'memories of lost (and wounded) friends' by those who walked them and rambled within them.[315] In 1924, notes Tebbutt, a war memorial tablet was unveiled in the Lake District: the unveiling took place, as reported, on 'the high crest of Great Gable' in 'soft rain and rolling mist'.[316] This affecting scene was said to have been attended by 'a sense of communion with the spirits of dead warriors'.[317] The act of rambling within wild and quintessentially British landscapes became a way to demonstrate the vicinity and gratitude that civilians felt towards those who were dying or had died abroad and, after the end of the conflict, the mourning and anxiety that pervaded the interwar years continued to push people towards the moorlands, in order to rekindle the memory of the recent traumatic past through ritualistic rambling through the wilderness.[318]

The pressing question of remoteness, though, remained, and had been one of Reginald Berkeley's central concerns in writing *The White Château*: as an army officer who served during the First World War, the choice of setting his markedly anti-war play in Flanders was partially motivated by his fervent internationalist politics, but also it was spurred by a necessity to remind Britons of the 'destruction that overtook so many thousands of buildings' on the front.[319] How

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[315] Melanie Tebbutt, "Landscapes of Loss: Moorlands, Manliness and the First World War", *Landscapes* 5, no 2 (2004): 125.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Recent theatrical experiments that aimed at memorialising the First World War have relied on a similar premise. In July 2018, Italian theatre-makers Marco Paolini and Simone Cristicchi led audiences on guided walks to the Massiccio del Grappa, where they performed their show *Senza Vincitori né Vinti*, adapted from Mario Rigoni Stern's *The Sergeant in the Snow*. The site-specific performance, staged in the same location of the violent battle of Cavaso del Tomba (Monte Grappa), required audiences to ascend almost 900 metres of altitude: they were encouraged to take in the special memorial quality of the mountain, which was defined the ideal location to stage a performance that aimed at evoking the memory of the war into the present. There is no video recording of this performance, but an audio recording was broadcast on Rai Radio 3 on Nov 10, 2018. See Francesco Niccolini, Marco Paolini, Simone Cristicchi, 'Senza Vincitori né Vinti', *Il Teatro di Radio 3,* aired Nov 10, 2018 (Roma: Rai Radio 3), radio broadcast.
[319] Reginald Berkeley, "Foreword" to *The White Chateau* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1925), vi. All further references to *The White Chateau* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses. The "foreword" will continue to be referenced in footnotes.

could the ruins of Flanders, which Berkeley described as a deplorable 'wreckage of all life', be narrated successfully to British audiences? [320] How does one represent such widespread devastation? To circumvent the difficult task of transposing the geographical markers of destruction, both Berkeley and Sylvaine found alternative methods of dramatic representation which relied on ghosts as agents of memory, charged with the mission of revealing and uncovering, like spectral archaeologists, the collective trauma that lies hidden under ruins. In the first section of the chapter, I argue that *The White Château* is an experiment in forging an acousmatic language of the ruin, which makes both a spectral and a memorial use of disembodied sound; in the second section, I examine the overtly spectral material central to Vernon Sylvaine's later stage play *The Road of Poplars,* where Ypres is a haunted city. In the section dedicated to *The White Château*, I first lay out the play's internationalist allegiance with the League of Nations and situate it within the context of the 1925 Armistice Day broadcast before moving on to a discussion of how the spectrality achieved by acousmatics complicates the play's outward propagandist structure. In the section dedicated to *The Road of Poplars*, I first situate the inception of the play within the 1930s pilgrimage culture, which saw masses of Britons travel to Flanders and France on periodical trips organised by charitable organisations, to then consider the ways in which it rejects monumental commemoration to propose a more organic and spectral notion of the memorial.

[320] Ibid.

'Of Moral Disarmament': *The White Chateau*, Pacifism and The League of Nations

As I have noted in the introduction to this chapter, Reginald Berkeley was a former soldier: he had served both in Flanders and in France, and he would always remember the 'heaps of stone' that the beautiful cities along the Western front had been reduced to.[321] Yet, as Hell and Schönle have pointed out, 'the beholder defines the ruin'.[322] Berkeley searched for a way to breathe life into those ruins that reminded him of death: he imagined them rebuilt and he saw, mirrored in the dialectic process of destruction and renewal, the 'symbol of European civilisation, rebuilt again and again'.[323] *The White Château* was born out of this reflection: a hopeful one, but one that hides within it a sense of war's continuous threat. 'Everybody realises,' Berkeley said to *The Observer*, 'that this wonderful house in which we all live is in jeopardy'.[324] We are reminded of Millar's use of the haunted house in *Thunder in the Air* to put forward a reflection on the difficulty of managing collective grief: in that case, the house was the paradigm of a grieving community. With a more markedly internationalist sensibility, Berkeley writes of the world itself as a 'wonderful house', which he imagines is crumbling to the ground in its entirety under the weight of war. This kind of rhetoric is fitting with Berkeley's long-standing association with the League of Nations, an internationalist organisation of which he was a member throughout the 1920s. His ties to the League informed his approach to representing war in his drama, and *The White Chateau* was born out of his engagement with the League's pacifist policies. The League was

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321 "A House as a Hero: Capt. Reginald Berkeley and His Play", review of *The White Château*, *Observer*, Apr 24, 1927, 14.

322 *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

323 "A House as a Hero", 14. Artists and writers of the late eighteenth century often saw the depths of human nature revealed through landscapes of destruction. In the wake of the two World Wars and the impetuous coming of modernity, ruins came to signify destruction itself, relentless and violent decay, the shattering of previous categories of meaning. Yet, even within such modernist frameworks, a sense of renewal remained embodied in the peculiarity of the ruin as reminder of death and, simultaneously, signifier of life. See Hell and Schönle's *Ruins of Modernity*, or Michel Makarius' *Ruins* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), 143.

324 "A House as a Hero", review of *The White Château*, 14.

founded in the 1920s: the British branch defined itself as 'the Guardian of International Right, the organ of International Co-Operation, the final arbiter in International Differences, and the supreme instrument for removing injustices which may threaten the Peace of the World'.[325] Helen McCarthy, in her study of popular engagement with the League, notes that the liberal-internationalist programme of the organization 'repackaged pre-war principles of arbitration, conciliation and publicity with new provisions for the collective use of economic and military sanctions and an overarching vision of a permanent international authority'.[326] She points out, also, that 'pacificist' would perhaps be a more fitting term to define the League than 'pacifist', as the organisation stated its willingness to support military action if, and only if, it was needed to 'uphold the rule of international law'.[327] In an article which appeared in the 1921-1922 *British Yearbook of International Law*, Berkeley related not only the League's organisational tasks in detail, but also its far-reaching political, economic, humanitarian, and technical activities in England and abroad.[328] This deep engagement with the work of the League informs some of the language that Berkeley employed in his interviews and his art: his definition of the world as 'this wonderful house in which we all live' chimes with the League's internationalist rhetoric. .

Crucially, the League was involved in the task of producing and financing art that could reconcile internationalist ideals without compromising national identity. An anonymous author featured in the September 1926 edition of the Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs, published on the subject of *The League of Nations and Art*, reveals that the magazine had just received 'an elaborate and ambitious scheme for the establishment of art year books, an international index of museums, a museums office, a catalogue of photographs of works of art and a congress of

[325] Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism C. 1918 – 1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 3.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Reginald Berkeley, "The Work of the League of Nations" in *British Yearbook of International Law 2 1921-1922* (London: Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, 1922), 150-167.

popular arts' from the *Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle* of the League of Nations.[329] The author writes: 'In the foreword we are told that "art grows out of feeling", and it is by calling on men's deeper convictions that one can most readily inspire them with a wish for an understanding of peace'.[330] While the author is doubtful about this particular design, the article is further confirmation that the League was concerned not just with upholding art's didactic purpose, but also with promoting art's agitational potential, convinced that it could appeal to the depths of people's soul. This is, notably, a fundamental part not just of pacifist propaganda, but of all propaganda. McCarthy writes extensively about how League activists, especially those associated with the LNU (League of Nations Union), strove to create 'a new field of symbolic display' which aimed at reflecting and reinforcing 'public understandings of nationhood'; this was mainly done through popular and folkloric ritual forms such as historical pageantry, liturgical drama, the Renaissance masque and Carnival.[331] These displays were meant to reach large crowds to educate them about international cooperation; as such, they relied on simple messages and ear and eye-catching songs and costumes. McCarthy does not write about the place that radio held in the delivery of this specific LNU programme, but *The White Château*, which aired on the BBC (which at the time was still a private radio station) on Armistice Day, responds to these project aims in its design, Berkeley writing in its foreword that the play aims to 'reinforce the determination to abolish war' on a day 'when the thoughts of all nations turn to the subject of war'; the play is thus both envisaged as entertainment and a ritualistic, collective experience designed to address, and create, the sense of an imagined community.[332] The League of Nations then founded its own broadcasting station, Radio Nation, at the beginning of the 1930s, following the internationalist trend that regarded the wireless as an ideal method to encourage an

[329] "The League of Nations and Art", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 49, no 282 (1926), 149.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Helen McCarthy, "The League of Nations, Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain, c. 1919-1956", *History Workshop Journal 70* (2010): 111, 112.
[332] Berkeley, "Foreword" to *The White Château,* v.

exchange of ideas between countries, foster friendship and understanding and increase interest and excitement in foreign languages and cultures.[333] It is interesting to view the experiment of *The White Château* as a trailblazing attempt to utilize the confirmed power of the wireless to channel an internationalist agenda that addressed what McCarthy called 'the individual's emotions as well as his or her rational faculties'.[334] This very success led *The White Château* to be considered as a television adaptation, whose production would have been kickstarted after the 1927 theatrical run.[335]

Several important features of *The White Château* are designed to directly echo the League's most vital precepts. Berkeley is adamant that internationalism, pacifism, and an interest in civilian life are the play's cardinal preoccupations; he writes this in the preface to the radiophonic script, where he is keen to clarify that there will be no real end to war if the task of 'moral disarmament' is not tended to with unremitting commitment.[336] He then goes on to explain the coordinates of the play's symbolism, which dutifully reflects, again, the League's tendency towards universalisation and ritualism. The play is set in Flanders, but even within this specification it harbours a certain generality, as the exact location of the château in Flanders is never stated. This is a deliberate choice. Kosok includes *The White Château* in his catalogue of First World War plays, specifically within the list of plays that employ 'symbolic generalisation' as a narrative technique.[337] He defines the symbol as something 'invested with a significance that, when recognised, transcends the singularity of the individual case and assumes a degree of universality that is not possible within mere realism': according to this framework, the house in *The White Château* is 'equally real and unmistakably symbolic'.[338] The château, writes Berkeley in the foreword to the script, *typifies* the 'destruction that overtook many thousands of buildings': it is

[333] Potter, *Wireless Internationalism,* 50.
[334] McCarthy, "Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain", 122.
[335] "Broadcasting: Music, Variety and Opera", *Times*, Nov 12, 1938. ProQuest.
[336] Berkeley, "Foreword" to *The White Château*, v.
[337] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 115.
[338] Ibid, 117.

not a single château, but a 'composite' of all destroyed buildings of Flanders.[339] It is not in 'Hollebeke' or 'Ypres'; to an extent, though, it could well be.

The family that inhabits it at the beginning of the play – the Van Eysens – are also written about the representatives 'of the civilian victims of war in all ages'.[340] 'The subject of the play,' he concludes, 'is not the war between A and B, but War, the Giant Hideous Despair of our times'.[341] Interestingly, the title that featured on the BBC programming for Armistice Afternoon and Evening 1925 was indeed *The White Chateau: A Symbolic Play*.[342] This insistence in retaining a degree of generality works in favour of the play's most didactic purposes, as didacticism thrives under a parabolic and symbolic mode of narration. The play thus stands in a particularly interesting position in relation to other symbolic commemorative solutions, like the burial of the Unknown Warrior: the ceremony, in which the body of an unnamed and unidentified officer was interred, took place on 11th November 1920, after the unveiling of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London.[343] This practice also relied on symbolic generalisation: the act of burying and mourning a soldier whose name was only 'Known Unto God' encouraged, as Kelly has noted, a 'possibility of imaginative imposition' which could be inherently democratising.[344] In a sense, Berkeley also utilises this notion: the parable of the destruction of the château aims to generate empathy and inspire a desire for the restoration and protection of international relations within the individual listener, thus pushing British audiences to imagine the warzone. However, *The White Château* is also far from what Winter has termed the 'elemental' simplicity of the Cenotaph and the Unknown Warrior's burial ceremony: the details inserted in the narrative are enough to impede the creation of a truly democratising space of acousmatic remembrance.[345] For example, we are

339 Berkeley, "Foreword" to *The White Château*, vi.
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid.
342 Rachel Cowgill, "Canonizing Remembrance: music for Armistice Day at the BBC, 1922 – 1927", *First World War Studies* 12:1 (2011): 80.
343 Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms*, 193.
344 Ibid, 201.
345 Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning,* 103.

struck by Berkeley's (and the BBC's) choice to make an upper middle-class reality the ultimate and central paradigm of civilian suffering; the play's parable points, in this case, to an exclusionary form of symbolism that suggests that institutional commemoration still struggled to confront and tackle the problem of class. 'On the one hand, the narration makes use of symbolic generalisation to facilitate the reception of the play's moral and pacifist lesson: any level of detail might remove attention from its far-reaching didacticism. On the other hand, the story is located in Flanders as a testament to the author's attention to the League's mission to encourage Britons 'to see themselves as members of an international community, as well as citizens of an imperial nation state'.[346] This exercise in the dramatic rendering of a foreign location capsizes the wartime practice of utilising British landscapes as 'propaganda, appealing to individuals' sense of attachment towards the land (whether closely acquainted with it or not) to induce them to defend the nation'.[347]

Despite its incongruities, the play is still a commemorative event concerned with creating a community united in memory: just within Britain, the broadcast would have been available to an immense audience, considering that by September 1924 at least 900,000 homes 'had radio licenses, representing an estimated British audience of three million listeners every evening'.[348] This community was invited to view itself not just as a national community, but an *international* one: the BBC's first motto had been, since 1922, 'Nation shall speak peace unto Nation'.[349] And, indeed, the first scenes of *The White Château* are instrumental in making clear the ideological core of this internationalist design. In the first scene, the 'cheerful sounds of the breakfast table' introduce us to the Van Eysen family, the owners of the château, who rejoice in the beauty of their surroundings and the warmth of family life (11). Violet, young Jacques Van Eysen's fiancée, is visiting. Plans are made to visit the town later in the day, family banter is exchanged, and an

[346] McCarthy, "Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain", 120.
[347] McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 87.
[348] Potter, *Wireless Internationalism*, 24.
[349] Cowgill, "Canonizing Remembrance", 76.

atmosphere of apparently unbreakable serenity is established, until Jacques reads the news of a war ultimatum being announced in the morning paper. As the family tentatively wonders if a war might indeed break out, old Van Eysen is adamant that 'civilisation is far too complex and interlocked' to consider the possibility of fighting. 'There's not going to be a war at all,' he assures them. 'Both countries are much too sensible to fight. There's an ultimatum and there'll be an adjustment' (15). Yet, against all odds, not only does war break out, but it does so with a rapidity that nobody would have been able to predict. The Van Eysens' idyllic breakfast is shattered by unimaginable violence, as the army takes hold of the Chateau, seeking to push the family out and create new bases in the premises. Jacques shoots a soldier for kissing his fiancée: he is immediately seized to be court-martialled.

