



COMING OF AGE: THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN BRITISH FICTION, 1989-2014

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Abstract

This thesis breaks with conventional distinctions between British adult and young adult fiction to offer a comparative study of ‘coming of age’ in the historical novel since the late 1980s. 1989 marks the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and the symbolic end of the Cold War. It inaugurates a period of reflection in Britain on the relationship between the past and the future that centres on tropes of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and personal growth. Drawing on Erik Erikson’s theory of ‘identity crisis’, I bundle these manifold tropes together under the heading ‘coming of age’ in order to focus on these identities as transitional states of *becoming* rather than *being*.

My thesis is split into four chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of coming of age. In Chapter 1, I define the nineties’ shift, arguing that Pat Barker’s *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-5) and Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* (1993) explore coming of age and the war in relation to a growing concern over the stability of adulthood and the past. In Chapter 2, I demonstrate that young adult fiction takes up the themes discussed in the previous chapter, but presents it more explicitly in terms of the transition from adolescent to adult. Michael Morpurgo’s *Private Peaceful* (2002) and Linda Newbery’s *The Shell House* (2003) in different ways engage with the teenage reader negotiating the present through reading about the First World War. Chapter 3 sustains this focus on young adult fiction, moving onto a discussion of coming of age in national contexts. Drawing on the work of Bryan Turner and others, I argue that Linda Newbery’s *Some Other War* (1990), Theresa Breslin’s *Remembrance* (2002) and Marcus Sedgwick’s *The Foreshadowing* (2005) use the First World War to explore new ideas of citizenship in the context of gender and participation. Chapter 4 looks at adult novels which reflect on the First World War in relation to contemporary protagonists. Drawing on Svetlana Boym’s theory of nostalgia, I argue that Pat Barker’s *Another World* (1998) and Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Stranger’s Child* (2011) question whether it is desirable to reconstruct past models of masculinity and family.

This thesis offers a new framework for thinking about the place of the First World War in contemporary British culture, in relation to shifting cultural constructions of adulthood, adolescence and British identity in the nineties and beyond.

For my parents, with love and thanks
&
For Zoe, for always.

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Introduction

0.1 Coming of age after the short twentieth century

My thesis argues that from the 1990s into the first decade of the twenty-first century, the First World War is culturally reimagined as a site for the exploration of coming of age. It extends previous work done on novels and representations of the war of this period by focusing on their overlooked but insistent emphasis on exploring the instability and uncertainty of the transition into and establishment of adulthood. There has been little work done on the thematic connections between adult and young adult fiction, particularly on comparisons between representations of the First World War in the two categories.¹ It is through reading the two alongside each other that the theme of coming of age becomes most apparent as a feature of contemporary representations of the conflict. Normative models of adulthood in the twentieth century assume a correlation between the subjective experience and the social expectations of coming of age.² The increasing disconnect between the lived and the expected results in identity crises and an increasing sense of instability. Adult and young adult fiction place different emphases on the individual experience as opposed to the social expectations of coming of age, but both respond to a sense of disruption between the two modes. It is in analysing the responses to these crises of identity and transitions that different approaches to the possibility and desirability of stable models of adulthood are revealed. Setting the characters' coming of age against the backdrop of the First World War further heightens the stakes of their identity crises, drawing a parallel between the 1910s and the end of the century which emphasises a sense of transition and loss of certainty. Correspondingly, these are novels about the possibility of transforming self and society.

The nineties and first decades of the twenty-first century are a period of transition which sees conceptions of adulthood, youth and childhood shift without necessarily transforming into new models. I have chosen a range of novels from across the decades as

¹ Work such as Esther MacCallum-Stewart's article on the representation of the First World War in children's fiction implicitly compares children's novels to adult novels, but does not create a sustained comparison. Kristine Miller's article on children's and adult representations of the Second World War lays the groundwork for the kind of analysis I do in this thesis, but in a shorter, more limited form. See Miller, 'Ghosts, Gremlins, and 'the War on Terror' in Children's Blitz Fiction' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 2009 Fall, Vol.34 (3), pp.272-284; MacCallum-Stewart, "'If they ask us why we died': Children's Literature and the First World War, 1970-2005' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* 2007 Apr, Vol. 31(2), pp.176-88.

² Experiential aspects of coming of age include: self-determination, sexual awakening and defying parents. Expectations include: acquiring political rights, leaving home and starting a new family.

examples of this, from the new First World War writing classics, *Birdsong* (1993) and *The Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-5), to the latter period novels, *Another War* (1998) and *The Stranger's Child* (2011). The young adult novels span a similar time frame, from *Some Other War* (1990) to *The Shell House* (2002), *Private Peaceful* (2003), *Remembrance* (2003) and *The Foreshadowing* (2005). I am interested in mapping the ways in which these novels both problematize and try to resolve the gap between the individual's experience of becoming or being an adult, and societal acknowledgement, expectation and structural markers of adulthood.³ The First World War is a crucial site for this exploration. Participation in the war presumed a unified movement into adulthood for its young soldiers, as suggested by the sentiment 'the army will make a man out of you'. The role of the soldier with its attendant outward signifiers – most obviously the uniform – furthermore indicates that social expectations of adulthood have been fulfilled. Yet the war also displaces individuals and puts them through experiences which cannot be easily mapped onto a vision of coming of age, nor can they easily be translated into a conception of adulthood. Thus these coming of age narratives repeatedly return to a feeling of disconnect between experience and expectation. I argue that this disconnect is a central focus of the fiction of the nineties and noughties, reflecting what sociologist Alan France calls 'the age of uncertainty', a period of increased national concern about the transition from adolescence to adulthood and the definition of adulthood itself.⁴

Transitions and how they are negotiated are at the centre of this thesis. My chosen starting point of 1989 is significant in this context. In 1993, Eric Hobsbawm coined the term 'the short twentieth century' to describe the period between 1914 and 1989. I use this term to gesture at the nineties' reappraisal of the twentieth century, and the First World War's centrality to this project.⁵ The description also marks the nineties out as a transitional moment: 1990 is positioned as the beginning of a new world order, which has yet to be fully realised.⁶ This dual interest in reassessing the past and imagining the future

³ Rachel Falconer's discussion of the kidult phenomenon is particularly relevant to the literary expression of this; see *The Crossover Novel* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.36.

⁴ Alan France, *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007). The title of his chapter on youth and adolescence in the nineties is 'Youth transitions in the age of uncertainty', p.59.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2009 (1994)), p.3.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama's *The End of the History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012 (1992)) is a useful reference point for this period; in this book, alongside his earlier article, 'The End of History?', published in 1989, he makes an argument for needing new frameworks for approaching the future, one which was based on a more stable worldview. See p.xi-xxiii; p.12. This strikes me as a *particularly* nineties' argument: defining the twentieth century as a century of violence and failure, but ultimately creating a narrative of

is further shaped by a series of anniversaries in the early nineties: the Somme, the end of the war, and the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day. It is in this context that the First World War again becomes a relevant and potentially revelatory site through which the transition into this new period can be understood.⁷ The war allows for the exploration of violence, warfare and trauma, but it is also a space for engaging with social and cultural changes in terms of art forms, gender roles and class positions, as well as the perceived shift of political power from elites to the people. This movement in the war's meaning is reflected in its literary representation during this period: Sharon Ouditt and Dan Todman argue that the nineties' boom of novels about the war responds to the increased interest in shell-shock, family history and the First World War which came about in the late eighties.⁸ The nineties' literary output is understood in this thesis to be a culmination of *and response to* the anxieties and identity crises which come out of social and political turmoil and change in Britain through the postwar period. This concern with transition in the representation of the war in the nineties is reflected in my term for this period of publishing: the nineties' shift.

The term 'nineties' shift' also indicates that the war itself becomes a coming of age 'event' in the 1990s and early 2000s. In making this claim, I draw on arguments such as those of Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, who argue that the 1990s provides a vantage point from which to take stock of the century.⁹ I expand this understanding of the war, suggesting that in both fictional and historical representations in the 1990s and early 2000s, the war is reimagined as a transitional period – a period of national, social and political coming of age. This reimagining necessarily happens in the context of previous representations and interpretations of the conflict: the mythology of the First World War.

progressive improvement, with an argument undermined by its lack of acknowledgement of uncertainties and complexities in both its reading of the past and the future.

⁷ T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper in particular articulate this sense of the reconfiguration of the First World War, positioning it as the beginning of a century of conflict and the war through which other wars are read in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.6-11. Ross J Wilson describes the war's continued presence in British culture as 'a haunting' in reference to its continued emotional affect in *Cultural Heritage of the Great War in Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p.1.

⁸ Sharon Ouditt, 'Myths, Memories and Monuments: Reimagining the Great War' in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ed. Vincent Sherry, pp.245-60, p.245; Dan Todman, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p.146. Virginie Renard has traced this wave back to a smaller trickle of First World War fiction in the eighties, but it is in the early nineties that First World War novels begin to accrue critical acclaim and a broad readership, and significantly begins to engage in a more sustained way with these themes of transition, change and memory's role in coming of age; significantly, of her 16 novels, only 4 were published before 1989, see *The Great War and Postmodern Memory* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013), p.16.

⁹ Emmanuel Sivan and Jay Winter, 'Setting the Framework' in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.6-39, p.8.

This mythology surrounding the war changes and adapts, bringing coming of age to the forefront. I use the term ‘mythology’, rather than ‘myth’, both to indicate that I am engaging with the war’s cultural afterlives as well as the historical event, and to suggest that there are a multiplicity of myths at work in these novels.¹⁰ Through this mythology, the novels present the war’s impact on society as a whole reflected and reflecting its impact on characters’ individual lives in the novels. Subsequently, the question of whether the disconnection between social and individual experience and expectation can be negotiated and resolved is potentially equally urgent for individuals and society alike. The transitional and shifting nature of these representations is informed by the changing meanings of adulthood and adolescence in this period.¹¹ For the novels under discussion in this thesis, the disruption of the war challenges old models of coming of age, mirroring the disconnect of experience and expectation with the binaries of the war’s mythology: between young and old, home front and front lines. Thus the novels fluctuate between the most basic normative form of structural coming of age, where children become adults when they take on adult roles in terms of creating new families, new homes, and new professional roles, and a model of coming of age which focuses more on the subjective experience of coming of age and the potential for that experience to disrupt normative expectation.

My argument builds on previous studies of the literature of this period, including Barbara Korte’s survey of the fiction of the early nineties, ‘The Grandfather’s War’ (2001) and Virginie Renard’s monograph, *The Great War and Postmodern Memory* (2013), both of which discuss texts covered in this thesis.¹² Renard’s and Korte’s [studies are work is](#)-indicative in [their](#) focus on representations of the past in the context of myth, memory, family history, as well as the political uses of past to illuminate present tensions around class, gender and sexuality.¹³ Their work also draws attention to the

¹⁰ My usage of myth is indebted to the definition given by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 1972 (1993)), p.119

¹¹ Both wave and boom are commonly used to describe the sixties and nineties’ periods of increased interest in the First World War. See for example Stephen Heathorn’s ‘The Mnemonic Turn in the Cultural Historiography of Britain’s Great War’ in *The Historical Journal* (48(4), 2005), Graham Galer’s ‘Myths of the Western Front’ in *Global Society* (18(2), 2004), pp.175-95. This periodisation also means this thesis spans period between the 75th and 100th anniversary of the start of the war.

¹² Barbara Korte, ‘The Grandfather’s War’ in *Retrovisions* (London: Pluto Press, 2001) ed. Imelda Whelehan, Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, p.120-31. See also Ouditt’s article ‘Myths, Memories and Monuments: Reimagining the Great War’ pp.245-60.

¹³ See also James Campbell’s article, ‘Interpreting the Great War’ in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature of the First World War*, p.261-79, which also outlines the shifting critical focus from canon creation, through gender and sexuality to form and memory.

centrality of memory and trauma theory both to the novels themselves and to the criticism of them. My thesis' focus on coming of age links these novels to contemporary social concerns about youth and adulthood, adding another dimension to these themes which have rightly dominated the conversation about the literature of this period. Furthermore, the concern in memory and trauma studies with national identity and personal experience is here reconfigured through the lens of social expectation and individual experience of coming of age, allowing me to intervene in debates about the war's function in British national identity.¹⁴

In this thesis, I argue that reading British adult and young adult novels through the framework of coming of age reveals textual anxieties about the changing expectations and experience of adulthood and adolescence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In this way, I seek to reframe debates about how the war is remembered and represented. History, in these novels, is called on to variously shape and explain the present, to provide models for the successful consolidation of identity, or as a space for tracing an origin for the coming of age disconnect which becomes such a crucial concern in the novels of the nineties and beyond. This interpretation also draws attention to the centrality of transition in representations of the First World War. As I show, historical setting and its mythology add urgency, embedding the processes of transition in discussions of social responsibility, nostalgia, national identity and memory, and the increased uncertainty of adulthood.

0.2 Defining coming of age

Coming of age is the process of moving into a new state, encompassing the adolescent transition, and its imagined end point: adulthood.¹⁵ In defining coming of age, the construction of this end point as a norm is particularly relevant.¹⁶ As I indicated above,

¹⁴ In doing this, I am drawing on Jed Esty's reading of the *Bildungsroman* as shoring up the certainty of adulthood and nation by making them contingent on each other. Coming of age is productive for the writers discussed in this thesis precisely because it has a literary history of being associated with the stability of society and nation. See *Unseasonable Youth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.4, 17, 26.

¹⁵ In terms of framing this definition, sociologist Jens Qvortrup's understanding of children as human becoming has been particularly useful. He argues that in seeing children as human becoming, childhood and adolescence become a process of potentiality which *becomes* fully human when he or she reaches adulthood. Qvortrup is rightly critical of this idea, but he points to its cultural ubiquity, and it is productive to consider the way in which coming of age is shaped by futurity; coming of age is the promise of adulthood. See for example his article: 'Are children human beings or human becoming? A critical assessment of outcome thinking.' *Rivista Internazionale Di Scienze Sociali* 117.3/4 (2009), p. 631-53.

¹⁶ I am aware here of creating a model of aetonomativity, which also assumes that the 'norm' is adulthood; however, following Maria Nikolajeva's work on power and subjectivity in children's literature, I see both young adult and adult fiction as operating on the assumption of adulthood as the *desired* destination, even if

these novels are ultimately as much about problematizing normative constructions in the nineties and noughties as they are about adolescence itself. There are two aspects of adulthood which are particularly relevant to my readings in this thesis. The first is social expectations. Adulthood is assumed to have been reached when certain structural signifiers are attained: a degree, a job, marriage, or an independent home.¹⁷ Social expectations also encompass legal definitions of adult-status, which is understood in part as being attained through socio-political acknowledgment of the individual's transition into being an adult – in Great Britain, this is marked by turning 18. The second aspect is experience. It is impossible to wholly extricate individual experience from cultural norms and expectations. However, for the purposes of this thesis, experiential adulthood is defined as a person's understanding of him or herself as an adult. This often coincides with a 'rite of passage' experience such as having to take responsibility for another person or action.¹⁸ The correspondence between the 'expectations' and the 'experiential' model of adulthood is crucial to my understanding of coming of age as an aspiration towards social recognition as well as a negotiation of adulthood-creating experiences. As this suggests, there is always a period of disconnect between experience and expectation. However, coming of age is framed as a process of working towards and negotiation of the two modes of adulthood, acquiring experience in order to be able to live up to and fulfil the expectations of that status.

The centrality of expectation and experience to my definition of coming of age draws on Erik Erikson's conception of an 'identity crisis' as central to youth as a category. His understanding of the relationship between self-definition and transition is useful for a number of reasons: firstly, he defines identity as a process '*in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those identities.'¹⁹ Identities are thus both process and end point, and – even more significantly for my framework – they are created and sustained through

it is not the norm, and my framework reflects this. See *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (London: Routledge, 2010), p.8.

¹⁷ The expectation model is in part indebted to Michel Foucault's ideas of structural and social power, but also draws on sociological definitions of adulthood, including Sarah Irwin's work in *Rights of Passage* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

¹⁸ This experiential model draws on psychoanalytical models of coming of age and Erik Erikson's concept of stages of development, which sees adolescence as the period where identity construction is most intensely bound up with living up to social expectations *as well as* attempting to learn correct social roles. By combining the two, I am acknowledging the external pressure of structural expectations while also emphasising the centrality of expectations to theories of adolescent development. Erikson, *Identity* (New York: Norton, 1968 (1994)), p.128-30.

¹⁹ Erikson, p.22 [emphasis in original].

negotiation between a core identity (which I call experiential) and a communal understanding (which I call expectation). Erikson's understanding of 'identity crisis' corresponds to the adolescent's on-going decision to either reject or adopt the communal cultural understanding of herself, even if she is not fully (socially) acknowledged as doing so. It is, in his understanding, a period of rebellion, but that rebellion stems from a sense of mismatch between the still developing core and the communal demands. This corresponds to my understanding of coming of age as a process of trying to reconcile experience and expectations, capturing something of the double-bind of coming of age as a status *and* a process which may or may not progress or be completed.²⁰

This model of coming of age suggests a desire for correspondence between the social acknowledgement of adulthood and individuals' experience of themselves as adults as the ultimate outcome of coming of age. The value of studying this concept, then, is in the critical and disruptive potential which lies in the attempted achievement or aspiration towards adulthood. Representations of coming of age can problematize the normative conception of 'adulthood' as a stable destination and a category of certainty by placing it in relation to the unstable signifier of adolescence.²¹ The novel is almost uniquely well suited as a form for this negotiation, being able to present both interior and exterior experiences and expectations.²² In his overview of contemporary British fiction, Nick Bentley suggests that the 1990s and first decades of the 2000s are a period of increased literary interest in youth, arguing that:

the coming of age story allows for the workings of society to be described as if from a fresh perspective, and through the technique of defamiliarization, a cultural critique can be produced of some of the practices of contemporary society encountered for the first time by the protagonist.²³

My reading of the transition from childhood in these novels does some of the same work. Indeed, I argue that the possibility of critique can be even more heightened in young adult fiction, where the reading these novels can also be constructed as an act of coming of age. By an act of coming of age, I am describing an act which (ideally) matures the reader: by

²⁰ Here again I draw on Qvortrup's idea of a *human becomings* and the sociological importance of adolescences as a contingent status.

²¹ By defining adolescence as an unstable signifier, I am in particular drawing on Kristeva's depictions of adolescents as 'open structures', able to transgress boundaries of gender, sexuality, responsibility and citizenship, while also being ultimately limited by these structures. *New Maladies of the Soul*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) p.136-9.

²² Thomas Jeffers, in his work on the *Bildungsroman*, argues that it is this ability in particular which leads to coming of age being a predominant literary concern of the early novel. See *Apprenticeships: the Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p.2.

²³ Nick Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p.22.

exploring new moral or ethical dilemmas, by encouraging readers to see themselves in a larger social and historical context, or by asking questions of the social expectations which are presumed to surround the adolescent.²⁴ My inclusion of young adult fiction and insistence on the importance of the construction of adulthood in these narratives also complicates Bentley's notion of cultural critique. The literary representation of coming of age provides multiple opportunities for disconnection between expectation and experience to arise, and in doing so, creates space for questioning and challenging social norms. However, these disconnections can also suggest a *return* to previous models of community. The disconnection between expectation and experience is not necessarily radical or disruptive; it can be conservative and/or restrictive as well.

The literary representation of coming of age is also necessarily bound up with historical pressures. In his book, *Unseasonable Youth* (2012), Jed Esty argues that a similar questioning of the value and stability of adulthood can be found in modernist fiction about youth, and draws a helpful distinction between the function of the traditional *Bildungsroman* and these modernist re-writings. He argues that the *Bildungsroman* represents '[a]dulthood and nationhood [as] the twin symbolic termini for the endless and originless processes of self-formation and social transformation'.²⁵ The stability of both adult-status and nation-status in this form of writing is inextricably linked and suggests a broader cultural assumption of adulthood's normative status. This shoring up is achieved by 'balancing inner and outer directives' – what I am calling experience and expectation.²⁶ However, Esty argues that this is disrupted in modernist novels of development, which present adolescence as unending and unresolvable, 'both absent change (no growth) and constant change (continuous transformation)' and this representation of youth 'reveals the contingent, even fragile, logic of the old bildungsroman in which soul and nation grow together, then stop.'²⁷ Esty focuses on a very specific time period, arguing that the trope of endless youth in the novels of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century reflect a growing anxiety around colonialism and imperial expansion. I am not arguing that the representations of coming of age in the late

²⁴ This definition of an act of coming of age is influenced by number of sources including: Kim Reynolds' *Radical Children's Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p.2; Stephens, p.202; Kathryn James' *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* (New York; London: Routledge, 2009), p.6.

²⁵ Esty, p.26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16-7.

twentieth and early twenty-first century's anxieties are a direct mirroring of this period. However, Esty's observations make clear the way in which disrupted/ending coming of age has also *historically* been associated with changes in the construction of the nation and national identity.

This link between youth and societal concern can also be found in the work of sociologists such as Sarah Irwin, Christine Griffin and Alan France, all of whom observe a similar uncertainty about national identity in relation to coming of age in their work on the eighties and nineties.²⁸ Their work discusses concerns about adolescents' access to the *expected* structural features of adulthood, arguing that increasing uncertainty surrounding economic and societal indices has destabilised the idea of a 'secure' adulthood, in turn making 'youth' as a concept more fraught, as reflected in both extreme patriotism and an apathy towards political participation.²⁹ In Irwin's words, the eighties and nineties 'have seen a pattern of deferral in the timing of transitions from the partial dependence of youth to the independence associated with adult status.'³⁰ She argues that the political changes of the eighties have created an extended period of transition by removing or making it more difficult to access the structural features of adulthood. These barriers also have the potential to create an extended period of disconnect between expectations and experience, in both directions: on the one hand, the perception of youth goes on for longer, so that even someone starting their own business, for example, at 19, might be treated as an adolescent; on the other hand, individuals can experience themselves as adult, yet struggle to meet the expectations of adulthood with regards to, among other things, homeownership and starting a family.

In *The Crossover Novel* (2009), Rachel Falconer describes the complexity of the experience and expectation of coming of age and coming into adulthood thus:

Growing up seems to have become an infinitely reversible process [...] the freedom to be whatever you want, to act whatever age you feel, can induce a sense of vertigo which ironically leaves you unable to act at all. Moreover, if adults are feeling slightly queasy about the limitless possibilities of 'growing down', children are feeling the pressure of growing up very quickly as they

²⁸ See for example Christine Griffin on the urgency of youth research as linked to changing notions of adulthood in *Representations of Youth* (Oxford: Wiley, 2013 (1993)), p.23-6.

²⁹ See Irwin, p.188-9, and France, p.59-62 on 'youth in the age of uncertainty': France in particular focuses on the ambivalent position of the nation in the nineties, as young people coming of age after the major ideological battles of the eighties.

³⁰ Irwin, p.1.

become more thoroughly absorbed into the networked global economy than ever before.³¹

In the post-1989 world, it is not just that young people struggle to buy houses and develop careers in the way which was perceived as the norm for much of the twentieth century.³² Staying young has gained in cultural cachet (the oft-cited reason for the kidult phenomenon Falconer documents in her book), and so the experience of youth is prized alongside the expected markers of adulthood. On the other hand, some experiences of adulthood, particularly with regard to sexuality and violence, seem to be occurring earlier and earlier. Falconer's observation underlines the practical importance of power structures to adulthood: feeling experientially empowered to make decisions as well as being acknowledged as part of the adult world makes it possible to act, either in terms of defining your approach to adulthood or in terms of negotiating the experiences which have been pushed upon you.

That these novels are about the First World War also adds an extra dimension to the coming of age concept: coming to terms with history. Kenneth Millard argues that '[t]he contemporary coming-of-age novel might be usefully understood as walking the line between presenting its protagonist as a newborn who is innocent of history and of depicting a protagonist whose coming of age consists principally of acquiring historical knowledge.'³³ The experiential element present in these novels is related to acquiring an identity which incorporates historical continuity and understanding. History informs the experiential coming of age as characters come to terms with and (re)discover both their own and the war's past. However, historical understanding also shapes expectations, as novels present, critique and problematize the ways in which acknowledging adulthood has changed or, on occasion, not changed enough. Coming of age first and foremost functions as a framework of disruption, allowing the authors to explore uncertainty, instability and insecurity for both characters and society, reflecting the concerns of the millennial world through the lens of the crisis at the start of the century.

³¹ Rachel Falconer, *The Crossover Novel* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.36.

³² These expectations are heavily weighted towards a middle class norm, but a parallel crisis can be found in the working class, with the decline of traditional, manual industries and their associated family traditions.

³³ Kenneth Millard, *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.7. Millard is referring primarily to adult fiction which focuses on coming of age, but the observation does seem relevant to young adult fiction as well.

0.3 Coming of age in the myth of the war

Very little work has been done on the theme of coming of age in relation to the representation of the war. To discuss the representation of the First World War is inevitably to speak of the myth of the war, a term which came into common usage in scholarship and later public discourse in the nineties. The main model was popularised by Samuel Hynes in *The War Imagined* (1990), which also gives a summary of what may broadly be called the futility myth, often positioned as the central narrative of the war.³⁴ In his book, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005), Dan Todman describes the origins of this myth as a ‘sort of cultural Chinese whispers’ where ‘repetition and simplification can be seen in the development of a readily understood symbolic vocabulary of the war’ based on ‘a limited number of black and white still photographs and the shorter poems of Wilfred and Siegfried Sassoon’ forming the basis for a broader cultural understanding of the war.³⁵ Todman goes on to analyse the way this shorthand has emerged from contradictory narratives, interpretations and understandings of the war, to become, in the late eighties and early nineties, the dominant cultural version of the war. My work engages with this understanding of the ‘myth of the war’ extensively. However, as Todman’s description of the myth as Chinese whispers suggests, there are always multiple versions in circulation. I want to distinguish here between multiple, related figures and narratives circulating around the First World War, albeit all in relation to the overall futility myth of the war.

In doing so, I am also contextualising the war as part of a larger mythos of the twentieth century, arguing that the twentieth century can be understood as a national mythscape. Duncan S.A. Bell coined the term ‘mythscape’ to explain how national narratives function and defines a mythscape as:

the discursive realm, constituted by and through temporal and spatial dimensions, in which myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly. The temporal dimension denotes a historical span, a narrative of the passing of the years, and it is a narrative that is most likely to

³⁴ It is worth noting that Hynes’ work came out the same year as Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson’s *The Myths We Live By* (1990), which makes a broader argument for the importance of myths in historical thinking. This also suggests that this reconsidering of history and representation presents a larger trend in millennial thinking.

³⁵ Todman, p.40

include *inter alia* a story of the origins of the nation and of subsequent momentous events and heroic figures.³⁶

This 'realm' is conceived as a space for the circulation of myths, narratives, representations and conceptualizations which appear to create a unified national identity. However, as Bell also writes in his definition, the mythscape is a site of constant shifts and renegotiation. Thus the myths belonging to the national narrative(s) seem simultaneously constant and foundational *and* ever-changing. It is this tension between stability and transformation which is particularly crucial for my understanding of myth. The twentieth century functions as a mythscape, insofar as this period sees several reimaginings and negotiations of British national identity. These rewritings are linked to the loss of Empire, decline in international (and subsequently industrial) power and the uncertainty of the Cold War. However, these narratives also contain triumphant myths: the victory of the Second World War, the creation of the National Health Service (and, more controversially, the expansion of the welfare state) and the rise in standards of living. Within this mythological space, the First World War is simultaneously 'the original sin', a radical break with the previous century, and the impetus to improvement, insofar as the post-war world of the late 1940s was radically different from the 1920s. This conflict between a negative and optimistic reading of the century is part of the novels of the nineties' shift's engagement with, and rewriting of, the myths of the war.

The mythical nature of the war's remembrance and representation has been central to the critical engagement with the novels of the nineties' shift. As Renard argues, in her survey of British fiction from 1985 to 2000, these novels of this period have been routinely criticised for their reliance on the mythology to the point of a-historicity.³⁷ Some of these critiques suggest that the futility interpretation of the war is fundamentally flawed, and that the main purpose of these novels is (and should be) to re-present the (presumably accessible) historical war. Consequently, much criticism, such as Renard's, has investigated the way in which the mythological ideas of disillusionment and futility are negotiated in these novels. My innovation is in centring coming of age in relation to the mythology. The key myths I return to throughout this thesis are all informed by and bound up with conceptions of youth and coming of age. However, these are rarely acknowledged as major feature of the mythology which shapes our understanding of the

³⁶ Duncan S.A. Bell, 'Mythscape: memory, mythology, and national identity' in *British Journal of Sociology* (54(1), 2003) pp.63-81, p.75

³⁷ Renard, p.16

war. Even Todman's *The Great War*, the most comprehensive history of the development of the mythology of the war, ultimately elides youth as a central theme. One of the aims of this thesis is to show the centrality of coming of age to the myths, as well as the literature, of the war.