The family's faith in a perfectly balanced and reasonable civilisation may strike one as a display of naiveté. Yet, in the context of the play's relationship to the League of Nations and the BBC, this naiveté serves a deeper purpose. What may have disturbed the reviewer as an altogether unrealistic scene is the core of the script's engagement with the play's overarching spectral internationalism. In other words, the scene responds to simple questions: how can humans turn so brutal, so quickly? What did the Van Eysens do to deserve this? The unrealistic, absurd speed with which the occupation of the château comes about aims to cement an impression of the very paradoxical nature of warmongering, foregrounding war as an obvious absurdity in the face of complex civilisation. Van Eysen cannot fathom how an invasion could already have taken place, as the ultimatum had just appeared in the morning's news. Yet, an invasion has taken place, defying all reasonable rules of international conduct alongside all reasonable rules of time and space within the world of the play. The significance of such a scene lies precisely in the careful orchestration of a sense of disbelief, achieved through the juxtaposition of Van Eysen's logic against the completely nonsensical and temporally warped state of war. Van Eysen assures his family that the possibility of invasion is completely ridiculous: 'Don't you know this country has been under a guaranteed treaty of permanent

neutrality for a hundred years? And why should an invasion have taken place?' (16). Yet, Diane, the youngest of the family, suddenly cries out that she is seeing 'extraordinary flashes of light' from the window, which Jacques confirms look remarkably like 'the glitter of cavalry lance-heads' (16). The image the two are conjuring is hazy, almost visionary, extraordinary indeed; Van Eysen dismisses the sighting as a practical joke performed by university students, while the sounds of doors and tramping feet announce the arrival of a foreign soldier, who unceremoniously enters the room, introducing himself as 'the officer in charge of the B troop of the Black Skull Hussars' (17). Van Eysen is still incredulous: 'Some ridiculous prank! What? – Black stuff and nonsense!' (17).

We are not in possession of the reviews of the original radiophonic show: however, in the reviews of the play's theatrical run, a disgruntled *Observer* reviewer wrote: 'The Van Eysens were completely taken aback by the war. They had no idea that there was any likelihood of such a thing happening, and their newspaper contained nothing but an obscure reference to impending hostilities somewhere in the Balkans. I found that ignorance altogether too filmish to be credible'.[350] However, one could argue that the belief that war is nonsensical, paradoxical and illogical is a fil rouge which sustains, conceptually, all scenes in the script. Within this framework, the advance of the Black Hussars in Flanders needs to proceed in necessarily surreal fashion, heightening the unfairness and tragedy associated to the sudden eviction of the Van Eysen family, who are forced to vacate the château and anxiously await the court-martial's decision regarding the life or death of their son, guilty of having killed an army officer to protect his fiancée. 'C'est la guerre! I'm sorry, personally,' the Officer assures them, 'But there is it is' (21). With these words, the Officer disowns the notion of personal responsibility in war.

This preoccupation with detachment, and the loss of humanity in conflict, echoes Sigmund Freud's 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', where he turned keen attention to

350 "The White Chateau by Reginald Berkeley", review of *The White Château*, *Observer,* Apr 3, 1927, 15. ProQuest.

the experience of civilian parties in the face of the outbreak of the First World War. Freud had also considered the question of morality, defining 'civilised nations' as those countries which had laid down 'high norms of moral conduct' for individuals, for them to become the basis of the nation's existence; as such, Freud testifies to the natural sense of shock and disillusionment when the state 'contradicts the basis of its own existence' by choosing not to respect them.[351] When Berkeley writes of the necessity of encouraging 'moral disarmament' for the final elimination of armed conflict, he thus refers to this Freudian paradox; the First Scene in *The White Château*, in all its 'filmishness', is dedicated to the depiction of the original act of betrayal perpetrated by the state – or a 'composite of all states', to follow Berkeley's logic - against its citizens. This betrayal is, in the play, the foundation of armed conflict. Van Eysen appeals to the Officer's sense of fairness while attempting to vindicate the lawful right to retain his property, but the truth is that his property has now become part of the warzone, a unique place which, as McLoughlin argues, is both 'highly regulated (including by the international law of armed conflict) but also highly lawless'.[352] For this reason, the Officer simply reminds him of the famous proverb, 'nothing is fair in Love and War': war is, if anything, a state of suspension in which the categories of fairness and unfairness cease to signify (18). As we can observe in these initial scenes, *The White Château*'s commemorative rhetoric makes use of the wireless to highlight the absurdity of war and establish peace as a requirement for the betterment of the human condition inside (but also outside) of national borders. In this sense, the château's discombobulated fall under the Black Hussars is taken to represent the rapid and exceptional destruction of international relations under the regime of war.

[351] Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" in *Sigmund Freud, 12: Civilization, Society and Religion.* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 62, 63.
[352] McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 86.

The Spectral Language of the Ruin

In his book on modernism and radio drama, Tim Crook relates a quotation from Roger Wood about *The White Château*: 'Far from being limited by radio, Berkeley recognizes its potential as drama for the brain'.[353] This is an apt definition of the dynamics put in place by the First Scene; as listeners follow and empathise with the Van Eysens' story, their likely rage at the display of cruelty on part of the Hussar army is not a mere gut reaction, but rather an intellectually stimulated response to the absurdities that govern the theatre of war. Yet, the complexity of the play lies in its use of the radiophonic medium which is amply able to address the 'brain' .Berkeley knew this before writing *The White Château,* due to his predilection for experimenting with horror techniques in his radio plays; his successful *Dweller in the Darkness*, also a BBC production, was described as showing 'an awareness for the mind's vulnerability to suggestion' and singled out for employing a significant dose of 'crudeness' and 'terror' in its denouement.[354] With *The White Château*, Berkeley parted from the terrain of horror fiction, but did not abandon his aspirations to use radio to generate a powerful sense of 'suggestion': no war is devoid of 'crudeness' and 'terror'. To achieve this, Berkeley utilises a combination of voice, noise, and natural sound to eerie and unsettling effect.

Alan Beck argues that *The White Château* was the first wireless creation of sound perspective within British radio drama; as such, the play presents an innovative 'three-dimensionality' in the construction of sonic space.[355] The main action is framed within a complex structure of sonic 'events' which are not defined as background effects but are rather consequentially intertwined with the main action. Beck terms this 'the outer drame of acousmatic sound', whereby the images constructed by the mind of the listener are 'orchestrated' to include

[353] Wood in Tim Crook, *Audio Drama Modernism: the Missing Link between Descriptive Phonographic Sketches and Microphone Plays on the Radio* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 435.
[354] Crook, *Audio Drama Modernism*, 426.
[355] Beck in ibid, 435.

several levels of meaning which contribute to the overall reading, and reception, of the scene.[356] This is an innovation that engages the listener's perception and imagination through a new kind of wireless narration that complicates what Beck terms 'the Stage Model', whereby acousmatic sound is 'confined to the conventions of stage's sound effects and voices off'.[357] To exemplify this, and show in this case how these effects serve Berkeley's intentions in relation to his presentation of war, it is worth taking a closer look at the beginning of the Second Scene. The stage directions reveal that the war is in full swing; the music plays to mimic the sounds and rhythms associated to war, but it also slips in and out of the tune to reveal the bare 'chatter of machine-guns' (25). The combination of music and the sound of artillery works to create both an emotional and a physical response to the advance of the 'relentless piece of machinery' that is the army (25). What follows, though, forces the listener to perform a conceptual jump: 'the theme dies away and is replaced by one suggesting the distant boom of the sea breaking on a reef' (25). The Chronicler, an unnamed narrator who introduces each scene in verse, speaks, reflecting on the similarities between combat and a hurricane battered sea (25). Although we are never sure of the Chronicler's real identity, we know that he ventriloquises the experience of the war by focusing on the symbolic force of the house as metaphor, following a narrative trajectory of which the house is, and always remains, the centre. In his speech introducing the Second Scene, the Chronicler brings the listener back to the now 'bare and bleak' rooms of the château which, 'once alight', has now lost its homeliness and comfort and become the War Office's Grand Headquarters (26). A new, subtle theme accompanies the Chronicler's crucial last lines: 'Clipped hair for a baby's curls/Gleams of weapons for gleams of pearls/And in my lady's deserted bed/A grim old general in gold and red' (26). Who, or what, is the Chronicler that accompanies us through this journey? Could it be the house itself? The use of the possessive in the sentence 'and in *my* lady's deserted bed [my emphasis]' suggests this, although this hypothesis is never

[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid.

confirmed. However, the notion that the house can and *does* speak for itself is alluded to in this way, paving the way for the spectral voice of the Château's ruins to be heard at the very end of the play.

The opening of the Second Scene presents us with a variety of connected images: the army is unruly and unstoppable, like a stormy sea. The château has been seized by the army; things change quickly in the theatre of war and the great mansion, bleak where it was bright, has now sunk under the weight of war bureaucracy. The listeners visualise the château, its glory now coated with a coldness unfitting to a family home, adrift in the constant waves and storms that characterise times of war. These sonic juxtapositions allow the voice of the Chronicler to communicate the heart-wrenching fate of the château and the family that lived within it more effectively through the sonic channel of a storm at sea. The sea acts as a descriptive, but also an emotional referent, as it represents the reality of the army's attack, but also the ravaging and destructive effect that the war has on the château and its community. In this way, the Chronicler's guidance – which is separated from any 'visualised referent' – allows us to follow the house's downfall from glory to ruin.[358] Berkeley offers an acousmatic representation of the process of ruination that war carries within itself, and acousmatics allows the listeners to understand ruination *as* process, because it does not present them with a still image, like the ever popular testimonial postcards and photographic collections of war-torn landscapes did in the interwar period.[359] Instead, the medium of the radio play allows listeners to participate in a unique journey through time and space that relies on their own willingness to integrate the story with imaginative material. As such, the Chronicler's poetic introductions to each scene carry

[358] Schaeffer in Morin, "Beckett's Speaking Machines", 4.

[359] Alex Mayhew has recently written about the popularity and circulation of postcards of the front during the First World War. As he notes, several postcard booklets were French-produced but showed the 'gradual destruction' of towns 'in the area of British operations'. See Mayhew, "A War Imagined: Postcards and the Maintenance of Long-Distance Relationships during the Great War", *War in History* 28, no 2 (2021): 315.

listeners along with the ever-changing conditions of the house, exploited but not looked after, not loved, not ever truly inhabited after the Van Eysens.

As the army trudges away through rain and sludge at the beginning of the Third Scene, the Chronicler recites: 'Long since departed GHQ/ From the Chateau (its whiteness faded!)/Corps, Divisions, Brigades passed through/And left it, when they each withdrew/A little more degraded…' (37). The enjambment between 'through' and 'and' cements an impression that the château's faded whiteness is both a literal hint to the physical deterioration of the building, but that it is also a reference to a certain loss of innocence, set in motion by the violence and cruelty that takes place both within and without the house's walls, polluting its history one Brigade at a time. The building comes to vocalise the relentless, corrosive and haunting violence of warfare: occupied, left and re-captured, it also ventriloquises the maddening precarity of the warzone, which shifts and morphs with the movement of the army through the landscape. The house on the warzone, like the warzone itself, is a locus that responds to the rules of war as the illogical, immoral and exceptional event that the First Scene has presented.

The Third Scene continues to explore this theme, as it follows a group of British soldiers stationed in a trench in front of the château. One of them warns his companions that the enemy has 'occupied the Chateau with a machine-gun post', which exposes them to the constant threat of enemy fire (38). Barrington, known as Badger, is concerned about the situation, yet he is distracted by the news that his wife has just given birth to twins. He confides in his friend Braithwaite, who assures him that he will be able to obtain leave to go home and visit his family. Before leaving, Badger realises that there might be a second gun firing from the château. Obsessed about finding the exact spot from which it operates, he '*clambers on the fire step*'. The '*tut-tut-tut-tut*' of the machine gun fires in the distance; Badger spots it, but he is hit. '*The sound of a shambling fall*' announces his death (44). As radio drama only relies on sound cues, the scene is constructed so that the 'enemy' is associated with the château and its architecture: the basement, the windows, the West Wall are the repositories of the enemy's destructive force, because the

scene is filtered through the British soldiers' perspective. When he is struck, Badger is not able to make out the shape of his killer; he simply screams that he has spotted a 'flash' at the 'angle of the low wall, at the back', the location where the second machine-gun is placed (44). Badger's last words before he dies conjure an image of the 'flashes' of artillery that the Van Eysens had seen from the château's walls at the beginning of the play, announcing the coming of tragedy in a way that retrospectively qualifies the First Scene as ominous, and warfare in general as an event the only certain outcome of which is destruction. Interestingly, throughout the Third Scene, Berkeley chooses to grant the château a murderous identity, spectralising the 'enemy' so that the house may act metonymically as its uncanny double. The playwright thus moves away from the specificity associated to the 'Black Hussars' of the First Scene; by the Third Scene, we are unsure if this is still the same war, and who the enemy really is that hides within the château's walls. This is a marker of the author's pacifism, a further step towards the establishment of a symbolic, internationalist and universal language through which the ruin itself can finally and authoritatively speak against warfare.

Berkeley seems to suggest that, if we accept that there can be a form of spectral consciousness to be found in the château, then there is also a more metaphorical, abstract ruination that affects our own consciousness and our own morality under warfare. The imaginative power of acousmatics allows the listeners to understand that the château is more than a decor: its mutations throughout the script are a way to conceptualise what McLoughlin describes as 'land as a figure for the special consciousness that characterises the war experience'.[360] This special consciousness is generated by the 'hyper-sensuousness' of a soldier's relationship to the land: terrain and body become inextricably intertwined, as the dwelling and movement of the body through the space creates a special experience for which the land provides the coordinates.[361] The body exists, and feels, in relation to space; the terrain thus gains,

[360] McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 90.
[361] Ibid, 93.

in McLoughlin's words, 'cognitive and emotional' value.[362] Building on McLoughlin's work, I argue that, through the narration of the château's history, Berkeley evokes a relationship between the built environment and the soldier's body which operates similarly to the symbiotic relationship between land and body; while McLoughlin's notion of land refers to the terrain, and territory, on which soldiers live, fight and fall, it is also true that buildings held a place of particular importance for soldiers on the Western Front. This is explored by Berkeley in the first volume of his *History of the Rifle Brigade*, which covers the period from 1914 to 1916. Here, the author recounts that his regiment would travel through regions of both France and Flanders in which houses and buildings had been evacuated and lied empty; like the White Château, these houses, farmyards, and commercial establishments ended up being held, raided, or occupied by the army. In outlining the army operations in the village of Le Touquet, best known as a holiday destination, Berkeley paints a picture of frightening stillness, where the danger and uncertainty of war are contained within the figure of the occupied house. He writes: 'enemy snipers were in houses sometimes only twenty yards by houses held by us'.[363] This context allows us to understand how the affective connection between body and place is reflected in the château becoming 'alive' in the play, a building – or a symbol of all buildings – defined by, and defining,the mechanisms of the war experience. This is encapsulated in Third Scene, in which the sight of Badger's wasted life gives rise to feelings of hate and a thirst for revenge in the British troops, which are then directed to the château's bricks rather than his occupiers. As Private Williams screams on the telephone: 'Is that you, Reynolds? (…) The infantry want some hate on the White Chateau!', asking his comrades to open fire on the building, the Third Scene displays the vital role that buildings and geography held in the phenomenal experience of war, but it also fields a reflection on the destructive affective realm that accompanies processes of war-borne

[362] Ibid, 95.
[363] Reginald Berkeley, *The History of the Rifle Brigade Vol I 1914 – 1916 [With Plates, including Portraits and Maps]* (London: The Rifle Brigade Club Ltd, 1927), 36. Consulted in the British Library.

ruination (45). At the call for 'hate' on the Chateau, the British heavy artillery targets the West Wall. 'Marvellous. The whole West Wall is caved in. Go on …. There won't be a stone standing tonight …' muses a '*delighted*' Williams, as the destruction of the Chateau is announced by loud *BOOMs, Roooooooos* and *CRANGs* (45). In such scenes, Berkeley offers British listeners a chance to imagine, sensorially, both the physical and moral impact of warfare on the landscape and the soul: the scene is a reminder that the moral responsibility associated to acts of violence and destruction can and will remain 'etched' in geography and spirit. Thus, the play's didacticism finds its roots in the blindness of the radiophonic medium: the château's affecting final destruction comes after the listeners have been exposed to the ebbs and flows of its history throughout the radio drama. This history has allowed us to witness the destructive power of the violence of the Hussar and the British sides both. It is a violence reflected in the process of degradation of the house: at the end of it, the sounds of château's crumbling fall stand to signify the tragedy of civilian suffering, a fact which both armies have equally contributed to. The next scene confirms that the beauty of the Flemish landscape has, with the destruction of the château, radically altered, to the extent that soldiers are unable to make sense of pre-war maps: 'the sounds of cautious footsteps in a muddy track' reveal a British officer walking through the desolation, until he asks, dubiously and incredulously, 'I suppose this *is* the White Chateau?' (49). The appearance of mud as a defining characteristic of the sonic landscape brings to mind the dreaded, nightmarish vision of the front as it appears in countless letters, memoirs and accounts from Flanders, and evokes the architecture of the trench-ridden Western Front that haunted the British imagination. This precise image of the trenches – the mud, the barbed wire, the desolation – was circulated widely during the interwar period, especially through postcard and photograph collections. Differently from these photographic accounts, *The White Château* relies on a novel, and slower, process of visualisation prompted by sound: through offering audiences an aural journey through the different stages of deterioration of the Flemish landscape, the radio drama also engages its listeners with a form of sonic witnessing. When we think of

commemoration, we often recognize that it is an act of collective recollection of the past. However, we sometimes fail to realise that commemoration relies on a specific notion of temporality that also looks to the future, beyond the past that is being commemorated *and* beyond the very event of commemoration itself. As explored previously in the thesis, Casey defines this as 'perdurance': essentially, a 'remedy against time's dispersive power'.[364] When perdurance is ensured, it in turn ensures a 'lastingness' that can translate itself into a set of practices, phrases and rituals that future generations may have the means to understand and re-perform, should it become necessary.[365] This is interesting in relation to the question of the ruin: how does the ruin relate to this mechanism, which is in many instances intrinsic to the commemoration of a conflict? 'The ruins of war' writes Pong, represent a crucial problem 'after war': this problem **'**gestures towards questions of what can or cannot be erased: what aspects of wartime life need to be remembered, reconstituted and forgotten'.[366] Under this framework, the ruin points to a hypothetical future that is caught between construction and destruction, whereby reconstruction may mean forgetfulness, and remembrance may imply the preservation of destruction. The closing scene of *The White Château* utilises the spectral voice of the ruin to pose the crucial, yet thoroughly complex, question of what it means to rebuild the ruins of a conflict. When Diane, the only member of the Van Eysen family to survive the war, is wandering alone among the ruins of her old house, she hears the echo of the Chateau's voice: 'Once more you build [the château] up. Are you wise?' (76). Through the spectral animation of the Chateau, Berkeley asks the listeners to accept and imagine a paradox: if we saw ourselves from the perspective of a ruin, what would we see? The answer is another paradox: we'd see ourselves rebuilding, only to destroy again. 'For make no mistake' says the ruin, 'the next time is the last time' (77). To quote Walter Benjamin, the ruin sees us flying forwards like Klee's *Angelus Novus*,

[364] Casey, *Remembering*, 230.
[365] Ibid, 231.
[366] Pong, *For the Duration*, 232.

while it reminds us to keep our face 'turned towards the past', and understand that history is 'one single catastrophe, piling wreckage upon wreckage' and 'hurl[ing] it in front of [our] feet'.[367] Yet, in virtue of its internationalist allegiance, the play suggests that we must eventually rebuild, like Diane decides to do: she believes in God, in peace and in progress. She believes that 'we have made the League of Nations' for a reason (77). However, the château's voice provides her with a spectral caveat: there is an emotional expense that comes from rebuilding, and some traces of ruination will always be left behind to haunt her, even if no longer visible. In the face of the rebuilding efforts that were already underway in Flanders after the end of the First World War, Berkeley's ground-breaking radio play thus acts as an alternative commemorative artefact, an attempt to circumvent the limitations of monumentality and productively mine the spectral prescience of the ruin before it is rebuilt.

The Haunted City as Memorial in Vernon Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars*

In 1919, the British government proposed to buy the ruins of the city of Ypres. Championed by Winston Churchill, this design externalised the belief that 'a more sacred place for the British race' did not exist.[368] Rebuilding over the site would be actively forbidden: the place should remain a burial site and a ruin for posterity, because 'around that battlefield probably more than 300,000 of our men of the British Army are buried'.[369] The sacredness of the ruin would invite a sense of religious communion with the spirits of those who had fallen, but would also preserve a sense of discomfort, cementing an impossibility to forget, or misremember, what led to such destruction. The proposition was ultimately rejected, as the Belgian government pointed out that it was the wish of the Belgian people to rekindle the life and beauty that previously characterised

[367] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257, 258.
[368] Winston Churchill's statement in Dendooven, *Menin Gate and & Last Post,* 20.
[369] Ibid.

Ypres. The British government ultimately accepted to settle on the construction of a single, but impressive, war memorial: the Menin Gate, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and eventually unveiled on the 24 July 1927. In the previous section of the chapter, I have discussed the tension between construction and destruction: the contention between the British and Belgian governments, which resulted in the building of a new monument to the missing, is a good testimony to the importance that discourses surrounding ruins and their handling during the interwar period. In the rest of this chapter, I will draw on Vernon Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars* – which is set in Ypres – to examine the ways in which the playwright conceived of the city itself as memorial: against the monumental memorialisation embodied by the Gate, which stretches almost fifteen metres high into the sky, I argue that the play puts forward a logic of the memorial that requires us to 'go under', into the foundations of the city, to find the haunting remnants of the lives that have been buried underneath it.[370] While Berkeley's *The White Château* seems to find an answer to the problem of the creation of an architecture, or landscape, of remembrance in the spectrality associated to radiophonic representation, *The Road of Poplars* utilises haunting images of hallucination, spectral manipulation, and mental illness to dramatize the dark undertones of commemorative practices, and the shattering psychological and physical suffering which lies buried in the shadow of monumental memorials.

Due to this iconic status as a holy shrine for the British Empire, Ypres saw countless pilgrimages from every corner of the Commonwealth between the years 1919 and 1929. Among these was the 1928 British Legion pilgrimage, when as many as 10,000 pilgrims, most of them former soldiers, travelled to Ypres and the surrounding areas.[371] The Menin Gate memorial was unveiled and inaugurated the year before, in presence of 800 pilgrims brought to Ypres by the St

[370] On a 1927 July edition of the BBC owned magazine *World-Radio* we read that 'from the roof' of the Menin Gate 'the whole country of the salient is visible'. G.A.C, "The Ypres Memorial", *World-Radio*, July 15, 1927, 51. Warm thanks to Emilie Morin for showing me this article.
[371] David Wharton Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 107.

Barnabas Society, British and Flemish officials and representatives of international media. The Gate, a memorial to the missing, bore the names of more than 54,000 soldiers from all the Commonwealth nations whose grave was never found. Defined as 'a monument more moving than any other on European soil', it soon reached an almost mythical status as one of the grandest and most impressive memorials to ever be erected.[372] Pilgrimages were also encouraged by the introduction of the ceremony of the Last Post in the summer of 1928: every evening at 9 pm, traffic in Ypres was stopped and buglers sounded the tune of the Last Post in front of the Menin Gate. Like the 'Great Silence' of Armistice Day, this ceremony was perceived as a kind of ritualistic suspension. A visitor to Ypres described the moment in which the tune sounded as profoundly affecting: 'the hands of time were turned back for me,' he said, 'and the floodgates of memory opened wide'.[373] At this time also, William Longstaff's painting 'The Menin Gate at Midnight' became immensely popular: it depicts a cornfield overlooking the Menin Gate. Dotted across the field are the ghostly figures of soldiers, rendered as simple white shapes, haunting the surroundings of the memorial; to the initial gaze, they appear like a host of flowers. This confusion is itself a moving recognition of the lives and bodies that were assimilated into the soil of Ypres. The painting toured across museums worldwide and opened a market for Longstaff to produce other, successful spectral paintings of war locations throughout the interwar period. Longstaff's pictorial reading of Ypres' memorial identity recalls McLoughlin's reading of Rupert Brooke's poem 'The Soldier', which displays a particularly 'earthy approach to death', where the soldier's corpses form the 'richer dust' concealed in the ground, acting as a special kind of 'flesh-fertilizer' and giving birth to flowers.[374] This organic approach to death will be crucial for a

[372] Dendooven, *Menin Gate & Last Post*, 71
[373] Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, 81.
[374] McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 91.

reading of *The Road of Poplars*, and will carry us through to the fourth, and final, chapter of the thesis.[375]

But how could the emotional magnitude of a location such as Ypres, and the significance of a building such as the Menin Gate, be conveyed on a theatre stage? The early 1930s saw the publication and performance of a variety of plays concerned with war memorials. One was, of course, *The Road of Poplars*, which was particularly successful in amateur theatre circles for the relative simplicity of its set design – there was no need to display the war memorial, as it was represented through the distinctive aural cue of the Last Post – and the entirety of the play took place in only one location, a café in the proximity of Gate. Also interesting was David Cleghorn Thomson's play *War Memorial: A Parochial Satire in One Act*, dated 1930. Written in Scots dialect, the play obviated the problem of staging a memorial by imagining the meeting of a War Memorial Committee, gathering to decide precisely what the best war memorial would look like.[376] Australian playwright Sidney Tomholt wrote his unsettling *The Last Post*, about London's Cenotaph, in 1936: the play features an Australian family – former soldier John, his mother, and his wife Jean - travelling to London to attend the Armistice Day parade. John remains in his hotel room, watching from the window as he struggles to walk due to a wartime injury. His wife and mother decide to step outside. During the ceremony, John is visited by several of his dead companions, who sneak their way in through the window. They exchange pleasant reminiscences and banter, until Bill, one of John's best friends, beckons to him. 'Come on Johnny … back with us' he orders.[377] John, with visible relief, lets himself go into the realm of the dead. When his wife and mother return, the room is empty. As the Last Post fades, Jean cries in bereavement and

[375] John Stephens mentions that the paintings titled The Ghosts of Vimy Ridge (1930) and Carillon (1931) were produced on the wake of the success of The Menin Gate at Midnight. See John Stephens, "The Ghosts of Menin Gate: Art, Architecture and Commemoration", *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no 1 (2009): 21.
[376] David Cleghorn Thomson, *War Memorial: A Parochial Satire in One Act*. (Glasgow: Wilson, 1930).
[377] Sidney Tomholt, "The Last Post" in *Bleak Dawn and Other Plays* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Limited, 1936), 149-160.

shock, aware that the ghosts have finally 'taken him'.[378] In this case, too, we are never privy to the happenings outside of John's hotel room, and the sound of the bugle allows the playwright to convey the presence of the war memorial without the need to construct, and display, a replica of it. As we can see, dramatic solutions to representing the memorial often included setting the story in a location that would lie in proximity of the memorial itself, and which could therefore be reached by the memorial's aural spectre.

One last, and relevant, example of this technique can be seen in Sidney Newman Sedgwick's play *At the Menin Gate: A Melodrama*, published and staged in 1929 for the League of Nations. It depicted a moving encounter between two families of pilgrims, one of British and one of German origin. Meeting in a restaurant in the vicinity of the Gate, the families realise, thanks to the intercession of a waiter, that they are united by an uplifting wartime episode, as the son of the German couple, now invalid, was saved from sure death by the son of the British couple, who later went missing. Both families are therefore visiting the Gate to remember, and celebrate, the same person. The play, as the script recites, was 'intended for use at meetings of various branches of the League of Nations Union, or for programmes in connection with Armistice Day, or the signing of the Peace Pact': it focused on the experience of international fraternisation that could derive from pilgrimages to an area of war that held such poignant significance for all nations.[379] Like other League of Nations works, the play's intent was didactic and its moral positive. We can inscribe Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars* into the same interwar tradition as Sedgwick's play: both actively reference a blossoming pilgrimage culture to Western Front locations in which British and other Commonwealth soldiers had fought. 1930 was, after all, a particularly significant year for pilgrimages to Ypres: tour prices had gone down to a mere 2 pounds, enabling a variety of people from all economic means to make the journey, and the

[378] Ibid, 160.
[379] S.N. Sedgwick, *At the Menin Gate: A Melodrama, and a Parable, Written for the League of Nations Union* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1929), ii.

Workers Travel Association and local and provincial newspapers had started organising tours to the area, which also proved popular.[380] One could argue that the *The Road of Poplars* is immersed in this rekindling of the pilgrimage culture, and even that it is a direct dramatization of it. However, departing from Sedgwick's, Berkeley's (and the League of Nations') optimism, Sylvaine stages a pilgrimage that is ultimately marked by tragedy. In fact, in *The Road of Poplars*, a character simply defined as 'The Tourist' visits an estaminet (a café) in the vicinity of the Menin Gate, where he engages in conversation with the utility man, an Englishman named Charley. He finds out that Charley is an ex-serviceman, who has married a local, therefore relocating permanently to Belgium. Charley is nicknamed 'Le Fou': not only is he plagued by terrible headaches which derive from a war injury to the head, but he also appears to be the victim of visions and hallucinations.

Charley's wife, Marianne, runs the estaminet. While talking to the Tourist, she suggests that Charley is 'very, very strange'. 'At night – on the road – sometimes he thinks he sees – many things' she whispers.[381] The Tourist himself, it is revealed, is an ex-serviceman on a pilgrimage to the site. He harbours a terrible secret: here, in wartime, he caused the death of his whole battalion due to a simple mistake: he had misread the name 'Cambridge Line' as 'Cambridge Farm', given the wrong order, and thus condemned forty-eight companions to death. Charley knows him and recognizes him: he too was part of the same battalion and was the only man who miraculously survived. Excited, he makes The Tourist privy to his own secret: every night, at the sound of the Last Post from the Gate, the ghosts of dead soldiers come walking by the estaminet. 'Men! In Khaki! Some of them in khaki! Not all! Mixed up together – some of them. Germans! And Tommies!' he screams, agitated (7). The two are eventually left alone in the café to listen to the Last Post being played at 9 pm. Their eyes fixed on the Menin Road, they witness

[380] Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, 71.
[381] Vernon Sylvaine, *The Road of Poplars* (London: The Y.B.P Series of Plays, 1930), 7. All further references to *The Road of Poplars* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses.

the appearance of the ghostly battalion which surrounds the estaminet, first as sound, the noise of 'heavy, clumping boots passing just outside the door', and then as 'shadowy figures' standing starkly in the moonlight (24). Despite his initial disbelief, the Tourist realises that these ghosts are not just the product of Charley's mind, he can also see them, even speak to them. Among them, a known face: Sergeant Richardson, dead due to the Tourist's negligence. As the Tourist calls out to him, asking him desperately to 'take him with' him into the realm of the dead, Charley understands what he must do. He grabs an old revolver he keeps hidden in the estaminet and shoots the Tourist, whose body is picked up by the ghosts and whisked away in the night (28).