For this reason, in this section I define the myths of the war that I use in this thesis and their relationship to coming of age. Hynes suggests that myths are 'not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it, the story of the war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true [...]'.³⁸ Distinct from the historical facts of the war, these narratives invoke an emotional and cultural 'truth'. This is true to some extent of all historical events. However, the First World War attracts a significant amount of scholarship about its mythologizing.³⁹ Furthermore, attempts to dismantle the dominant myth(s) are treated as particularly contentious in Britain.⁴⁰ The mythology shifts significantly during the nineties in accordance with the reworked mythscape. This is in part, as Peter Leese argues, due to the memorial cycle of 1989 to 1995, which made it 'possible to reaffirm national and personal British identities, and to address current concerns by looking again at these most prominent moments of national unity: the First and the Second World Wars.'⁴¹ There are several tensions at play here: between reaffirmation and concern, between the national and the personal, and between the idea of unity in the mythologies of the First and the Second World War. In the case of the latter, there is a clear contrasttension between the popular understanding of the two wars. The dominant contemporary British myths surrounding Second World War centre on ideas of shared national purpose and coming together, shaped by the 'Blitz Spirit' and the clear signification of Nazis as evil. On the other hand, the mythology of the First World War is defined by oppositions and ambivalences, with an uncertain enemy or potentially even

³⁸ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Pimlico, 1992 (1990)), p.ix. It is Hynes' use of the term which influences Todman, Leese, Sheffield and Korte, among others.

³⁹ Indeed, the major controversy over the war in the nineties was around the myth, leading to a group of historians and cultural historians to write revisionist critiques of the myth through the nineties and early 2000s. See Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (London: Headline Books, 2001), Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Martin Stephen, *The Pity of War* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993).

⁴⁰ One of the clearest examples of this was the controversy sparked by then Secretary for Education, Michael Gove's, article in the *Daily Mail*: 'Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes?' *Mail Online*, January 2, 2014. See for example Richard J Evans' response 'Gove shows his ignorance of history – again' *The Guardian*, January 6, 2014, as representative of the reaction to Gove's attempt to disrupt the myth.

⁴¹ Leese, p.173

multiple enemies, not all of which are enemy combatants.⁴² However, as discussed above, both can be worked into a mythscape of the twentieth century and usefully considered as mythical hubs which help create a narrative of the century.

Samuel Hynes provides a useful outline of the dichotomous themes which shape the popular understanding of the First World War:

a generation of *innocent young men*, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them.⁴³

This description functions as a useful definition of the futility myth. Hynes' outline picks up on the key elements of the mythology, touching on a range of myths which also appear in the novels discussed below. The futility of the war is shown through a series of oppositions and tensions which are crucially often generational and (with exceptions) familial. These include the split between old men and young, between generals and the ordinary soldier, between the home front and the trenches. It is a mythology focused on *internal* conflict. Although the (international) war is mentioned, its impact is described in terms of national and civil conflict which continues after the war itself ends.

At the heart of Hynes' description are the innocent young men, and it is unsurprising that a significant number of the myths which intersect with the futility myth are about the soldier. This figure is particularly important as the symbol of coming of age. I focus on three mythical versions of the man at war, before moving on to add a fourth female figure: the nurse. The three soldier myths are:

- The disillusioned soldier
- The shell-shocked soldier
- The reluctant soldier

All three are heavily influenced by the first war books boom, drawing on the memoirs and novels of Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Richard Adlington among others. It is from these novels the myth of the disillusioned soldier in particular develops. Gail Braybon summarises the 'model' First World War soldier, as 'young, straight from school

⁴² This is of course a simplification, and a lot of work has been done particularly over the last 30 years to disrupt the myth of the 'cosy' war. However, the myth still remains popular and was particularly celebrated during the early nineties' anniversary years. For an in-depth reading of the myth of the Second World War and its political uses, see Lucy Noakes' book, *War and the British* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

⁴³ Hynes, p.x [emphasis mine].

or university, and idealistic. [...] And they are the victims of politicians and generals who exploited their idealism.⁴⁴ This is a construction which draws heavily from the initial rush of publications, although variations occur. Significantly, one of the key changes is age – the reimagined mythical soldier is often younger than he was in the memoirs of the war. Idealism and the desire ‘to do what is right’ is central to this myth, setting up as it does the ultimate disillusionment. The disillusioned soldier often survives, but sometimes dies having realised that his participation in the war is for nothing and serves no greater purpose.⁴⁵ The pointlessness of the violence is brought home by the death of a close friend (or less often, a father figure).⁴⁶ As the description suggests, this figure is at the heart of the futility mythology – a symbol of the war’s ultimate harm: the heroic victim of its horrors. However, the disillusioned soldier’s story is *also* inherently a coming of age narrative: moving from innocence to experience, maturing as knowledge is gained and childish views of the world are blown away. Occasionally, in the nineties’ shift, the character is underage or takes on a parental role in relation to an underage soldier, illustrating the breakdown of generational responsibility. In this myth, adulthood is a negative construction, reflecting both the disillusionment experienced by the soldier, and the indifferent politicians and generals who create the conditions for it. Although this narrative is often seen as deconstructing the hero, John Onions argues that, particularly in the first war books boom, the literature of the war actually ‘both destroyed and mostly rebuilt [...] notions of heroic behaviour’.⁴⁷ This tension between disillusionment and glorious action remains crucial to the coming of age transition from idealistic warrior to critical witness or victim.

As Onions suggests, heroism is important to the myth of the disillusioned soldier. As a concept, it is less central to the later figure of the shell-shocked soldier. This addition to the mythology originates in part from the first war book boom, and from novels such as Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*

⁴⁴ Gail Braybon, ‘Winners or Losers’ in *Evidence, History and the Great War* (New York: Berghan Books, 2005) p.86-7.

⁴⁵ An extended analysis of the changing nature of the disillusioned soldier can be found in ‘The Uncertain War a Century on: The First World War in British and Irish Fiction’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts*, ed. Katherine Baxter, Ann-Marie Einhaus, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p.21.

⁴⁶ This figure is sometimes implied to be the soldier’s beloved, drawing on the homoeroticism of canonical war poetry, and the queerness of many of the poets.

⁴⁷ John Onions, *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1990) p.3

(1918).⁴⁸ However, it is with the rising interest in and study of post-traumatic stress syndrome that the shell-shocked soldier moves from being a possible element of the disillusionment myth to a mythical figure in his own right. Kirby Farrell suggests an explanation when he describes western culture in the nineties as a post-traumatic culture, which sees trauma as a framework through which to understand the twentieth century and its atrocities.⁴⁹ Jay Winter presents a similar interpretation when he argues that shell-shock has turned ‘from a diagnosis into a metaphor’; trauma no longer just reflects an individual experience, but is representative of a larger social and cultural malaise.⁵⁰ The metaphorical effect of shell-shock was not just to traumatise the minds of a lost generation. Rather, Winter suggests that we are still today in some ways living with the consequences of the war and its violence. The shell-shocked soldier’s symbolic value has changed, then, reflecting a greater cultural investment in trauma and its after-effects. This manifests in the novels stylistically through repetition and echoes, imagery of disembodied limbs and the mutilated body, and in the characters’ experiences of themselves.⁵¹ However, it is shell-shock’s metaphorical impact on experience – the sense of disconnection and growing critical positioning – which is of concern in this thesis. Shell-shock and trauma exacerbate and complement the sense of alienation which forms part of the coming of age narrative. The two forms of disconnect are not equivalents, but I argue that in the novels of the nineties, they are in conversation. The figure of the shell-shocked soldier adds urgency and historical weight to the uncertainty of coming of age.

This narrative also borrows aspects of the myth of the ‘Lost Generation’.⁵² Hynes productively breaks members of lost generation into two categories: ‘those who died, died in such numbers as to leave their generation emptied of men who would have given it meaning’ and those who came back from the war ‘*disorientated, wandering, directionless*’, given to ‘much moving about, much changing of plans, many beginnings

⁴⁸ Arguably, West’s and Woolf’s novels only become novels about ‘the shell-shocked soldier’ as a mythical figure after Elaine Showalter brings the two together in *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1987), putting them into the context of hysteria and trauma, rather than broader expressions of disillusionment. See Showalter, p.191-4.

⁴⁹ Kirby Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), p.ix-x.

⁵⁰ Jay Winter, ‘Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War’ *Journal of Contemporary History* (35(1) (2000)), pp.7-11, p.7.

⁵¹ Anne Whitehead argues in *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) that there is an aesthetics of trauma which these novels draw on. See p.3-11.

⁵² For details on the accuracy of the ‘Lost Generation’ myth, see David Cannadine’s article ‘War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain’ in *Mirrors of Mortality* ed. Joachim Whaley (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), pp.187-242, particularly p.197-9.

without endings'.⁵³ As Victor Watson has argued, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the former type of lost generation had consequences for coming of age and its desirability, particularly in terms of children's literature. Watson argues that 'the deaths of thousands of young men raised bitter questions about childhood and adulthood: why celebrate maturation at all [...] if its consummation was to come in such a terrible form?'⁵⁴ This question haunts the myth of the disillusioned soldier. However, the narrative of the *returning* soldiers becomes a key focus in the nineties' shift. This lost generation is reflected in the myth of the shell-shocked soldier, a living rebuke to the idea that the war has ended, could be forgotten or measured purely in physical damages. It is this mythical function which is foregrounded in the novels of this thesis.⁵⁵

The most recent myth is that of the reluctant soldier. This narrative serves to emphasize how much the myths of the First World War are reliant on participation. This figure starts off sceptical of the war, often critical of patriotism and the government more broadly as well. However, for a range of reasons, most often familial pressures, he eventually does go to war.⁵⁶ At the front, he is traumatised and/or finds that the experience of war confirms everything he believed. Occasionally, this myth also ends with the death of the soldier. The reluctant soldier shows the evolution of the mythology; in some ways, he is more nuanced than his disillusioned predecessor.⁵⁷ This figure illustrates a growing awareness of Hynes' observation that '[i]n the Myth, opposition to the war came later, and was a consequence of the experience of trench warfare [...] but the war had its opponents from the beginning [...]' suggesting a more complex approach to the war.⁵⁸ As a combatant, he also functions to emphasize the importance of the opposition between old and young. Indeed, generational conflict recurs throughout the mythology of the war, particularly in the myths of the disillusioned and reluctant soldiers.

⁵³ Hynes, p.385-6 [emphasis in the original].

⁵⁴ Victor Watson, 'Introduction' in *Coming of Age in Children's Literature* (London: Continuum, 2003) eds. Margaret Meek, Victor Watson, p.1-44. p.24. Esty also notes that the First World War is commonly seen as the conclusive end of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre, as it disrupted faith in 'coming of age', see p.31.

⁵⁵ Ross J. Wilson convincingly argues that the term 'lost generation' sees a resurgence in popular discourse after the 2007 financial crisis, suggesting its continued power in British culture. See *Cultural Heritage of the Great War in Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p.138-40.

⁵⁶ Contentious objectors are rarely protagonists in First World War novels after 1989, although exceptions exist, such as Helen Dunmore's *Zenna in Darkness* (1993), which takes as its protagonist D H Lawrence.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, Esther MacCallum-Stewart argues that in children's and young adult fiction, the First World War soldier's moral journey increasingly reflects the structures of Holocaust narratives, which may account for the increasing popularity of the reluctant soldier in these narratives – the sense of foreboding and doom predating the war echoes the foreknowledge of characters in these sorts of stories as well. See p.176-7.

⁵⁸ Hynes, p.81.

However, drawing on the soldier-poets (particularly Owen's re-writing of the story of Isaac and Abraham, and Sassoon's satirical attacks on generals and the home front), the myth of the reluctant soldier in particular shows fathers and older men as negative figures. The generational conflict is not created by the war, as it is for the disillusioned soldier, but it is exacerbated by it. Thus in this myth, coming of age becomes bound up with defying, challenging or ultimately changing the mind of, the older generation. The fighting man becomes impetus for the transformation of others' or as a criticism of adults for the reader to take on board. The reluctant soldier is often the carrier of a 'new vision' of adulthood in the nineties' shift. Their example does away with the previous generation's perceived conservatism and investment in the 'heroic' fighter, rather than the sensitive, sympathetic figure of the resistant participant.

The soldier is the original centre of the futility narrative, and it is consequently an initially masculine mythology. For the disillusioned soldier in particular, women might appear only as antagonists, unable or unwilling to understand the horrors of the trenches. In *British Culture and the First World War*, George Robb suggests another reason, apart from a lack of comprehension, for the antagonism towards women which has been part of the mythology: that the war turned the traditional gender roles upside down, 'liberating women and enslaving men.'⁵⁹ In the literary representations of the war, women initially appeared primarily in ancillary roles: mothers, lovers, wives, aunts and occasional nurses. However, in the broader cultural discourse, particularly after the 1960s, a myth of liberation has sprung up, suggesting that women gained power and influence through war work, culminating ultimately in being given the right to vote.⁶⁰ This is of course an oversimplification, but the myth of female freedom gained through war work persists.⁶¹ The totality of this myth is too large to discuss here. Instead, I want to engage with a specific female myth of the war: the nurse. The nurse sits within the myth of female liberation, as she usually signs up 'to do her bit' during the war, and is both horrified by what she sees and empowered by what she gets to do. She can be seen as the equivalent to the disillusioned soldier, particularly in those narratives which draw on Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) for inspiration. Brittain's story serves as a template for the myth of the nurse. As Sarah Cole argues, it is a classic coming of age story 'structured

⁵⁹ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.47.

⁶⁰ James Campbell details the shifting focus of both criticism and novels in relation to women's roles in 'Interpreting the War' in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp.261-279.

⁶¹ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

according to a Romantic trajectory, where a time of youthful hope and exuberance is smashed by the relentless assault of adult insights and experiences.’⁶² This of course echoes the myth of the disillusioned soldier. But this negative reading is fundamentally complicated by the positive representation of work in these narratives. Braybon suggests that the nurse is also a sign of progress and increased power.⁶³ Thus she sits alongside both the disillusioned and the reluctant soldier, a female view of the futility of the war *and* the need for a new vision of the future.

As I noted above, there is significant crossover between these myths. Circulating through them all are themes surrounding the purpose of the war, the lessons to be learned from the experience of the trenches, and a need for change – in regards to the roles of women, the power of the young, and societal norms more broadly. However, these notions are emphasized differently from myth to myth: ideas of the war as a break with the past or the divided nation are less relevant to the shell-shocked soldier, whereas visions for the future play a smaller role in the myth of the disillusioned soldier. For the reluctant participant, an investigation of gender is less foregrounded for the shell-shocked soldier. For the myth of the nurse, the tension between freedom and disillusionment is central. However, what these four myths share is their transitional trajectory. They are concerned with change and transformation, and whether that is the movement from idealism to disillusionment, active hero to shell-shocked victim, reluctant soldier to active voice of opposition, or the home to the work place, these myths all suggest that the war brought about a fundamental change, both for individuals and the country, which could not be ignored or dismissed. These myths have also changed and adapted the overall mythology of the war, and then have themselves been altered, subverted or disrupted. The persistence of the mythology of the war is due in part to its flexibility and continued usefulness in encapsulating different concerns at different times, not least in terms of national identity, as well as reflecting issues of gender, class and sexuality.⁶⁴ I am not suggesting that the myths discussed here are the only narratives of the war in circulation – the revisionist historians of the nineties are proof enough of that. However, the futility mythology and its attendant myths are the ideas and constructions which feature most prominently in the

⁶² Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.176.

⁶³ Braybon, p.88-90.

⁶⁴ Both Samuel Hynes and Dan Todman have good overviews of this, with Hynes focusing on the twenties and thirties, and Todman studying the century as a whole. For a present day perspective on the myth of the war, see Wilson, p.129-38.

mythscape of the twentieth century, and the novels of the nineties' shift necessarily engage with them as a way of engaging with the century more broadly.

0.4 Memory, transmission and coming of age

It is useful to distinguish between myth and memory, in order to clarify my position and also to emphasize the primacy given to cultural representation and retelling, as opposed to communal and local memory.⁶⁵ As Geoff Eley notes, memory is a slippery phenomenon; he argues that it is 'hard to know exactly how to read [...] how to judge its social and cultural meanings [...] how to situate its explanations or historicize its occurrence.'⁶⁶ The book his foreword appears in is one of a number published in the nineties, responding to the millennial anxieties of 'the much-vaunted "end of history"' and the 'postmodern condition' by looking to memory to provide answers and explanations for the current state of society and – even more crucially for the work in this thesis – as 'a site of identity formation'.⁶⁷ This desire to engage with memory, then, is in part a reaction to a perceived failing of history to supply answers for, and subsequently confidence in, the future.

Works such as *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory* (2000), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (1997) and *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (1999) suggest the centrality of war to the question of memory in the nineties and make clear the impetus the end of the century plays in the desire to engage with how conflict is remembered and represented.⁶⁸ As such, it necessarily informs my readings of the novels in this thesis and informs my framework. I define memory's function in this thesis: in relation to readers of these novels and to the representation of characters' memories in the texts themselves.

Writing about First World War fiction, Korte observes that '[w]riters [...] embed their war fictions in the generally intensified interest – scholarly and literary – that phenomena of memory have received over the last few decades.'⁶⁹ Memory is not just a

⁶⁵ The myth can be seen as a form of collective memory, a set of collectively remembered tropes which stand in as a shorthand for the historical war – Todman makes a similar argument to this in his introduction to *The Great War* (2005) and Bell conceives of the mythscape as an alternative to the idea of collective memory.

⁶⁶ Geoff Eley, 'Foreword' in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), ed. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, pp.vii-xiii, p.vii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.vii.

⁶⁸ Emmanuel Sivan and Jay Winter's 'Setting the Framework' gives a clear statement of intent with regards to why the nineties make remembrance necessary in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* ed. Emmanuel Sivan, Jay Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.6-39, p.8.

⁶⁹ Korte, p.127.

literary preoccupation, but a significant broader cultural concern during the late eighties and nineties. This is true not just in Britain, but internationally: from the concern surrounding testimony in truth and reconciliation committees, to the increased anxiety about ‘forgetting’ traumatic events such as the Holocaust, to the desire to record World War I and World War II veterans’ testimony for posterity.⁷⁰ It is important to note that this is also a period of increased British engagement with historical writing.⁷¹ Mariadele Boccardi sees this as linked to ‘millennial conditions’ leading to a ‘concern with history’ and particularly with revisiting troublesome or ambivalent moments in Britain’s national history.⁷² The two phenomena – the rise of memory and the increased popularity of the historical novel – are linked in significant ways which inevitably shape my readings of these novels. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, in their influential study, *Literatures of Memory* (2000), argue that much of the literature concerned with past events which was written after the Second World War can be understood as ‘literatures of memory’, defined as a mode of reading ‘the intersection between this self-understanding of contemporary literature when it looks backward and a prevalent politics of history in public culture which also relies on memory as a mediator between present and past.’⁷³ By this, they mean that the novels of this genre are textually reflexive, but they also assume a reflective reading audience, as unsettled by the past as the novelists themselves are. Middleton and Woods see this genre as primarily focused on violent and traumatic events, including the First World War. As they understand it, these texts are literatures of memory, rather than historical fiction, because they focus on the subjective and the postmodern as forms and aesthetics which best represent the contradiction of the unspeakable past.

Middleton and Woods see this tendency as writers’ response to the loss of memory observed by historians and philosophers across Europe and America at this time.⁷⁴ Pierre Nora, Andreas Hyussen and David Lowenthal, among others, express a

⁷⁰ For an extended discussion of the different ways in which memory has been conceptualised in this period, see Geoffrey Cubitt’s *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Anne Whitehead’s book *Memory* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2008) provides a fascinating historical overview and useful contemporary context for these discussions. Renard gives a valuable overview of the dominant theories on p.25-56.

⁷¹ For examples of the work done on this, see Suzanne Keen’s article ‘The Historical Turn in British Fiction’ which includes statistics on both the increased publishing of historical fiction and its rising cultural position in award culture. In *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* ed. James F English (Hoboken: Wiley, 2008) p.167-87; p.167-9.

⁷² Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p.1.

⁷³ Tim Middleton and Peter Wood. *Literatures of Memory* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.1.

⁷⁴ See particularly chapter 1, ‘Postmodernism and the death of the past’, p.19-30.

sense of loss and changing relationship to the past: the past is becoming dislocated from the communal and the local, memory is no longer being conveyed through family and community storytelling, and instead, the age of information removes events from context and re-interprets them as is most useful in any given circumstance.⁷⁵ Eric Hobsbawm's reasoning in *Age of Extremes* (1994), is particularly useful:

The destruction of the past, or rather of the *social mechanisms* that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. *Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.*⁷⁶

What Hobsbawm articulates here is a concern for the structures of transference: how can the previous generations' experiences be passed on without local connections and familial conveyance? The past here is implicitly separate from history; history can be learnt, but the past requires 'social mechanisms' and 'organic relation'.⁷⁷ It is worth noting that Hobsbawm speaks of a public remembering here. His argument is not about family history as such, but rather about the relation between public and private, about a sense of investment and personal connection to the large narratives of history. A similar concern, albeit articulated differently, is evident in the work of Pierre Nora. In his essay, 'Between Memory and History', Nora defines memory as 'by nature multiple and yet specific', contrasting it with history which 'belongs to everyone and to no one'.⁷⁸ Ownership and identification are positioned as central to Nora's argument, whereas history is seen as anti-ethical to it in its desire to make the past accessible to all and thus removing the emotional specificity which gives memory its power. This argument is elegiac. Nora sees the end of memory as more or less a *fait accompli*, the only remaining traces of what he calls *lieux de memoire*, usually translated as 'sites of memory', which 'survive only as the reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history'.⁷⁹ There is no longer space for

⁷⁵ Lowenthal's approach is slightly different in its focus on heritage and also slightly more optimistic in terms of his view of the past's position in the present. See *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.346-9.

⁷⁶ Hobsbawm, p.3 [emphasis mine].

⁷⁷ One of the most important voices on this relation, Marianne Hirsch, interestingly coined the term 'postmemory' to describe the impact of trauma on these kinds of 'organic' relations, suggesting that the generations after the initial trauma can only really remember the unspeakability of the trauma; they live with its affect, but do not possess its memory in an organic sense, such as Nora or Hobsbawm seems to think used to be possible. See the introduction to *Family Frames* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1997).

⁷⁸ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History' in *Representations*, (Spring (26), 1989), p.7-24, p.9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.11-2.

personal investment in the past. Current generations are doomed to grow up with no memory and therefore no sense of belonging or loyalty.

Nora's argument is explicitly about French national and local identity, while Hobsbawm's argument is necessarily more international and concerned with ideology.⁸⁰ However, they share a sense of the past as disappearing and becoming lost.⁸¹ Of particular concern to them – and of memory studies more generally – is the next generation and it is this which is particularly relevant to my work here. This concern implicitly suggests an expectation that young people who are about to come of age will not feel responsibility towards the world and society, because they will not understand it or feel invested in the family, in local community, or in the nation, having no personal or empathetic connection to the past. For Hobsbawm and Nora, memory and the past are sources of connection.⁸² Their concerns for the next generation, then, are in part concerns about disconnection from the social and familial. Due to the atomisation of society, there are few places where young people can learn about the past and, more importantly, *experience themselves as part of an historical continuum*. The novels in this thesis reflect this fear of loss of connection as part of their coming of age narrative. Characters in *Birdsong* express a concern for history-less society, whereas *Remembrance* (2003) ends with a character exhorting the importance of remembering and preserving a record of the experience of the war. In my readings of these novels, I take these concerns into account, particularly in my readings of the characters' negotiations of their identity crises. A lack of historical continuity can exacerbate the disconnect between experience and expectation, further complicating the coming of age process.

⁸⁰ The British experience of this is rather different. However, there is a clear sense, in the nineties' in particular, of concern about the past and its place in the present, evident in reassessments of Britain's identity after the Cold War, and particularly after the end of Margaret Thatcher's government, which end a period of (right-wing) patriotism and (left-wing) clear oppositional politics. Dominic Head, in *Modern British Fiction 1950-2002* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), writes very persuasively on this and its influence on British fiction. See p.4-5; p.47-8. See also Martin Shaw's 'Past Wars and Present Conflicts' in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* ed. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp.191-204, p.191-3, on the relationship between the Falklands and the anxieties around war in the nineties.

⁸¹ This perceived loss of connection is also the other side of the coin to Fukuyama's theory of the 'End of History'; the end of grand ideological narratives, the decreasing centrality of the nation-state in the eighties and the increased sidelining of communism as a political force all play into these interpretations. The central difference between Fukuyama, and Nora and Hobsbawm is whether this change is seen as positive or negative.

⁸² It is also worth referencing Jay Winter, whose definition of remembrance echoes Nora's idea of memory, although Winter's view of memory is less pessimistic (see Jay Winter, *Remembering War* (New Haven: Yale Press, 2005), p.2).

However, these novels are also products which are part of memory/memorial culture, striving to convey an experience and understanding of the past. It is worth noting that none of the authors in this thesis personally experienced the war. As Todman has noted, the 1990s and early 2000s were the end of the war's living memory, and thus a period of anxiety about how the war would survive after the last veteran died.⁸³ What is being conveyed in these novels is not a memory of the war as such, but rather an *experience* of the importance of the war and of the emotional investment in the war, as a frame for understanding the nineties and noughties themselves. Furthermore, their desire to reinvest the past with affect and importance is dislocated from the local and familial which is so central to Nora, Hobsbawm, Winter and others. Although memory may be familial and local within them, the novels' own status as 'memory' objects is more complex. I have been careful here to distinguish between memory and an empathetic representation of the past: whereas the characters in the novels deal with issues of memory within their families or communities, these novels present the *past*, but in such a way as to invite emotional investment from their readers.

To do this I draw on Alison Landsberg's idea of *prosthetic memory*, which she argues 'emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative of the past'.⁸⁴ Landsberg is very clear that experience at a remove is at the centre of prosthetic memory, and her focus is on multisensory sites such as film and museums, rather than novels. I am not suggesting her theory is directly applicable to these novels, but her description and analysis of the way in which historical narratives seek to affect and can produce emotional responses is productive.⁸⁵ Landsberg sees prosthetic memory as a possible ethical model for engaging with the past, arguing that it can:

Make people feel themselves part of larger histories, of narratives that go beyond the confines of the nuclear family [...]. By bringing people into experiential and meaningful contact with a past through which neither they nor their families actually lived, prosthetic memory opens the door for a new relation to the past, a strategic form of remembering that has ramifications for the politics of the present.⁸⁶

⁸³ Todman, p.208; p.226.

⁸⁴ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p.2.

⁸⁵ It also again gestures at the limitations of the memory of the First World War; Landsberg's readings focus on minority groups' histories and the ways in which these histories can be conveyed and made personal to those who do not belong to this group. As I noted in the preceding section, the question of identification is less radical in much First World War fiction, although there are still key pockets, particularly in terms of queer identity, where this empathetic investment in the past has disruptive potential.

⁸⁶ Landsberg, p.152.

As memory works and as representations of the past, the novels in this thesis operate along a spectrum: some novels reiterate the centrality of the nuclear family and familial transference to continued investment in the past even as their own status as novels seems to suggest a more complex model of engaging with historical events. Equally, I see some of the novels I discuss as moving towards Landsberg's model of ethical engagement. For the best of these novels, the desire to influence the politics of the present outweighs the need to reiterate a model of emotional engagement with the past which relies on hereditary investment. Landsberg's work also brings identity and the individual back into focus. Her approach is less interested in arguments about collective memory than on the individual's response; it is the viewer or reader taking on the past and letting it inform their understanding of their present. Here, the past is experience, but can also inform an understanding of expectations. This focus on identities also emphasizes the potential for prosthetic memory to be disruptive, while allowing that memory experiences are equally likely to entrench existing claims to loyalty and identity.