The Tourist's return to Ypres, where he eventually finds his death, foregrounds the notion – already introduced in the previous section of this chapter – that the warzone becomes intimately bound up with the body of the soldier, in a way that continues to live on beyond the event of war. The depiction of the Tourist's haunting compulsion to return to the locus of trauma coheres with a variety of other testimonies, both literary and biographical, that testify to soldiers' recurring pilgrimages to former warzones. For example, in T*he Great War and Modern Memory,* Paul Fussell narrates that a Private H. C. Bloor, writing in 1971, had gone back to the infamous location of the battle of the Somme, which he had survived, at least thirteen times. 'I intend to keep going as long as I can,' Bloor had stated. 'I try to be there on 1st July. I go out and, at 7.30 am, I stand at the exact spot where we went over the top in 1916'.[382] Fussell also quotes an Ernest Parker, sole survivor from an attack which killed his whole battalion at the Somme in 1916, who remembers a particularly gentle image of the French landscape: 'One day… I shall revisit that little undulation in the fields between Guedecourt and Delville Wood on an early morning in mid-September. There I will give thanks for being spared another fifty years of happy and fruitful life'.[383] Parker here imagines that his return to the location of battle will ritualise the memory of a traumatic past: by performing a commemorative journey, he conjures a time-

[382] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 131.
[383] Ibid.

bending catharsis achieved through (re)placing his body in space. Yet, as *The Road of Poplars* dramatizes, not all returns to the warzone were bound to be as cathartic as this: what if the terrain which once cemented one's identity as a soldier, and then a war survivor, has now undergone so many changes as to be virtually unrecognizable as a result? This activates a process of misrecognition not just of the geographical grounds that characterised the experience of war, but also, ultimately, of one's memory and sense of self. Ross J. Wilson has noted how, during the First World War, 'place' and 'emplacement' – the creation of a series of names, mental maps and definitions for foreign locations – were in fact 'social entities'.[384] In other words, the naming and renaming of the Western Front was a means of 'expressing identity and common purpose' between soldiers in the face of the desolation that characterised the disorienting world of the warzone. Wilson terms this process a 'tommifying' of the front, a 'meaning-making' activity of building a shared geography of the war experience.[385] This soldiers' practice is well documented by a variety of archival material, including war diaries, letters and journals in which soldiers recount the process of crafting an impression of familiarity within a dangerous and hostile landscape.[386]

The Road of Poplars explicitly references this process of renaming. During their first conversation, Charley and the Tourist find out they both belonged to the Twentieth Division and embark on a shared moment of re-mapping Ypres' reconstructed landscape:

> Charley: D'you remember Bellewaarden Farm?
>
> (*The Tourist nods his head*)
>
> And the Cambridge Road?
>
> (*The Tourist nods his head*)

[384] Ross J. Wilson. "Tommifying the Western Front, 1914-1918", *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011): 341.
[385] As Wilson notes, the term 'tommifying' derives from the word 'Tommy', or the longer expression 'Tommy Atkins', a general term used to define all British soldiers 'since the nineteenth century'. Ibid, 340.
[386] Ibid, 341.

And Cork Cottage – and Gordon House?

(*A pause. Charley smiles*)

I know all the people living there now. Nice families, they are. They don't like me though (10).

Through Charley's notion that he is somehow unwelcome in the *new* Ypres, the play introduces the sense of disorientation at the soldier's experience of finding novelty and reconstruction within the landscape that he had learnt to name, define, and recognize according to his own coordinates. This disorientation is also registered in real-life accounts of pilgrimages to France and Belgium. L.H. Clarke, Sergeant Major in the 5th West Yorkshire Division, made two pilgrimages to the warzone, one in 1936 and one in 1965, when he wrote his short diary '50 Years Later or A Sentimental Journey to the Trenches of France and Flanders'. Here, he registers his confusion and inability to locate unforgettable landmarks of his war experience, such as one of his old billets or the fields in which the graves of his companions had been dug. Upon arriving to Ypres, he describes it thus: 'I sat on the verandah in front of the hotel and thinking what a wonderful piece of work it had been to restore the shattered Ypres to the attractive scene now before me. Across the Grand Place were the Cloth of Hall and St Martin's Cathedral looking very lovely in the golden light of the afternoon. […] Then my mind flashed back to when I passed through the same Grand Place during the last few months of the war. Nothing but ruin and desolation. No houses, only heaps of rubble piled up on each side on the shell torn pavé roadway'.[387] Clarke strongly appreciated the detailed work of reconstruction which restored Ypres to its pre-war glory, but not everyone would have reacted in the same way. The kind of disorientation generated by the alterations of the landscapes that soldiers had known and navigated during the conflict may have given rise to profoundly negative feelings. Some former

[387] L.H. Clarke, "50 Years Later or A Sentimental Journey to the Trenches of France and Flanders. The Great War 1914-1918", Sept 1965, Alfred Peacock Collection, PEA Box 8, University of York Borthwick Archive, York.

soldiers indeed felt resentment and sadness at the feeling of having become 'strangers on [their] own ground'.[388]

In a process akin to colonisation, the soldiers felt and established a certain ownership over the shifting terrain of the warzone. *The Road of Poplars* suggests that this ownership is, in fact, destined to become obsolete and retreat within the borders of individual consciousness, heightening the feeling of strangeness, displacement and incredulity that derive from visiting and re-visiting loci of war in which the soldier does not fit any more. Inverting the process of what Wilson has referred to as 'tommifyication', the project of reconstruction of Ypres thus renders the land newly foreign, newly disorienting for Charley and the Tourist. Charley's constant crises and inability to detach himself from his past are causes of 'honte' – shame – for his wife Marianne, and he is ridiculed as a madman by several of the estaminet's customers. He annoys French and Flemish customers by playing English war songs on the piano, causing one of them to storm out. Notably, the Tourist also cannot stand that people would refer to Cambridge Farm, now the estaminet where Charley works, as anything but 'Cambridge Farm'. When Charley gently points out that the name of the place is 'Chez Madame Jeanne' and that it was only Cambridge Farm 'for [them]' - the soldiers - the Tourist refuses to accept it, replying, forcefully, that it was Cambridge Farm for 'everybody'. 'Why do they hide it?' he wonders (14). Through the scornful denial with which he registers Ypres' new geography, the Tourist displays an almost pathological attachment to the memory of the places and spaces of the war. This is, perhaps, not surprising, as the site of Cambridge Farm specifically played a fundamental role in his own traumatic experience as a Lieutenant. The estaminet 'Chez Madame Jeanne' rises precisely over the ashes of the same Cambridge Farm which so strongly embodies the Tourist's

[388] See, also, Edmund Blunden in Lloyd: 'It is ridiculous to be depressed by the triumph of life, but I feel a little grey as I move in this vernal world, marvellously re-flourishing. I am grateful to the low drumfire of the thunder, and the sudden, cold slashing, thorough rainstorm which makes us crouch under an outhouse wall in Zillebeke.' Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, 94.

all-encompassing guilt, his responsibility for the unnecessary death of forty-eight young men: not the Menin Gate, but the estaminet itself, is the real memorial around which the play revolves.

Charley understands the Tourist's plight. 'You ought to have gone with the others!' he tells him, 'You're one of them!' (11). For Charley, the Tourist is, in a way, already dead. This notion of a life 'halved' by the experience of war is also present in real-life accounts of the conflict. For ex-serviceman Henry Williamson, who travelled back to the front in 1930, the pilgrimage to the battlefield represented a way to exorcise the feeling of being 'a foreigner among the living, and half a foreigner to [himself] … a man who had lost part of himself'.[389] The Tourist has found himself in a similar situation; a part of his self is lost, because it is already claimed by the dead. Places have changed, the buildings and the streets have new names and new functions, and time is moving forward, both in Flanders and in London, where the Tourist feels irremediably out of place. However, for him, time had stopped when he had given the order to head to Cambridge Farm: he remains still in time and space, as trauma renders him spectral. 'London – with all its streets – and traffic – and shops – and windows – and faces,' he relates, mechanically, to Charley. 'Faces, that look at you – and don't see you!'. 'They're alive' Charley points out to him. 'Yes, they're alive' nods the Tourist 'They can't say that of us, Charley!' (19). In the newly reconstructed Ypres, he realises what Charley has already known and accepted: that both him and his old companion are suspended in a temporal and spatial realm on the cusp of life and death. As Ypres is reconstructed and London flourishes, a sense of ruination lingers, for them, no matter the *where* and *when* of their existence: Charley and the Tourist can be said to have internalised ruination in a way that the spectral voice of *The White Château* had predicted. If it is true that ruins 'refer to multiple temporalities, simultaneously and multidirectionally', then we see, within Charley and the Tourist, a pulsion towards the death that they were spared, which

[389] Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, 95.

lifts them outside of reality into a state of temporal and spatial suspension.[390] For this reason, the Tourists laments the sense of *not being seen* in life, and eventually comes to beg the ghost of Richardson to 'take him with' him in death.

McLoughlin notes that narratives of war often present a notion of synchronic, or paradigmatic, wartime, whereby time is not conceptualised as linear, but rather as a 'layered temporal experience in which two or more mutually incompatible outcomes hang simultaneously in the balance'.[391] For this reason, the Tourist is able to function as a living man and feel, also, that he does not belong in life. McLoughlin cites Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Flight to Arras* as an example of paradigmatic time which cements the idea that the experience of war often impedes the ability to imagine a future outside of the conflict. The book relates the experience of waiting for a telegram that will reveal to him whether a friend has died. Saint-Exupéry also imagines that he is split in two, like the Tourist, and that part of him is already spectral: 'The man I shall be when the news comes, dwells outside me: he is moving towards me like a ghost about to fuse with me'.[392] Charley and the Tourist are stuck in a similar situation: they are both unable to imagine themselves as severed from their war experience and from Ypres, though their Ypres no longer exists, and only remains within their memory. For this reason, the ghost becomes an extremely effective narratological solution to breach the divide between temporalities, for the ghost is a testimony to the endlessly Unheimlich realm of memory, where 'things that are assumed present are now witnessed as absent, things hitherto thought to be homely emerge as unhomely, and entities we once thought dead materialise as being quite undead'.[393] In this sense, the Ypres dramatized in *The Road of Poplars* is more uncanny than it is sacred or holy. The sounds

[390] Georg Simmel has written about ruins as engaging precisely with, and being constituted by, the dynamics 'between destruction and survival'. See Simmel in Pong, *For the Duration*, 181.
[391] McLoughlin, *Authoring War*, 120.
[392] Saint-Exupéry in ibid.
[393] Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 47.

and sights of war have not been erased from the city, but they carry on vibrating in the bodies of those who have survived: Charley claims he still 'hears' the army 'going up to the Line' (23).

Far from representing a sanctuary of prayer and repose, in which international relations are cultivated and cherished under the benign shadow of the Menin Gate, Ypres is here a portal between temporal and spatial realities, where spectres seem to walk on in search of retribution. Internationalism still retains a space within this framework; in fact, Charley claims that the ghosts of dead Germans and Englishmen walk 'arm in arm' (23). The sounding of the Last Post is thus articulated as a magical moment of suspension (the play's subtitle was indeed 'A War Phantasy') where memories come alive, temporalities fuse and collide, and international enmities are forgotten. The time bending act of the commemorative ritual confirms the futility of the conflict and the necessity for international cooperation. However, alongside this, the sounding of the Last Post also emphasizes the life-altering effects of war on individual consciousness: the 'retribution' searched by the ghosts is, effectively, the claiming of the lives of those who are unable to snap out of the time-warped realm of trauma. As such, the Last Post within *The Road of Poplars* is not simply the temporally finite point in which all minds must engage in commemoration, but rather a recurring aural marker of perpetual haunting: the link between the ritual of commemoration and the appearance of the spectres seems to foreground haunting as a necessary reverberation of the memorial ritual. The play pivots on the idea that the audience may feel suspicious and think that the arrival of the ghostly apparitions is nothing but Charley's deluded dream. After the ceremony of the Last Post commences, Charley encourages the Tourist to listen carefully for the spectral battalion, but he cannot hear a sound. 'Nothing, Charley,' he says, 'I heard nothing'. 'You did!' replies Charley, 'But you wouldn't believe you heard' (24). Here, Charley is addressing the Tourist as much as he is addressing the audience: the request to believe is strongly linked, and strongly refers, to an acceptance of the spectral and doubtful mechanics of theatre performance. If the sense of a community united in memory can be achieved through the shared commemorative ritual, the play seems to suggest that it can also be

achieved through the shared reality of performance; through Charley's invitation to 'believe', the playwright is recognising the idiosyncrasies of theatre. If you believe, you will see, and hear, the ghosts: this is the silent pact that seals the audience's relationship with the space and time of the performance.

Through his willingness to believe, the Tourist gains access, together with the audience, to a world that is Ypres' spectral double, first in the form of 'the sound of men marching', then – once the door of the estaminet flings open – in the form of 'shadowy figures' outlined against the blue moonlight which floods the Menin Road (25). *The Road of Poplars* thus highlights the profound connections between theatre, memory, and spectrality through the configuration of Ypres as portal, simultaneously a locus of personal tragedy and the repository of a collective memory that is bound to return, and be recalled, through the performative repetitions and imaginative journeys through the landscape. The Last Post, a recurring ceremony happening every night at the strike of 9, evokes and feeds into the similarly repetitive world of the performance as event. The mechanics of the play thread the line between reality and imagination: the 'blue moonlight' which envelops the scene, after the Tourist decides to play along with Charley's supposed delusion and finds that it is also real for him, may well signify that a displacement is in progress, a passage from the gritty world of Ypres and the estaminet into a dream-like, hallucinatory state that reminds us of Martha's experience, which has been explored in Chapter Two. In the case of *Martha*, the blue light did not simply signify a dream-like state, but pointed to the liminal quality of Martha's existence, caught in between life and death. In *The Road of Poplars*, too, we sense that death lingers on the horizon. Charley knows that the ghosts walk around in search of retribution. This is evident in the exchange between the Tourist and Richardson, in which the Tourist's request 'Take me with you!' receives the mysterious reply of 'Not yet, old man. Your name wasn't down to go with us! Not yet! Unless ….' (27). Richardson's 'unless …' sparks within Charley the desire to act upon the Tourist's request. Slowing raising his revolver, he pulls the trigger, completing the sentence: 'Unless – somebody writes it down, now!'

(28). Charley's act marks a stark change in the dynamics of the scene, which suddenly plunges into darkness before we return to the usual, lamp-lit estaminet room. The Tourist has disappeared. Here, we find ourselves unable to fully conceptualise what has happened. Was this Charley's dream? This cannot be, as the Tourist was real, Marianne had seen him too. Has the Tourist really committed suicide, plagued by the memories of those he indirectly killed, and has Charley simply fantasised about killing him, thus imaginatively gaining a retribution that he also felt was necessary? This question is never answered. As inexplicably as they have appeared, the ghosts have vanished, taking the Tourist with them.

In a conversation with the Tourist, Charley guesses that the man has come back to Ypres, as a pilgrim, four times already, claiming that he can always tell 'the ones that are going under' (9). The expression 'going under' may refer to the descent into depression experienced by several war survivors, but the words may also hide another reality. The phrase's meaning becomes clear later in the scene, when Charley pours the Tourist a drink: the bottle, he reveals, was unearthed in 1920 in the hidden cellars of the Cambridge Farm, when they were building the new estaminet. The Tourist is profoundly affected by this revelation and asks Charley 'what else' he saw unearthed. After an initial moment of hesitation, Charley reveals that he saw 'forty-eight, at least': the missing word is corpses. The understanding is that, like a great number of soldiers had been buried under the Farm in wartime, thousands of others would lie, still unearthed, underneath the new Ypres; thus, Charley envisions every 'lost' soldier – such as the Tourist – as eventually bound to 'go under', past the reconstructed landscape to take up their place in the uncanny map of Ypres' foundations. *The Road of Poplars* thus suggests that Ypres is re-built on the bones of the dead and that, as such, it must suffer their perpetual visitations: what rises above the ground must be aware of what lies beneath it. As we have seen, Longstaff's pictorial view of the Menin Gate had also foregrounded the city of Ypres as an immense, haunted, and unmarked burial ground. 'The sun could surely never shine on such a simulacrum of divine aberration'

wrote Edmund Blunden of Ypres in his memoir: in the soldier's eyes too, Ypres was almost akin to a black hole, in which 'the bleakness of time had found its proper theatre'.[394]

As we have seen throughout this chapter, reconstruction harbours the seeds of haunting, and so does commemoration: the dead are not only assimilated into the ground, but they are imagined as a constitutive part of the city's architecture, Menin Gate included. Both *The White Château* and *The Road of Poplars* propose a landscape of memory that looks beyond the phenomenon of haunting into the material locus whence the ghosts are born. We are reminded of Yaeger's observation that literature may be a valuable tool for the study and understanding of geography; she also recognises literature's ability to portray the 'phantoms that still hover, dreaming and cursing, in geography's thoroughfares'.[395] The landscapes encountered throughout this chapter are spectral, and their spectres are charged with negotiating the dichotomies of reconstruction and destruction, life and death, the preservation and annihilation of memory. These plays are further examples of interwar reflections on memorialisation that are aware of the material realm of death, and of the ways in which literature, and theatre, may make it apparent with ghosts. Charley is aware that what's 'under' the foundations of Ypres is a testimony to the ways in which not only the city, but also the collective memory of the city, shifts through time, and is at times forgotten. Like the speaker of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, who cries 'Stetson!/You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!/That corpse you planted last year in your garden/Has it begun to sprout?', the characters of both plays considered here live in a world where the linear time of history is endlessly disturbed by the fluid and unruly temporality of memory, conceptualised as a corpse, or a ruin, endlessly buried and uprooted, manifested by its ghostly apparition.[396] Both *The White Château* and *The Road of Poplars* feature ghosts that, as Smith has put it as he explores the intersections between the modernist and the Gothic ghost, 'demand

[394] Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Collins, 1928), 136.
[395] *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Yaeger, 28.
[396] T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), 55.

forms of remembrance, and unsettle the ambitions of a post-war world which cannot move into a new peace until these ghosts have been appropriately appeased'.[397]

In both the playwrights' imaginaries, memory is a necromantic act; instead of conjuring an image of stillness in deadly sleep, it animates the dead, turning them into spectres which the new, reconstructed world is bound to be haunted by. Like most British spectral plays of the interwar years, both works strive to actualise their own form of memorialisation by choosing the highly charged space of Flanders as setting: they are designed to both reflect on *and* perform memorialisation. Yet, they also insert some glitches into a well-rehearsed matrix: unsettling anomalies which suggest that the implications of the periodic ghostly resurrection are far from clear-cut. This becomes apparent at the end of the *The Road of Poplars*, for example, where Charley is incited by the spectres to murder the Tourist. The ghosts spur him on until he finally pulls the trigger. We wonder, then: was this spectrally ordained killing for mercy or for revenge? In funerary and memorial discourses focused on the glorious resurrection of the war dead, the living are often presented as fundamentally deserving of the dead's intercession: Bremen's war memorial, for example, quotes John, XV, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'.[398] Both *The Road of Poplars* and *The White Château* trouble this, and, in their narration of the mechanisms of personal and collective war memory, focus on the themes of guilt and responsibility. In Chapter Four, I consider two plays that make such themes their central concern: here, I show that, under the shadow of humanity's flawed and sinful nature, the resurrection of the dead might make for a disturbing prospect indeed.

[397] Smith, *Gothic Literature and the Writing of Trauma*, 10.
[398] Stefan Goebel, "Re-membered and re-mobilised: the 'Sleeping Dead' in Interwar Germany and Britain", *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no 4 (2004): 491.

CHAPTER FOUR

'Awake, Men of Verdun! Awake, Men of the Argonne!':

The Body as Memorial in Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* (1936) and Hans Chlumberg's *Miracle at Verdun* (1932)

As I have mentioned in Chapter Three, Ypres featured everywhere in the British war memorabilia of the 1920s and became one of the preferred subjects in photographs displaying the wartime destruction of Flemish and French cities' main monuments and touristic attractions. Several popular booklets of war-themed *cartes postales* sold to the public focused on the depiction of the process of ruination that radically transformed areas where the war had raged most violently. One of them, composed of photos by Flemish photographer Maurice Antony, contains an affecting photograph of the host of white crosses which marked the British military graves in Ypres.[399] In the same postcard, various ruined buildings are superimposed on the main image, and, over these, a hanging banner recites: 'This was the city of Ypres, one of the most beautiful and historic towns in Europe. During over four years (1914-1918), two million British soldiers defended it from the invader. […] Its stones are sacred: you are on your honour to conduct yourself reverently here. Do Nothing to despoil or desecrate the Ruins'.[400] The city is written about in the past tense; visually, we get a glimpse of the destroyed buildings, signalling the decay and devastation of what was previously beautiful. Yet, it is the photograph of the British cemetery that occupies most of the top section of the postcard. The destruction of the landscape and the loss of human lives are thus juxtaposed, while the use of the past tense projects us into

[399] A collection of photographs by Maurice Antony and his brother Robert have recently been collected into an edited volume titled *Ypres: War and Reconstruction*, published in Dutch and English. The volume includes all photographs by the Antony brothers, previously sold as single postcards that documented Ypres' journey between destruction and reconstruction during the First World War. The volume was edited by Dominiek Dendooven, Piet Chielens and photographer Jan Dewilde for the *In Flanders Fields Museum* in Ypres.

[400] "Ypres: Avant, Pendant et Après la Guerre", postcard collection, n.d., Alfred Peacock Archive, PEA Box 8, University of York Borthwick Archive, York.

the realm of death. Ypres *was* one of the most beautiful towns in Europe, but it is no more, though its remains linger. Historic Ypres is here represented not as a city, but rather as the memorial of a city. But, as Chapter Three has foregrounded, a memorial – like a city - can also be a tourist destination, and it comes with precise expectations. The mayoral order in the photograph thus asks for silence and care from all visitors, who should tread lightly and avoid 'despoiling' or 'desecrating' the ruins: 'You are on your honour to conduct yourself reverently here'.[401] This postcard of fallen Ypres acts as a visual companion to the trope of the fallen soldier as the foundation of the reconstructed city, merging the abstract notion of death with its materiality: the physiology of the dead body becomes constitutive of the land, a landscape that has death written into the curves of its hills, which death 'shaped' and 'made aware', as Rupert Brooke wrote.[402]

The mayoral order embedded within the postcard suggests that the ruined city must now lie in peaceful sleep, similarly to the bodies that are resting below its ground. The tendency to use the metaphor of sleep to signify death is an important one: as Philippe Ariès writes in *The Hour of Our Death*, 'the idea of sleep is the most ancient, the most popular, and the most constant image of the beyond'.[403] In particular, as Goebel points out, in its most fervent iterations this sleep becomes 'enchanted' and foreshadows an eventual reawakening, in which the dead could return with the specific mission of helping the living through periods of difficulty.[404] Goebel rightly notes that the notion of death as sleep, even 'enchanted sleep', is rooted in the 'intermediate stage between the departure and return of the dead'.[405] In this sense, it comforts the living in two central ways: it contributes to an impression that loss is not final (reminding us of the central

[401] Ibid.
[402] Rupert Brooke, "The Soldier" in *Rupert Brooke: Collected Poems* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1942), 150. In McLoughlin's analysis of this poem, she notes that Brooke's 'earthy' approach death foregrounds death in battle 'not so much as a heroic gesture as a horticultural event'. McLouglin, *Authoring War*, 91.
[403] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death,* translated by Helen Weaver (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 24.
[404] Goebel, "Re-membered and remobilised", 488.
[405] Ibid.

concerns of certain branches of consolatory spiritualism in Britain), but it also strips death from its 'ugliest' attributes, allowing the bereaved to imagine their loved ones engaged in a 'deep and joyous sleep'.[406] However, it remains to be said that the image of the sleeping dead (before their supposed return) gestures towards an extreme sentimentalisation of the corpse; as Bronfen and Goodwin would define it, the body of the 'dormant' soldier is less a literal corpse than it is 'a pose', a 'congealed configuration of cultural meanings'.[407] According to Goebel, the tradition of representing the dead as 'sleeping' became more prevalent in Germany and, to a lesser extent, Britain, after 1918, as debates surrounding the construction of war memorials began to intensify: notably, in institutionalised memorial and funerary practices, a crucial decision had to be made about what visual and architectural markers could best memorialise the war dead.[408] In the interwar period, this decision often translated into the visive power of a single image that upheld a certain monumental stillness – rows upon rows of identical white crosses, for example, like in the Sanctuary Wood Cemetery in Ypres – and depictions of sleeping soldiers were among the most popular statuary trends.[409]

Throughout the previous chapters, I have demonstrated that the figure of the ghostly soldier, as it appears in the theatre of the interwar period, partially resists, and circumvents, a commemorative logic associated to the stillness of monumentality: this resistance is brought about especially through the theatrical use of disembodiment, which in turn reflects the influence exercised by wireless technology on interwar memorial practices. However, the thesis has thus far considered a rather insular genre of British drama which turns a spectral eye –a simultaneously urgent *and* retrospective eye –to First World wartime and its contemporaneous

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406 Ibid.

407 *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 7.

408 Goebel, "Re-membered and remobilised", 488, 489.

409 The debates surrounding the 'look' of British war graves in France and Flanders that circulated in the IWGC in the interwar period can be brought up again, here, as a good example of such a necessity to 'curate' the image of the dead.

reverberations: even in the face of its idiosyncrasies, the thesis' corpus so far can still be inserted in a memorial zeitgeist that often echoes and complements interwar commemorative rhetoric. This chapter moves beyond the insularity of the geography and focuses on European and American texts – Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead (*1936) and Hans Chlumberg's earlier *Miracle at Verdun* (1932) – which crucially rethink the spectral soldier not as spirit, but as body. It also draws on related works such as Abel Gance's early film *J'Accuse* (1919) and Sylvaine's *The Road of Poplars*, which has already been discussed at length. *Miracle at Verdun* and *Bury the Dead* are unlike the plays discussed in other chapters, which only offer partial glimpses into the material 'deadness' of the ghost, and the dying body of the soldier tends to be reduced to a trace, or an echo, with the other characters' own bodies always acting as vessels. In this last chapter, I instead focus on a process of de-mystification of the ghost, and I highlight some of the relevant characteristics of a new-look spectral trend of dramatic literature of the 1930s, which – outside of the British reality – was becoming increasingly appreciative of the unapologetic aesthetics of expressionism. The body of the dead soldier becomes, then, unashamedly material: the spirit is made flesh on stage, with playwrights evoking images of peculiar mass resurrections that openly defy post-war tendencies towards the sentimentalisation and glorification of the war dead. Against the scenario which often presupposed the natural re-assimilation of the dead into society as heroes and helpers of the living, various pacifist plays of the 1930s – *Bury the Dead*, *Miracle at Verdun*, even Sydney Tomholt's Australian war plays – imagined an alternative reality, in which the dead serve an agenda that is theirs and theirs alone.[410]

While *The Road of Poplars* was rehearsed and staged in Autumn 1930 in London, Austrian dramatist Hans Chlumberg was following the rehearsals of his own ghost play, *Miracle at Verdun*,

[410] There is not enough space here to discuss Tomholt's work in relation to this topic, but his play *The Crucified* is particularly interesting, as it considers the dead body of the soldier through the framework of Christian iconography and openly likens it to the crucified body of Christ. Veronica Kelly writes insightfully about Tomholt's plays and their relationship to memorialisation in "Spatialising the Ghosts of Anzac in the plays of Sidney Tomholt: the absent soldier and the war memorial", *Australian Literary Studies* 23, no 1 (2007).

which would be performed shortly after in Leipzig. Sadly, Chlumberg died at the end of the October 1931, victim of an accident on set, just days before opening. *Miracle at Verdun*, though, would become one of his most successful legacies, and would later transcend the borders of Germany to be translated and staged in London at the Comedy Theatre in 1932.[411] Its influence would travel beyond Europe, catching the attention of the young Irwin Shaw, who became enamoured with the premise. With these plays in mind, the chapter aims to explore further the implications of what it means to 'go under': to look at the revenant body as flesh and bone and to consider memory not as a rarefied concept, but as an organic thing. Through looking under, these plays respond to crucial questions about the representation of death that scholars such as Goodwin and Bronfen have put forward: how do survivors conceptualise and exploit the dead body's 'traces'? Who, and what, does the dead body represent?[412] It is true that, as Brian Murdoch noted, *Miracle at Verdun* – and, I would add, *Bury the Dead* too – both stage a reflection about Murdoch's 'memorials and the emotions they provoke'.[413] Despite the marked differences they display from the previous works explored throughout the thesis, especially in Chapters One and Two, both plays can be qualified as memorial plays in the sense that they name and explore the traditions of memorialisation; as Murdoch has pointed out, Chlumberg's work explicitly references Verdun in its title and is dedicated to those who died during the war, and this is enough to grant it some memorial strength.[414] However, these works engage with the memory of the war dead in more complex ways, in that they stage the funerary practice of burial and the space of the war cemetery as sites of political and ideological meaning-making. In both *Bury the Dead* and *Miracle at Verdun*, the undead engage in the self-profanation of their own graves, either

[411] Brian Murdoch writes about the early performance history of Chlumberg's *Miracle at Verdun* in *German Literature and the First World War: the Anti-War Tradition*, where he relates the information about Chlumberg's accident. See Murdoch, *German Literature and the First World War: the Anti-War Tradition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 92.
[412] "Introduction" in *Death and Representation*, 7.
[413] Murdoch, *German Literature and the First World War*, 92.
[414] Ibid.

refusing to descend into the holes that have been dug for them or trampling and uprooting the crosses that mark their resting place. This way, the cemetery's identity as a *curated* site of memory is uncovered, and burial is exposed as an action that bears political weight.

In this chapter, I argue that the plays portray the soldier's (un)dead body as a 'figure of liminality', an organic locus that encompasses both life and death.[415] In other words, the dead soldier is here fashioned as a living corpse, which testifies to the spectral memory of a death that remains visible and carved in flesh. In the previous chapters, I have oftentimes considered the ghost as a figure invested with various degrees of immateriality. Chapter One engaged with a ghost that was simultaneously embodied and disembodied, an ever-changing figure who could inhabit several bodies or none; this unique form of spectral disembodiment served to represent and probe the process through which remembering becomes commemoration. In Chapter Two, the ghost pointed to the problem of remoteness, a solution to the absence of the body: the multitude of the missing and the impossibility to repatriate the dead, as we have seen on several occasions throughout the thesis, prompted playwrights to imagine spectral solutions. We have encountered the ghost as a widespread metaphor in the interwar period; as Smith has noted, much fiction of the period utilised ghostly images to represent 'shell-shock', and Gothic tropes of 'division, doubling and self-haunting' (and I would add, possession, like in the case of Leonard in *Flowers of the Forest*) were employed by authors to explore ideas of a traumatised and damaged self.[416] However, where death has been evoked so far in images of the ruined landscape and ghostly apparitions both visual and aural, it is also true that the ghost has also served to get away from the necessity to represent the material reality of the dead body. The bodies that populate

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415 "Introduction" in *Death and Representation*, 7. As Elizabeth Barry has noted, this sense of liminality has similarly been a feature of literary portrayals of the ageing body, which allows us to 'look at [death] from the inside'. Barry explores the ways in which descriptions of ageing often rely on the notion that the body in old age is a 'spectacle of living death', a locus in which the boundaries between life and death are no longer distinct and clear. As we shall see later in the chapter, this notion of the body as already 'containing' its own death, as it were, is also applicable to the representation of the body of the soldier in Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead*. See Elizabeth Barry, "The Ageing Body" in Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 133, 134.

416 Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma*, 48.

the plays considered in this chapter are, instead, corpses:the wounds they display are the imprints of the violent act that has undone them. The very moment of these soldiers' death is thus re-membered in performance through the materiality of the staged body, as the return of the undead provides the image of an afterlife that is simply life that bears death's material signs. This afterlife is not the 'beyond', or the 'below': it is the realm of death-in-life, and it finds its highest point of dramatic fulfilment here in virtue of the plays' expressionist sensibility, which commands what Kosok discussing expressionist war plays describes as a 'distortion of observable reality without however completely severing the links with real life'.[417] Chapter Three has explored the ways in which the materialisation of death in life was staged in dramatic renditions of haunted ruins: here, the ruin or its reconstructed version somehow figured, or conjured, the spectral memory of war. This conjuring still operated under the logic of the commemorative ritual: *The White Chateau* was part of an Armistice Day celebration, and *The Road of Poplars'* ghosts were directed and materialised by the sound of the Last Post as it was re-enacted in performance. Chapter Four's texts rather foreshadow the moment in which the return of the (un)dead might render commemoration obsolete, precisely by erasing the living's need to define, imagine and remember the dead – in other words, by disposing of the need to fashion 'a pose' for the corpse, to follow Bronfen and Goodwin, because the corpse is already displayed in plain sight. And if the mobilisation of the realm of death for the creation of meaning is an accepted and fundamental aspect of commemorative rituals, these plays both overtly challenge commemoration while also proposing an alternative to it, a new commemorative practice that finds its *raison d'être* in theatre's radical relationship with death.[418] In this sense, the plays

[417] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 129.