Drawing on Landsberg's theory also allows for engagement with representations of traumatic events without reading them solely as traumatic fictions. One of my reasons for distinguishing between an empathetic engagement with the past and seeing these novels as works of 'memory' is because literary memory is still largely associated with trauma.⁸⁷ As I noted above, many of these novels engage with trauma as a part of the mythology of the war and some – most notably *The Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-5) – are also aesthetically shaped by trauma writing. However, I analyse these novels as simultaneously trying to convey the emotional affect of the war as they understand it *and* convey its validity to a new generation after the end of the short twentieth century. Drawing on Raphael Samuel's idea of 'theatres of memory', I see these texts as sites of multiple strands of engagement with history, heritage, and memory, and as 'playing' spaces, which perform memory, but are not themselves based on 'organic' memory. The novels reframe the past in order to influence contemporary political engagements. In positioning of this interplay between current and historical events which functions as part of a coming of age process, requiring both the situating of the individual in a historical continuum and the individual's engagement with and responsibilities to a larger community. Prosthetic memory is a useful influence on this model in its balancing of the

⁸⁷ *Literatures of Memory* is the most prominent example of this; however, Renard's monograph is also typical.

importance of feeling ‘a connection to the past’ while remembering ‘their position in the present.’⁸⁸ This insistence on not taking ownership of the versions of the past is distinguishes Landsberg’s analysis from memory, opening space for *learning* about the past in an empathetic way: as a motivator for present day action and reconsideration of identity; and as part of, and reflecting on, the crisis of coming of age.

0.5 History and coming of age in adult and young adult fiction

The novels featured in this thesis are part of what Suzanne Keen calls the ‘historical turn’: a rise in historical fiction and critical engagement with historical fiction after the eighties.⁸⁹ In the late eighties, but particularly in the nineties, historical fiction came to provide a site for exploring this dual desire to look back critically on Britain’s past and to create a stable national identity through reading history. In the coming of age narratives I explore, historical events are bound up with the characters’ abilities to define themselves: as British, as citizens, as members of social and political communities, and as adults and adolescents. Thus the versions and myths of the past are used in these novels to illuminate questions of identity and its construction. The mythology of First World War makes explicit the tensions of the creation of identities, while implicitly drawing out the larger social and cultural questions inherent in this act of looking to the past for answers to the future.⁹⁰ While positioning these novels as part of the history boom, I am also distinguishing between young adult and adult fiction, clarifying their different uses of history.

Young adult fiction is first and foremost a marketing category. As Alison Waller argues, ‘[b]ooks that are organised, marketed, sold, lent (in libraries) and taught as young adult literature become young adult texts and in this way cultural, economic and educational forces dictate the definition.’⁹¹ However, I do want to make claims for certain

⁸⁸ Landsberg, p.9.

⁸⁹ Suzanne Keen, ‘The Historical Turn in British Fiction’ *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* ed. James F English (Hoboken: Wiley, 2008) p.167-87, p.167; for critical work, see David Higdon, *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1984); Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988). This critical engagement marks the increased cultural acceptance of historical fiction as a *literary* genre. This follows a rise in theory on heritage and history, such as Raphael Samuel’s *Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1987) and Patrick Wright’s *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso, 1985). For more on the relationship between the historical turn and the election of Thatcher, see the new introduction to Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹⁰ It is important to note that I do not see *all* engagements with the past as necessarily acts of coming of age; rather I am interested in the way that the past serves the coming of age narrative in these novels.

⁹¹ Alison Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), p.9

generic features and their function in this thesis. As a genre, young adult fiction is perceived to be at least in part didactic in intent.⁹² It seeks to influence its readers' identity, by teaching them something they did not know before – in the case of the novels in this thesis, about the First World War and the way it has shaped British identity. These novels are seeking to shape the readers' understanding of themselves. I use young adult fiction to explicitly identify questions of social identities and the potential for future change which are implicit in adult fiction. Insisting on its relevance to adult fiction and to contemporary cultural understandings of the First World War, I argue that these concerns transcend categorical definitions. Kristine Miller does similar work in relation to the Second World War in her article, 'Ghosts, Gremlins, and "the War on Terror" in Children's Blitz Fiction', arguing that by '[m]agnifying [...] present-day problems in the imaginative space of history [...], children's war literature trains young readers to make at a distance the same meaningful connections between wartime private and public life that more experienced readers can make at close range.'⁹³ As Miller suggests, a central difference between children's and adult fiction is the 'training' aspect. Conversely, looking at what children are trained to read for can reveal what adult fiction is *also* attempting to do, albeit less explicitly didactically. I want to distinguish my approach in two ways: I insist on a clear thematic link between the two categories' representation of the First World War, not just a similarity in themes; and I insist on the complexity of young adult fiction's representations of coming of age. The adult novels in this thesis are responses to what Boccardi calls 'the Victorian fictional model': nominally realist, with a minimum of postmodern techniques evident, although fantasy and ghostly elements are present in adult and young adult fiction alike.⁹⁴ This mostly-realist mode allows the novels to 'teach' the reader about the past (encouraging the implied reader to empathise and recognise the relevance of the past to the present), drawing attention to unresolved historical and present-day crises and/or insisting on the defamiliarisation of the past in

⁹² For more on didacticism and young adult literature's relationship to children's literature as a wider category, see Deborah Stevenson, 'History of children's literature and young adult literature' in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* eds. Shelby A Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso and Christine A. Jenkins (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.179-92.

⁹³ Miller, p.273.

⁹⁴ Boccardi, p.13. These moments of fantasy are rarely metatextual in the sense of Linda Hutcheon's work on novels of the seventies and eighties; rather, they are disruptive for the characters and usually particularly emphasise crises of experience.

order to emphasise the limitations of nostalgically returning to the past for solutions.⁹⁵ The young adult novels in this thesis, however, are more explicitly focused on identity formation than the adult novels, mapping out more clearly ways of engaging, accepting or thwarting expectations.

Both young adult and adult novels, then, are to some extent *didactic*: they convey a sense of the importance and emotional effect of the past to a generation which might not otherwise know or understand, and in doing so, they also effect a form of coming of age, in allowing the reader to come to terms with themselves as historical beings. John Stephens suggests that this is particularly explicit in historical fiction for children and adolescents, noting that in order to understand these novels, 'readers need to have developed a less solipsistic view of the world in order to engage imaginatively with characters and events not identifiable in the present.'⁹⁶ Thus historical fiction can also be a call to social responsibility and engagement – which I have argued, following Erikson, is a crucial aspect of adulthood. It is worth noting here that one of the key differences between the two categories is that adult literature presumes an adult and equal audience. YA's calls to social responsibility are often less instructive and more suggestive, implicit in the tone of the novels. This call to responsibility is particularly significant in the representation of the identity crisis in young adult fiction. Karen Coats argues that writing for adolescents is defined by:

the same sorts of tensions that preoccupy the physical bodies and emotional lives of its intended audience: tensions between growth and stasis, between an ideal world we can imagine and the one we really inhabit, between earnestness and irony, [and], perhaps most importantly, between an impulsive individualism and a generative ethics of interconnectedness.⁹⁷

This definition echoes Robyn McCallum's, Roberta Seelinger Trites' and Kathryn James' insistence on the importance of the tension between the development of self and negotiating social power in social constructions of adolescence and, consequently, in young adult fiction.⁹⁸ Young adult fiction is more explicit than adult fiction in its

⁹⁵ One difference I do address in my readings is reliable narration – young adult fiction is far more clearly dominated by reliable narrators, although even here there are exceptions – *The Shell House*, for example, arguably questions the reliability of narration and focalisers.

⁹⁶ John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature* (London: Longman, 1992), p.202.

⁹⁷ Karen Coats, 'Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory' in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, p.315-329, p.316.

⁹⁸ See Robyn McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* (New York: Garland, 1999), p.4; Roberta Seelinger Trites, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1998), p.2-11; Kathryn James, *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.1-8.

exploration of the gap between experience and expectations, and consequently it also allows for a greater mutability of power than its grown-up counterpart, presuming that eventually characters will feel both experientially and socially empowered. These novels also dwell more clearly on the potential desirability of adolescence, privileging its position as one of renewal and recreation. As such, young adult fiction is commonly focused on experience, and expectation tends to function primarily as a challenge to be overcome, or as something which eventually aligns with the adolescents' own norms and values. Thus these texts are generally more conclusive and allow for a clearer interpretation of how understanding the past might help resolve tensions in the present, reflecting its intended audience's perceived desires and needs. These typical expectations and structures are why I deal with adult and young adult fiction in separate chapters. I distinguish between the two types in order to pay particular attention to how categorical norms influence the representation of the war and of coming of age, even as I argue that there are thematic links between the two. Discussing them alongside each other allows me to explore their connections as well as where they differ.

A key difference lies in adult fiction's representation of expectations: social and cultural expectations play a more complex role in these novels, acting as a potential trap, or as fundamentally unchangeable.⁹⁹ As such, the adult novels in this thesis are also somewhat less conclusive, their coming of age narratives less empowering in terms of social responsibility. The novels' power lies in their extrinsic motivation, rather than necessarily in the models of coming of age represented within them. Their status as historical novels is significant in this context. Writing on the English novel and its relationship to history, Steven Connor argues that representations of the past through the eighties and into the nineties either present 'a knowable, narratable and continuous history, any one of whose points may be brought into communication with any other' or 'a discontinuous history, or the potential for many different, conflicting histories' which imply a lack of coherence which translates easily into narrative.¹⁰⁰ The latter, he notes, 'seems to disallow any perspective on history other than those contingently available within history, such that any kind of continuity established between histories and the languages that enact them will be provisional and constructed, rather than essential and

⁹⁹ A clear example of this might be dystopias – consider the difference between a series such as *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010), which suggests that dystopias can be transformed, and the famous adult dystopias of *1984* (1948) and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968).

¹⁰⁰ Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.142-3.

historically given', whereas the former arguably allows for the reader and writer to 'step outside' history, privileging their perspective.¹⁰¹ What is productive about Connor's outline of historical fiction is what it represents: two different ways of approaching the concern about the stability of the past and a desire for certainty as opposed to the embrace of uncertainty. His outline also implicitly suggests a key aspect of my framework for reading these novels: that the way they interpret the past is bound up with their understanding of the identity crisis and therefore their understanding of coming of age. Either identity is singular and resolvable through learning about the past, thus aligning expectation and experience through historical context; or learning about the past deepens the conflict, making the individual more critical of the expectations placed upon them. The former model proposes a stable past and stable conception of adulthood. The latter mirrors the unfinished work of identity creation with the unfinished work of understanding the past.

These adult novels' approach to the past and identity(ies) is also bound up with their representation of national identity. As I discussed above, the mythology of the First World War is often ambivalent, and its literary resurgence in the eighties and nineties is hardly a coincidence. Boccardi argues that historical fiction after the eighties obsessively returns to moments of national crisis, 'romanticising loss and turning it into the foundation of identity', reflecting larger cultural and national debates about the uses of history and British identity.¹⁰² This links into the anxieties of memory I discuss above, and becomes even more pressing in the nineties after the Falklands-Malvinas conflict and the fall of Thatcher. The adult historical fiction of this period reveals a tension between wanting to expose these moments of loss and discontinuity, and wanting to rebuild coherent national and personal identities, which becomes even more crucial in the nineties after the end of the Cold War. Throughout the nineties', a series of histories of the British twentieth century were published, many reflecting on what David Reynolds, in *Britannia Overruled* (1991), calls 'the British myth of decline', mapping Britain's waning status as a global power.¹⁰³ The myth of British decline of course pre-dates the nineties, reaching back to at least the fifties. However, this publishing boom of twentieth-century histories underlines the nineties' status as a reflective moment, one where the British

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.143.

¹⁰² Boccardi, p.171.

¹⁰³ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled* (London: Longman, 1991), p.1. See also the books mentioned in 0.4, as well as Alan Booth and Sean Glynn's *Modern Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

identity crisis again comes to the fore after the supposed panacea of the Falklands-Malvinas conflict.¹⁰⁴ I see this uncertainty and anxiety around British identity as the national equivalent of the crisis of adulthood; the social sense of adulthood in decline is inextricably bound up with the transitional and changing national imaginary. The crises of characters, particularly in adult fiction, are implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) commenting on a crisis of national identity. This alignment of individual and nation is far more prevalent in adult fiction than in young adult fiction, and one of the aspects I draw out in Chapters One and Four.

However, at the heart of my thesis is the assertion that reading young adult and adult fiction gives us a greater sense of the uses of the First World War in contemporary culture; that it is only through reading them alongside each other that the significance of coming of age to the nineties' shift becomes evident; and that they represent two useful sites for reading the ambiguous relationship between adulthood and adolescence in contemporary culture. Both adults and adolescents to some extent desire the other position: adults want the youth and intensity of adolescence, whereas adolescents long for the power and independence of adulthood. Yet young people are also repelled by the perceived conformity and repressiveness of adulthood, and grown-ups fear and dismiss adolescents as troublesome and disruptive. This relationship is further troubled by the uncertain status of both categories. Because transition is the definition of adolescence, it appears paradoxically the more stable construction. This is reflected in the young adult novels in this thesis, which are no less concerned with the creation of identity than adult novels, but are able to engage more explicitly with social institutions and structures, troubling these through their unwillingness to accept expectations as unchanging or conclusively restrictive. Falconer usefully argues that the increased adult readership for children's and young adult's fiction in Britain reflects insecurities around identity and adulthood, noting that 'it [gives] consecution, consequence, and depth to the unreality of a suspended adolescence which troubles adults [...] at the beginning of the twenty-first century'.¹⁰⁵ By giving adolescence meaning (in the form of a coherent social identity) and adolescents the power to change and affect their surroundings in young adult fiction,

¹⁰⁴ I am not claiming that the Falklands-Malvinas conflict united the nation necessarily, but rather, following Lucy Noakes in particular, that the conflict was explicitly presented to the public as a redemption of British Imperial identity. See *War and the British* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p.110-3 – Noakes also contrasts it with the Gulf War as a war which bred widespread anxiety, rather than a patriotic narrative.

¹⁰⁵ Falconer, p.40.

these novels also suggest the possibility of a meaningful, empowered construction of adulthood.

I argue that the adult fiction discussed in this thesis explores this desire for 'consecution, consequence, and depth'. Equally, I argue that the perceived security of young adult fiction's conception of narrative and identity is often an embrace of uncertainty as a structuring feature of identities. Thus these novels also present different models for the past's role in coming of age narratives, even as all of them insist on the importance of knowledge of the past as giving context to both experience and expectations. They move between acknowledging multiple histories and attempting to construct a single, coherent past. The novels I discuss are all structured by the tension between the desire for change and the desire for stability, certain past versus uncertain presents. In their engagement with this tension, all the novels discussed are informed by often implicit anxieties around the possibility of transitioning from one state to another and in doing so, aligning expectation and experience.

0.6 Coming of age in the First World War

This thesis argues that from the 1990s through to the early decades of the 2000s, there was a significant shift in the representation of the First World War in British fiction, and this shift is defined by the use of coming of age tropes. The coming of age theme in these novels reflects a sense that crises of identity are no longer temporary. Instead the disconnect between the experience of self and the expectations and structural features of society has grown larger. This disconnect has wide-ranging effects on definitions of Britishness, community cohesion, and the construction of identities. Ultimately, the disconnect between experience and expectation reflects an increased uncertainty about adulthood and adolescence. Thus the representation of transition, change and potential transformation as a critique of the present models of adulthood which are at the centre of this thesis. All the novels, young adult and adult alike, offer criticisms of the present moment: its insecurity, the lack of ideological stability, the sense of atomisation, and the breakdown of community. I argue that the novels whose critiques are most productive are those which not only challenge present conceptions of adulthood, adolescence and community, but also see the past as not having answers, adding urgency to the need for an ethical and socially responsible solution to the current crises.

Both adult and young adult novels do this. As the separation of the two categories throughout suggests, I am interested in how these novels engage with, negotiate and represent the crisis of adulthood and of coming of age for their intended audiences, rather than arguing attempting to universalise my argument. The best of these novels provide an implicit challenge to the assumption that there is – or was – a time when adulthood signified unthinking confidence, a clear sense of home, and an easy ethical and moral framework. Those novels which choose to linger on the potential power of transformative uncertainty provide greater scope for acknowledging the insecurities of the past as they inform the present, challenging empathy as an ethical engagement with historical events, and suggesting a future which engages with and admits to these uncertainties, absences and grey areas.

In the following pages, I map out the way adult and young adult fiction uses coming of age narratives set in the First World War to negotiate the British crisis of adulthood in the nineties, through in-depth readings of exemplary texts which stand in for significant tropes of the nineties' shift. My first two chapters map out how coming of age is used to explore the relationship between history and the present. Chapter One treats two 'canonical' texts of the nineties' shift, Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993) and Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-5), arguing that they present the two main models for coming of age in relation to history. Both of these novels present traumatised soldiers. However, these traumas are also identity crises, and by [centring the latter aspect in my analysis](#)~~centring this analysis~~, I draw attention to new ways of reading these novels and their engagement with society. *Birdsong* focuses on the danger of forgetting family history, suggesting that only through negotiating the past can the future of family life be secured. The *Regeneration Trilogy* represents a continuing negotiation between margins and centres of the myth, presenting a series of characters dealing with an increasing inability to resolve their identity crises. In both novels, these crises do not originate in the First World War, but the war gives them greater significance, exacerbating the effect of the disruption of experience and expectation. However, whereas *Birdsong* suggests the family might resolve the disconnect, the *Regeneration Trilogy* is uncertain whether resolution is even ultimately desirable.

Chapter Two focuses on two examples of young adult fiction, Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* (2003) and Linda Newbery's *The Shell House* (2002). This chapter considers in particular the implied reader, drawing on John Stephens' *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature* (1992), arguing that these novels seek to encourage

readers to see themselves in relation to the national past. They do this through positioning the war as both a site of ethical and moral dilemmas *and* a historic event which must be negotiated. In both novels, the past is fundamentally subjective and thus they are focused on experience. However, they differ in their representation of the relationship between experience and expectations, and particularly whether the latter can be dismissed. I argue that *Private Peaceful* presents a resolution to the narrator, Tommo's, crisis which suggests that expectations can be dismissed, whereas *The Shell House* suggests that expectations can never be entirely escaped or ignored.

The question of expectations is also the central theme of Chapter Three. Using theories of citizenship, I argue that Newbery's *Some Other War* (1990), Theresa Breslin's *Remembrance* (2002) and Marcus Sedgwick's *The Foreshadowing* (2005) use the First World War to explore the possibility of political power for adolescents, and map out in various ways it is necessary to negotiate between the desire for independence and the expectations and restrictions of society. These novels ultimately suggest that the only way to create balance between expectation and experience is to transform expectation. This process of transformation is explicitly gendered. I compare the construction of citizenship for female and male characters, arguing that female characters' transformation is framed through the legalistic models, while male characters' expectations are more clearly cultural, with consequences for the success of their coming of age narratives.

Whereas the young adult novels featured in Chapter Three suggest that transforming expectations is possible, the adult novels discussed in Chapter Four present a less hopeful view. Positioning Pat Barker's *Another World* (1998) and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child* (2011) as nostalgic fictions, I argue that these novels construct complex nostalgic visions of the First World War which reiterate the instability of contemporary adulthood. However, these novels also present the past as fractured and divided between experience and expectation as a possible resolution to the identity crises of the present. These novels negotiate issues of class and sexuality in relation to past, suggesting that new ways of understanding the past are needed – as are new models of coming of age.

This thesis is an argument for the importance of coming of age to our understanding of the myth of the First World War and particularly its incarnation in the fiction of the 1990s and 2000s. Using Erik Erikson's theory of the identity crisis and Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory, I show how the relationship between coming of age and the past has been used productively to comment on present day

uncertainties around adulthood, citizenship, and the uses of history in the public sphere. By studying both adult and young adult fiction, I present a rounded and varied picture of the uses of coming of age, suggesting that this framework nuances existing debates on myth, memory and trauma, as well as opening up for reading these texts as multifaceted novels of transformation and possibility.

Chapter 1: The First World War Comes of Age in the Nineties

1.1 Introduction: Remembering, Writing and Coming of Age

In this chapter, I read two classic works of the nineties' shift, Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-5) and Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993). I argue that they represent two models of coming of age which inform the understanding of the First World War in fiction after 1989. These models inform the rest of my thesis, providing a framework for my discussion of the tension between the desire for connection, consolation and successful coming of age on the one hand, and an acknowledgement of uncertainty and the potential impossibility of connecting the twin pressures of experience and expectation on the other. Both texts are case studies of the nineties' shift. I argue that although they engage with very different aspects of the debate about the First World War, they both position the First World War as the twentieth century's coming of age. The war becomes simultaneously a historical site and a framework for debates about the contemporary moment. This similarity has been picked up by critics and, alongside their similar publication dates, has resulted in their canonisation as the key texts of the nineties' shift. As such, they are often read alongside each other by cultural historians and critics.¹ Brian Bond's revisionist book, *The Unquiet Western Front* (2002), is indicative: arguing that the First World War is consistently misread through the 'lens' of the futility mythology and the myth of the disillusioned soldier, he describes the books together, suggesting that they 'display the tendency to dwell on "the horrors" of the Western Front.'² To a point he is correct: *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy* focus on the Western Front, are critical of the war and its management and make use of the dichotomies which form the basis for the futility myth. Thus they are mythical as well as historical, acting necessarily as commentary and critique as well as reproduction of a version of the past.³ However, by reading the novels through the framework of coming of age, paying particular attention to their representation of characters' transitions and identity crises, I complicate the

¹ See Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.102-5; Antoine Prost and Jay Winter, *The Great War in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.184-5.

² Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.76.

³ Bond criticises Barker more than Faulks, a tendency which is replicated in a number of these texts. Barker is also singled out for criticism in Adrian Gregory's *The Last Great War* (2008) and Bernard Bergonzi's *War Poets and Other Subjects* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). Barker's 'feminist politics' come in for special criticism – see also Ben Shepard 'Digging Up the Past' (*The Times Literary Supplement*, March 22, 1996). Barbara Korte also discusses this critical focus in her article 'The Grandfather's War', p.125-6, noting that despite the general increase in focus on female characters in the nineties, Barker's more explicit feminism seems to attract more criticism than most.

assumption that these novels are similar, arguing that reading them simply through the lens of the futility myth alone elides their different uses of the war and, indeed, of the mythscape and multiple myths circulating in the novels. Their representation of coming of age in turn shapes their disparate approaches to the past and its value to the present.

These differences in representation is not usually reflected in the criticism of the two novels, or in the cultural histories of the period. In Bernard Bergonzi's *War Poets and Other Subjects* (2000), he singles Barker out for particular criticism, allowing that the *Regeneration Trilogy*, although compelling and well-written, ultimately fails as a historical novel. In his final conclusion, however, he includes *Birdsong*, critiquing:

the essentially mythical approach of novels like Barker's and Faulks'. Such works may draw in detail on historical scholarship, but their perception of the war, being mythic, is fixed, static and ahistorical. It is nevertheless deeply rooted in the national consciousness.⁴

This description of Barker's and Faulks' novels as *essentially* mythical is typical. In this form of cultural criticism, there is an assumption that the novels' focus on the war's relation to a (contemporary) national 'consciousness' or in relation to a mythscape rather than the war's historical setting is a weakness rather than a strength: it positions the mythology as monolithic and contrary to the historical 'truth'. In my argument I show how the myths deployed in *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy* are more complex and differ significantly in their purpose and deployment. This complexity is particularly evident in their representation and resolution of coming of age's identity crisis. The trilogy's interest in the myths of the war is structured by its critique of social and national narratives and expectations. It is about those people and communities marginalised by these socio-cultural expectations which inform and shape the myth: the *Regeneration Trilogy's* characters struggle to come of age and recognise themselves within the confines of narratives, both social and historical. This is clear from the focus in the trilogy on institutions as sites of authority and power, from military hospitals to prisons to the Ministry of Information and the army itself. By contrast, *Birdsong's* model of coming of age centres on the family and the negotiation of remembering from generation to generation, as well as the importance of futurity to the understanding of the self. The central tension in the novel is protagonist Stephen Wraysford's struggle to find a place to belong and to find a social context for his experiences both before and during the war. Although *Birdsong* deals with the relationship between past and present too, it is the act of remembering's potential for the creation of

⁴ Bergonzi, p.13.

family in the present which is foregrounded. The family is the solution to the disconnect between experience and expectation, a place for social acknowledgement of the experience of the past. Through this acknowledgement, the identity crisis too can be resolved.

As this suggests, *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy* share a thematic focus: coming of age. They are novels which track transitions, successful or not. Jerome de Groot implicitly gestures at this shared transitional aspect when he argues that:

Barker and Faulks take the trauma of the war and fold it into their meditations upon memory and identity. In both instances the experience of combat leads to an inability to articulate one's identity, a desire to not speak of things and to repress them. Historical events here become something to forget, something unable to be expressed, something that might wound or hurt the psyche.⁵

De Groot picks up on two key themes which the texts share: remembering, and creating identity. Although he is not explicitly making a point about coming of age, this engagement with changes in identity, in sense of self, and the transformative properties of war echo the themes I see as central to coming of age. The intersection of these themes is the structure around which the coming of age framework is shaped, although de Groot reads them in the context of trauma. I want to stress the resonance of remembrance and identity beyond the question of the First World War as a site of trauma: the question of social acknowledgement and the expectation placed on acts of self-definition necessarily informs the novels. They are novels about transition and about attempting to make sense of self in relation to others, whether represented by the family or by more nebulous constructions of class, gender and sexuality. The novels also share an anxiety about contemporary models of adulthood.

In distinguishing between the way in which the coming of age models of *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy* approach the past differently, I use the terms 'remembering' and 'marginalisation'. In *Birdsong*, the main focus is on the act of remembering as an act of connecting experience and social expectation through coming to terms with the past. It is through this taking on of the past by the present, a joining up of past and present experiences, that it becomes possible to come of age. Thus the novel repeatedly emphasises the importance of sharing and articulating memory. Remembering is a social act, shoring up (adult) identity and securing a place within a community, primarily the family.⁶ Faulks draws on the implicit assumption of much of the memory work surrounding war: that the

⁵ De Groot, (2010), p.105.

⁶ Although the homosocial world of the army is central to the novel, drawing on the myth of the disillusioned soldier, its potential community is repeatedly disrupted and destroyed through the violence of the war.

natural guardian of remembrance is the next generation, suggesting a specifically familial link which cannot be replicated through other means. This necessarily means that remembering requires the reproductive family in order to exist, because a personal, organic connection must be maintained. At the heart of the novel's construction of coming of age is the expectation of parenthood. The experience of war is negotiated and integrated into a familial identity through reproduction. Thus *Birdsong* is concerned with the problem of forgetting the war, but its forgetting is linked to a growing distance from the family and increased solipsism. This echoes the anxiety discussed in the introduction as well as the perceived increasing instability of the nuclear family, reflected in the importance of disconnection in *Birdsong*.⁷ *Birdsong* aims to confirm the war's meaning and subsequently, the meaning of adulthood, coming of age, and family. The novel uses the myth of the disillusioned soldier in particular in order to emphasise the importance of remembering and the centrality of family to identity. I argue that ultimately, the novel suggests that through familial recognition, the gap between experience and social expectation can be bridged, a unified identity formed and disillusionment potentially undone.

For the *Regeneration Trilogy*, marginalisation is far more important. Marginalisation, in contrast to forgetting, is bound up with power relations. It is concerned with those who are left out of dominant narratives, and those trying to establish an identity in relation or in opposition to these dominant narratives. The *Regeneration Trilogy* engages with how the war is remembered in the present, but it is more interested in *who* it remembers and *why*. In doing so, it subverts the expected myth of disillusioned soldier while also repeatedly invoking the myth, both in its plot and in its use of the canonical war poets, Owen and Sassoon. In this way, its representation of the past begins to approach what Landsberg calls for; representations of the past which are a call to contemporary social responsibility which goes beyond concern for a biological familial past.⁸ This is evident in the trilogy's depiction of expectations; its construction of coming of age is explicitly engaged with the question of texts and their ability to reinforce expectation *or* express and negotiate experience. This is also why the question of marginalisation is so crucial: the trilogy can be read as a study of how unacknowledged or unaccepted experiences can prolong, exacerbate or even create the identity crisis of coming of age. Thus the trilogy's

⁷ In *Representations of Youth*, Christine Griffin argues that the nuclear family has always been a cause for concern in the postwar world, but argues that its decline had become 'accepted fact' in the media and in social science in the 1980s and 90s. See p.161-3.

⁸ For the clearest articulation of this, see Landsberg, p.152.

characters' struggle to come of age into secure identities is informed by questions of not fitting into broader social categories and the contradictory desire to conform to expectations versus expressing and being true to lived experience. The *Regeneration Trilogy* actively disrupts the myths of both the disillusioned and traumatised soldiers in its settings, and in its treatment of reader expectation, while its focus on marginalisation means it does not allow for consolation.

Barker's trilogy focuses in part on the historical figure of W H R Rivers: *Regeneration* (1991) centres on Rivers' work at Craiglockhart, including his treatment of Siegfried Sassoon and the fictional Billy Prior; *The Eye in the Door* (1993) follows Rivers to London, also taking in Prior's work as an intelligence officer for the Ministry of Munitions. *The Ghost Road* (1995), the final novel, sees Prior depart for France alongside Wilfred Owen, while Rivers reflects on his pre-war anthropological experiences. The trilogy has been well received and has seen a lot of academic as well as popular attention. It can be seen as an example of what Margaret Scanlan terms the 'sceptical historical novel', meaning novels which 'concern themselves with the question of how private lives and consciousnesses [sic] intersect with public events; how it is we experience our history.'⁹ This question of public/private intersection is essential to Barker's project. Thus the trilogy is particularly engaged with the cultural construction of the war, its articulation and representation and the power relations inherent therein. The trilogy focuses on marginalisation; those written out of the myth for various political and social reasons. These themes are evident in the presence of non-combatant characters such as Rivers and Sarah Lumb, and through the trilogy's insistence on focusing on Britain and the home front, places and people at the margins of the soldiering myths.

In *Birdsong*, little time is spent in Britain. Indeed, Stephen is linked almost as much to France as he is to Britain. The novel opens with his arrival in France in 1910, and describes his subsequent unhappy affair with a married French woman, Isabelle. The narrative then skips ahead six years, to Stephen in the trenches, an officer in charge of a mining unit. Although Faulks' narrative takes in multiple points of view and characters, there is never any doubt as to Stephen's being the main character. There is another central element of the plot, however: the tracing of Stephen's experiences in the war by his granddaughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth's subplot brings in questions of the after-life of the war, particularly in relation to the family. It is this which differentiates Faulks' novel

⁹ Margaret Scanlan, *Traces of Another Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.5.

from earlier representations of the war. *Birdsong* has sold better than Barker's novels and has been generally favourably reviewed.¹⁰ However, there is very little criticism of it, outside the outlines of the nineties' shift mentioned above. Perhaps this is because the novel is detached from overt politics and its characters entirely fictional. *Birdsong* is a realist text with no explicit engagement with the war as a literary phenomenon or the unreliability of narratives. Dan Todman notes that *Birdsong* draws on Faulks' research at the Imperial War Museum, and has intertextual elements and the novel is in some ways an idealised romance of the archive. Rather than an unsatisfactory or partial narrative, the novel suggests looking into the past will permit access to a complete and legible (familiar) past.¹¹ *Birdsong* is about the act of remembering as a way of solidifying family and thereby securing stable, adult identities.

In its focus on family, *Birdsong* reflects a broader cultural concern with the context of remembering the war. T.G Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper observe a 'focus on generational transmission [of memories]' which sees 'the children and grandchildren of survivors engaging in activities that translate individual memory and family stories into museum exhibits, film, history and fiction.'¹² The examples they mention are performative, implying an audience. These acts of articulation stem in part from a desire to situate these stories in a larger context. Implicit in Ashplant *et al.*'s understanding of these activities is the concept of memory as something transmittable; not just as an individual experience, but something to be shared. The focus here is less on the a mode of recall, but rather *remembering* as an act or performance. The focus on familial memory also reflects a concern for the family as an institution. Marianne Hirsch, in *Family Frames* (1997), suggests that in the 'postmodern moment' of the late eighties and early nineties 'the family occupies a powerful and powerfully threatened place: structurally a lost vestige of protection against war, racism, exile, and cultural displacement, it becomes particularly vulnerable to these violent ruptures, and so a measure of their devastation.'¹³ Hirsch is specifically discussing the Jewish family as a site disrupted by trauma and the unspeakability of the Holocaust, which is at the heart of

¹⁰ See Jenny Holden, 'The Twelve Books You Must Stock' *The Bookseller* [<http://www.thebookseller.com/feature/12-books-you-must-stock.html>] Published: 31.07.2008; accessed: 02.10.2013; Virginie Renard's book is the first to engage in a close reading of *Birdsong*, but her work is comparative and focuses on its relation to trauma and memory. See p.279-81, p.323-5 for her most sustained readings.

¹¹ Todman, p.147, p.185.

¹² Ashplant, T.G., Graham Dawson and Michael Roper. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.43.

¹³ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.13.

her idea of postmemory, but it has had broad resonances, and echoes larger historical themes of memory and family. For Hirsch, the family is both the framework for understanding trauma, and its potential inheritor. Subsequently, it is here that the past can be engaged with and incorporated into the next generation's identity, a model which bears a resemblance to the function of the family in *Birdsong*, despite the difference in context. *Birdsong* is three generations removed from the First World War, and does not reflect the lived with silence of Hirsch's examples. However, Elizabeth's plotline draws on similar ideas as 'postmemory', albeit Hirsch insists on the unspeakability of the past, whereas Faulks insists the past must be spoken, experienced and understood. The past becomes part of the *experience* of the family, and its continued remembering part of coming of age. It is not just, as other critics have suggested, that *Birdsong* 'functions to fill the gaps and silences in both family and public memory [...].'¹⁴ Rather, *Birdsong* insists on the importance of *specifically* familial remembering in facilitating the creation of an adult identity. This is reflected not just in the narrative movement between Stephen and his granddaughter, Elizabeth, but also in the centrality of children and reproduction to the novel, functioning as symbols of future potential *and* as the redemption of the disillusioned soldier. To truly come of age in *Birdsong*, the past must be faced, with a view to negotiating the future.

If reading *Birdsong* through the lens of coming of age repositions it as a novel about the family's influence on shaping of adult identity, analysing the *Regeneration Trilogy* through this framework presents it as a series of novels about the impossibility of resolving the disconnect between experience and expectation. Sarah Trimble begins to articulate this argument in her article, "'The Unreturning Army that Was Youth': Social Reproduction and Apocalypse in Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*". She suggests that the trilogy presents the war as a site of uncertainty specifically associated with youth: 'the trope of groundlessness also allows Barker to express how the instabilities of war opened up possibilities for social change.'¹⁵ However, Trimble does not consistently read the importance of youth in the trilogy, and thus misses the way in which the transitional aspect of coming of age shapes the novels. It is not so much groundlessness as a sense of endless deferral: textual deferrals as well as the deferral of articulation of experience and

¹⁴ Ashplant *et al.*, p.44.

¹⁵ Sarah Trimble "'The Unreturning Army that Was Youth': Social Reproduction and Apocalypse in Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*" *Contemporary Women's Writing* 7:1, March 2013 pp.73-91, p.88.

social acknowledgement.¹⁶ Moments of connection occur in the trilogy, but are almost immediately undone. Most of the protagonists believe themselves to have become adults, only to find themselves regressing to childhood habits, revealing instabilities through their use of textual allusions, in their writing or through interactions with institutions such as the army, the medical profession, and/or the prison system. This suggests the potential undesirability of experience, the debilitating way in which experiential coming of age can in fact cause a regression as it exposes the hollowness of social expectations of adulthood, undermining any confidence in the presumed certainty of adulthood. The *Regeneration Trilogy*'s engagement with the normative power of institutions is particularly crucial to its coming of age approach.¹⁷ By reading this potentiality into the past, the trilogy uses coming of age in order to explore the past's relevance to the present. This approach distinguishes it from *Birdsong*: the *Regeneration Trilogy* is focused on broad social and national narratives, using coming of age as a way of exploring those marginalised by these narratives, whereas *Birdsong*'s focus remains limited to the family.

It is through the *Regeneration Trilogy*'s focus on articulation (of experience) and marginalisation (as the process of having one's experience rejected or pushed to the margins) that coming of age is at its clearest. This work of negotiation between speaking about experience and the space given to those voices is central to the identity crises in the novels. Reclaiming or reconstructing marginalised narratives draws attention to possibilities of change in the past, as well as suggesting potential for change in the present. Marginalisation suggests political and social pressure; I use the term to mean the deliberate writing out of experiences which do not match the expectations of dominant social and cultural narratives. It is by attempting to orientate themselves in relation to these narratives around them that Prior, Rivers, and Sassoon arrive at their coming of age crisis. Their desire for a connected identity and a stable sense of their pasts is forever deferred or subverted by their relation to the expectations of the dominant narrative, and their inability to create an affirmative community entirely at the margins *or* live up to the expectations at the centre of the myth. Texts and writing are a central aspect of this focus. As critics such as Gary Sheffield, as well as Brian Bond and Bernard Bergonzi, have

¹⁶ Kate McLoughlin argues that war writing is always characterised by deferrals, because of its inherent unrepresentability, an argument which also suggests Campbell's 'combat gnosticism', with its insistence on only those who have been in combat being able to understand it. See McLoughlin, *Authoring War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.7-8 in particular.

¹⁷ Millard argues that this one of the function of the coming of age narrative: to expose faults in existing institutions, p.2.

noted, Barker's use of texts draws heavily on 'mythical' sources, particularly the war poets. Sheffield argues that, in doing so, Barker reinforces the importance of these mythical voices and narratives, further adding to the homogenization of the myth.¹⁸ However, focusing on the use of coming of age tropes in the novels, I argue that Barker uses these voices to question the dominance of the myth and, through her characters' attempts to come of age, complicate the use of the past in the present more broadly. In making this argument, I am drawing on John Brannigan's observation that the trilogy circles around 'tropes of speech and silences'.¹⁹ The terms 'articulation' and 'marginalisation' draw attention to the way that silence is never neutral in the trilogy. These concepts draw attention to the influence of experience and expectation on the ability to speak and resolve characters' identity crises. The engagement with marginalisation and articulation operates between the two poles of potential and repression, and is always contingent on power relations and normative structures. It is the negotiation of these poles which enables the trilogy's project of criticism of these structures.

In this chapter, I read the texts in turn, mapping out two models of coming of age which inform the rest of this thesis: one which seeks to balance social expectation and experience through memory work; and one which sees marginalisation of experience as a source for the critique of societal expectations. In *Birdsong*, I argue that the central tension is between the act of remembering and potential loss of the past through traumatic repression and familial forgetting. Todman suggests that the contemporary understanding of the First World War circles around two central figures: 'the silent veteran, so traumatized by his experiences that he is unable to communicate them' and 'his polar opposite, the soldier writer, poet or dramatist, or more recently, the aged veteran, who did choose to communicate his experiences'.²⁰ There is a similarity here to the myths of disillusioned and traumatised soldiers. This tension is particularly relevant to the concerns of the nineties; silence becomes a symbol of unspeakable trauma and the potentially overwhelming power of experience – experience that it might be more 'comforting' to forget. It also evokes the silence of living memory, as those who had first-hand experience of the war die and the experience of war becomes less immediately accessible.

¹⁸ See G.D Sheffield, 'Oh! What a Futile War' in *War, Culture and the Media* (Trowbridge: Flick Books, 1996), p.64.

¹⁹ John Brannigan, *Pat Barker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.109.

²⁰ Todman, p.8.

I read *Birdsong* as a coming of age narrative, in which the act of remembering the past is a rite of passage into adulthood, creating a space for experience within the structure of familial expectations. In the movement between the silent veteran and the act of articulation, *Birdsong* reconfigures Todman's model through two generations speaking to each other and allowing the present to act as witness to the experiences of the past. It is through this art of witnessing and remembering that Elizabeth is able to come of age, living up to the expectations of adulthood. Her narrative underscores the importance of creating space to acknowledge the experience of the past; by contrast Stephen remains the silent, traumatized victim, unable fully to enter adulthood. *Birdsong*'s invocation of memory is not merely about *remembering* in itself; it is about the sharing of memory and return to familial pasts in order to re-establish a stable vision of adulthood through the equal focus on expectation, particularly in terms of the reproductive family, and experience.

I move on to analyse the *Regeneration Trilogy* as more interested in the impossibility of fully connecting experience and social, cultural and political expectation. Its central themes are articulation and marginalisation. Brannigan suggests that Barker's interest in the war is in illuminating 'its own mythologising and revisionist tendencies'.²¹ I argue that this misses out a central tension in Barker's work: the impossibility of separating the textual pressures of the soldiering myths from the lived, experienced life, and this impossibility's impact on the construction of adulthood in the trilogy. Marginalisation and silence are central to the crises of identity in the novels, reflecting contemporary anxieties surrounding the politics of identity. The characters attempt to come of age in relation to narratives and discourses around gender, class, sexuality, and, ultimately, stable adulthood. Their coming of age is reflected in Barker's use of the First World War as a symbol for the twentieth century; it becomes a site where she can challenge or at least question dominant narratives of progress and the desirability of stable models of adulthood and adult community. The *Regeneration Trilogy* functions as an exploration of the creation of dominant narratives, using intertextuality in order to expose the impossibility of discovering any 'true' sense of origins or the past, suggesting the instability and perhaps ultimately the futility of attempting to fully align expectations and experience. The way the characters' coming of age crises is mirrored in the war's

²¹ Brannigan, p.94.

textual instability positions the war's effect on coming into adulthood as an on-going crisis.

1.2 *Birdsong*: The Myth, Family and Acts of Remembering

Remembering in *Birdsong* is a social act. For remembering to have value, it must be communal and shareable. Thus the novel's act of remembering functions on a meta-textual level as well as in the text itself. Faulks says his motivation in writing historical novels about the wars of the twentieth century was 'to articulate the horror which, for so many, was literally and devastatingly incommunicable,' adding that he feels 'that these things needed to be explained to people of my generation.'²² He is looking to provoke engagement with the war as an historical event, yet suggesting that it is somehow beyond communicating – except perhaps by the novel. Todman suggests that this is part of the appeal of the novel for readers who 'made use of *Birdsong* to create a mental image of what the war had been like' – to an extent deliberately trying to create a prosthetic memory.²³ The novel acts as a substitute for memory *and* historical knowledge by giving depth and individuality to the myth of the disillusioned soldier, not unlike Landsberg's theory. Unlike Landsberg's ideal of prosthetic memory, an ethical engagement with forgotten or minority narratives, *Birdsong* offers a re-inscription of the myth, even as it brings in elements of the traumatised soldier, ultimately suggesting that remembering is enough in itself. By introducing the character of Elizabeth to the narrative, however, the context of these soldier myths is changed. By showing that the experience of the past can be reclaimed and understood by the present, the novel also argues for the continued importance of the reproductive family, often seen as oppositional to the mythical disillusioned soldier. Elizabeth's child becomes her 'lesson' from the past, for the future; Elizabeth acknowledges and incorporates the experience of the past into her present socially expected coming of age into parenthood and to some extent undoes the futility of the war.

It is through Elizabeth's story line that the connections between family history, remembering the war, and coming of age are most explicitly brought out. This may explain why what critical attention has been paid to *Birdsong* has focused primarily on

²² Jane Dickinson 'Sebastian Faulks: The bitter taste of Vichy bottled out' in *The Independent* [<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books-interview--sebastian-faulks-the-bitter-taste-of-vichy-bottled-out-1174730.html>]; the article discusses *Birdsong* and its semi-sequel, *Charlotte Gray* (1999).

²³ Todman, p.176.

Elizabeth's narrative. This attention has mostly come from cultural historians such as Todman, and short literary interventions, such as Korte's.²⁴ Jerome de Groot's analysis may stand in for other critics when he argues that, through Elizabeth's engagement with Stephen's story, *Birdsong* 'dramatizes [...] the ways in which people in contemporary society understand their past. Through engagement with the personal and revelatory, her experiences make her more whole. Elizabeth uses her past to understand herself through a type of empathy and experiential understanding.'²⁵ This 'empathy and experiential understanding' manifests as a 'performance' of memory. It is not enough for Elizabeth to learn about the past: she needs to become part of it, visiting battlefield sites, speaking to veterans, and finally, discussing the war with her mother. In doing so, she helps to articulate the past for the present, and gives her mother a better understanding of herself. De Groot stresses the personal aspects of Elizabeth's narrative; it is about the past as the past is relevant to the present, and particularly to the individual. His conclusion that Elizabeth's engagement with the past makes her whole, however, is interesting, in part because it does not touch upon why she feels incomplete before her engagement with the past.

By ignoring the causes of her incompleteness de Groot elides or misses the centrality of expectations of coming of age to the novel's larger engagement with remembering and transmission between generations. The relationship between past and present is not straightforward. This manifests particularly in Elizabeth's decision to look to the past:

Her life had reached an age at which she should no longer be the last to die; *there ought to be someone younger than her*, a generation of her children who should now be enjoying that luxurious safety of knowing that grandparents and parents lay like a barrier between them and their mortality. But in the absence of her own children she had started to look backwards and wonder at the fate of a different generation. Because their lives were over she felt protective; she felt almost maternal towards them.²⁶

The emphasis is on familial relations: as there is no future for her to care for, the past supplies the family connection which will anchor Elizabeth and take her beyond the present. Her desire to engage with the war and Stephen is positioned as a consequence of her childlessness. Being the last of her family line places her in the generation-space of a

²⁴ Todman returns to *Birdsong* repeatedly, but his most sustained analysis is p.172-7; see also Korte, p.129.

²⁵ De Groot, (2010), p.103; see also Renard p.265, 267.

²⁶ Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (London: Vintage, 1994 (1993)), p.213 [emphasis mine].

child. Looking to the past is explicitly figured as a maternal and *adult* act. In restoring the past hidden by the silence of Stephen (and Francoise, Elizabeth's mother), Elizabeth is performing an act of caring and protection. Remembering creates empathetic bonds, constructing a family which defies linear time: Elizabeth is able to act as a maternal force for Stephen, despite their temporal separation. It is Elizabeth's act of speaking about the war which permits Stephen retrospectively to be given the maternal care which he lacked in life. In turn, Elizabeth negotiates her coming of age through her care for Stephen. As she takes on his experience, she is able to fulfil the novel's ideological expectation of adulthood: becoming pregnant and passing on the family's history.²⁷ This negotiation of memory through family (and particularly the chronologically disrupted family structure) positions remembering as necessary for coming of age and becoming an adult. It provides Elizabeth with meaning, and permits her to experience adulthood through her maternal care for Stephen. In turn, this implicitly positions remembering as *always* necessary, ethically valuable, and personally enriching.

Articulating and sharing experience in *Birdsong* are central to constructing the family. Passing family history on to the next generation is a continual concern of the novel; Elizabeth looks to the past in part as compensation for not having her own children to pass family stories on to. However, whereas Elizabeth reconfigures her sense of family through the past, Stephen does the opposite. In *Birdsong*'s first section, which takes place before the war, Stephen finds himself talking about his past. Speaking to Isabelle after they run away together, Stephen is able to articulate his childhood traumas. Put in an institution after being abandoned by his mother and grandfather, Stephen remembers:

I'd never seen so many people in one place before and it seemed to me each of us was diminished by it. I had feelings of panic when we sat there, as though we were all being reduced to numbers, to ranks of nameless people who were not valued in the eyes of another individual.[...]²⁸

It is only because Stephen feels recognised and loved by Isabelle that he is able to acknowledge the effect this institution has had on him. She values him as an individual, and therefore Stephen feels he can no longer be 'reduced to numbers, to ranks of nameless people'. In *Birdsong*, this defines family: they are the people who love the individual, allow them to face their past, and keep them from being reduced. Family also

²⁷ The novel is ultimately more invested in *parenthood* than motherhood; however, it is worth noting that for both Isabelle and Elizabeth, motherhood coincides with a return to the 'responsible', biological family - a sense that motherhood confers new responsibilities and a more significant coming of age.

²⁸ Faulks, p.85.

includes the dream of the future; shortly after this exchange, Stephen begins to make plans for Isabelle's and his future life, including a visit to his home.²⁹ It is a moment of transition, both geographically (travelling away from Isabelle's husband in Amiens) and emotionally; Stephen goes from having been abandoned to gaining a sense of stability through the (potential) for family he sees in Isabelle. He is able to begin to come of age through his processing of the past, which is facilitated by her presence. Stephen begins to become an adult in the sense of being ready to create his own family and negotiate the failures of care which mark his past. It is significant that this is a moment of articulation, emphasising the importance of performing memory. It is in the speaking of his memory that Stephen is able to begin to manage its impact on his life – and come of age.

This scene also presents the opposite of the family: the institution, which reduces the individual 'to numbers, to ranks'. The phrasing is a reference towards the larger institution of the army, and recalls the mythical trope of soldiers reducing individual men to numbers, rank and file, or statistics.³⁰ The use of this imagery foreshadows both the war and the unhappy ending of Isabelle and Stephen's relationship. However, it also sets up the central themes which recur throughout the novel: the reduction of the individual; the emotional and physical separation of men from their families; the association of the war with childhood and regression. The past needs to be articulated in order to be fully understood in relation to the present and this articulation is inextricably bound up with the family and coming of age. When the novel moves forward to 1916 and Stephen's experiences in the war, it is revealed that Stephen believes himself simultaneously beyond childhood and beyond any connection to the future: 'He felt that he had already lost all connection with any earthly happiness that might persist beyond the sound of guns. The scattered grey hairs at his temples and above his ears seemed to remind him that he was changed and could not return.'³¹ This initially suggests that the war has matured Stephen beyond his years. However, his assertion that he has 'lost all connection with any earthly happiness' gestures at his failure to inhabit the futurity of adulthood; he is not able to engage with the social expectations of a post-war existence. Despite his experiential

²⁹ See *ibid.*, p.94.

³⁰ See for example Petra Rau, 'Between Absence and Ubiquity – On the Meanings of the Body at War' in *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) pp.1-25, p.12-8; also Hynes, p.281. It is worth noting that this 'reduction to numbers' features in the futurity mythology, as well as being a prominent part of the disillusionment of the mythical soldier's narrative.

³¹ Faulks, p.124-5.

maturity, the lack of connection to future action makes any sense of coming of age here sterile.

However, Stephen is not beyond his childhood. This is confirmed when he is seriously wounded:

He could smell the harsh carbolic soap of the orphanage, then the school room with its dust and chalk. He was going to die without ever having been loved, [...] not by anyone who had known him. [...]. He could not forgive them – his mother or Isabelle or the man who had promised to be a father.³²

The smells of the war force him into a confrontation with his past and all those by whom he feels abandoned, all of whom are potential family connections which failed. He connects this failure with institutions: the orphanage and school function as precursors to the institutionalised anonymity of the army. These institutions cannot provide love; instead they distance the individual from the possibility of recognition.³³ The school and orphanage prefigure the devastating effects of the army in creating ‘unknowable’ men who are unable to fully articulate or face their experiences, and are rendered invisible as individuals even as they are collectively celebrated. It also presents a negative example of memory: involuntary, linked with the physical trauma of the war. This is not an articulated memory and does not permit Stephen to negotiate his past. It feels immediate, emphasizing his loneliness and lack of family ties as part of an ongoing crisis, a crisis which does not allow him any sense of stability or security. This prefigures the crisis of the war on a larger scale: it too proves impossible for Stephen to negotiate or accommodate.

Stephen’s failure to face his past is commented on by other characters. Colonel Gray, speaking about Stephen’s card prediction games, where he uses the cards to determine whether he will survive an attack, suggests that Stephen does it: ‘because of what happened to you as a child.’³⁴ That Gray links this behaviour with Stephen’s childhood confirms what the two quotations above suggest: Stephen, far from having matured, is in crisis; that crisis is linked to his childhood and his inability to move beyond the traumatic events of his past. Gray, who is an adherent of Freud and presents psychological explanations for the breakdowns of his men, suggests that part of Stephen’s

³² Ibid., p.144.

³³ Faulks gestures towards the army’s potential for homosocial community, particularly in the figures of Weir and Gray; however, this community is ultimately always undermined by the threat of death and is ultimately rejected in the figure of Tom Brennan, who, through being in the care of the army, is ultimately essentially rendered ‘unknown’ until Elizabeth rediscovers him.

³⁴ Faulks, p.155.

problem is a lack of storytelling as a child, arguing that children need the fantasy of stories: '[t]hat's why they read books about witches and wizards and God knows what. But if a child's world is broken up by too much reality, that need goes underground.'³⁵ The storytelling suggested here by Gray is fantastical and imaginative; yet in his analysis, the fantastic provides a model of negotiating childhood which allows for a clearer relationship with the real in adulthood. Coming of age is figured through imaginative engagement and articulation, which provide an ability to negotiate and temporally situate experiences. Stephen's inability to engage with and articulate his experiences illustrates that his transition between childhood and adulthood has left him vulnerable, and unstable, temporally and emotionally. Stephen has no buffer between his childhood and his present, and thus the war causes him to regress into childhood habits.

Gray functions as a father figure for Stephen: he provides the lone example of a stable, admirable masculine figure in the novel. He is also presented as having secure family bonds. Married with a child, Gray is linked with both the home front and the future. After a particularly bad attack in which Stephen's closest friend, Michael Weir, dies, Gray's comfort makes clear the shortcoming of the homosocial space of the army and the centrality of reproductive family to the ability to keep going. He states: 'If you falter now you'll rob his life of any purpose. [...]' / 'Our lives lost meaning long ago. [...]' [Stephen said] / [...] 'Then do it for our children.'³⁶ This makes clear the failure of the army to provide a homosocial alternative to the family. The violence of war robs the soldiers' lives of individual purpose; only the futurity of children can provide a reason to keep going. Furthermore, this scene reiterates Gray's position as a stable figure, able to offer support, while drawing attention to Stephen's on-going crisis, manifested in his inability to see beyond the war. It is interesting, then, that Gray's response to Stephen's assertion that his life has lost meaning is not to promise him that it does have significance in and of itself, or to suggest any reason for the war. Rather, Gray gestures to the future and to the shared promise of 'our children'. I argue above that children symbolize the future throughout the novel; the past is given meaning in part through its passing on to the next generation. By including Stephen in the phrase 'our children', Gray allows Stephen a future. That this exchange happens in relation to the death of Weir is suggestive; the homosocial bonds of the army are ultimately sterile, except when they are in the service

³⁵ Ibid., p.155.

³⁶ Ibid., p.311.

of the next generation. Male-male friendship cannot facilitate the 'true' coming of age and coming to terms with experience which parenthood can grant.

Another interpretation of Gray's comment is that the war has purpose insofar as it makes the world safer for the next generation. Most of the critics who have commented upon the novel have seen it as anti-war, as is suggested by its grouping with the *Regeneration Trilogy*.³⁷ Todman suggests that in both the *Regeneration Trilogy* and *Birdsong* readers are presented with 'a set of recurrent themes and images which summed up the First World War [...]: poets, men shot at dawn, horror, death, waste.'³⁸ These images are part of the mythology of futility and of the experiences of the disillusioned soldier. Implicit in this narrative is the meaninglessness of the war. *Birdsong* does not fundamentally critique or disrupt this myth. What Gray's comment offers, perhaps, is nuance; after all, he is a stable, adult figure. Furthermore, his comfort is not the only comfort Stephen receives; Jeanne, Isabelle's sister, whom Stephen meets and begins a tentative friendship with, also urges him to continue. It is for her and Gray that Stephen is able to continue; both argue that the war must be fought to the end. They represent familial figures: father and wife, and significantly, familial figures based at the Front, disrupting the sense of the Front as separate from familial life and the futurity it promises in the form of children. Thus they provide a connection to the world beyond the war that Stephen himself does not feel, enabling him to keep fighting. The social expectations of family have the potential to redeem experience – and this is particularly true for children. This is not a critique of the myth, however. What is new is this familial element and its integration of the disillusioned soldier, with a nuancing of the traumatised soldier myth. Here, the expectations of adulthood which include potential future children, can help to ameliorate traumatic experiences. Representatives of a social and structural return to adulthood cannot, however, fully integrate the experience of the front. Thus, although Stephen returns to the front, his existence becomes 'grey and thin, like a light that might at any moment be extinguished'.³⁹ Stephen from then on experiences no more flashbacks; his past is cut off and he becomes disillusioned with any idea of 'home'. His trauma is marked by his full immersion in the world of the front – and only the social expectations of family can potentially redeem him.

³⁷ See Bergonzi, 1999.

³⁸ Todman, p.160.

³⁹ Faulks, p.313.