[418] This relationship has been explored by many theorists in the field of theatre and performance studies. There is much criticism, for example, on Tadeusz Kantor's theatre practice and the ways in which it tackles death as an aesthetic category to be explored in performance, especially in attempting to depict traumatic memory. See, for example, Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) or Mischa Twitchin, *The Theatre of Death: The Uncanny in Mimesis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Dorota Sajewska's *Necroperformance* is also part of this canon.

considered here are both a continuation and a radical re-imagining of the corpus that I have considered so far.

'You've Got to Change the Crops Sometime': Beyond the Politics of Burial

In the interwar period, poets, as well as dramatists, engaged with the artistic zeitgeist that had started to question the rhetoric surrounding cultures of mourning and funerary practices. For example, as alluded to above, the first section of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is titled 'The Burial of the Dead' and ends with the poetic speaker questioning Stetson on whether the corpse buried in his garden 'will bloom this year'.[419] The question seems to conceptualise the corpse as an ultimately living organism or, at least, as a vessel capable of generating life, which can bloom like seasonal plants do in an allotment. We may be inclined to read this image through a Bakhtinian lens: the corpse is assimilated 'sweetly' by Mother Nature through burial, and as such is a fundamental agent partaking in the cycle of burial-decomposition and renewal at the heart of the grotesque celebration of the human. In his analysis of Rabelais' work, for example, Bakhtin mentions the dead body as 'seed', with blood fuelling the regeneration of the earth, 'making her bear fruit once more'.[420] For all the joyousness of this view of death, still we are haunted by a sense that the blooming corpse in Stetson's garden hides a darker reality behind it. After all, the corpse has not bloomed quite yet, and the speaker comes to doubt that it even will: 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?' they wonder.[421] Eliot, like Lovecraft in his short stories, paints the picture of a 'sudden' chill, a change in the flowing of the seasons, an unnatural coolness descending on the land.[422] If the natural cycles that govern the processes of life and death in

[419] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* in *Collected Poems 1909 – 1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), 55.
[420] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 327.
[421] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 55.
[422] Outka, in *Viral Modernism,* posits that Lovecraft's short stories were a direct response to the influenza pandemic of the late 1910s. We can, especially in the current climate, read much of our own anxiety surrounding the spread of an uncontrollable disease, which is Outka's preferred reading of Lovecraft's

nature are skewed, we may wonder what this implies for the bodies we bury. The sense that the war has pushed the earth to its breaking point appears also in soldiers' memoirs of the interwar period, where the assimilation of soldier corpses into the battlefield grounds progressively loses the poetic beauty that Brooke had once conferred upon it. One soldier describes, for example, the sheer impossibility of performing normal burial rites on the front. He writes: 'Burial was impossible. […] There were hundreds, thousands, not merely ours, but German as well. […] Bodies became incorporated in the material of the trenches themselves. In one place, we had to dig through corpses of Frenchmen who had been killed and buried in 1915'.[423] Similarly, Eliot invokes, in *The Waste Land*, the image of a post-war 'Unreal City', populated by those which death had 'undone': in this case, too, they are 'so many' that it becomes hard for the mind to compute the number.[424]

The soldier's recollections resonate with the concept that drives the denouement of Irwin Shaw's play *Bury the Dead*, suggesting that Shaw was, like Eliot, keen to capture a sense of the extreme challenges posed by mass inhumation on such a scale. The play opened to rave reviews at the New Theatre in Manhattan and was soon hailed as 'extraordinary': a *New York Herald Tribune* review collected by Shaw's biographer Michael Shnayerson defined it 'so strong, so powerful and so compelling a drama that a more important place should be given to it'.[425] This review already foreshadowed the fascination that *Bury the Dead* would hold for the 1930s American political theatre scene, which tended to use it as a 'social weapon'; while with the expression 'important place' the reviewer had probably simply meant to wish the play into

imagined miasmic apocalypse. Or, again, we could view these apocalyptic narratives as foreshadowing the relentless corrosion of our planet's climate. This Lovecraftian vision of a natural world that has passed from 'the control of known gods' to that of 'forces unknown' – as Outka puts is - is perhaps helpful to us as we consider the mechanisms behind certain dramatic representations of burial or, rather, failed burial in pacifist theatre of the 1930s. See Outka, *Viral Modernism*, 3.

[423] David Cannadine quotes Stuart Cloete's wartime experiences as he relates them in *A Victorian Son: An Autobiography, 1897-1922* in his chapter "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain", in *Mirrors of Mortality: Social Studies in the History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (New York: Routledge, 2011), 206.

[424] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 54.

[425] Michael Shnayerson, *Irwin Shaw: A Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1989), 62.

Broadway, *Bury the Dead* would quickly proceed to find a solid (and indeed important) place for pacifist movements across America, Australia and eventually Europe.[426] Part of the reason for this immediate success is perhaps that *Bury the Dead*, differently from its supposed inspiration *Miracle at Verdun*, is a rather simple piece, easily staged in small theatres and easily pulled off with a small cast. At its core, the play engages with the power dynamics at the heart of burial as a political action: the general premise sees six soldiers who have just been killed in the trenches refuse to be buried, despite the efforts that everyone around them puts into convincing them that the ground is their rightful place to be, because burial is what ultimately seals the reality of death, and there can be no such thing as a dead man walking. Ignoring the prayers of government officials and army superiors, the six soldiers are determined to defend their right *not* to go into the ground. The corpses are animated with rebellious energy, and they sit in protest in the graves that their living companions have dug for them at the beginning of the play. It is worth noting that, while the play was promoted and appreciated by groups aligned with left-wing politics, such as the New Theatre League, the soldiers' protest is not overtly and substantially associated to left-wing politics within the script itself.[427] However, it is true that all the resistant dead in the play are working-class privates, not army officials; in this sense, their protest does serve to make manifest the exploitation of working-class lives in war, and the fact that army hierarchy perpetuates existing societal inequalities. In fact, the political capital of these soldiers' refusal to be buried goes beyond their existence as undead bodies and is realised in the alliance they form with other living privates, who eventually help them halt funerary rites, first, and war, second.

[426] Ibid, 65. Incidentally, *Bury the Dead* did eventually interest Broadway: a 'lavish' production of it was staged at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, in April 1936. See ibid, 63.
[427] The New Theatre League was established as the League of Workers Theatres in 1931, before it changed its name to New Theatre League four years later. According to Lisa Milner, it described itself as 'America's only anti-fascist, progressive federation of theatres'. See Lisa Milner, "A Great Anti-War play: *Bury the Dead* on the World Stage", *Australasian Drama Studies* 72 (2018): 36.

The materiality of the dead's body, however, represents a first, crucial shock to the machine of war. 'They weren't ghosts' points out a shocked captain in charge of the burial when reporting the incident to the army generals, 'they were men – killed and standing in their graves and looking at me'.[428] It is precisely this un-ghostliness of the soldiers, their being more corpse than spirit, that disturbs and unsettles: in *Miracle at Verdun*, too, the dead had been depicted as more corpse-like than ghost-like, with 'pallid faces, and dark-ringed eyes', 'a peculiar staring look of absorption and abstraction', 'emaciated' bodies and torn uniforms. Like malfunctioning puppets, they move 'tentatively and with great difficulty' and their speech is 'colourless, broken, hesitant' and hoarse.[429] In both *Miracle at Verdun* and *Bury the Dead*, doctors' reports are compiled that testify, without doubt, that these men are no more: but the undead body eludes all coordinates of sense, openly defying scientific authority. As Commander in Chief of the Army, as appointed by the President of the United States in accordance with the Constitution of the United States, and as your superior officer, I command you to lie down' a General desperately screams to the 'silent and motionless' bodies in *Bury the Dead* (21). The doctor's report, as well as the meaningless list of institutions and roles, does nothing to bend the dead's will. The play shows that the phenomenal existence of the undead body is intensely troubling: we realise that, perhaps, the undead body conjures a reality in which the authority of the state has become redundant. What authority do the Generals have on bodies that so openly defy the social and political structures that call for the effacement of death? Differently from the sleeping dead, who can be gently awakened at the hour of need, the ravaged bodies in Shaw's play refuse to sleep even when they are begged to do so. The 'restful sleep' rhetoric does not work on them, as – as they state – they have seen the bottom of the grave and it is 'black': they do not want to go back under the

[428] Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc, 1963), 13. All further references to *Bury the Dead* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses.
[429] Hans Chlumberg, *Miracle at Verdun*, trans. Edward Crankshaw (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), 35. All further references to *Miracle at Verdun* will be to this edition and will appear in the body of the text in parentheses.

ground. (36). The dead feed on their hunger for life, which the play suggests is also a hunger for peace, a peace deeper than 'that which comes with feeding the roots of grass' (25). In particular, the character of a dead soldier named Schelling reveals that his refusal to be buried is really an act of ecological respect: 'Maybe there's too many of us under the ground now. Maybe the earth can't stand it no more. You got to change the crops sometime' (29). This poignant line fashions once again the dead body as crop, gesturing to the *possibility* of death being a fundamental part of rebirth; however, in this context, Schelling implies that warfare is so destructive that it can generate a stagnating, un-natural stillness in nature as well as culture.

Schelling's line references the overwhelming and unsustainable number of bodies hidden under the ground, conjuring an image like that found in *The Road of Poplars*, where the estaminet Chez Madame Jeanne had been rebuilt above the dead's unmarked resting place, and was thus periodically haunted. Under this framework, the buried body, forced underground by war, does not figure as a natural fertiliser, but rather as an artificial pollutant. Crucially, Schelling's remark – that 'the earth can't stand it no more' – gestures to the impossibility for corpses to *stay* buried, even if they accepted burial in the first place: we sense that war's hubristic bending of natural cycles will eventually prove unsustainable. As Elaine Scarry has argued in her reflections on injury in conflict, 'the structure of war itself will require that injuring is partially eclipsed from view' and, as such, 'requires both the reciprocal infliction of massive injury and the eventual disowning of the injury', which is not 'permitted to cling to the original site of the wound, the human body'.[430] Scarry's remarks are poignant when applied to both *Bury the Dead* and *Miracle at Verdun* because they address the question of whether the impossibility to conceal the injured corpse would lead to a disruption of the very premise that sustains the act of war. What's more, both plays imagine that, together with the destabilisation of warfare, the disappearance of burial might also uncover a problematic side of commemoration, which naturally thrives off the event

[430] Elaine Scarry, "Injury and the Structure of War", *Representations* 10 (1985): 1.

of war. *Miracle at Verdun*, for example, focuses precisely on the ways in which national commemoration purports 'a narrative of *past* and *future* that is always representative of the dominant ideology'.[431] Here, we confront the idea that the imagined future of the nation is built on a sanitised and highly crafted memory of the wartime past, and of the war dead especially.

At the beginning of the play, large scale crowd scenes display the French and German Prime Ministers giving highly rhetorical commemorative speeches under the shadow of their respective war monuments. In true Sophoclean fashion, Chlumberg reflects on the tendency to use the dead as 'metatropes', signifiers forwhat Goodwin and Bronfen call 'the process of representation itself: its necessity, its excess, its failure and its uses for the *polis'*.[432] The dead, screams the German Chancellor, 'are the spirit of our endurance': thinking of the dead, cherishing their memory, soothes the living's souls, giving them hope (30). The dead have risen, and they'll live forever in 'us' (31). We recognize a familiar commemorative message: the dead have died so that the living can carry on. The construction of the image of the 'glorious dead' is a tool for both the victorious and vanquished to promote an impression of national cohesion that partially obscures a reality of heavy human loss, which – ironically enough - nobody *really* wants to face. Indeed, the French prime minister rhetorically promises the dead that 'if [they] could rise once more and walk in our midst', they would be 'welcomed with rejoicing' (27), but the truth of the matter is very different: as confirmed later on, the dead will walk, but they will be drawn back to 'the earth whence [they] came' as the countries of the world fear the political, religious and economic collapse that their return foreshadows (120). Bronfen and Goodwin interestingly argue that thinking about death locates us half-way between a physical and metaphysical realm: as they note, 'although death poses a metaphysical problem, it is a physical event'.[433] They argue that the thought of death also foregrounds the overbearingness of the physical body and this, in turn,

[431] Tom Houlton, *Monuments as Cultural and Critical Objects: From Mesolithic to Eco-Queer* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2021), 106.
[432] "Introduction" in *Death and Representation*, 4.
[433] Ibid, 20.

points to 'an absence of spirit and intellect and grace' whereby the most frightening side of death as an epistemological category is revealed.[434] Political and religious leaders thus agree that the dead should 'persist in death': this statement, though, fully addresses death as a 'metaphysical' concept, and its implication is that the dead should descend once more under the ground so that their death may be acknowledged, but remain unseen (120).

By refusing to confront death as an embodied, physical phenomenon, the representatives of each nation attempt to perpetuate the idea that the war has not 'scarred' the body politic and negate the centrality of injury as the driving motive behind war.[435] For this reason, at the beginning of the play, tour guide Mazas reprimands his colleague Vernier for lingering too long on the identity and cause of death of some of the men buried in the Verdun war cemetery, now a popular touristic destination: 'one grave like another' Mazas says 'It is all the same. (…) Not half so fine as the memorials in your big town with their undying flames' (22). Mazas suggests, here, that the ideal war memorial - one which may incense one's national pride – will necessarily be located as far away as possible from a site that testifies to the materiality of death. His definition of the memorial 'flames' as 'undying' perfectly encompasses the irony at the heart of Chlumberg's play, by highlighting the subtle difference between what is 'undying' and what is 'undead': the wounded soldiers who will rise together from the common grave represent the material body of death itself. As Scarry writes, 'it may be in part precisely because *once the war has ended* the physical alterations no longer belong to two sides but seem to belong to neither or both simultaneously, that the erroneous idea can arise that injury was not, *during the war,* the central activity, or that it had nothing central to do with determining a winner and a loser, and thus comes in descriptions of war to be unrepresented […] or misrepresented'. Mazas' words in *Miracle at Verdun* thus expose the paradox of an 'undying' commemorative flame, whose

[434] Ibid.
[435] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 121.

perpetual life negates the truth: that mortal injury is one of the central and unequivocable outcomes of war.[436]

Perhaps for this reason, the undead are not summoned back to life by the force of the commemorative events that are being held across the world, but rather by an otherworldly occurrence. At night, a 'tall, upright figure' materialises under the monument which overlooks the common grave in the Verdun cemetery (33). It is the Messenger, whose identity or provenance is unclear: as Murdoch points out, the original German script defines him a *Bote*, an angel, suggesting that he is an emissary of God.[437] This evokes the religious undertones of a conversation that Vernier, himself a former soldier, had with a tourist under the same monument: there, he had spoken of the 'resurrection' of the dead as his own personal memorial wish (24). 'Awake! Men of Verdun' the Messenger calls. 'Awake! Men of the Argonne! […] Your memory is unfading: it torments the living and will not let them rest. […] They cannot rest, remembering you' (24). In this sense, the play quite literally engages with 'the problems of memory', as Murdoch has defined them; it also foregrounds memory as a problem, an issue that highlights the contradictions of the ideologically charged memorial rhetoric purported by political leaders across Europe in the previous scenes.[438] This problematic nature of institutional commemoration was well depicted in one of the American productions of Chlumberg's play, the Theatre Guild's staging of it for Martin Beck theatre in March 1931. This production was luckily documented by Roy S. Waldau, who includes a photo of the set design in a study of the Theatre Guild's 1930s work. As Waldau notes, designer Lee Simonson had placed the replica of a large (though non-descript) commemorative monument on set, which eventually would 'yawn back' to 'disgorge' the corpses of the dead soldiers in the resurrection scene.[439] Where Chlumberg's stage

[436] Ibid, 117.
[437] Murdoch, *German Literature and the First World War*, 97.
[438] Ibid, 92.
[439] Roy S. Waldau, *Vintage Years of the Theatre Guild: 1928-1939* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), 109.