This containment model is also evident in his inability to speak about the war. Having got a friend to decode Stephen's diaries, Elizabeth discovers an entry where he has written: 'No child or future generation will ever know what this was like. They will never understand. [...] We will seal what we have seen in the silence of our hearts and no words will reach us.'⁴⁰ It is significant that this is read by Elizabeth, rather than presented in one of Stephen's sections. It is at once a warning against any further attempt at understanding (no future generation, of course, includes her) and at the same time, a plea for recognition, for Elizabeth to perform the act of remembering which Stephen finds himself incapable of doing. Stephen's diaries suggest that he did find some way to negotiate his experiences in the war, but only alone. He was never able to articulate his memories. The novel continually returns to this idea of speaking about the past within the family as a way of facing up to and accepting the past. Aleida Assmann argues that 'memories may be reconstructed and represented on a social level by those who succeed them in time. The family, the political unit, the nation, can create ties, loyalties and obligations which call for a continuation of memories.'⁴¹ Assmann's argument conflates the family, political unit and nation, as if to suggest that, even if they are not similar collectives, these groups remember in similar ways. Her linking of acts of remembering, and loyalty and obligation is a useful contrast to Faulks' representation of remembering. In her construction, remembering is about obligation, almost formalised. However, in *Birdsong*, the act of remembering is not just about doing justice to the past, but crucial to the creation of a secure individual *and* familial identity. In speaking about Stephen, and in performing acts of remembrance, culminating in the naming of her son, Elizabeth is able to use the past to facilitate her own coming of age *and* make good on Stephen's failed coming of age.

Elizabeth's coming of age into parenthood which ends the novel suggests that the act of remembering can serve as a sort of therapy, restoring the self or illuminating something lacking in the present. At the start of Elizabeth's narrative, she is struck by how little her life has changed since she was at university. Looking at her friends' lives, she finds that 'the children had altered things. At some stage there would be an exchange between the others about behaviours and schools, and she would have to close her ears,

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.340.

⁴¹ Aleida Assman, 'Re-framing Memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past' in *Performing the Past* eds. Karen Tilmans, Frank van Vrees and Jay Winter, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p.49.

partly through boredom, partly through an unacknowledged anguish.⁴² At this point, Elizabeth is framed by her lack of change; she is presented as a contrast to Stephen, whose life is constantly changing. Her feelings of stasis are connected with the absence of children which suggests that she, like Stephen, has not fully come of age; although her life has stability, her status as adult is not fully secure. However, for Stephen, the problem is an inability to articulate his past, which then transitions into an inability to imagine a future through the trauma of the war. For Elizabeth, her lack of anyone to imagine a future *for* drives her back into the past. In *Birdsong*, remembering is not just about remembering the past, but also having a future to convey the past to. The silence which Stephen adopts, however, has been passed down, and Elizabeth at the beginning of her storyline knows nothing about her grandfather and his experiences. Her curiosity is piqued by an article in the *Times*: ‘interviews with veterans and comments from various historians. Elizabeth read it with a feeling of despair: the topic seemed too large, too fraught and too remote for her to take on at the moment. Yet something in it troubled her.’⁴³ This ‘troubling’ is connected to the absence of her grandfather. Elizabeth knows he was in the war, but little else. The ‘troubling’ indicates her personal link to the war, foreshadowing her engagement with it. This personal engagement is contrasted with national and international memorial sites. When Elizabeth travels to France, she visits Amiens, and goes to see Thiepval.⁴⁴ These two instances gesture to the national context of the war, suggesting that Elizabeth’s remembering may be part of a larger project of commemoration. However, these are the only traces of national engagement in Elizabeth’s narrative. Indeed, just preceding her visit to Albert, Elizabeth reflects: ‘What did it matter? It mattered passionately. It mattered because her own grandfather has been here, in this town, in this square: *her own flesh and blood*.’⁴⁵ The site does not have a national meaning for Elizabeth. Rather, it is an important site because it rescues a connection with her family’s past. De Groot suggests, in *Consuming History* (2009), that family history can take on an almost biological meaning; memory becomes genetic and equally as important as features or illnesses passed on.⁴⁶ For Elizabeth, this is true: her focus is solely on her family; looking to the past is tied to her identity and coming of age, and what she can do for Stephen.

⁴² Faulks, p.197.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.199.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.210-11; the memorial is not named, but its description makes it clear that it is Thiepval.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.209 [my emphasis].

⁴⁶ De Groot, 2009, p.86-9; see also p.73-6.

The nation looms larger in Stephen's narrative, but here too, it is dismissed. When Stephen's fellow officer, Weir, comes back from leave, he tells Stephen: '[England] stunk when I went on leave [...] I wish a great bombardment would smash down along Piccadilly into Whitehall and kill [...] them. [...].'⁴⁷ This remark recalls Siegfried Sassoon's poem 'Blighters', which also imagines the weapons of war killing civilians on the home front. Weir, the purest example of the disillusioned soldier myth in the novel, dismisses the nation as a potential site for comfort or community; the nation cannot provide space to face the memories and experiences of the front. Weir also rejects the possibilities of family, saying: 'I tried to explain to them what it was like and do you know, my father was bored. He was actually bored with the whole thing. I would especially like a five-day bombardment on the street [...].'⁴⁸ Weir's disillusionment with the nation is tied to his disillusionment with the family, and it is his family which provokes the most ferocious response. The failure to perform memory on the home front provokes Weir's anger and slide into despair. He is unable to process his memories because he does not have a recipient to recognise them; his 'father was bored' and did not provide the acknowledgement and recognition which might allow Weir to negotiate his experiences. At the beginning of the narrative, Weir is described as possessing 'innocence still visible beneath the strain' as opposed to Stephen's own feeling of being sterilely aged; his family is also described as stable, conventional, unlike Stephen's chaotic background.⁴⁹ However, his distancing from his family and subsequent death in the war is foreshadowed by the revelation that he is a virgin and proves scared of the prostitute Stephen finds for him, unable even to attempt intercourse.⁵⁰ Incapable of imagining the future, his death marks the ultimate failed coming of age. He has no relation to any community apart from the present, no community in which to 'read' a past or picture a future beyond the war. Weir's failed coming of age speaks to the necessity of not just memory, but also futurity, associated with the communities of family and, to a lesser extent, nation.

These communities are imaginatively linked through the notion of a *home* front. Marc Redfield has noted that the nation and the family are associated through imagery which 'inscribes [nationalism] within a domestic scene, figuring language as a 'mother-

⁴⁷ Faulks, p.235.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.235.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.124.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.123, p.163-5, p.167 – Stephen is also incapable of going through with the act, but this is presented as a traumatic reaction, rather than a failure of masculinity.

tongue' that accompanies the male nationalist in his itinerary from 'mother's knee' to 'the grave'.⁵¹ Redfield is not suggesting that the family and the nation are equivalent; rather that the discourse of nation borrows from the presumed emotive value of the family. Just as the individual's ties to their family are positioned as unbreakable and irreversible (in normative terms), so nationality is constructed as unchanging, despite the reality of emigrations. In this, it is important to note that both are also sites of remembering; part of their power comes from shared stories and myths which emphasise the 'naturalness' of belonging. However, the nation in *Birdsong* is ambiguous. As I have argued, there is little sense of a collective identity or community in the novel. Elizabeth's reconstruction of the past is primarily positioned in familial terms. The nation is still necessarily present in the novel: Stephen is part of the British Armed Forces, after all. The fact that Stephen begins the novel in France, and remains at the end of the 1910 section, however, raises some ambiguity about where Stephen would choose to serve:

He contemplated joining the French army, but although it would have entailed killing the same people and fighting for possession of the same land, it was not the same as fighting with other Englishmen. He read in papers of British regiments mobilizing in Lancashire and London [...] stations in Suffolk and Glasgow [...] Stephen was moved by the thought of his fellow-countrymen fighting this foreign war.⁵²

Benedict Anderson observes that nationality can inspire 'remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.'⁵³ Stephen, in joining the British army rather than the French, exemplifies this confidence; he feels that fighting with the French 'was not the same as fighting with other Englishmen', suggesting that – despite his rejection of Britain as a place to live, and his perceived rejection by his English family – he still expects to be welcomed by the nation. Significantly, his engagement is imaginary: he has not been to most of the places mentioned nor does he have any personal links to his fellow-countrymen. This is also a capitulation to the myth; Stephen's patriotic motivation allows him to be inscribed in the traditional narrative of the British officer on the Western Front, drawn in by a desire to 'do his bit' with his countrymen.

⁵¹ Redfield, Marc. 'Imagi-Nation: The Imagined Community and the Aesthetics of Mourning' *diacritics* 29:4: 58-83, p.69; Redfield is, of course, also gesturing at a gendered construction of nation, a notion I will return to in Chapter Three.

⁵² Faulks, p.131.

⁵³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), p.36.

Stephen's nationalism is described in terms of the people. The willingness of British men to fight for another country moves him. In his explanation, there is no reference to the country as a physical place; it is explicitly the sense of a community of men, fighting for the same cause, which attracts Stephen: the promise of a collective where he can be recognised as an individual *and* can simultaneously be part of something larger than himself, which he lost when Isabelle left him. It is significant, then, that after disillusionment with the army has set in, Stephen sees the nation in geographical terms, asking: 'Should we fight for fields and hedges and trees? [...] we should just let the bullets and the shells dismember us so that the green hills are undisturbed.'⁵⁴ The war is positioned as purely about space and locations, not about people any more, becoming an empty symbol. As Stephen's speech makes clear, there is no suggestion of an experiential coming of age through service to the nation for him, nor is there any comfort to be found in having lived up to the expectations of the nation towards the end of the novel. However, despite the ambiguity of the nation's position in relation to Stephen and Elizabeth's narratives, the novel as whole reiterates the war's place in the national mythscape of the twentieth century. *Birdsong* presents the conflict in a way which is coherent with the national imagination of the war and the war's position in the mythscape as a tragedy which began the twentieth century, but which stands to be redeemed through familial memory. In its insistence on placing Stephen in the British forces, on the Western Front, and re-enacting the disillusioned soldier myth, *Birdsong* limits its critical potential. What it offers instead is a textual performance of Elizabeth's remembering, an attempt at reconstructing the past, away from any sustained engagement with the nation or government. De Groot suggests that *Birdsong* makes the case that 'personal history, experience, can make the past live. This is metonymic for the relationship of the historical novelist to history.'⁵⁵ I argue that this is ultimately the novel's weakness, reflecting its desire for a conclusive ending. In *Birdsong*, history stays at the level of personal experience and *familial expectation*. The novel does not position history as a site of potential questioning of the present or the nation; its coming of age does not suggest that the past is impetus to social action. Its engagement with the present is confined to the family. The past lives as a way of understanding the contemporary crisis of family, and with it, adulthood.

⁵⁴ Faulks, pp.235-6.

⁵⁵ De Groot, 2009, p.103.

The novel functions as a plea for remembering the First World War in particular, tapping into the anxiety about forgetting and the war's fading from living memory; it is here that the family becomes the primary site for articulating the expectations of adulthood. Stephen expresses the possibility of dying for his country; however, his desire to live is bound up with the potential for family. During an attack, shortly after meeting again with Jeanne, Stephen thinks, '[h]is renewed love of the world made the prospect of leaving it unbearable.'⁵⁶ This foreshadows Stephen's eventual marriage to Jeanne; furthermore, the reader is aware, even if Stephen is not, that he has a child, a child that his friendship with Jeanne brings him closer to. Even if Stephen does not fully come of age, due to his inability to articulate his experiences, a potential family at least means he survives. Of the focalising characters in the war sections, he is the only one to do so: Weir dies shortly after his disillusionment with family and home. Jack Firebrace, one of the miners in Stephen's unit, dies while rescuing Stephen at the climax of the novel, shortly after learning that his son has died. Jack dies telling Stephen: 'What I've seen...I don't want to live any more. [...] My boy, gone. What a world we made for him. I'm glad he's dead. I'm glad.'⁵⁷ For Jack, the death of his son makes him give up on the world of the living. The horror of the war is contingent; it is harder to bear without any connection for whom to fight or to confide in. The possibility of a future becomes inscribed in the notion of family and child. For Jack, as was implicit in Gray's reasoning earlier, without the promise of the future, symbolised by John, his son, there is no purpose to living. Jack becomes unmoored, outside the temporal space of remembering and being remembered, engaging with the past and looking towards the future.

Stephen's response is significant: he tells Jack, 'There's always hope, Jack. And it will go on. With us or without us, it will go on.'⁵⁸ Stephen takes on Gray's role of offering the future as comfort; signalling Stephen's shift from disillusioned and distanced from nation and family to a new reconciliation. Through his relationship with Jeanne, he has rediscovered some semblance of care for the world and desire for the future. As they lie buried underground, Stephen recounts the events of his relationship with Isabelle for the first time; he is able to articulate this emotional crisis and feel that he is understood. Even though Jack is delirious, he manages to respond when Stephen's story ends with 'I

⁵⁶ Faulks, p.300.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.381.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.381.

could have loved you.’⁵⁹ This exchange mirrors Stephen’s earlier confession to Isabelle; in both cases Stephen is able to remember and perform memory at a moment of emotional intimacy and gains some sense of identity and stability through it. Even as Jack dies, Stephen finds the willpower to dig himself out. Here at the novel’s climax, two things are central: children, who represent an expectation of the future; and the act of remembering as affirmation of experience. As I argued above, coming of age in *Birdsong* requires an acceptance of experience whilst moving towards future fulfilment of expectations. Middleton and Woods suggest that ‘[t]he temporal performance embedded in a plot, however fictional, can recreate the current understanding of what it means to live in history.’⁶⁰ They are suggesting the *possibilities* of historical fiction. However, in *Birdsong*, this is not true just at a meta-textual level; it is embedded in the novel’s performance and reiteration of the importance of, on the one hand, remembering, on the other the future and the promise of *being remembered*. This connects with the novel’s approach to coming of age: through acceptance and articulation of the past, and acknowledgement and desire for the future, characters are able to become part of a temporal family, to shore up their identity and become adults.

Stephen does not fully come of age through this model: Françoise tells Elizabeth that he was silent for two years after the end of the war, noting that: ‘[I]like a lot of men of that generation, he never really recovered.’⁶¹ This silence suggests that Stephen remained unable to fully reintegrate into family as he could not articulate his experiences. It is this absence which invites Elizabeth to look at the First World War. Elizabeth’s ‘quest’ is fundamentally about undoing this silence through the act of remembering. By the end of the novel she has succeeded in doing so in two ways. One is through the conversation with her mother, following Elizabeth’s confession that she is pregnant with her married lover’s child. This moment of engaging with her past (her mother) and her future (her unborn child) places her back in her ‘correct’ generational space, and allows her to come of age. In this conversation, Elizabeth and Françoise are able to break the silence between them as well: Françoise is able to articulate memories of her mother, Isabelle, as well as her life after the war with Stephen and Jeanne. Through her investigation into her grandfather, and through the telling of his story to her mother, Elizabeth allows Françoise

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.386; Jack’s love is not enough to redeem or contextualise the trauma of the war. It takes the maternal, heteronormative power of Elizabeth to fulfil the familial obligation of Stephen’s experience.

⁶⁰ Middleton and Woods, p.70.

⁶¹ Faulks, p.399.

to articulate her own memories; she facilitates a familial act of remembering which leaves both Francoise and Elizabeth with a clearer sense of themselves and the past. The other act of remembering performed at the end of the novel is the naming of Elizabeth's son. She calls him John, in honour of Jack's son, having been 'particularly struck by a passage [...] in which [Jack and Stephen] seemed to have talked about children, and whether either of them would have them after the war.'⁶² The reader knows that Stephen in fact promised to have children *for* Jack, offering him some connection to the world beyond the trenches, again suggesting that the future can only be imagined through the reproductive family. By naming her son after him, fulfilling the 'promise...made by my grandfather', Elizabeth performs the ultimate act of commemoration.⁶³ She creates a space where the experience of the war is honoured by her fulfilment of reproductive familial expectations. This final act of remembering in the novel guarantees the continuation of memory; it also creates a family mythology, which ties baby John to the war, granting him at birth the sense of identity and rootedness in the past which Elizabeth lacked. Her act of remembering at the end of the novel lets her come of age fully into a sense of temporality. Furthermore, by fulfilling Stephen's promise, she also permits him some measure of stability and identity, denied to him by the trauma of the war.

Throughout this section, I have argued that the relationship between past, present and acts of remembering is at the centre of *Birdsong*. It is through the present of Elizabeth that the past of the war can be fully mediated and understood; she stands in as a reader proxy. However, Elizabeth is *also* nominally a historical figure; her sections span 1978-9, coinciding with the sixtieth anniversary of the Armistice. Yet this is the only trace of any historical context in her sections. Her narrative contains no mention of the politics of the seventies or any societal unease; given that her search for Stephen takes place at the same time as the Winter of Discontent, it is striking that there is little to indicate any relationship between politics at the time and her looking back. Instead, her reasons for doing so are almost entirely interior and her revelations almost equally so. During a particularly uncomfortable date, she reflects:

her life was entirely frivolous. / It was a rush and slither of trivial crises; [...] [...] it was this continued sense of the easy, the inessential nature of what she

⁶² Ibid., p.396.

⁶³ Ibid., p.406.

did, that most irritated her. She thought of Tom Brennan, who had known only life or death, then death in life. In her generation there was no intensity.⁶⁴

Tom Brennan, a veteran who served with Stephen and who was left physically and mentally paralysed by the war, is able to remember Stephen and recall him for Elizabeth. This suggestion that his generation had an intensity missing from her own, indicates a sense of apathy which is writ larger than Elizabeth herself. It represents an inward gaze and a focus on the 'trivial crises' compared with the large crises of the war and the wars which followed. This seems to me to refer more clearly to the nineties as a time of reflection and indeed, to the eighties as a time of heightened individualism; the novel was written at the end of the eighties, into the beginning of the nineties: to some extent, a post-ideological space.⁶⁵ As Brian Graham and Peter Howard note, the late eighties and early nineties saw a growing concern over the atomization of identity beyond the political and communal.⁶⁶ Elizabeth's sense of herself as outside of time and without a sense of her past reflects this crisis, again gesturing to the nineties moment, rather than the seventies. My argument is not that Faulks intended for the seventies to read as the nineties, but that Elizabeth's concerns reflect the nineties' moment, indicating that her own time period is of secondary interest to the period of the First World War.

The effect of this is to reiterate the importance of the First World War as a foundational event. It is, after all, Stephen's coming of age story which is given prime importance; Elizabeth's narrative derives its importance from *remembering* and articulating the war for her generation and the next.⁶⁷ Higdon suggests that '[l]ooking backwards may be a reconstitutive act in a number of contemporary novels, but looking backwards involves neither nostalgia nor sentimentality, because confrontation, not escapism, serves as the pivotal action in the novel.'⁶⁸ There is no sense of confrontation in *Birdsong*; its engagement with the past is not to critique or offer a sense of the consequences of the war as a political or social event. Instead, the implied tragedy is *forgetting* the war. Through the focus on the family, *Birdsong* suggests that losing an active engagement with the past and one's family history in particular results in a loss of

⁶⁴ Faulks, p.334.

⁶⁵ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan. 'Setting the Framework' in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.6-39, p.8. This is also reflected in works such as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992)

⁶⁶ Brian Graham and Peter Howard, 'Introduction' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) p.1-18, pp.5-7.

⁶⁷ Indeed, while Renard suggests that *Birdsong* ends happily for Elizabeth, it only does so through her articulation and recovery of Stephen's narrative and coming of age. See p.275.

⁶⁸ Higdon, p.20.

identity and an inability to place oneself in a historical and temporal context. It is not irrelevant that Faulks uses the First World War to make this argument. The mythology of the war, and the figure of the disillusioned soldier provide an obvious site for explorations of the loss of individuality, and the ramifications of this on the family. This myth comes with a pre-existing subtext of being a moment of radical break.⁶⁹ It is not a break as such in *Birdsong*; rather, the war disrupts and exacerbates existing issues, such as Stephen's feelings of abandonment, it regresses the soldiers to children, stripping them of the stability of adulthood. The war creates a moment which appears to be beyond articulation; however, as Elizabeth's narrative shows, it *needs* to be articulated. Remembering allows the present to sustain a connection to the past, and through that a connection to the future. The war, then, becomes a pivotal site for coming of age: a coming of age which can only be completed in the present.

1.3 *Regeneration Trilogy*: Margins, Origins and the Myth of the War

Whereas *Birdsong* relies on Elizabeth to make its call to familial remembrance clear, the reader is given no such support in the *Regeneration Trilogy*. The novels are traditional historical novels in the sense that they are set entirely in the past. However, the trilogy still comments on the present and gestures towards the future in its construction of its implied reader. Scanlan argues that in the historical novels of the eighties and nineties, the present is always already compromised, noting that:

Shuttled between their own time and that of the characters, readers become implicated in the past [...]. [T]he reader cannot be inspired to imitation, but neither has he or she been given a lofty perspective from which to judge or even learn from the lessons of history.⁷⁰

Historical novels are, of course, more commentary on the present than documentaries of the past. However, this is heightened in the *Regeneration Trilogy* through Barker's use of meta-textual references and occasional deliberate anachronism. The implied reader is invited to pick up on these references, in order to reflect on the role of myths in the novel (the disillusioned and traumatised soldiers, the dichotomies of the futility myth), but also to understand the novels' insistence on the relevance of the identity crisis at the heart of the trilogy. The disconnect of the characters is not just historical; it is also an invitation to

⁶⁹ See Winter, p.29, and Prost, p.182-3 for debates surrounding how the war manifested as different breaks.

⁷⁰ Scanlan, p.11.

reflect on the present and the way in which current expectations of adulthood repress and marginalise individual experience.

The trilogy's (often textual) inaccessibility of the past is mirrored by the characters' search for access to their own pasts, driven by their insecurity about their status as adults. The trilogy's intertextuality acts in much the same way as the coming of age narrative: drawing attention to the impossibility of a return to origins, while at the same time insisting on the need for an engagement with the past in order to understand the present. If the reader is implicated in a text, then the past becomes less a clear cut source of 'lessons' than a place of emotional engagement and potential confusion and instability. Brannigan suggests that Rivers 'functions as a surrogate rational reader', providing a trustworthy guide to the reader's past and his present.⁷¹ Rivers is also a literal reader: there are two scenes, early on in the narrative and end of *Regeneration*, which show Rivers reading Sassoon's poetry. The poems are replicated in full, allowing the reader to read along with Rivers. However, Rivers does not read these poems as the contemporary reader has been trained to, as poetic representations of the 'truth' of the war.⁷² Rather, he observes that he 'knew so little about poetry that he was almost embarrassed at the thought of having to comment on these. But then he reminded himself they'd been given to him as a therapist, not as a literary critic [...]'.⁷³ There is a disconnect here between what these poems are seen to represent in the present – an eyewitness account of the front, an indictment of the generals and the home front – and what they represent to Rivers. This disruption of the expected reading framework presents a challenge to the reader, setting up the trilogy's representation of the search for a secure, accessible past, and through that, a stable identity. Rivers is presented as an alternative reader of the war, drawing out the readers' assumptions about the war and its canonical works and attendant myths. The scene presents a familiar narrative of the war, in the form of Sassoon's poetry, but places it in a (presumably) unfamiliar context: as potential evidence of shell-shock and trauma. In doing so, the scene also positions Rivers as secure in his role as therapist; despite initial hesitation, he assumes an ability to understand the poems in a medical context.

⁷¹ Brannigan, p.103.

⁷² 'Taught' here encompasses not just educational settings, but also larger cultural contexts such as Remembrance Day readings and so forth.

⁷³ Pat Barker, *Regeneration*, (London: Penguin, 1992 [1991]), p.25.

The mirroring of this reading sequence at the end of the novel provides a more conventional reaction to Sassoon's poetry; reading Sassoon's 'Sick Leave', Rivers finds that he is 'not capable of saying anything. He'd taken off his glasses and was dabbing the skin around his eyes.'⁷⁴ The strength of Rivers' response can be read as indicative of his beginning to come around to the mythical narrative of the futile war. His response to the poem also suggests the beginnings of Rivers' coming of age crisis, gesturing to his own increasingly unstable sense of self.⁷⁵ This instability complicates Rivers' position as a surrogate rational reader, rendering him a more ambivalent figure in relation to the myth and Sassoon's work. Rivers' reading of the poem foreshadows his response to Sassoon's eventual return to service on the last pages of *Regeneration*, when Rivers reflects 'in the middle age, the sheer extent of the *mess* seemed to be forcing him into conflict with the authorities over a wide range of issues...', even going so far as to mark his change as a 'rebellion'.⁷⁶ His maturity reverses and renders him no longer a stable adult figure. Thus his act of reading works to challenge the mythical dichotomy of old versus young which influences the disillusioned soldier narrative, as well as undermining the notion of adulthood as a secure construct. Furthermore, he subverts multiple myths by *not* being a soldier; being a non-combatant who nonetheless can understand the experience of the soldier. This complication of the mythology of the war which the scenes of reading present is facilitated primarily by the reader and the expectations placed on canonical poems. The subversion of cultural expectations and assumptions draws attention to the way that these poems have become read and (potentially) misread solely through a single narrative. Middleton and Woods argue that the performance of 'truth' is central to the historical novel as a genre, as it:

cannot claim the artistic autonomy of most literary genres, because readers expect a considerable degree of verisimilitude and historical accuracy, which makes it dependent on an external knowledge of the past. It is, therefore, always required to subordinate imagination, the play of the signifier, unity or textuality, to the final authority of historical realism.⁷⁷

The suggestion here is that instances of replication gesture to the 'authority of historical realism'. However, Barker's use of Sassoon's poems produces a more complex effect. The poems are evidence of the textuality of the war. By focusing on the production and

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.189.

⁷⁵ Figured through crying, one of the emotional responses Rivers trains his patients into seeing as natural, yet which remains antithetical to Rivers' own 'adult' masculine identity.

⁷⁶ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.249.

⁷⁷ Middleton and Woods, p.58.

context of the poems, *Regeneration* makes explicit the construction of a cultural narrative at its source. Sassoon is writing for an audience of his contemporaries, yet the poem's placement in a historical novel draws attention to the poems' continued importance as cultural artefacts and 'evidence' in our current understanding of the war.

The trilogy's engagement with intertextuality and the war gestures at the war's cultural status as 'unfinished', as well as the a-historicity of the myth. The novels explicitly address this through Wilfred Owen as well as Sassoon. In *Regeneration*, the two discuss the feeling that the war might transcend time, gesturing towards the present of the novel *and* to the future. Owen reflects on seeing the skulls of soldiers, saying, '[...] it was actually *easier* to believe they were men from Marlborough's army [...] It's as if all other wars had somehow...distilled themselves into this war [...].'⁷⁸ Sassoon recounts an experience of 'seeing [the flares] from the future. A hundred years from now they'll still be ploughing up skulls. And I seemed to be in that time and looking back. I think I saw our ghosts.'⁷⁹ War is presented as timeless, gesturing forward and backwards, transcending individual conflicts. However, it also suggests the role of Owen and Sassoon themselves in the contemporary myth. Their ghosts still persist, in the form of their poetry and the way their poetry shapes the cultural mythology of the war, prioritising combatant perspectives and suggesting a war fought primarily by middle class officer poets. The poems, in *Regeneration*, represent simultaneously true *and* imagined versions of the past, carefully constructed and presented, crowding out the landscape of remembrance. In doing so, they also marginalise other voices and obscure the origins of the present's ideas of the war, creating a seemingly stable version of the war, which in turn cannot actually affect or change the future. Sassoon's poetry cannot stop him becoming a ghost of future wars.

The Sassoon poems are one of the clearest examples of Barker's use of canonical poems to explore the way the war, and particularly the figure of the disillusioned soldier, become mythical, alongside perhaps the most well-known scene in *Regeneration*, where Sassoon and Owen edit an early draft of 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'.⁸⁰ Barker quotes the poems directly, providing an obvious textual example of the writing of the war. However, the *Regeneration Trilogy* is intertextual in other ways, taking in rewritings of poems such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and making reference to Robert Louis

⁷⁸ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.83.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.84.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, see pp.141-2; pp.156-8.

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). This intertextuality and multiplicity of sources serves many purposes in the trilogy. These are all texts about complicated and ambivalent interactions with the world and presentation of self; they are also a mix of adult and children's fiction (as well as poetry), suggesting the mixed up and 'infinitely reversible' relationship to coming of age which underpins the trilogy. This intertextuality mirrors the multiplicity of voices in the novels: in *Regeneration*, Sassoon, Owen, Rivers, Burns, Prior and Sarah Lumb all focalise the narrative at various points. The combination of the multiple references and different focalisers defamiliarises presumably well-known texts. Kaley Joyes suggests that this is the case in the scene where Sarah Lumb moves into a room to find men she can no longer fully recognise as human, men who had 'been pushed out here to get the sun, but not right outside, and not at the front of the hospital where their mutilations might have been seen by passers-by.'⁸¹ This scene is a reference to Owen's poem 'Disabled'; in that poem, he indicts women specifically; 'women's eyes / passed from him to the strong men that were whole'.⁸² Joyes argues that 'Barker's Sarah and Owen's disabled soldier are on opposing sides of the gap between home front and front line, between civilian and combatant, between women and men, yet Sarah would empathize with Owen's soldier's situation.'⁸³ Significantly, Sarah does not change the actual conclusion of the poem; yet *Regeneration* changes the ideological intonation, drawing attention to the position of women in the canonical poetry.