directions had instead commanded that 'the monument over the common grave' eventually 'collapse', with a dull thud, at the vanishing of the Messenger, Simonson's design choice reworked this to emphasize the subtlety of Chlumberg's reflections on memorialisation (35). The undead are made to climb out of the monument, which slowly regurgitates corpses: thus, the contradictions at the heart of celebratory commemoration are manifested physically on stage, as the monument which testifies to perpetual remembrance undergoes a process of ritual and radical dismantling.[440]

The ritual dismantling of commemoration affects the funerary tradition of burial, but also – more generally –the larger societal, political, and religious order in both *Miracle at Verdun* and *Bury the Dead*. In Chlumberg's play, as French and German soldiers rise stiffly from their grave and form a united front, holding each other up as they cross the threshold of the cemetery and sustaining each other as they regain physical strength, the dead's resurrection is foregrounded as a God-ordained miracle; or rather, more poignantly, exhumation – the awakening of those who were 'buried deep beneath the earth' – is forcefully opposed to inhumation, the act of burial, in a dramatic capsizing of funerary traditions (33). Where burial is commonly understood as a rite that aids mourning and facilitates closure, the Messenger in *Miracle at Verdun* reveals it to be a symptom of 'the madness of mankind' under the regime of warfare; as he states to the dead, 'it was not according to the law of the life the Lord gave you that you went thus early into the grave: it was by your own will alone' (34). The Messenger thus presents the war as 'a frenzy' that 'devastates' the earth – in a similar way, Schelling had stated, in *Bury the Dead*, that the earth was at its breaking point, unable to sustain the frantic raging of human violence that made burial

[440] This ritual process of dismantling is interesting when filtered through the lens of the Greek tragic canon: I am thinking, particularly, of the Bacchic *sparagmos*, the ritual dismemberment performed by the Bacchae on the body of King Pentheus – the utmost representative of the state gone wrong, of governmental *hubris* – in Euripides' *Bacchae*. In this case, Dionysus spurred the Bacchae to physically undo the body of institutional power in a murderous push towards catharsis. Perhaps this is a reflection for another context, though this kind of violently physical act of dismantling resonates with both *Miracle at Verdun* and *Bury the Dead*, as plays that forcefully endeavour to imagine the collapse of an unsustainable order.

unsustainable. Against inhumation as a sinful act, the resurrection of the dead of Verdun is shown to be granted by God to the living as a form of mercy. In this sense, both plays' expressionist sensibility is most acute and recognizable in the ways in which both Shaw and Chlumberg stage a 'programmatic protest against established systems of authority, imperialism, militarism, industrialism and the values of bourgeois respectability, combined with a search for new forms of love and dignity'.[441] Starting from the premise that, through warfare, humanity has strayed so far away from itself to compromise its very essence, both plays imagine the return of the undead as marking the start of a new civilisation, where heaven – as dead soldier Driscoll dreams about in *Bury the Dead* – is '*planted* here on the earth where most of us can get a slice of it [my emphasis]' (35). The dead's view of a new world thus wishes for a heaven that is nothing more than the earth at peace: Driscoll imagines peace not as an otherworldly state, only granted by death (one of the army Captains had told him that peace could only be found in the grave), but rather as a natural condition of life on earth (24). In this sense, the vision of the dead body as crop is accompanied by an image of heaven as a living organism that can be planted, grown and nurtured. Both plays thus utilise images of burial and exhumation to craft a spectral fiction of ecological harmony, which foregrounds peace as the only sustainable option for the future.

'Tell 'em all to stand up!': Building Memory in Action

Bury the Dead and *Miracle at Verdun* stage the dead body not as illusion, hallucination, or nightmare; rather, they display it in its materiality to reprimand a social, political, and religious order that has made it possible for a devastating conflict to break out. However, they go further this: both plays imagine alternative worlds in which the dead may be the vehicles for the fulfilment of the fictive promise that this war could truly be the last, gesturing satirically to the

[441] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 130.

popular slogan 'the war that ends all war' that was so readily utilised in pro-war propaganda before and during the first years of the conflict. The ending of *Miracle at Verdun* suggests that the fear of the dead is stronger than the fear of the new, potential conflict that lurks on the horizon, because the resurrection of the dead poses a serious necropolitical threat to a socio-political order which war actually upholds. Goodwin and Bronfen are right when they write of the dead body that it is often perceived as a 'challenge to all our systems of meaning, order, governance and civilisation'.[442] Crucially, Chlumberg's dead return as a united 'social force' that bears within itself the potential to enact a revolution.[443] We understand that God has resurrected thirteen million dead, although we only see a relatively small number of them on stage: these dead are peaceful and simply wish to return home, but the playwright suggests, nodding to the gigantic absurdity of warfare, that their overwhelming number cannot but be perceived as threatening. For example, terrified shoe-maker Vadinet, who has taken over a departed soldier's shop and since married his wife too, calls to his fellow villagers to enlist in a new war: '[…] Call the living together! Call them to arms! Go!! Cry to the living throughout the land: All living men: Prepare to defend yourselves and all that is yours from the dead!!!' (79). Essentially, the living feel like they must defend themselves from a new army. The resurrected soldiers have in fact put differences of nationality and language aside, and march together as they used to lay in the common grave. Their previous allegiances are now articulated as hazy remnants of the past, which death has cancelled. When a Private Morel hoarsely asks another soldier: 'Are you a … Boche?', he receives the poignant answer: 'I was, chum. I was', before his interlocutor helps him out of the grave (35). While nationalistic rhetoric is shown to thrive in the realm of the living, the world of the dead is devoid of it and the newly resurrected soldiers have forgotten it, in favour of a new, and reformed, transnational allegiance.

[442] "Introduction" in *Death and Representation*, 4.
[443] Ibid.

The moral and physical terror that Vadinet (and others) feel at the sight of the undead rising in *Miracle at Verdun* does remind us of the dread usually associated to what Luckhurst has termed 'the dominant figure of the undead in the twenty-first century': the zombie.[444] In our contemporary imaginary, the zombie is usually an unthinking, cannibalistic and rotten body, who preys on humans and consumes them: Agnieska Soltysik Monnet notes that, from its inception rooted in Haitian folklore, the zombie had first invaded American imagination to 'represent anxieties about enslavement and loss of self'.[445] However, it became a crucial figure in the genre of the twentieth-century 'War Gothic', starting to signify 'the alienated and dispossessed body of the soldier'.[446] Indeed, Elizabeth Outka has traced the origin of the modern zombie in a kind of 'protozombie' figure that appeared in the interwar period and, specifically, in Abel Gance's film *J'Accuse*, produced in 1919 and then revived in 1938.[447] Although Outka is more interested in Gance's walking dead for the way they mirror a fear of contagion that was spreading due to the influenza pandemic, we cannot but note that Gance's film is a 'war Gothic' tale in its own right. In fact, the earlier version of the film was partially financed by the French army, which also provided several servicemen to act as extras and impersonate the living dead.[448] *J'Accuse* follows the story of a serviceman named Jean and his hopeless love for Edith, who is already promised to another man, a soldier in Jean's battalion. The film is most famous for its ending sequence, where Jean accuses the inhabitants of a village of letting down the memory of the war dead with their shameful and immoral conducts. During Jean's speech, the dead rise from their graves, their bodies still wounded, covered with mud and blood, and stumble towards the village, looking for retribution. Once they are satisfied that the villagers have learnt their lesson, and that they will

[444] Roger Luckhurst, *Zombies: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 8.
[445] Agnieska Soltysik Monnet, "Gothic and War, 1930-1991" in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic Volume 3: Gothic in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 104.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Outka, *Viral Modernism*, 216.
[448] Martin Hurcombe, "Visual Representations of the Combatant's Body in Interwar France", *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 1, no 2 (2008), 160.

fulfil their promise of honouring their memory through their actions, the corpses return to their graves. A large Crucifix looms over the film's last shot, which closes on a note that, according to Outka, signals both 'memorial' and 'warning'.[449] For Outka, proto-zombie narratives of this kind essentially aimed at generating comfort, rather than anxiety: it is precisely the terrifying and 'threatening' nature of the undead bodies that allow their eventual 'reburial' to wield such a consolatory effect.[450]

Jay Winter and Martin Hurcombe have also commented upon *J'Accuse*'s iconic ending, suggesting that the Crucifix that signals the bodies' return to the grave may even offer an image of 'redemption', where 'it is possible for the viewing public to justify the cost of the conflict in their future conduct'.[451] While much of *J'Accuse*'s premise resonates with *Miracle at Verdun*, Chlumberg's play does not necessarily envision the eventual return of the undead to the darkness of their grave as truly redemptive for the living, and no sacrifice in conflict is truly justified. Instead, the play fashions war as an original sin that cannot be shed, and the 'Special Memorial Services held in [the dead's] honour' as the ideological, cursed fuel which perpetuates it (117). As Government official Steppach points out towards the end, in fact, 'the fundamental factor in the war economy is and must for ever be – the periodical war' (118). The inevitability of war as a circular and recurring catastrophe is *Miracle at Verdun*'s darkly ironic morale: the peaceful army of the dead has been mobilised by none other than God, and for what? We may read the sense of enraged disillusionment that pulsates throughout the play still as partially coherent with the proto-zombie narratives of the interwar period; according to Outka, such narratives' exercise of 'imagining' the return of the dead ultimately 'provided a new storyline and an outlet for anger

[449] Outka, *Viral Modernism*, 227.
[450] Ibid, 200.
[451] Hurcombe, "Visual Representations", 163. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Winter argues that the film ended on an image of Christ on the Cross to invite the French public to meditate on what 'redemption' would imply, although Winter is clear that the film cannot be read separately from its propagandist endeavour. See Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 136.

and guilt that might otherwise be unexpressed'.[452] However, in *Miracle at Verdun*, Chlumberg invites us to imagine the return of the dead as a recurring event, and not simply in virtue of the play's identity as a performance that will be repeated: the same rules, he suggests, regulate the 'theatre' of war. If war continues to exist, then grief and mourning so powerful to shake God's will into reviving the dead will continue to exist, too. Even when the threat of an invasion of the undead is warded off, the undead's existence remains a contradiction whose roots lie in the inevitable and recurring experience of collective mourning; in this sense, a new return of the undead is perhaps always lurking on the horizon. As Marie Mulvey-Roberts has noted, in Gothic war narratives, fictions of the undead corpse have often been employed to paint a picture of war itself as a vampiric, blood-sucking event: within this framework, *Miracle at Verdun* foregrounds the body politic as more of a monster than any undead soldier will ever be. [453]

In *Bury the Dead*, too, the exposure of the soldiers' corpses foreshadows the breakdown of the American social order. In this case, though, this breakdown is fulfilled, and the promise of a new order materialised. In virtue of their being dead, the rebel soldiers of *Bury the Dead* gain a position of privilege in the fight for pacifism and in the successful spurring of a revolution; death grants them epistemological enlightenment. 'I got things to say to the people who leave their lives behind them and pick up guns to fight in somebody else's war' says Private Driscoll to his sister Katherine 'Big things. Big enough to lift me out of the grave right back onto the earth into the middle of men just because I got the voice to say them' (35). Here, Driscoll claims that he

[452] Outka, *Viral Modernism*, 242.

[453] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicizing the Gothic Corporeal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 179. Mulvey-Robert's analysis is helpful in this case chiefly because it allows us to think back to Robins Millar's Gothic vignette for *Forward*, and to the socialist undertones of that precise Gothic image. Mulvey-Robert, too, writes about the ways in which Communist anti-war rhetoric mobilised Gothic images of vampires and undead corpses in the 1930s, reworking Karl Marx's view of 'Capital as dead labour' to fashion war itself as a vampire. See Mulvey-Robert, *Dangerous Bodies*, 208. Both Chlumberg and Shaw might have been familiar with this discourse, given their associations with left-wing political groups in the interwar period; we cannot know this for sure, but their dramatic efforts certainly indirectly resonate with this rhetoric. In general, although Shaw once stated that he was 'not a pacifist', the use of the corpse in both these plays is intended to spark a critique against militarism. Shnayerson writes about Shaw's laborious relationship with left-wing politics in his biography. See Shnayerson, *Irwin Shaw*, 68.

has been given a 'voice' to spread the word against the business of war. Instead of arresting the body's functions, death has – in this case – literally strengthened their power. Like in the world of the Bakhtinian grotesque, 'death becomes a moment of life', where the body stretches so far beyond its own confines that it threatens to 'swallow up the world'.[454] The play once again shows us that there is a certain menace encompassed in this notion, a menace strong enough to send the entire United States into a frenzy. 'They're coming! We must stop them!' scream the voices of terrified citizens (44). A series of frantic spotlights focus on different groups of people in turn, showing that their reactions to the idea of the coming of the undead is, essentially, the same: priests, famers, newsboys, academics all agree that they must be buried, although they all have different ideas on how to get them to return to the ground. Chaos unfolds on the stage, as the Church invokes exorcisms to purge the corpses from the influence of the devil and get them 'to lie down in their graves like children to a pleasant sleep rising no more to trouble the world of the living' (43). All it takes is for the dead to refuse the grave to turn them from tragic figures, signifiers of the bravery and sacrifice of the United States, to detestable demons who foreshadow the coming of Judgement Day. The dead have become blasphemous Christ-like prophets; in this, *Bury the Dead* can be fully inscribed into an expressionist tradition that makes heavy and periodical use of the 'Christ image' in performance.[455]

However, the uncovering of war's (and society's) monstrous side is not the only revolutionary achievement of the undead soldiers in the play. Drawing on theatre's liminal handling of the body, the play cements the idea that there is an essential kinship to be found between the living and the dead during a conflict. This translates into an overt celebration of the individual bonds between soldiers, both living and dead, and takes the form of a solid alliance that places both categories together in opposition to their superiors, be them army generals or state representatives. Shaw establishes the roots of this alliance early on, where the terrified

[454] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317.
[455] Christopher Innes, *Avant-Garde Theatre, 1892 – 1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), 45.

soldiers of the burial party are addressed directly by the corpses that refuse their services. 'Stay with us' pleads one of the corpses. 'Don't be afraid of us' says another. 'Are you afraid of six dead men?' one corpse finally asks. 'You, who've lived with the dead, the so-many dead, and eaten your bread by their side when there was no time to bury them and you were hungry?' (11). At these words, the living soldiers stop backing away from the half-dug graves. 'Talk as our equals' one of the corpses incites them, until one of the living soldiers tentatively asks whether any of the dead might care for a cigarette (11). Thus, the dead invite their living companions to acknowledge the similarity between them: the play lays the groundwork for the dramatic exploration of the feeling of precarity that permeated the everyday life of the soldier at the front.

Crucially, the body itself testifies to this precarity: the soldiers live *with* death, existing within a 'zombie time' where death inhabits their body before it undoes it.[456] Death may come 'tomorrow', or 'the next day', as one of the corpses gently explains to the living soldiers, and it makes no difference: I would argue that it is precisely this idea of the body already holding death *within* it that illuminates the play's political message, while also pointing to the imaginative and radical potentialities of performance as an art relying on embodiment. Shaw never gives any indication, in the stage directions, of how the wounds afflicting the undead might be represented: this is left open to interpretation.[457] These men, who have reportedly died of terrible injuries, may well be physically indistinguishable from the other living privates with whom they interact: this uniformity is in keeping with the play's expressionist bending of naturalistic rules of

[456] "Zombie time" has been conceptualised in the field of contemporary radical performance studies: Martin O'Brien coined the expression in the context of his artistic practice as a person struggling with chronic illness, where "death is keenly felt […] as something we are constantly living through". See Martin O'Brien, "You are my death: the shattering temporalities of zombie time", *Wellcome Open Research* 5, no 135 (2020): 3.

[457] Contemporary productions, such as Joe Calarco's 2008 show for Connelly Theatre in New York and Rafaella Marcus' 2018 show for Finborough Theatre in London, have avoided any overt sign of wounding or have stylised and uniformised the look of the soldiers' wounded bodies. In Marcus' production, for example, a subtle trickle of blood was sown on the fabric of each dead soldier's uniform to differentiate them from their living counterparts. For a review of this show, see Hailey Bachrach, "Review: Bury the Dead at Finborough Theatre", *Exeunt Magazine,* Nov 2, 2018, accessed Apr 8, 2019, Review: Bury the Dead at Finborough Theatre - Exeunt Magazine.

representation, but it can also be read as a nod to the way in which theatre, as a means of representation as well as narration, is uniquely placed to convey death's parasitic pervasiveness in times of war, that sense of embodied death that assails the soldier.