This scene draws out the centrality of identification to the politics of Barker's engagement with the past. Sarah's impact on the disabled soldiers is startling; the men fall silent, 'a silence caused, she suspected, by her entrance.'⁸⁴ This silence is a reaction to her 'being that inconsequential, infinitely powerful creature: *a pretty girl*', kin to the women in Owen's poem who encourage the young soldier to go to war, and then ignore him when he returns, disabled.⁸⁵ The reader's attention is drawn to Sarah's status as female, non-combatant and marginalised in the mythical narratives of the disillusioned and traumatised soldiers. In forcing her to situate herself in relation to the war, represented by the disabled men at a textual level, it also asks the reader to consider her perspective in

⁸¹ Ibid., p.160.

⁸² Wilfred Owen, 'Disabled' in *Wilfred Owen: The War Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994) ed. Jon Silkin, ll. 43-4.

⁸³ Kaley Joyes, 'Regenerating Wilfred Owen: Pat Barker's Revisions' in *Mosaic* (Winnipeg: 2009, 42:3) pp.169-183, p.179.

⁸⁴ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.160.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.160.

relation to the established narrative of the war.⁸⁶ This is not a complete defamiliarisation: Sarah's empathy is limited to the futility myth. For all that Sarah adds the possibility of rewriting and creating spaces for the voice of the 'Other', it is striking that she is the character who sees the least growth in the novel, and whose (adult) identity is the most stable. If the thrust of the trilogy as a whole is a movement from confidence and stability (both for the characters and for the myth of the war) to crisis and (potential) transformation, then Sarah's lack of change suggests that she is somehow outside this crisis. Exempt from the coming of age tropes of the trilogy, she can provide an intertextual subversion and a critique of the myths' focus on the soldier's experience, but her identity crisis is not ongoing, limiting her disruptive potential. Unlike Rivers or Prior, she does not stand as a potential site of (political, social) transformation, and remains effectively marginalised.⁸⁷

For the male characters in the novel, intertextuality underlines the instability of identity and emphasizes the crises of coming of age. In *The Ghost Road*, Rivers considers the origin of his own (perceived) neurosis – his lack of visual memory, his stammer and his increasing uncertainty about the structure and systems his work sustains. However, he is unable to locate an origin for his neurosis. Instead, he looks to his sister Katharine, and particularly her relationship with Charles Dodgson, who Rivers sees as attracted to her, even if 'nothing untoward occurs'.⁸⁸ Imagining himself in her place, Rivers reflects:

In the adult life of that child no abnormality appears, except perhaps for a certain difficulty in integrating the sexual drive with the rest of the personality [...] until, in middle age, the patient begins to suffer from the delusion that he is turning into an extremely large, eccentrically dressed white rabbit, forever running down corridors consulting its watch. What a case history. Pity it didn't happen [...].⁸⁹

This musing is interesting in its allusion to the white rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*, and its lack of conclusiveness. It is a fictional narrative Rivers appropriates from and for his sister and does not explain Rivers' childhood, his lack of visual memory or the loss, in middle age, of the certainty of his youth; nor does it account for the difficult status of his sex drive, culturally a central aspect of adulthood. Like the white rabbit he conjures up,

⁸⁶ It is worth noting that Sarah is *not* a nurse, a figure Noakes argues remains central to the cultural imaginary of the nation-at-war, and thus also remains outside the mythology of the war.

⁸⁷ Arguably, Prior's deployment to the front alongside Owen in *The Ghost Road* limits his transformative potential, see below.

⁸⁸ Barker, *The Ghost Road* (London: Penguin, 1996 (1995)), p.25.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

the origin of his present identity (or rather, crisis of identity) remains elusive, always out of reach; in looking back to his childhood, he is forever chasing an impossible time. As with Prior's notion of the past as palimpsest, Rivers finds his origins obscured by his present knowledge (presented in an analytical framework) *and* through the textual imagery. His imaginative re-writing of his childhood is in itself allusive, drawing as it does on Carroll's story, transferring Rivers' childhood onto a fictional image, deferring any presumption of truth, and gesturing towards the compromised status of experience in the trilogy, where textual references function both to draw out characters' crisis of identity and to emphasise the impossibility of accessing origins without eliding facts which do not fully 'fit' in the narrative.

The trilogy's intertextuality is inextricably bound up with its representation of coming of age. Rivers' use of the white rabbit as a symbol of his unstable and elusive identity is just one example of this. These questions of coming of age and identity are also bound up with questions of gender, sexuality and class, negotiating marginalised identities. Indeed, one of the common criticisms of the trilogy is that it is a product of a politicisation of identity, particularly in relation to its focus on gender and sexuality. This is not an entirely unfair critique; the trilogy is focused on those elided by myth and thus inevitably appears to appeal more to the present than the past. However, this kind of criticism presumes that identity in the trilogy functions solely in relation to these sorts of social categories. Identity is at once more complex and diffuse. In the *Regeneration Trilogy*, identity is not simply about the past: it is about a past which remains elusive and unstable, constantly being rewritten, rendering identity itself suspect as a stable signifier and changing both the present and the imagined future. Barker does this in part by playing with expectations – both of her readers and of her characters. Her characters expect adulthood to resolve their identity crises; indeed, many of them expect the war to give them the purpose which will allow them to create a unified identity. Instead, the war and its traumatic impact reveals the impossibility of this unification. The novels then go on to suggest that this impossibility is equally applicable to the past; there is not a single version of the past, but rather, the way people remember the past is contingent on their gender, class, sexuality or race, among other factors. In the trilogy, these sites of identification are repeatedly returned to and invoked by the characters. However, they are continually shown to be problematic and unsatisfactory; identification cannot create or sustain identity or a sense of belonging and inclusion.

This is most obvious in the case of Prior, always described as an 'in-between' character, 'neither fish nor fowl', caught between age, class and sexual classifications, as well as ethical and moral boundaries.⁹⁰ He is part of the myth of the disillusioned soldier (as an officer) and excluded from it (due to his status as working class). In mythical terms, as well as character terms, this description is also applicable to other characters in the trilogy. In an early conversation with Prior about class divisions at the front, Prior judges Rivers' khaki to be 'borderline', almost acceptable to the middle class men who dominate the officer ranks, despite the promotion and recruitment of working class men such as Prior, but still not quite right.⁹¹ Rivers is further compromised by his asexuality, and his status as non-combatant officer and middle-aged, all of which mark him as other in a military narrative in which he is nonetheless embedded. They also place him outside the mythical narratives of the war on a meta-textual level, echoed by his distance from the front. This in-betweenness also manifests in Sassoon, despite his status as a 'creator' of the myth. He admits to Rivers that even before the war, he felt split: "It was like being three different people and they all wanted to go different ways. [...] And I didn't seem able to..." he laced his fingers. "Knot them together."⁹² This notion of multiplicity and in-betweenness is a question of personal negotiation of identity. It also gestures towards the problem of communal identity in the novels. Sassoon's inability to feel truly integrated is in part a reflection of being unable to fully express himself in any social grouping, a problem, albeit in a different way, faced by Prior, who no longer fits in his working class community, but resists identification with his fellow officers. Interestingly, Sassoon sees his poetry as part of the split: 'There was the riding, hunting, cricketing me, and there was the...the other side...that was interested in poetry and music and things like that'.⁹³ This division seems initially to be solved by the war, but is revealed, in *The Eye in the Door*, to have developed into an even greater disconnect, as the expectations placed on 'Sassoon the Soldier' and 'Sassoon the Poet' eventually lead to a second breakdown. That Sassoon's poetry is part of the problem gestures to the impossibility of writing a complete narrative, one which fixes and takes in all the internal contradictions of the individual, particularly in relation to normative narratives and the powerful appeal of

⁹⁰ This phrase is applied to Prior by his father in *Regeneration* (p.57) and by Charles Manning in *The Eye in the Door* (p.20).

⁹¹ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.66. Prior's position is not dissimilar to that of a scholarship boy or the grammar school boy at University, a recurring figure of the British fiction and playwriting of the sixties, seventies and eighties.

⁹² Barker, *Regeneration*, p.35.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.35.

myths. Sassoon, Prior and Rivers are forced to face their in-betweenness by the war, and their contradictory identifications problematize the different mythological narratives of the war.

Being in-between is, of course, also central to coming of age. All three characters want to belong and integrate into stable identities. However, the war reveals the impossibility of this integration. Sassoon identifies his split as predating the war; Prior's in-betweenness is also a product of his upbringing as much as the war. The war does not *cause* this crisis – it magnifies existing tensions. There appears to be one exception to this: in *The Eye in the Door*, Prior develops a second identity, a fugue state which acts separately from him, functioning as a literalised expression of the conflict all of the (male) characters experience in the trilogy. Prior identifies his fugue state as a 'Hyde' figure. The literary allusion works to make his situation comprehensible to himself. It also introduces an element of the uncanny to the narrative; as with Owen and Sassoon's reflections on the timelessness of the war, 'Hyde' suggests a disruption of order and time. Rivers is quick to reassure Prior that '[...] the fugue state is [...] almost never the darker side of the personality. Usually it's no more than a difference in mood.'⁹⁴ However, Rivers' attempt at a rational explanation is subverted by the fact that Prior's fugue state arguably does represent the 'darker side'. Furthermore, this 'Hyde' version sees himself as separate from the Prior Rivers knows. When Rivers encounters the Hyde identity, the fugue state recounts his origins: 'I was born two years ago. In a shell-hole in France. I have no father.'⁹⁵ Prior's fugue state identifies fully with the war and it is in the fugue state that the clearest sense of stable identity is presented. This stability is revealed in the fugue state's ability to remember its own origins. Significantly, Prior's fugue state speaks of being born: an act which has a definite date and time (as does death), as opposed to coming of age, which is potentially never finished. The war becomes a site of 'newness' and rebirth, even if it is a perverse and violent one; the war can offer some sort of stable identity albeit one which is fundamentally negative.

However, this presentation is undercut by Rivers' analysis. Although he is shaken and forced to admit that Prior may have been right about the fugue state, he insists on finding another perspective on its origins: 'that extraordinary claim: *I have no father*. Surely behind the adult voice, there was another, shrill, defiant, saying, *He's not my*

⁹⁴ Barker, *ED*, p.134.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.240.

*dad?*⁹⁶ Through his conversation with Prior in the following pages, it is revealed that Prior trained himself as a child to disassociate from the violence in his house by ‘hiding’ in the fugue state. The war brings out and exacerbates a childhood coping mechanism, connecting domestic and public violence. The fugue state thus also suggests the war’s ability to undo maturation and progressive time, returning Prior to his childhood coping strategies. The certainty of identity and origin expressed by Prior’s Hyde-self is proven to be a fiction, as prefigured by its association with a literary text. Its identity is deferred precisely through the reference that renders it understandable for Prior, and the reader. This is not to say that the fugue state is not presented as real or traumatic, but rather that the experience can never be fully described and must be filtered through existing cultural reference points. Prior’s fugue state acts as an unconscious mirror of Rivers’ imagined childhood trauma, figured through his notion of himself as a White Rabbit. In both cases, the literary allusions suggest that these origin stories are works of fiction. In the *Regeneration Trilogy* the past is always obscured, hidden behind allusions, references and the continued re-writings which take place on both on an individual and on a social scale.

In her analysis of the relationship between heritage, literature and the position of the ‘past’ in contemporary culture, Valerie Krips argues that

We preserve the idea of the past by making it ubiquitous and, in the process, we reify it. We continue to look to this newly reified past for the origins upon which a sense of self and of nation are established, even as those origins become less historical, less remembered. Our preservation of this past entails its persistent production.⁹⁷

Krips’ analysis is suggestive both in the context of the trilogy’s engagement with the myths of the war, and the characters’ preoccupation with their past. As noted above, the intertextuality of the novels, and the represented re-writings, suggest the way that the past leaves cultural traces, not just in the form of literary remains, but also in the assumptions made about the past. Barker’s tracing of the myths of the disillusioned soldier and its intersection with the traumatised soldier gestures to these myths’ position as ‘stable’ historical narratives, unproblematically accessible and integrated into a larger (exclusionary) mythscape. The war is part of the past on which British (English) national identity is constructed. Thus its myths must appear stable and complete; its exclusions or exceptions elided. By drawing attention to their construction and ‘persistent

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.246.

⁹⁷ Valerie Krips, *The Presence of the Past* (London: Garland, 2000), p.9.

production', national identity and the mythical narratives become suspect; the myths' origins too become elusive.

This is mirrored by the search for identities in the trilogy; the characters' sense of themselves as adults with understandable and 'closed' pasts, is disturbed and problematized by the war's disruptive effect. The war forces an acknowledgement of identity as not innate, but constructed and developed in the negotiation between experience and expectations. Rivers, Prior, Sassoon and the other male characters are forced into the uncertain social space of coming of age, which brings them up against their own 'constructed' versions of the past, as the disconnect between who they feel themselves to be and who they are seen as deepens. The construction of masculinity is central to this coming of age crisis.⁹⁸ Victor Watson has argued that correct gender recognition and performance is a central, constant theme of coming of age fictions.⁹⁹ In *Regeneration*, Rivers is presented as acutely aware of this:

In leading his patients to understand that breakdown was nothing to be ashamed of, that horror and fear were inevitable responses to the trauma of war and were better acknowledged than suppressed, that feelings of tenderness for other men were natural and right, that tears were an acceptable and helpful part of grieving, he was setting himself against the whole tenor of their upbringing [...].¹⁰⁰

Central here is Rivers' identification of the tension between the emotions brought out by the war and the soldiers' 'upbringing'; their behaviour is a question of training and performance, the training and performance of adulthood. This construction of masculinity which Rivers seeks to undo promises stability and security; it also implicitly functions as the key into a communal identity. Trimble argues that for Rivers, 'the erosion of patriarchal authority stimulates a national imaginary in which a traumatized and disillusioned younger generation threatens to de-form the social body [which] channels (post-) Great War anxieties about English futurity'.¹⁰¹ In their rejection of conventional masculinity, these men become potential symbols of change and transformation. They gesture to the future and provide a possible critique of the present. However,

⁹⁸ The trilogy's construction and deconstruction of gender is the focus of much of the criticism of Barker, which informs my argument, but is not central to it. For more in-depth exploration of these issues see for example: Ankhi Mukherjee, 'Stammering to Story: Neurosis and Narration in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*' in *Critique* 43.1 (Fall 2001) p.49-62; Greg Harris 'Compulsory Masculinity, Britain, and the Great War: The Literary-Historical Work of Pat Barker' in *Critique* 39.4 (Summer 1998); for the criticism of Barker's gender concerns, see Shepard, and Bergonzi, among others.

⁹⁹ Victor Watson, 'Introduction' in *Coming of Age in Children's Literature* eds. Meek, M. & Watson, V. (London: Continuum, 2003), p.1-44, p.10-1.

¹⁰⁰ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.48.

¹⁰¹ Trimble, p.76.

Craiglockhart's location limits this potential in the world of the novel; the men, having had their sense of themselves as adults disrupted, are taken out of the community of the front and to an extent, the community of their peers, and 'hidden away' in Scotland, far from the culturally recognised sites of the war. Their failed coming of age, symbolised by their failure to perform masculinity has placed them outside the main mythical (geographical) spaces of the war.

Their failed coming of age is initially presented as a consequence of shell-shock. Winter argues that:

In Britain [...] successive generations have inherited a set of icons or metaphors about the war. Shellshock is one such metaphor [...] battle does not end when the firing stops; it goes on in the minds of many of those who returned intact [...] and in the suffering of those whose memories are embodied, enacted, repeated, performed.¹⁰²

Winter's description of shell-shock as a metaphor is, I think, a useful one, suggesting that the word has a meaning beyond its use as a description of (mental) trauma; it gestures towards the term's association with war, and also its increasing position as a metaphor for the after-effects of war more broadly.¹⁰³ Shell-shock is not entirely elided in the cultural myth of the war; however, when the trilogy was published, shell-shock was less commonly associated with the war – indeed, in some ways, Barker's novel can be seen to both comment on an emerging myth of the traumatised soldier and further develop it. Barker's treatment of shell-shock draws on Elaine Showalter's work in *The Female Malady* (1987), which associated repressive masculinity and the male hysteria of war-related syndromes; significantly, Showalter's analysis also draws on literary sources for its argument. Barker expands on Showalter and the initial trauma myth, however. In the trilogy, shell-shock is not just an expression of horror at the war; it is also an undoing of time. The patients in *The Ghost Road* find themselves placed in a children's ward, surrounded by images of 'Alice, tiny enough to swim in a sea of her own tears [...] and, most strikingly, Alice with the serpent's neck, undulating above the trees.'¹⁰⁴ This imagery provides a graphic reflection of the patients' sense of displacement, rendered outside of time, and beyond a sense of stability and constancy. On a meta-textual level, it also gestures towards their marginalisation from the national impetus towards

¹⁰² Jay Winter, *Remembering War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) pp.60-1.

¹⁰³ See Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp.3-4.

¹⁰⁴ Barker, *GR*, p.18.

reintegration. Like Alice, Rivers' patients suffer from multiple transformations; they are doubly removed from the stability of adulthood and the stability of masculinity the army is supposed to promise. This disrupts their sense of themselves as adults, or even as children. Their regression is unstable and ever-changing. In Burns, one of Rivers' most affected patients, shell-shock renders him caught between two stages of development. Rivers notes that in Burns 'a prematurely aged man and a fossilized schoolboy seemed to exist side by side.'¹⁰⁵ This is contrasted with the ideal of wartime masculinity which presumes that the war will mature the soldier.¹⁰⁶ Rivers reflects that, while the war has given Burns 'a curiously ageless quality, [...] "maturity" was hardly the word.'¹⁰⁷ His experience has symbolically undone his adulthood. It halts progress towards a stable, integrated adult identity in Burns. The war also exposes this integrated identity as an illusion, not just for this character, but on a larger scale. In doing so, shell-shock in the novels works to underline the impossibility of a 'complete' and unproblematic narrative. In doing so, it reiterates the mythical construction of the Front as always traumatic, and reinforces the sense that expectation of the war 'making a man' out of young boys ultimately achieves the reverse. Rather than coming of age into a unified identity, the front becomes a space of disconnection. However, it also adds this sense of the undoing of expectations to the myth of the traumatised soldier; trauma here is ongoing and functions as social commentary in its connection with both the soldier's repressed emotions *and* his ability to be an adult upon his return.

By making shell-shock the site of the undoing of adulthood, Barker appears to argue that the First World War exposed and exposes the impossible contradictions at the heart of British society then and now. The war disrupted a sense of presumed progress and exposed the disconnect at the heart of the (British, Imperial) Victorian order. The trilogy does not present the war as a clear split between the integrated before and the fragmented after, although it does allow that the present is still fundamentally marked by the war. Indeed, arguably the novel does not present the war at all, except as a (flawed) narrative eliding social issues which have persisted into the present and risk being repeated in the future. Instead, the war becomes both a site of coming of age and the reason for the impossibility of fully doing so, represented through its effect on the home front. Significantly, Rivers is not beyond this crisis of coming of age, even if he is unsure

¹⁰⁵ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.169.

¹⁰⁶ Paraphrased from *ibid.*, p.169.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.169.

about the origins of his particular crisis. He is after all outside the war and beyond its presumed central reach, the young men embodied in the soldiering myths. However, Rivers notes that his treatment of shell-shock also affects him: 'In advising his young patients to abandon the attempt at repression and let themselves *feel* the pity and terror their war experiences inevitably evoked, he was excavating the ground he stood on.'¹⁰⁸ Rivers' sense of self becomes unstable (note the use of a metaphorical 'ground' to explain what the societal construction of masculinity means to Rivers' identity) and he becomes implicated in the same crises his patients are suffering. The dominant narrative of masculinity has been revealed as a construction, eliding the emotional vulnerability revealed by the war. Significant here is Rivers' description of his patients as 'young', indicating vulnerability but also *potential* that Rivers does not see himself possessing.

Rivers' sense of undermining himself is connected to his experiences in Melanesia. Towards the end of *Regeneration*, Rivers recounts a moment of revelation he had on his anthropological expedition. The islanders find his expectations of adulthood laughable, ridiculous, and Rivers reflects:

'It was...the *Great White God* dethroned, I suppose. Because we did, we quite unselfconsciously *assumed* we were the measure of all things. That's how we approached them. And suddenly I saw that not only we weren't the measure of all things, but that *there was no measure*.'¹⁰⁹

This is a transformative moment; it throws into doubt every social norm Rivers has come to rely on without question. This moment destabilises his sense of identity; however, it does so in a positive way, making Rivers feel freer and more capable of negotiating his internal contradictions, by removing him from the influence of father figures and normative narratives of 'the Great White God'. Back in Britain, he is unable to sustain that sense of self. The dominant social narratives coerce him back into a (presumed) stable adult identity, which forces him to ignore or dismiss aspects of his personality. In Britain, Rivers is forced into a single, apparently coherent narrative. Thus the novel questions the possibility of coming of age *against* the dominant narrative. It appears that Rivers' moment of questioning authority, challenging the father figures of God and (implicitly) nation, does not amount to much. The pressures of the national-societal narrative outweighs the transformative moment. However, by presenting the disruption of these norms as a positive, *Regeneration* suggests that Rivers' current undermining of

¹⁰⁸ Barker, *Regeneration*, p.48.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.242.

normative expectations might have positive potential, even if here too, social pressures make transformation difficult.

The Melanesian revelation is a coming of age moment: it undermines the 'parental' authorities of God and the nation, as well as the social norms of the society built around those two pillars. I would therefore suggest that Rivers' haunting, in *The Ghost Road*, by visions of his pre-war anthropological expedition to Melanesia, should be read in relation to this initial coming of age moment. The novel ends with Rivers seeing Njiru, in some ways the Melanesian equivalent of Rivers himself, 'advancing down the ward of Empire Hospital, attended by his shadowy retinue [...].'¹¹⁰ The intrusion's purpose is given earlier by Rivers: 'The ghosts were not an attempt at evasion, [...]. Rather, the questions became more insistent, more powerful, for being projected into the mouths of the dead.'¹¹¹ As with the ghosts of River's patients, Njiru comes with a purpose, and that purpose is to force Rivers to face what he has already begun to process: the relationship between his past and his contemporary present. Rivers himself is also set to become a 'ghost' of the First World War, haunting the edges of a mythological narrative which elides his position, much as Njiru and his people had become historical footnotes in the both the imperial and post-imperial narrative. Boccardi suggests that after empire, any sense of the 'continuity of nation, reflected in the homogenous time constructed by realist narrative, was ruptured [...]. The collapse of the accepted sense of the nation is reflected in the crisis of the means for its formal imagining, the conventions of realism.'¹¹² She argues that in contemporary historical novels, realism is a project of restoration, presenting the past as a time of completeness, reflecting the ideal state of the nation. This encounter in *The Ghost Road*, however, ruptures both the conventions of realism and the sense of the nation as a single, stable concept. It is significant that this encounter takes place in the Empire Hospital, in a site filled with the uncanny imagery of *Alice in Wonderland*, and that it too is an uncanny encounter. The presence of the Melanesian narrative becomes another example of disturbances at the margins of the myth of the war. It is also an example of temporal instability, both Rivers' and the nation's. If Njiru's appearance suggests that Rivers' coming of age is unfinished and requires further engagement with the past, it also suggests the Empire returning to Britain. Thus it gestures towards the second half of the twentieth century, and the negotiation of

¹¹⁰ Barker, *GR*, p.276.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.212.

¹¹² Boccardi, p.33.

British identity following the end of the empire. Rivers and Britain become mirrored; both are facing marginalisation and instability, without the promise of a secure identity – but with potential for change.

Rivers' haunting is indicative of the ongoing crisis of the First World War in the novel. It is simultaneously a traumatic and productive haunting, both for Rivers and on a national level. However, Rivers is not the only character who is haunted in *The Ghost Road*. For Prior, this is less literal; haunting becomes a comment on the unreality of the trenches: 'Even the living were only ghosts in the making. You learn to ration your commitment to them. This moment in this tent already had the quality of *remembered* experience.'¹¹³ Ghostliness and haunting are again associated with marginalisation; however, whereas Rivers' experience gestures forward, Prior's is starkly about the experience of the trenches. Prior's ghostliness still contains some of the same disruptive potential, however. His position as a working class officer means he lingers at the margins of the dominant narrative of the war, yet figures like Prior do have a tendency to appear even in the most straightforwardly mythical disillusionment narratives, a ghostly reminder of the shortcomings of the mythical soldier. Prior's coming of age crisis is intimately bound up with his class position and his sense of in-betweenness. In the trenches, that in-betweenness is replicated by his surroundings, caught between life and death. Haunting gestures to the problems of overcoming that past and challenges the stability of progressive time. After Prior reflects on the ghostliness of the soldiers on the Western Front, he qualifies the observation: 'Or perhaps he was simply getting old. But then, after all, in trench time he *was* old. A generation lasted six months, less than that on the Somme, barely twelve weeks.'¹¹⁴ Generations are presented as central to the understanding of the past. There needs to be the possibility of the future and of someone to look back. Prior's definition of trench-time, with its associated generations, dislocates 'generation' from a socio-cultural context. In the trenches, a generation is utterly different from what it is out of the trenches, creating a (temporal) gap between those on the home front and those on the Western Front.

Middleton and Woods suggest that 'historical fiction will reveal the unfulfilled possibilities of the past, and use the complex temporalities of tensed narration to explore otherwise hard to articulate temporal experiences orthogonal to linear time.'¹¹⁵ The gap

¹¹³ Barker, *GR*, p.46.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.212.

¹¹⁵ Middleton and Woods, p.69.

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between the front and the nation, presented in the *Regeneration Trilogy* as a question of age and time, suggests a *lack* of potential; Prior presents a case for the impossibility of the past being fully represented or communicated, due to the lack of temporal linearity between the front and home front.¹¹⁶ Prior's coming of age crisis is an example of Campbell's 'combat gnosticism', suggesting the impossibility of fully understanding the war without experiencing it; however, it also illustrates the impossibility of capturing all the narratives of the war in a single myth.¹¹⁷ The experience of the war in the novels has a different time, meaning there is no single 'adult' time which can facilitate understanding. Prior is presented as seeing himself marginalised in relation to the home front; significantly, once back at the front, he takes up journal writing: 'I think it's a way of claiming immunity. First-person narrators can't die, so as long as we keep telling the story of our own lives we're safe.'¹¹⁸ He is presented as trying to recapture the security of being part of the dominant narrative, which for Prior means the narrative of the nation, and fully come of age: into a stable class, sexual and social position. In mythical terms, Prior moves from the margins of the myth of the disillusioned soldier (and indeed, the futility myth) – Craiglockhart, London – to the very centre: he is at the Front, with Wilfred Owen. At the end of *The Ghost Road*, Prior dies alongside Owen; implicitly, he returns to anonymity. The conclusion of his coming of age is his disappearance into the mythical war Owen stands for; his potential for critique and subversion are muted.

The war in the *Regeneration Trilogy* is simultaneously central and peripheral to the texts' narrative, particularly in *Regeneration* and *Eye in the Door*. The war provides the literary device, in shell-shock, which can disrupt the mythscape which sustains a coherent nation, drawing attention to marginal myths and ideas, and reshaping the mythscape by doing so. Time becomes uncanny and the progression to a stable adult identity is no longer assured; the trilogy suggests that it never can be again. Barker uses the artefacts of the myth to make this point, particularly the canonical poems, which alternatively support and critique the trilogy's overarching ideology. Barker questions the power of the witnessing poet, and draws attention to the grotesque and fantastical in the Victorian literary artefacts through her references to Jekyll and Hyde, as well as Alice. This is not to say that the trilogy fully disrupts the myth, or that it ultimately rewrites it. Rather, the trilogy creates space for questioning the war's place in the present. It is

¹¹⁶ This is mirrored by the gap between the shell-shocked soldier and idealised martial masculinity.

¹¹⁷ Campbell, 1999, p.203-4.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.115.

notable that *Regeneration* is the only novel of the trilogy where Sarah is a focalising character. The novels move from Scotland (Craiglockhart) to London to the Western Front; each novel moves closer to the canonical narrative which focuses on the south of England, and France and the trenches. The industrial north remains central, particularly to Prior's character, but if *Regeneration* is disruptive in its location and its inclusion of male and female non-combatant characters, by *The Ghost Road*, the trilogy is (geographically) firmly back in the mythical narrative of the disillusioned soldier, focusing on Prior and Owen in France. Towards the end of *The Eye in the Door*, Prior decides to return to the war '[...] In spite of everything – I mean in spite of Not Believing in the War and Not Having Faith in Our Generals and all that, it still seems the only *clean* place to be.'¹¹⁹ The disappearance of Sarah and the increased focus on the war suggests that this is a position that the reader is invited to agree with, reiterating the dichotomy of the futility myth. In the end, as Prior lies dead next to Wilfred Owen in the last days of the war, the disruptive potential of the trilogy seems potentially muted by its capitulation to the mythical narrative. Prior's (and Owen's) disruptive potential, alongside their complex and contradictory relation to the war is neutralised by their deaths; they become mythical, both in some ways overshadowed by the contemporary, mythological, vision of Owen. Yet the Melanesian narrative troubles this 'easy' reading, gesturing both to the imperial past and the post-colonial future, and preventing Rivers from having a conclusive ending; he remains in crisis, his coming of age incomplete.

In the *Regeneration Trilogy*, experience and expectation are in near-constant conflict. Rivers, Sassoon, and Prior all struggle to overcome the identity crisis the war exacerbates, as the expectations on them push their actual experiences further to the margins. The trilogy also meta-textually draws attention to what is elided and marginalised by the futility myth while also reiterating it. Barker does not stray from the Western Front; nor does she move beyond the idea of the war as a primarily male space. In his analysis of myths, Duncan Bell warns that 'the mythscape should not be mistaken for a reified construct, a narrative without a narrator, for it is grounded in institutions and shaped by ever-present and evolving power relations.'¹²⁰ Myths are embedded in the politics of the dominant forces of society and always already being rewritten. For Barker, the First World War becomes a key site for the investigation of the power and

¹¹⁹ Barker, *ED*, p.275.

¹²⁰ Bell, p.76.

construction of myths, precisely because it throws up so many questions about identity, and the relationship between the individual and the cultural narratives of nation. In exposing and deconstructing the narrated nature of the past, and the way that this mythical rewriting can work to elide or dismiss certain groups, the *Regeneration Trilogy* questions the value of a stable and fixed past and in doing so, questions the value of seeing identity as stable, fixed and singular. Whereas *Birdsong* is consolatory and ultimately closes down any sense of ongoing crisis, the *Regeneration Trilogy* insists on uncertainty. Furthermore, in rendering identity as mutable and changing, and by potentially suggesting that transformation is only possible through accepting identity as shifting, dependent on community and surrounding politics, the trilogy argues for a new form of heritage, multiple and mutable, gesturing towards the future as well as the past.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mapped two different approaches to coming of age and the First World War. For Faulks, the war disrupts Stephen's coming of age, suggesting a crisis which appears to encompass not just Stephen's adulthood, but also modernity. At the end of Stephen's narrative, reborn from the tunnels under No Man's Land, he collapses into the arms of a German. This German, Levi, is Jewish. The end of Stephen's narrative does not have a conclusion as such. Instead it gestures to the next big crisis of the twentieth century: the Holocaust. Stephen is reborn, but traumatised and mute, and his rescuer represents a greater crisis to come. The novel does not end here, however: it ends on the birth and naming of Elizabeth's son. Robert, the child's father, has the last word, reflecting: 'Now here was John, his boy, another chance.'¹²¹ *Birdsong* ends on an optimistic note, having explored Elizabeth's negotiation of the past and ultimately looking forward. As Renard argues, Elizabeth restores 'the unproblematic relation between yesterday, today and tomorrow [and] a sense of perfect integration and completeness.'¹²² This completeness is figured through her successful coming of age: Elizabeth is able to be more fully in the present after her investigation into her grandfather; through her work, Stephen's trauma is acknowledged, recognised and integrated into a family narrative. His experience is articulated, and through that articulation, Elizabeth is able to come of age, taking up her role in the reproductive

¹²¹ Faulks, p.406.

¹²² Renard, p.28.1

family. Elizabeth's identity crisis is resolved and she is able to give herself over to being a mother, having fully come of age through history. In *Birdsong* coming of age successfully is possible; it happens *through* history, through acts of remembering which place oneself in a historical context *and* in the social context of the family. Coming of age, in *Birdsong*, is signalled by the achievement of a stable sense of identity through the articulation of experience in the service of the reproductive family: the symbol of an optimistic future.

In the *Regeneration Trilogy*, the ending offers no such confidence about the possibility of resolving the identity crises the war brings out. Each novel in the trilogy ends on a moment of insecurity or transition – Sassoon returning to the front in *Regeneration*; Prior doing the same in *The Eye in the Door* – and *The Ghost Road* is no different. It ends before the war does, leaving the reader with the image of the fading Njiru leaning over Rivers. This final haunting is not resolved, nor is the message Njiru comes to bring made clear. Of the coming of age crises presented in the trilogy, only Prior's has a conclusion: his death. Sassoon, barely present in *The Ghost Road*, is last seen crouching by Rivers' bedside, his identity crisis still unresolved; and for Rivers, the trilogy concludes with his conflicting sense of self literally haunting him. Njiru represents both Rivers' inability to fully balance the two sides of his identity (through his association with Rivers' Melanesian identity, which contrasts with Rivers' 'British' sense of self) *and* the problem of the violence and upheaval of the trilogy – not just the violence of the war, but also the violence of the home front. These open endings suggest a coming of age process which remains unfinished, being constantly rewritten and reinterpreted. Unlike Faulks, Barker positions the identity crisis of the twentieth century as ongoing. For the *Regeneration Trilogy*, there is no sense of history as something which can be processed and it certainly does not bridge the disconnect between the experience of the individual and expectations of society. Rather, the best that can be hoped for is a coming of age *into* history: becoming aware that the past is always compromised, always subject to the pressures of normative voices and dominant narrative, and therefore any sense of the self *in* history is always incomplete.

These two versions of coming of age are bound up with the representation of the past in *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy*. The focus on *remembering* as an act of familial construction positions the past as potentially horrifying and shocking, but always accessible, comprehensible and communicable. Working through the past is contingent on this readability; any horrors contained in the past can be readily empathised with and

therefore processed and negotiated. Middleton and Woods suggest that part of the appeal of the historical novel, particularly those they dub 'literatures of memory', is the 'capacity of narrative to show the effects of time on identity and consciousness' which 'enables the reader to inhabit a past world and understand the thoughts, feelings and actions of those who lived in a completely different environment.'¹²³ Elizabeth's reading of the past allows her to come to terms with her own temporal position in her family, and she begins to see her 'identity and consciousness' in the larger context of her family and its past. In doing so, she creates a social space for the empathetic reading which is also required of the novel's reader. Thus the novel offers a 'prosthetic memory', which nonetheless insists on the importance of what Landsberg calls 'hereditary memory': the memory of the reproductive family.¹²⁴ Stephen, by contrast, has space in his narrative to share and have his experience acknowledged. He is unable to move *through* his experience of history, and therefore never fully comes of age.

Coming of age *into* history is quite a different process. This is a by-product of the *Regeneration Trilogy*'s construction of the past as nebulous, constantly deferred through cultural and social 'scripts'. The most that can be gained from looking to the past is a greater understanding of the crises of the present; however, because the past is always unstable and only partially accessible, the act of looking back in itself does not provide any sense of secure identity. Furthermore, any *potential* sense of identity, individual or collective, is always at risk of being re-written by social pressures and norms. The novels' repeated return to the theme of marginalisation suggests that identification is always contingent on the available narratives and myths. Thus, although Prior does face up to and negotiate his past, attempts to understand his fugue state, and, perhaps even more importantly, challenges contemporary understandings of the war, this is to some extent undermined by his death; lying next to Wilfred Owen, he is about to become an anonymous footnote in Owen's myth. Prior achieves some understanding of himself as a historical actor and thus grapples with his coming of age crisis. However, there is no achievement of adulthood at the end of his narrative and thus no single conclusion to be drawn.

Brannigan argues that the *Regeneration Trilogy* 'registers the displaced chronoscience of the late twentieth century' which is structured by the contradictory

¹²³ Middleton and Woods, p.54.

¹²⁴ Landsberg, p.7.

notion that ‘we are both free to be “timeless”, and we are condemned to live in everyone else’s past.’¹²⁵ He sees this as a ‘paradoxical consequence of living in an age which defines itself as post-historical’.¹²⁶ However, as I have argued in this chapter, it is not necessarily a lack of history which is the crisis of the trilogy. As in *Birdsong*, characters in the trilogy do gain a greater understanding of themselves as historical/temporal beings. However, whereas for *Birdsong*, the family allows for the re-connection of experience and expectations, resolving the identity crisis, for the *Regeneration Trilogy*, the identity crisis continues, because it is no longer desirable to live up to societal expectations – symbolised in part by the failure of the family in the novel. The trilogy’s sense of an unfinished process does not only encompass Prior, Owen, Sassoon or Rivers: it takes in the reader as well, gesturing through its use of intertextuality and deliberate anachronism towards the present and the future, challenging the notion that the reader *can* know the past. For the *Regeneration Trilogy*, this is a crisis of dominant narrative history.¹²⁷ Trimble argues that the trilogy ‘evokes cultural anxieties about the trans-generational distribution of power and obedience.’¹²⁸ In doing so, the trilogy also challenges the still-existent anxieties about generational power and the value of cultural norms and expectations. The novels do this precisely to explore the haunting and fracturing of identities or the stability which might earlier have existed through the grand narratives of the nineteenth century (particularly for Rivers) and the ideological narratives of the short twentieth century.

In *Birdsong*, there is a sense of the ‘post-historical’, as Brannigan calls it; the novel is concerned with the loss of historical memory and the connection to the familial past. For Elizabeth and, to a lesser extent, Stephen, the past does not so much haunt as it risks being lost, and with it, a sense of identity and temporal stability. Both *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy* reflect nineties’ concerns about the relationship between past and present, and particularly the role of the past in shaping identities, individual, communal and familial. The coming of age trope is the central way in which Barker and Faulks work through these themes, and the two forms of coming of age which they present recur throughout representations of the First World War in the nineties and early

¹²⁵ Brannigan, p.118.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.118 – the post-historical is a nod to Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992); however, I think the nineties are equally a moment of commodified history (heritage, and (to an extent) the anniversary/commemoration cycle) and stock taking, the end of the Cold War providing space to think through the twentieth century.

¹²⁷ For a description of the nineties as a historical pause, see Winter and Sivan, p.8.

¹²⁸ Trimble, p.76.

2000s. As I move on to discussing reading the war in young adult fiction (Chapter Two), citizenship and the adolescent (Chapter Three), and nostalgic fictions (Chapter Four), this tension between what can be understood and articulated, and what has been forgotten or marginalised crops up again and again, as part of the novels' exploration of the relationship between the past, identity, community and family. They provide two ways of understanding the importance of the past in the present, and the way in which the experience of war informs the expectations of the present. In both frameworks, engagement with the past remains crucial, particularly in relation to identity, family and social responsibility. For both *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy*, the First World War stands as a site of crisis: it is a transitional event, traumatic, exacerbating existing issues and tensions, and rupturing presumed sites of security. The war itself is somewhat secondary to its representational possibilities as a site for the present and the future.

Birdsong does feature extended battlefield sequences and sets its climax in the tunnels under No Man's Land, yet the discussion between Jack and Stephen focuses on children, the future, and their ability to imagine a future for themselves and their families, rather than on the immediate consequences of the war. In Barker's novels, the war manifests primarily through being reconstructed, retold or reimagined, informing the way characters imagine themselves and their futures, and the meta-textual messages of the novels. Even *The Ghost Road*, which sees Prior sent to the front, presents the war through his diary entries, an editorialised version of his experience. The war is a catalyst and the site of the crisis, but it is the reverberations up to the present which provide the impetus to look back – and learn.

Chapter 2: Reading the Past and the War in Young Adult Fiction

2.1 Introduction: Coming of Age, the Past and the Reader

In Chapter One, I mapped out the way in which the mythology of the First World War is rearticulated in key canonical fiction of the nineties, arguing for the distinct ways in which *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy* position the anxieties of remembering and forgetting. Both Faulks' and Barker's novels engage with the war's meaning in the present, and through their novels, they map different tropes of coming of age onto the war. These novels are aimed at (primarily) adult readers, focusing either on coming of age's relationship to adulthood (positioning adulthood as the true 'human' norm) or using adolescent characters as commentary. In this chapter, as well as in the thesis overall, I argue that young adult fiction shows a similar critical engagement with history and, perhaps more importantly, with coming of age, as adult fiction. However, it does this through the re-assertion of adolescence as a norm in its own right, with its own expectations and experiences, and with the identity crisis as a constant, rather than as an aberration.¹ Coming of age does not necessarily need to be resolved in these novels, nor are the crises of identity inherently traumatic in the way they can be portrayed in adult fiction. Rather, coming of age is an ongoing process, which can progress and regress without being 'failed'. In this chapter, I discuss Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* (2003) and Linda Newbery's *The Shell House* (2002), arguing that they present two different versions of what it means to come of age in relation to the past. *Private Peaceful* suggests that coming of age is primarily experiential and does not require a serious identity crisis. The novel creates a clear divide between progressive and regressive expectations, and presents the latter as easily rejected. On the other hand, *The Shell House* sets up experience and expectations as equal forces, illustrating how both influence and shape an individual's identity. Their approaches echo the differences between *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy*. Like *Birdsong*, *Private Peaceful* offers a vision of the past which encourages admiration for past disruptions, while encouraging present-day norms, and suggests ultimately that the disconnect between expectations and experience can be resolved. *The Shell House* offers a fragmented, uncertain past which mirrors the identity

¹ I draw on Qvortrup's idea of 'human becomings': the best of young adult fiction functions in part as a response to the traditional *Bildungsroman*'s drive towards full formation by insisting on youth culture, experiences and norms as worthy in their own right.

crises of the present moment, suggesting the continued need to acknowledge and negotiate the limitations of expectations, echoing the openendedness of *The Ghost Road*.²

These novels are *about* coming of age, but they are also *sites* of coming of age: they instruct their readers on how to understand and engage with the past. John Stephens notes that the reader is especially important in fiction for young readers:

As a culture's future is, to put in crudely, invested in its children, children's writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into 'desirable' forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose.³

Put simply: child readers are seen as more vulnerable, more malleable and more able to be influenced. Therefore, children's writers are often more invested in 'raising' their readers by conveying lessons, values and attitudes. There is, of course, a difference between children's literature and YA literature; however, I want to insist on the importance of didacticism in YA fiction. There is an increased focus on the reader and specifically on teaching or instructing the reader, whether explicitly or implicitly, relative to adult fiction.⁴ These didactic aspects inform both *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*, and suggest ways in which reading about the past – and the First World War in particular – may represent an act of coming of age. These novels are necessarily interested in the passing on of the national past to a new generation. Equally, however, they are aware of a need to present this past in a way which is relevant to contemporary adolescents. Erikson argues that the identity crisis is not just a case of rebelling against expectations or seeking to destroy norms. Instead, 'the search of youth [is] for new ways of directly facing up to what truly counts.'⁵ *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* are concerned with this act of deciding 'what truly counts' about the past and helping the implied reader figure out how to face this.

Negotiating between experience and expectations is a way of deciding how to view the world and understand it, a concern which is particularly pressing in YA fiction, for characters and readers both. Thus I read these novels through the framework of coming of age as a character and as a reader. In the former case, I focus on brothers Thomas 'Tommo' and Charlie Peaceful in *Private Peaceful*, and on contemporary

² From here on, I refer to young adult fiction as YA fiction.

³ John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature* (London: Longman, 1992), p.3.

⁴ I am drawing on the work of Roberta Seelinger Trites in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2000), 'Introduction' and Alison Waller in *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, p.6-7.

⁵ Erikson, p.37.

teenager Greg and First World War officer Edmund in *The Shell House*. The novels represent two modes of coming of age: one that presumes a straightforward connection between past and present, experience and action; and the other which sees the gaps and disconnection between then and now as indicative of a larger and necessary identity crisis. I move on to look at the way the reader is positioned as coming of age through the act of reading about the First World War. Both *The Shell House* and *Private Peaceful* frame the transition to adulthood in relation to an engagement with the past, both personal and social. Tommo, Charlie, Edmund and Greg's coming of age processes in *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* provide the 'guide' for the implied reader, a form of prosthetic memory offering an experiential perspective on the war and the characters' negotiation of the expectations of the time.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to look at actual readers' responses, which may vary widely depending on critical stance, individual life experiences, pre-existing knowledge about the war and so on. Rather, my focus is on the construction of the implied reader and the textual devices used to convince the reader of the novel's position and ideology, and on the cultural construction of the adolescent. The implied reader is indicative of the assumptions of the text and, beyond that, the cultural discourse which the author is writing into. Thus it provides another way of mapping out the negotiation of the identity crisis, the integration (or not) of experience and expectation. In my definition of the implied reader, I draw on Stephens' definition in *Language, Ideology and Children's Literature* (1992):

the implied reader is what an interpretive act will pivot on in that it mediates meaning which is a potentiality inherent in a text's structures and the (real) reader's actualisation of this potential. The 'implied' reader thus tends to blend into a notion of an 'ideal' reader, the reader who will actualize a book's potential meanings.⁶

My use of the implied reader encompasses the idea of the ideal reader, who is open and receptive to the novel, able to close gaps and pick up on the novel's subtexts and implications. Stephens further describes the implied reader as 'an implied stance constructed out of a socially determined language in the context of some dominant social practices and inherent ideologies.'⁷ The implied reader, then, is not just constructed

⁶ Stephens, p.55; Stephens' definition is based on the work of Wolfgang Iser, particularly *Acts of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 [1978]), which my conception of the implied reader is also influenced by.

⁷ Stephens, p.57.

through authorial intention, but also through larger cultural expectations and norms. This framework draws attention to how the text uses existing discourses to appeal to and entreat the reader, *and* construct an 'ideal' reader of the text. Here, the implied reader is traced through the role of the focaliser as disruptive/non-disruptive; expectations of prior knowledge, and endings in particular, and my reading of both novels focuses on these elements.

Underlying this analysis is the assumption that texts are trying to convince their readers. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that all texts have a dominant perspective, usually identifiable as 'the narrator-focalizer. If additional ideologies emerge in such texts, they become subordinate to the dominant focalizer, thus transforming the other evaluating subjects into objects of evaluation'.⁸ It is through the characters' changing understanding of the war in the novels that readers are encouraged to position themselves ideologically and normatively – in relation to the war and to their present. Reading the novels become an 'act' of coming of age which is connected to, although it does not necessarily mirror, the characters' coming of age, as the novels offer models for negotiating experience and expectation. Furthermore, Rimmon-Kenan argues that the implied reader activates the dynamics of reading which are 'not only [...] a formation, development, modification of hypotheses', ideas and lessons learnt on the way to a finalised reading, 'but also [...] the construction of frames, their transformation and dismantling'.⁹ Texts can work, in small ways and large, to change the discourse they are writing into by creating gaps for readers' assumptions and expectations to be 'transformed and dismantled' and creating frames for a new way of seeing the world.¹⁰ In the case of *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*, they are constructing frames for the implied reader to understand the past through, while suggesting the importance of these frames for the present as well – and as such are acting as sites of coming of age, conveying a version of the past for the reader to take on, either as their own, in the case of *Private Peaceful*, or as a set of differing models for viewing and negotiating with the past and its expectations, in *The Shell House*.

When considering the implied reader, it is worth noting that there is a difference between the intended audience and age group of *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*.

⁸ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.83.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁰ I am using frames here in the simplest sense of the term, as a way of perceiving and understanding texts through genres and expectations.

Both can be categorised as YA fiction: they have adolescent protagonists, deal with burgeoning sexuality, and engage with the violence of war more explicitly than would be usual in literature for younger children.¹¹ Seelinger Trites usefully defines YA fiction by its ideological focus, arguing that the difference between YA and literature for younger children is to be found in 'the very determined way that YA novels tend to interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between society and the individual rather than focusing on Self and self-discovery as children's literature does.'¹² Setting these novels in the First World War puts the relationship between society and individual at its centre, given the importance of participation in the myths of both the disillusioned and reluctant soldiers, myths which Tommo, Edmund and Charlie all inhabit at various points in the narratives. In their role as soldiers, the characters present a debate about the ethical relationship between the state (represented by the army and the school in particular) and the individual. The reader is also implicated in this discussion at a meta-textual level, as a student *and* as an individual who is in the process of coming of age into a new relationship with the state and society. This socio-political engagement is most evident in *The Shell House*, which foregrounds the relationship between individual, school, and the normative power of peers and family in relation to its present-day protagonist. *The Shell House* has two parallel narratives: Edmund Pearson, an officer from the landed gentry, whose sexual awakening in the trenches brings him into conflict with his family at home, and Greg Hobbs, a contemporary teenager whose own crises around sexuality and faith are underpinned by his interest in the shell house Edmund used to live in, and Edmund's fate in particular. The novel interrogates heteronormativity and societal pressures. Through Greg's hunt for Edmund, the novel also explores the role of school in introducing students to larger cultural discourses.

The Shell House makes clear that the individual is always already implicated in larger norms and structures, mirroring the *Regeneration Trilogy's* use of textual deferral and its focus on multiplicities of identity. By focalising the narrative alternatively 'within' Greg and Edmund, while never letting the implied reader fully identify with either, *The Shell House* uses the characters as a way of guiding the implied reader to question these structures.¹³ There is little of this sort of cultural exploration in *Private Peaceful*, but there

¹¹ Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse* (1982) and Michael Foreman's *War Games* (1993) are examples of World War I books more clearly for readers under ten.

¹² Seelinger Trites, p.20.

¹³ *The Shell House* uses an external focaliser, which further disrupts the implied reader's identification. See Rimmon-Kenan, p.75, p.82.

is a focus on the power of the family and individual in relation to larger institutions and power relation. The Peaceful family are smallholders on a larger estate, their livelihood dependent on the Colonel who owns the estate, and vulnerable because of it. The novel returns repeatedly to this conflict between those who have power and mismanage it, and those – like the Peacefuls – who are structurally and systemically disempowered. *Private Peaceful* is both narrated and focalised through Tommo. Through his narration's shifting use of present and past tense, the novel constructs an implied reader who identifies with Tommo, sharing his responses to and perspective on these injustices.

As I noted above, the audience for these novels is slightly different. *Booktrust* suggests that *Private Peaceful* is suitable for children aged ten and up.¹⁴ Its implied reader is expected to be younger than for *The Shell House*, and this is reflected in its use of simpler language, and its more pedagogical focus on introducing, framing and making clear the war's importance for the reader. *The Shell House* is listed as appropriate for ages twelve and up, although they do suggest that the subject matter may make it more appropriate for readers aged thirteen and up.¹⁵ It is a more stylistically complex novel, expecting more from its reader: *The Shell House* implies a reader with knowledge of the war, suggested through the novel's opening which makes use of subtle war imagery, and familiar with the English school system, as little is explained in the school scenes. Despite their slightly different audiences, however, the novels share a focus on the war as a site of coming of age, both for their characters and readers. It is possible to argue that *The Shell House*'s more active engagement with contemporary social structures makes it more complex; the implied reader's assumed age does inform the way the novels present their arguments, and what they feel can be left as implied. Yet it would be overstating the case to argue that *Private Peaceful* does not make demands of its reader. Its effectiveness and popularity stem in part from its ability to engage readers with emotionally complex and harrowing subject matter, as well as requiring a sophisticated reading level. Thus I see the difference in their approach to what the implied reader is assumed to need to take away from the war as a more productive focus than what can be explained by appealing to different age groups.

¹⁴ 'Private Peaceful', *BookTrust* [<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/view/24585>] (accessed on 17/06/14). I am using *BookTrust*'s rating as the organisation works closely with publishers, schools, children's librarians and other professionals working with children's literature.

¹⁵ 'The Shell House', *BookTrust* [<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/view/24748>] (accessed on 17/06/14).

For both *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*, the implied reader of the text is of school age, and is currently part of the English school system, a central feature which distinguishes these novels from *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy*.¹⁶ *Private Peaceful*'s popularity is facilitated by the novel's position in English schools.¹⁷ In Ann-Marie Einhaus and Catriona Pennell's study of how the First World War is taught in schools across England, they note the popularity of Michael Morpurgo as part of English teaching. They suggest that his popularity stems in part from the sense, at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE level, that students are more motivated to read fiction which invites their empathy and emotional engagement, such as *Private Peaceful*.¹⁸ The novel is presented as a valid point for adolescent readers to begin their engagement with the war, endorsed by schools and other institutions with responsibility for children's literature. Esther MacCallum-Stewart argues that '[t]he strong support by education in the United Kingdom also means that certain ideologies and themes about the war are encouraged' in children's literature about the First World War.¹⁹ The way the war is taught in English broadly replicates the dominant cultural understanding of the war. Furthermore, MacCallum-Stewart suggests that this 'restrict[s] the depiction of the First World War to certain patterns that tell moral parables about war in general, without challenging the existing status quo' pointing to the way in which the war becomes framed as an ethical tale, the moral of which is [...] the horror and pointless waste of *all* war, not just the First World War.²⁰ Einhaus and Pennell's findings complicate this. Teaching the war is not uniform across the school system, nor is it as prescriptive as MacCallum-Stewart suggests.²¹ However, as can be seen in *Private Peaceful*'s success, which comes in part from its effectiveness at drawing on the mythology of futility and the myth of the reluctant soldier, and its ability to engage readers emotionally with a potentially alienating past, much of what is published for and presented to adolescents does reiterate ideas of 'horror and pointless waste'. The way in which these narratives are reproduced through the novels

¹⁶ Both *Birdsong* and *Regeneration* have appeared on the AQA A-level syllabus; however, they were not written for teenagers and they are presented in the syllabus as adult fiction.

¹⁷ This is in no small part also linked to Michael Morpurgo's general popularity in schools and with school librarians.

¹⁸ Ann-Marie Einhaus and Catriona Pennell. *The First World War in the Classroom*, (AHRC-funded research project: <http://ww1intheclassroom.exeter.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/FWW-in-the-Classroom-final-project-report.pdf>, 2014), p.46-47; the novel is most popular for younger sets, but is used almost as much for 16+ students, p.49.

¹⁹ Esther MacCallum-Stewart, 'If they ask us why we died': Children's Literature and the First World War, 1970-2005' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* 31.2 (2007) p.182.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.182.

²¹ Einhaus, p.68-70.

and their cultural/educational context informs my argument. *Private Peaceful*, like *Birdsong*, ultimately re-enforces expectations and norms, even as it draws on the futility mythology for its power; while modelling rebellion, it requires subordination to the authority of the text and the narrative it presents.

As this suggests, the impact of these novels stems in part from their status as historical novels. Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan argue that 'part of what enables one to be fully English [...] is an understanding of English history and a recognition and acceptance of that history as part of one's own heritage and cultural identity' which can be facilitated through historical fiction and *particularly* historical fiction which covers recent history.²² This focus on identity illuminates another aspect of coming of age in these novels: they help their readers come of age in relation to their national identity, experiencing an emotional engagement with national mythscapes. Butler and O'Donovan further argue that fiction of the twentieth century is different from other historical fiction:

Where novels about engagements within living memory are concerned, [...] this engagement may include a need, both psychological and moral, to tell a story [...] as an 'elder' within a community in which each generation is driven to bequeath something of itself to its successors [...].²³

The First World War is on the edge of living memory and this partially accounts for the heightened emotional and cultural investment in the war, which is often personalised, familial, and emotive. Both *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* are a product of this cultural desire to 'bequeath something of itself to its successors', even if it is not a direct line of succession. What is being passed on to readers is a way of understanding their society, and in turn, an expectation of greater responsibility – for the past, and for the present.²⁴ Readers become aware of their antecedents through the bequest of 'understanding the past' and identify with a larger history – taking on a prosthetic memory of the events in question. This bequest is largely the mythology of the war and its value as a site for the exploration of the horror of war, the bravery of the individual and the cruelty of faceless bureaucracy and authority. This is not to say that other historical periods and conflicts cannot provide 'coming of age' moments for the reader; Butler and O'Donovan, as well as Stephens, argue that any historical fiction at the very least disrupts the readers' sense of solipsism and introduces them to a larger social and

²² Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan. *Reading History in Children's Books* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p.182; recent past refers to events which happened in the past century.

²³ Butler, p.153.

²⁴ See Rimmon-Kenan, p.124.

cultural context than their own.²⁵ However, the First World War is particularly useful for this, as it is explicitly linked to a sense of national tragedy and failure; furthermore, it is culturally seen as a 'young' war, as the soldiering myths suggest. These novels reflect a sense of the twentieth century as a period of growing scepticism towards institutions, a scepticism which complicates coming of age, for the characters and for the implied readers.