The front as depicted of *Bury the Dead* is thus populated by soldiers who live at one with death; yet the playwright suggests that it is precisely in this perceived impossibility to separate the dead from the living that we can locate the potential for the capsizing of this status quo. This is evident in the last scene of the play, in which the six corpses finally stand up, engaging in a slow march that aims to annihilate and belittle the representatives of those ruling classes that used to oppress them. When one of the Generals succumbs to a fit of hysteria and starts firing at them with a machine gun, they simply 'walk soberly' towards him, 'obscuring him' as they pass him. At the sight of this, the living soldiers also 'break ranks' (46). They walk like the dead have walked, until 'the last Soldier, as he passes the Third General, deliberately but without malice flicks a cigarette butt at him, then follows the other Soldiers off the stage' (46). The General is thus left alone on stage, 'huddled over his quiet gun, pointed at the empty grave, as the light dims – in the silence' (46). The march of the dead emphasizes, and eventually triggers, the uselessness of weapons, as the corpses and their living allies walk unscathed and unphased by the General's machine gun. 'Huddled' over it, the General remains powerless, as the new silence reveals the ceasing of warmongering and the beginning of a new, non-violent uprising. The army of the dead has recruited the living: this alliance foreshadows the eventual capsizing and redistribution of power on a larger scale. The dead bodies, solemn and shattered, are, like Bakhtin would put it, 'in the act of becoming': as they march, they 'build and create another body', that of a revolution to come.[458] The physical nearness between the living and dead privates, like the blurred boundaries between the dead and the living body, testifies to the expressionist tendency to dramatically emphasize 'the pathos of human brotherhood'.[459]

[458] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317.
[459] Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, 130.

It is fair to say *Bury the Dead* displays a hyper-awareness that soldiering is indeed its own form of class struggle. Marx and Engels had famously used the figure of the soldier as a rhetorical device: in *The Communist Manifesto*, we read that 'masses of labourers […] are organized like soldiers. […] Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State: they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the over-looker, and, above all, by the individual manufacturer himself'.[460] If it is then true that war is one of capitalism's monsters, then *Bury the Dead* suggests that, as disposable weapons at the hands of the warmongers, the living soldiers' existence is close to the dead's on yet another level.[461] Shaw effectively wrote a piece of openly left-wing theatre, which encouraged the *pièce*'s success with radical and socialist theatre companies across America, Europe, and Australia in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War, where fascist pressures were mounting worldwide.[462] In the United Kingdom, the play was performed by the Unity Theatre and the Left Book Club Theatre Group in London; both had links to the Communist Party of Great Britain and took *Bury the Dead* under their wing between 1938 and 1939, cherishing the play's skill in discussing 'the problem of war in its very widest aspects'.[463] In particular, the play was appreciated for its capacity to provoke both intellectual and emotional reactions in its audiences, leaving spectators in tears and, simultaneously, ready to support pacifist politics. In fact, when the play appeared in the *New Theatre Journal*, it was prefaced by a statement which revealed its purpose was not only to harrow its spectators, but to 'affect their lives'. [464] 'If it can draw masses of people into the militant

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[460] Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, 2018), 14.

[461] On the long connections between the monster, violence and the modern phases of capitalism see Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) and David McNally's *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011).

[462] Critic Robert Garland wrote that 'nobody has seen fit to deny that Mr Shaw's is one of the most stirring plays ever fashioned by an American, even at the same time it is one of the most dramatically denunciatory of the anti-war, anti-munition makers, anti-jingo dramas'. He then added: 'the simplicity and honesty of Shaw's approach make it a forceful pacifist cry as well as effective theatre'. See Milner, "A Great Anti-War Play,40.

[463] Ibid, 44.

[464] Milner, "A Great Anti-War Play", 42.

struggle being waged against the forces of militarism by such organisations such as the American League against War and Fascism and the American Student Union', the statement continued 'it will have fulfilled the prime aim of its young author. *Bury the Dead* should stir two particular classes of people to action: the students, and all those who depend on their labour, manual or otherwise, for their living'.[465] In the words of Shaw's biographer, the roots of the play's success did not lie in its theatrical merits – though it had many – but rather in the journey that led it to become 'an international symbol of the peace movement'.[466]

With this chapter, I have aimed to offer a glimpse into the representational solutions that dramatists found for the ghosts of the war dead outside of the British context. As we have seen, these solutions have their roots in the concerns of the expressionist movement, but also mine the aesthetic terrain of the 'war Gothic' genre, drawing on images of zombie invasions and the resurrection of the undead; while *Miracle at Verdun* imagines that the potential return of the undead that is eventually warded off, situating the play in closer contact with popular proto-zombie narratives such as Abel Gance's film *J'Accuse*, *Bury the Dead* leaves us with an image of a burgeoning revolution to come. Both plays, though, offer a vision of death that is essentially un-sanitised and unapologetic. I have begun the chapter by mentioning the popularity of the 'sleeping soldier' trend in instances of monumental commemoration: to this image of enchanted stillness, both *Miracle at Verdun* and *Bury the Dead* counterpose a sense that memory is not built in stillness, but rather in action. Memorialisation thus does not take place as part of a status quo that looks ahead to 'the periodical war', as one of the state officials in *Miracle at Verdun* defines it; rather, memorialisation implies a radical capsizing of the status quo itself, beginning with the phenomenal return of the dead body. In *Bury the Dead*, a woman named Martha asks the corpse of her husband why he is 'standing up' against injustice only after death (41). The answer her husband gives her fashions death as the threshold beyond which a form of truth is finally

[465] Ibid, 41, 42.
[466] Ibid, 57.

accessible: 'I didn't see it before' (41). Martha knows that it is 'about time' for the return of the undead: 'Tell 'em *all* to stand up!' is her last fervent injunction to her husband (41). This a*ll* points, for Martha, not simply to the contingent of the dead, but that of the living too: here, again, we notice a sense of memorial urgency that addresses the possibility of society's rebirth beyond burial. Though in the play, ironically enough, there has been no burial at all, for the dead have refused it. Both plays, in different ways, propose an image of pacifism that, like warfare, is strongly dependent on the dead body as it is handled *after* the event of killing. Here, the return of the undead essentially negates 'the logic of martyrdom' that sustains warfare and some instances of celebratory commemoration, in which 'the body's matter', as argued by Mbembe, 'can be deduced not from its character as a thing but from a transcendental *nomos* outside it'; to this notion of transcendence these two plays oppose a staging of death in which the ghost is no more stuck 'between the grave and the stars'.[467] For the sake of the warding off of the next war, the spirit has finally been made flesh.

[467] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 89.

CONCLUSION

we're here because we're here

One of my visits to the University of York's Alfred Peacock archive unearthed a fascinating item from under a pile of fragile papers concerning one Clarence Long of Bradford, who had been taken prisoner in a German war camp during the First World War. Between 1932 and 1952, Long had not written much about the war: only two poems overtly reference his wartime experiences. One of them is a curious piece titled 'Witch's Curse'. Like Robins Millar's vignette for *Forward*, this poem also constructs a Gothic frame: its witch-like speaker, with incantatory tones, calls for the buried dead to return and 'haunt' the 'master-man of master race' responsible for the war's unimaginable devastation, which has transformed land after land into a hellscape resounding with the cries of the dead. The poem recites: 'from Poland, rotting human bones/From France and other ravaged lands,/Discordant, awful dying groans/And blood stained dust from desert sands;/These I will boil, encant and curse/Thy master-man of master-race/To haunt thee far beyond thy hearse'.[468] Notably, the witch is not fashioning the raw materials needed for the spell out of thin air, but rather working with what is already there: the war's legacy are masses of bones, the groans of the dying, the blood on a desert's sand. The poem wishes for a haunting that may plague the living as well as the dead; 'beyond the hearse' there shall be no peace for the warmongers, except an afterlife of inextinguishable guilt. A sense of necropolitical justice is evoked: where death might be seen to level the inequalities that saw so many deaths fuel nationalistic and economic profit, during a novel war of unprecedented brutality, Long wishes for haunting instead. These undead beings, made of pain and wounded flesh, join the procession evoked by Shaw and Chlumberg. Also, like the ghosts of the Menin Road in *The Road of Poplars*, they draw strength from the ravaged land in which they were forced

[468] Clarence Long, typescript of "Witch's Curse", *Alfred Peacock Archive*, PEA Box 1, Borthwick Archive at the University of York, York. Accessed May 9, 2020.

to lie, and the poem ventriloquizes their voices, imagining them as finally able to control their own memorialisation. In Long's vengeful fantasy, this reappropriation of control marks the violated body of the dead of war as its own form of monument. This vision complements well the themes and concerns I have explored in this project: here, like in my corpus, the (mostly absent) body of the dead is sought for, mobilised and then memorialised through a literary imaginary that relies on spectral solutions.

Throughout this thesis, I have considered texts and performances that deal with layers of remoteness and distance. The distance, for example, between the intensity of grief and the void left by bodies absent and unrecoverable, which has culminated in the theatrical (and, in the case of Long, poetic) retrieval of the hurt body as memorial; I have posited that the ghost play offered, in the interwar period, an ideal locus for the imagined breaching of this distance. As such, the theatrical ghost was conceptualised both as a mirror held up to the incorporeality of First World War deaths and, at the same time, as a corporeal solution that addressed a necessity for memorial representation that complemented monumental and funerary practices. By reading these plays together, I have considered various ways in which the tensions at the heart of war memory were addressed by both small-scale and large-scale popular theatre in the interwar period. I have argued that the dramatic ghosts deployed by these playwrights, in virtue of the versatility of the spectral metaphor, are able to navigate the anxious temporalities of the interwar period. This was a period in which the memory of war both too close *and* too remote a thing – the ghost makes manifest the fears of a widespread forgetfulness, while also signalling an inability to let go of the conflict and look decisively to a future ahead. For this reason, my work has reflected on commemoration as a fundamental framework to understand the ties between these texts; as commemorative efforts rely simultaneously on community, retrospection and perdurance, I have argued that spectres served these playwrights to conceptualise a sense of just how central, haunting, and diffuse a concern the memorialisation of the dead was for the interwar collective consciousness. This is not simply because the dead were many, or because

many soldiers – as we have seen – were missing, their absence giving way to fantastical images of spectral retrieval in literature and popular culture. It is also because a sense of spectrality extended to the living. As such, the progression of this thesis has aimed to show that the figure of the ghost is also intimately bound with images of ruins and ruination. Beryl Pong has written eloquently about ruins that 'they signify the persistence of something beyond its time: life'.[469] I hope to have shown that ruins stand in close conceptual relationship with the rising, rebellious dead of Chapter Four: unburied and unreconstructed, they draw attention to our discomfort with what the dead may signify for our lives, what they might reveal about ourselves, our histories and our institutions, and the injunctions they might pass on to us. Ruins point to all this fear, but they also contain the possibility of reconstruction. Against images of futures past, and futureless characters, the mosaic formed by these ghost plays complicates our existing notions of modernism and lays out a new genre of modernist memorial literature: these plays foreground both funerary and memorial practices as cultural sites of political struggle while identifying this struggle as one we must take on. In virtue of this, the thesis has aimed to address spectrality beyond the history of the spiritualist revival: I have argued that tracing the literary history of the ghost in the interwar period foregrounds the memorial potentialities inherent to the living body, and that a study of theatre and performance is productive within this framework. These plays are precious examples of a kind of memorial literature that relies on the mechanics of theatre performance (and the spectral notions of possession, ventriloquism and haunting that theatre necessarily evokes) to find a catharsis, a form of resolution in unprecedented times of bereavement.

I have argued that studying these exceptional plays allows us to think about the logic of the memorial, and about questions surrounding commemoration that are still relevant today. These playwrights were ahead of their time in pointing to the untended gaps within established,

[469] Pong, *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime*, 182.

institutional memorial practices, and in attempting to find solutions that proved attentive to the unsettling affective realm that accompanies the memorial impulse.[470] All these plays look back into the wartime past to look forward; this, as we have seen, is intrinsic to memorial rituals. However, what the spectres within these texts allow us to see is a notion of memorial futurity built upon the fear of another war to come. This corpus of plays struck me because, as I started to unearth the threads that connect the plays to one another, I could see that it almost performs an act of exorcism: there is a dissonant, almost frantic urgency about these idiosyncratic texts that foregrounds the need to imagine a future free from grief, pain and violence while also recognizing that something – the next war, the next conflict, the next catastrophe – must be continuously warded off. This thesis has only scratched the surface of the enormously complex connections that one can make between popular culture, literary production, and the logic of the memorial: it has attempted to begin a reflection on the ways in which literature, entertainment and performance can deepen and even create alternative possibilities for memorialisation and the management of grief. I have been fascinated, sometimes frustrated, by these ghosts. I have also been moved, touched, and upset by them. It was humbling to recognize that, despite all their ancient guises, ghosts still hold surprises and new, unique identities.

There are countless philosophical, literary, and political reasons why ghosts have been conjured or exorcised throughout history. Confronting this corpus, though, allows us to step back into a more fluid, shifting terrain: it allows us to see the ghost before it becomes an accomplished metaphor, and before all the reasons for its appearance are quite conceptualised enough to reach theoretical power. These plays are difficult to read: they are convoluted, resistant and indecisive texts, heterogenous and clumsy. Crucially, as I have written in the introduction, the spectrality contained in these works does not, in most cases, feel like a deconstructive tool, an artistic affectation or even a rhetorical flare: it feels, instead, like a

[470] In his recent book, *Monuments as Cultural and Critical Objects*, Tom Houlton foregrounds the necessity to keep thinking about the exclusionary politics of memorial practices, especially monumentality.

universally understood translation of the uncanny, complex and problematic realm of memory into art. Literature that testifies to memorialisation in practice, I found, reads strangely, like a curious, half-formed thing, and it is often left to rest in the archive as if the archive itself was a monument or – to use Nora's words – a *lieu de memoire*, filled with 'relics' of memory. Yet, as I have explored throughout the thesis, burial is rarely final, and ghosts are rarely exorcised for good. So, in 2016, artist Jeremy Deller, in conjunction with Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the National Theatre (later joined by other major theatres across the United Kingdom) set out to stage what he called 'a contemporary memorial': this performance saw '1,4000 voluntary participants dressed in First World War uniforms' walk into crowded streets, stations and shopping malls.[471] Mostly in silence, sometimes humming the phrase 'we're here because we're here' to the melody of Aud Lang Syne, the actors held slips of paper with soldiers' names, age, and date of death at the Somme in their pockets and handed them out to whoever spoke to them.

We could imagine these contemporary revenant soldiers, too, joining the procession evoked by Shaw; in the soldiers of *Bury the Dead* stepping off stage and walking on, away from the front, we may read the conceptual roots of Deller's performance art. 'we're here because we're here' collects notions of spectral return, possession, haunting and resurrection to confront us with the implications of witnessing a traumatic past as it resurfaces into the present. Crucially, the silence practiced by Deller's apparitions, who are simply here 'because [they're] here', holds a mirror up to our tendency to make the ghost speak, to make it signify; this is a form of self-reflection that my interwar corpus also engages with. Deller's work attempted to question memorial traditions while overtly partaking in them (it was performed on July 1st, 2016, the commemorative date for the battle of the Somme): as such, it is a fitting contemporary addition to this thesis' case studies. I have attempted to demonstrate that the problematic memorial

[471] "we're here because we're here", *14-18 NOW: WW1 Centenary Art Commissions,* n.d., accessed May 3, 2022, 'we're here because we're here' (becausewearehere.co.uk).

impulse of my interwar corpus is expressed by the figure of the ghost as a thing that escapes categorisation. In their handling of the wartime past, these plays do still speak of interwar Britain like no other text I have ever encountered: I hope to have demonstrated that a study of these interwar ghost plays captures a discomfort with the memorialisation of the First World War that started then but that is not done haunting us.

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