One of the reasons *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* use the First World War as a site for exploring questions of coming of age is the assumption that the war speaks to the anxieties of the present, whether in the context of military and governmental authority (in *Private Peaceful*'s engagement with the campaign for pardons), or ongoing questions about class, education and sexuality (in *The Shell House*).²⁶ The war is relevant only insofar as it can speak to the next generation, and thus the novels' engagement with mythical soldier narratives may be read as part of a campaign for the continuing relevance of the First World War and its moral lessons. However, I argue that this is only true for *Private Peaceful*. *The Shell House* presents a more ambivalent relationship to the First World War, allowing that it is an important event, while also suggesting that its importance to the present is misunderstood and exaggerated. These novels position the First World War as a site for the exploration of social, political and cultural questions through their engagement with the crises of coming of age. *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* model different ways for the implied adolescent readers to use the novel as site for exploring their own sense of themselves in relation to the First World War. Central to this is a burgeoning sense of citizenship and civic responsibility. This sense shaped through the implied readers' understanding of the institutions and communities, such as school, which shape their life, and the readers' negotiations of their own experiences alongside the expectations of these places.

I begin by looking at coming of age as a character and coming of age as a reader in *Private Peaceful*. The novel moves from the personal relationship to events, in Tommo's reminiscences of his childhood and of Charlie in particular, to a national/historical relationship to the past, in the construction of the implied reader. I argue that *Private Peaceful* presents this past as easily accessible and readable, positioning the First World War as a site for both national and individual lessons. The war

²⁵ Butler, p.178-9; Stephens, p.202.

²⁶ Einhaus and Pennell found that a number of teachers chose to teach FWW literature as a way of framing the twentieth century, p.53.

is a tragedy, but also a space of experiential empowerment: encouraging the implied reader to stand up to authority, as well as inviting her to see the past as something which can educate and provide exemplary behaviour. However, these lessons are undermined by the text's lack of nuance. Tommo's identity crisis in *Private Peaceful* is easily resolved, prioritising the connection between experience and the expectations of the family as the ideal response to institutional abuses of power. This conclusive ideology is mirrored by the novel's narrative style. Through its use of a reader-identified focaliser-narrator, the novel limits the implied reader's interpretative power. Moving on to *The Shell House*, I look at the coming of age of Greg and Edmund, and their relationship to the past, as framed by the shell house of the title. There is a clear split between the personal past of Edmund, heir to the house, and the historical/national history which interests Greg as a reader/interpreter. I argue that *The Shell House* presents history and sites of the past as valuable, but also as ambiguous and ambivalent spaces, which are full of gaps and cannot be 'finalised' in the way that Greg assumes that he is able to. This is further emphasised through the ambivalent resolution of the identity crises in the novel; Edmund rejects expectations outright, while Greg ends the novel with his crises arguably worse than they were at the beginning of the novel. The implied reader in *The Shell House* is never fully identified with either Greg or Edmund, and is therefore able to be critical of the characters, their relationship with the past and their negotiation of coming of age. This opens up the possibility of the novel as a site for negotiating a relationship to the past and present, suggesting that social expectations and norms need to acknowledge the disconnect between generations as well as between the self and society. The crises here are not resolvable, nor is their resolution necessarily desirable.

2.2 *Private Peaceful*: Authority, and Learning from the Past

Narrating the past and who has the power to narrate is the immediate focus of *Private Peaceful*: the novel is a retrospective narrative, narrated by Tommo as he waits for dawn on the day of Charlie's execution for cowardice. In her reading of *Private Peaceful*, Kim Wilson suggests that it 'engages with the contest over not so much what to remember but how to remember the past. The interplay of memory and power is manifest in the questions Morpurgo asks of the surviving documentation.'²⁷ Wilson's point is about

²⁷ Kim Wilson, *Re-Visioning the Historical Fiction for Young Readers* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.149.

Morpurgo's para-textual engagement with the debate around those executed during the war; however, I want to suggest that it has further implications. Focusing on the relationship between Morpurgo's novel and the material surrounding executions is, of course, productive. However, focusing on that elides the way in which *Private Peaceful* models 'how to remember the past' in Tommo's narrative. The whole novel, with the exception of the final few pages, is Tommo remembering his life up until the present of the novel. He narrates his own coming of age, stating: 'I want to try and remember everything, just as it was, just as it happened. [...] I want tonight to be long, as long as my life, not filled with fleeting dreams that rush me on towards dawn.'²⁸ Two things are made clear here: what follows is personal and emotional (the narrator reiterates his desire to relive and dwell on the past); and it will be a full narrative of a life, not just a single event. *Private Peaceful* is presented as a completed narrative, tracing Tommo's (and Charlie's) development from children to adolescents to soldiers at war.

The war and Charlie's death are framed as the central events through which Tommo comes of age, but the novel also represents several other aspects of coming of age for both boys, including: Tommo's first stirrings of sexual attraction for the Peacefuls' friend, Molly; Tommo and Charlie leaving school; the boys taking up work on the estate; and Charlie and Molly starting a family together. At the centre of these coming of age experiences is the relationship between Tommo and Charlie. Their stories in some ways mirror each other. In other ways, however, they are significantly different. On his first day of school, Tommo describes himself as 'the littlest of the Tiddlers', subtly characterising him as vulnerable, young and naïve, although the past tense focalisation of 'adult' Tommo prevents his naivety from becoming overwhelming.²⁹ On the same day, Mr Munnings, the headmaster, singles him out:

'A new boy, a new boy to add to my trials and tribulations. Was not one Peaceful enough? [...] Understand this, Thomas Peaceful, that here I am your lord and master. You do what I say when I say it. [...] These are my commandments.'³⁰

The focus which falls on Tommo is linked to Charlie, who has fallen foul of the authority of the school, suggesting the connection between their experiences. It sets up their roles throughout the novel: Charlie attracts trouble, Tommo suffers for it. This scene also

²⁸ Michael Morpurgo, *Private Peaceful* (London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2012 (2003)) p.7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

presents the power relations which Tommo will struggle against throughout the narrative, although rarely actively – the oppressive expectations which have to be rejected. The laying down of the law which Mr Munnings represents makes clear that Tommo is not in a position to speak up for himself; Mr Munnings is ‘lord and master’ and he alone can command. His singling out of Tommo suggests Tommo’s particular vulnerability, and indeed, Tommo repeatedly becomes a site for the exercise of callousness of authority throughout the novel.

The need to reject the expectations of this kind of authority is further emphasized in another school scene. Tommo, in one of the few places in the novel where he stands up for himself, gets into an argument with another boy, who insults the third, developmentally challenged, Peaceful brother, Big Joe. Charlie steps in to defend Tommo, wins the fight and has to take the punishment which Mr Munnings metes out. This punishment does not take into regard the rights and wrongs of the situation; it is a blind application of authority, judgement without any recourse to defence. However, Charlie finds a way of resisting: ‘when it’s Charlie’s turn [for his punishment], all we hear are the whacks, and then the silences in between. I have the bravest brother in the world.’³¹ This act of resistance sets up Charlie as the heroic figure of the novel, emphasized by Tommo’s interjection, ‘I have the bravest brother in the world’. This commentary leaves no doubt as to what the reader is supposed to take from this situation. Seelinger Trites notes that in YA fiction, ‘[s]chool serves as the metaphorical representation of the many institutions that will influence adolescents throughout their lives.’³² She suggests that this is why most works of YA fiction conclude with protagonists subordinating themselves to the authority of the school. This is obviously not the case in *Private Peaceful*. However, the school here does set up a pattern which repeats throughout the novel. In a sense, then, the school in the novel functions as a ‘negative’ model of the connection Seelinger Trites sees: the school does encourage normative behaviour, but in opposition, rather than by reconciliation. Throughout the novel, the Peacefuls are set upon by, and oppressed by, the expectations of unfeeling authority figures. A pattern emerges of Tommo experiencing vulnerability, making clear the abuses of authority, and Charlie standing up to that same authority and being punished for it. It is through this rejection of institutional expectations that the boys come of age.

³¹ Ibid., p.24.

³² Seelinger Trites, p.33.

Charlie is set up as Tommo's, and subsequently, the novel's hero early on. He is presented as always coming to the defence of his family, whether taking care of Tommo at school, or poaching to keep his family fed. Although Tommo and Molly help out, it is Charlie who is best at hunting and fishing, and he who is cunning enough to figure out how to poach. From the beginning, he is established as the natural head of the family after their father's death: '[Big Joe] never liked killing [the fish] though, and nor did I. Charlie had to do that.'³³ Charlie's bravery is emphasized and contrasted with Tommo's vulnerability and 'softness'. There is never any indication of self-doubt or hesitancy in Charlie's character. His role in the novel is to provide an idealised representation of masculinity and adulthood for Tommo, setting up an alternative model of 'expected' adulthood. Thus Charlie also provides an example of an idealised coming of age. This is not just about his resistance to authority, which I will discuss further below; it is also about his 'innate' abilities. Charlie is repeatedly presented as good at whatever undertaking he takes up, including the army. 'Charlie didn't have to be taught. On the rifle range he proved to be far and away the best shot in the company. When they gave him his red marksman's badge I was so proud of him.'³⁴ As with Charlie's punishment, his heroic or impressive feats are bracketed by the commentary of Tommo, emphasizing the impressiveness of Charlie. Indeed, Charlie takes on an almost saintly aura towards the end of the novel, becoming a favourite of the battalion, impressing with his bravery in protecting and saving the other men. Although this is obviously from Tommo's perspective, the reader is given few reasons to believe Tommo is incorrect in his assessment. Describing Charlie as a brother to all their fellow soldiers, Tommo reflects, '[b]eing his real brother I could feel I live in his shadow, but I never have and I do not now. I live in his glow.'³⁵ This also foreshadows Charlie's eventual sacrifice. Because he is the novel's heroic figure and its implicit ideal, it is through his death that the ultimate callousness of authority will be made clear.

In *The Distant Mirror* (2006), Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair note that YA historical fiction is often focused on the 'clash between socio-political powers [...] This conflict is represented [by] reactionary characters pitted against a protagonist who signifies a more progressive element.'³⁶ The development of the characters is facilitated

³³ Morpurgo, p.21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.127.

³⁶ Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair. *The Distant Mirror* (Landam: Scarecrow, 2006), p.11-2.

through this conflict; the progressive (and therefore sympathetic) characters develop by becoming more secure in their contrast to the reactionary characters, more certain of their rightness. It is here that the coming of age narrative in *Private Peaceful* potentially fails: there is no sense of significant change for Charlie or his sense of identity. The novel repeats similar scenarios throughout, even drawing direct parallels between these situations. Towards the end of the novel, when Charlie stands up to the cruel Sergeant Hanley, Tommo describes the scene: 'Charlie looks him straight in the eye in open defiance and does not look away, just as he used to do with Mr Munnings at school when he was being ticked off.'³⁷ Sergeant Hanley and Mr Munnings are essentially interchangeable; the only difference between school and the army is that the stakes are higher. Charlie starts the narrative as in the right, and he ends the narrative in the same way. As Tommo imagines Charlie's execution on the final pages of the novel, he returns to the imagery of school: 'He is walking with his head held high, just as he was after Mr Munnings caned him at school that day.'³⁸ The repetition here reinforces the stability of Charlie's characterisation. The identity crisis is fundamentally about the conflict between experience and expectations, a mismatch between what the individual judges to be right based on experience and what is expected by society. Charlie's coming of age seems to suggest that expectations can be jettisoned without significant conflict or crisis. Charlie does not develop into, or struggle to become a hero; he is simply heroic all the way through the novel. This lack of development and attendant lack of crisis underlines the possible contradiction between the novel's overt progressive politics and its characters: although Charlie challenges authority and struggles against repressive forces, this struggle is not reflected in any self-doubt, or internal conflict. Experience is, fundamentally, not transformative or even particularly transitional. Even at the end, Charlie does not show any ambivalence about his actions, nor does the narrative give any sense that Charlie might regret staying back to save Tommo. Charlie's only concern is that he does not 'want [his family] thinking I was a coward. I don't want that. I want them to know the truth.'³⁹ The dismissal of internal conflict or a sustained identity crisis for Charlie suggests that it is possible to come of age without conflict and without struggle. Thus Charlie models an idealised version of coming of age for Tommo, one which does not allow for doubts or change. The lack of identity crisis mirrors the novel's refusal to allow

³⁷ Morpurgo, p.171.

³⁸ Ibid., p.184.

³⁹ Ibid., p.177.

that opinions and positions can waiver or change over time, through exposure to new experiences and perspectives.

However, Charlie is presented through Tommo's narrative, and his coming of age process is secondary to Tommo's. Tommo's desire to move from his position of relative vulnerability and (occasional) lack of bravery is shaped in relation to Charlie's ideal model of masculinity. Thus Tommo does have a version of an identity crisis which, fittingly, is defined in relation to Charlie's lack of one. This is suggested early on, when Molly dares Charlie and Tommo to take off their clothes and go skinny dipping. Charlie takes up the challenge; Tommo does not: 'So I sat and sulked on the bank and watched them splashing and giggling, and all the while I was wishing I had the courage to do what Charlie had done, wishing I was with them.'⁴⁰ Tommo is consistently presented as lacking Charlie's bravery, which wins Charlie Molly and allows him to resist authority in a way in which Tommo cannot. It is Charlie who stands up to the bully at school and Charlie who stands up to Mr Munnings, the Colonel and Sergeant Hanley. By contrast, Tommo is always aware of his own potential cowardice and this provides something to overcome. Tellingly, it is also Tommo's fear of being a coward which marks his first engagement with the war. At a recruitment rally, Tommo finds himself singled out: 'a toothless old lady [was] pointing at me [...] 'You go and fight. It's every man's duty to fight when his country calls [...]. Y'ain't a coward, are you?''⁴¹ It is this, more than the recruitment sergeant's invocation of protecting home, that haunts Tommo and after his first battle, it is the old woman he thinks of: 'I feel a surge of triumph welling inside me, [...] because I have stood with the others. I have not run. / *'Y'ain't a coward, are you?'* / No, old woman, I am not, I am not.'⁴² This shows Tommo's identity changing and developing through the experience of the war, proving that he can be brave and setting up the potential for him to take on Charlie's role: Charlie may be a better soldier, but Tommo is capable of standing next to him and feeling that he has moved beyond the vulnerable little boy he was at the beginning of the narrative. Tommo's recollection of Charlie, and the focus on Charlie's acts of resistance, may be seen as mapping out Tommo's own aims for his coming of age following Charlie's death. Thus Charlie creates an alternate set of expectations which match up to Tommo's own experience, allowing Tommo to resolve his crises. Indeed, the last scene the two share sees Charlie entrusting

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.44.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.96.

⁴² Ibid., p.140.

Tommo with their father's watch and Charlie's son: 'Keep it ticking for me, and then when the time comes, give it to Little Tommo [...] You'll make him a good father, like Father was to us.'⁴³ This is a symbolic handing over of Charlie's role in the family and with it Charlie's heroism and characterisation. Charlie offers a model of social expectations which allows Tommo to come of age through proving his bravery. By reconstructing Charlie as a model of *familial* expectation, Tommo is able to learn from his past and resolve his identity crisis.

By focusing on familial expectations, *Private Peaceful* suggests that broader social concerns need not be overly heeded. Although Tommo suffers physically from the social expectations of Mr Munnings and later Sergeant Hanley, their expectations barely create an internal conflict; it is only the old lady and recruiting sergeant who really affect him. Ultimately, Tommo's development is about *resisting* and becoming braver, never about changing opinions, or developing a more nuanced attitude towards the war. MacCallum-Stewart suggests that one of the ways in which *Private Peaceful* fails as a historical novel is in its representation of the Peacefuls as 'decent middle class types with a tolerance for the working classes, disenfranchised women and the mentally disabled.'⁴⁴ Although her description of the Peacefuls as middle class is incorrect in the context of the novel, MacCallum-Stewart picks up on the appeal of the Peacefuls and their ideological position, which maps onto a liberal middle class endorsement of tolerance and scepticism of authority. Her description also gestures towards the way in which the Peaceful family is presented as a unit, without any conflict or dissension. They begin the narrative as progressive and remain progressive throughout. Even Tommo's coming of age is relatively unproblematic. Although he overcomes his cowardice and begins to take on Charlie's bravery and resistance, this is not an ideological change. Nor is it a struggle: despite the focus on Tommo's vulnerability, once he gets to the war, there is little suggestion that he was ever at risk of running away. While away at war, he has a brief romance with a local Belgian girl, Anna, signifying his coming of age into sexual maturity beyond his infatuation with Molly. This too presents very little anxiety. The eventual derailing is caused by the war and Anna's death. It is not linked to any challenge Tommo in particular has to face or any conflict between the two of them which might need negotiating; rather, it is another tragic event which happens *to* Tommo. Thus,

⁴³ Ibid., p.180.

⁴⁴ MacCallum-Stewart, p.181.

although Tommo *does* come of age in the text, it is a relatively crisis-free coming of age; there is little evidence of the kind of conflict between experience and expectation which might involve a sustained identity crisis.

This lack of any sustained identity crisis is mirrored by the novel's representation of the war more broadly. The novel constructs an implied reader who agrees with the novel's dismissal of the war – who, indeed, is not given the opportunity to disagree. Wilson argues that *Private Peaceful*'s engagement with how the past is remembered 'becomes both a narrative strategy of recall and an affirmation of present ideological assumptions that posit the past as unjust and iniquitous.'⁴⁵ I want to go a step further and suggest that these are not two separate aspects of the novel, but rather, they reinforce each other. Tommo's recall becomes a way for him to repeat to himself the lessons Charlie presents for him. Looking to his past, he is able to model an ideal for himself going forward and fully understand the 'lessons' of his own life so far. This personal engagement with the past maps onto the implied reader's historical engagement, and in doing so, affirms the 'present ideological assumptions' Wilson picks up on. The novel suggests that an individual experience of the past and the fictional experience of the past can be seen as equivalent and equal. In both cases, the past presents lessons and maps out ways in which the 'reader' of the past might come of age through looking back. The novel does engage with the historical and political reasons for the war:

[Molly] didn't really understand what the war was all about, [...] only that some archduke – whatever that was – had been shot in a place called Sarajevo – wherever that was – and Germany and France were very angry with each other about it. They were gathering their armies to fight with each other and, if they did, then we'd be in it soon because we'd have to fight on the French side against the Germans.⁴⁶

It is telling that *Private Peaceful* offers some explanation for the causes of the war. These explanations do not appear in novels like *Birdsong*; even the *Regeneration Trilogy*, although it does discuss the political realities of the war, does not provide this sort of 'summary' of the causes. Faulks and Barker can assume that their readers have some knowledge of the causes of the First World War, which Morpurgo cannot. This quotation, then, suggests the expectations placed on the implied reader; it might also provide a cue for the reader to explore the history of the war, particularly in the context of a classroom.

⁴⁵ Wilson, 2011, p.149.

⁴⁶ Morpurgo, p.69.

The novel might be gesturing at a historical reality beyond its own limited representation of the past.

However, the dismissal of the war apparent in the interjections ‘whatever that was’ and ‘wherever that was’ within the text suggests that, even if the implied reader were to know more, it still would not give them a more ‘accurate’ insight into the war. The implied reader’s potential curiosity about the war is invoked only to be dismissed, as attention is brought back to what is important: the experience of the individual. Tommo concludes the above paragraph by noting: ‘[i]t made about as much sense to me as it did to her’, indicating that there is no sense to be found.⁴⁷ The politics of history are present in *Private Peaceful*, but they are simplified and elided in favour of a simplified argument against cruelty. When I discuss coming of age through history for the *implied reader* in *Private Peaceful*, the history I am discussing is not about the war as a political reality. Rather, it is about the war as a part of the national mythscape, and more specifically, about the myth of the reluctant soldier. This narrative exposes the problems and corruption of authority as well as the need for resistance, standing up to the abuses of the state and its institutions. The reluctance of the soldier to know more emphasises the seeming meaningless of the reasons given for the war. The implied reader is *not* supposed to have any doubts or feel any curiosity about the war.

This point is also clear in the construction of the implied reader as mirroring Tommo’s ‘reading’ of the past. *Private Peaceful* is presented as Tommo’s retelling of his life, passing the time until dawn, although the reader is not told why dawn is significant. Tommo declares: ‘I want to try and remember everything, just as it was, just as it happened’, setting up a truth claim right at the novel’s start and insisting on Tommo’s control of the narrative.⁴⁸ The novel opens *in media res*, with the reader immediately bound up with Tommo’s perspective; there is no temporal disconnect between Tommo as focaliser and focalised subject. This creates an immediate mystery and a sense of foreboding, drawing the implied reader in through her curiosity and desire to know what has happened to the narrator – and what is about to happen. This desire is further fed through the changing tenses. Early on in the novel, Tommo remembers: ‘Until this moment I have never known what it is to feel truly alone.’⁴⁹ Although the reader knows that this is a memory, Tommo’s thoughts are in the present tense, creating a sense of

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.69.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.11.

immediacy, as well as suggesting that Tommo's memory is precise and evocative enough to transport him *and* the implied reader back to that time. This notion of precision is related to the novel's claim to the 'truth' of Tommo's narrative. He is re-experiencing the war through the telling. Throughout the novel, Tommo shifts from past tense to occasional present tense in the most affecting passages, emphasising their importance and value. For the implied reader, Tommo's point-of-view is supposed to be unchallengeable. The present tense gives the narrative a sense of reportage, as if what is happening is still immediately happening to Tommo. An ideological hierarchy is established, then, at the novel's start: Tommo is the source of meaning and his conclusions are presented as valid and accessible. There is no indication in the novel that Tommo may be unreliable, nor is there any (sympathetic) contradiction presented to his version of events. It is through Tommo's 'true' account of events that the implied reader is supposed to develop her own relationship to the war.

That Tommo's is a true account of the war is emphasized when Tommo moves from his own memories to the apparently collective memories of his troop. Here, Tommo presents the reader with the presumed truth of the experience of the war. When Tommo remembers the training camp, he recalls:

No matter what the officers and NCOs told us of the hardships and dangers of trench warfare, we still all believed we were simply in some kind of rehearsal, actors in costume. We had to play our part, dress our part, but in the end it would be a play. That is what we tried to believe – if ever we spoke about it, that is. But the truth was that we didn't speak of it much.⁵⁰

Here, the 'we' refers not just to Tommo and Charlie, but to all the men with whom they are training. There is no indication that Tommo might be seen as unreliable here, or not able to speak on behalf of all the men. The quotation is in past tense and reflective, Tommo functioning as both witness and analyst. It prefigures the horrors to come, while stressing the innocence of the soldiers to the reader: the emphasis on acting and the repetition of play draws the implied reader's sympathy. This notion of play appears again as the regiment departs for France: Tommo remembers: 'the larking and the play-acting were over. From that moment none of us doubted the seriousness of what this would be about. It was our lives we would be acting out over here, and for many of us, our deaths.'⁵¹ This movement from 'larking and play-acting' to 'our lives' presents the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.110.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.113.

journey from training to France as a transitional moment, a form of coming of age which takes Tommo, Charlie and the soldiers from childhood to a kind of adulthood, following the expected narrative of coming of age *and* of the war. In doing so, the novel reiterates that this is a collective truth: all the soldiers felt this transition and understood that they were moving from a position of protected childhood to exposed (and exploited) adulthood. The quotation also stresses the youth of the soldiers, facilitating identification.⁵² Because *Private Peaceful* implies a reader who is aligned with Tommo, the implied reader is also emotively linked to the enlisted soldiers more generally.

The enlisted men, then, are represented as young and relatively vulnerable, if not innocent. The novel is at pains to emphasise that Tommo is not exceptional in signing up underage: 'Everyone knew [...] that I was Charlie's younger brother, and a year too young to enlist. [...] There were dozens of others underage in the regiment and everyone knew it. After all, they needed all the men they could get.'⁵³ This is a subtle call back to the recurring theme of uncaring authority, prioritising their desires over ethical concerns for right and wrong. It is also a central aspect of the myths of both the disillusioned and the reluctant soldier, although *Private Peaceful* is rare in choosing to focalise the narrative through the underage soldier. Tommo's age makes explicit the dichotomy of power between the incompetent generals and the innocence of those sent away to die at the front.⁵⁴ Through this focus on youth, the connection between the implied reader and the enlisted men is reiterated. I do not want to overstate this, however: the soldiers presented, when not shown as a collective, are not necessarily child-like in the sense of being innocent. The first time Tommo sees Anna, a fellow soldier, Nipper 'notices her smiling at [Tommo] and makes something dirty of it.'⁵⁵ There is some individuality allowed here, and a contrast drawn between some of the men and Tommo in a way which suggests that Tommo is still younger than other men in the regiment, as well as more sensitive, sustaining his child-likeness and allowing the (young) implied reader to remain sympathetic. However, Nipper's comment suggests an older teenaged boy, rather than a fully-fledged adult. The interaction here is not between innocence and experience, but

⁵² For more on the representation of adolescents as particularly vulnerable soldiers, see Milena Subrtova. 'When Children Die in War' in *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* (47.4 2009), pp.1-8, p.3-4. Subrtova's focus is pan-European, but suggests in particular the construction of the First World War as a site of vulnerable adolescents. She mentions *Private Peaceful* in particular as an example of a new kind of adolescent hero made vulnerable and sympathetic through his innocence and potential resistance.

⁵³ Morpurgo, p.116.

⁵⁴ See for example Wilson, 2011, p.136-8.

⁵⁵ Morpurgo., p.123.

rather between naiveté and the desire to perform experience; it does not disrupt the notion of the vulnerable adolescent soldier. This focus on the youth of the men suggests their victimhood: they are not culpable in their role in the war because they are not adults. Rather they are manipulated and used by those in power.

The novel for the most part closes down any sense of multiple opinions or perspectives, limiting debate or openness through the implied reader's alignment with Tommo and suggesting a uniformity of opinion among sympathetic characters. However, there is an exception to this: Tommo and Charlie's recruitment. This puts into conflict the myths of the disillusioned soldier, who starts off willing enough, desiring glory on the battlefield, and the reluctant soldier, who sees the war for "what it really is". As noted above, a significant part of Tommo's recruitment is about his desire not to be thought a coward. He does have another motivation, however:

I thought about how fine and manly the men looked in their bright uniforms, how Molly [...], might even love me, if I joined up and came home in my scarlet uniform, how proud Mother would be [...] I would go to France and [...] kick the stuffing out of the lousy Germans.⁵⁶

Tommo is presented as naïve, overly trusting in what he has been told, but he is shown as feeling a sense of conflict and pull towards social expectations of manhood. His reasons for wanting to join the army are not presented as frivolous or even exceptionally ridiculous and he still attracts the implied reader's sympathy. Indeed, this is one place in the novel where an alternate model of expected adulthood to the one Charlie embodies, and the Peacefuls as a whole endorse, is presented. Charlie, however, refuses to sign up, saying: 'I'm not going, not ever. I'll shoot a rat because it might bite me. I'll shoot a rabbit because I can eat it. Why would I want to shoot a German?'⁵⁷ Charlie implicitly points out that the Germans remain in Belgium and France, and are not an immediate threat. They therefore have no relevance to his day-to-day life. His down-to-earth rhetoric speaks to the rural context of the Peacefuls' lives, and that makes it persuasive to Tommo, as opposed to the emotive but abstract rhetoric of the recruiting sergeant. Charlie's expectations of coming of age are bound up with his experience of day-to-day life and his coming of age integrates the two, evidenced by this speech. The implied reader moves from identifying with Tommo's reaction to the recruiting sergeant to understanding the correct response to the war, which is Charlie's. This moment becomes a moment of

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.97.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.98.

education in the text – part of Tommo’s coming of age, along with the implied reader’s, is being able to understand that Tommo’s desire to go to war, although framed in admirable terms, is based on a naïve understanding of what war means. For both Tommo and the implied reader, taking on the novel’s ‘correct’ ideological position is an act of coming of age.

There are two perspectives displayed here, however, and Tommo finds himself empathising with both, thereby allowing the reader to see the emotional appeal of both. This opens a gap in which the reader can potentially be critical of Charlie *and* Tommo. The novel does not entirely close down this discussion. After Charlie is forced into the army by the colonel, Tommo signs up with him. His love for ‘my family, and Molly, and the countryside I’d grown up in’ means that he ‘did not want any enemy soldier ever setting foot on our soil [...]. I would do all I could [...] to protect the people I love.’⁵⁸ This presents the implied reader with a reason for going to war which is presented as valid and even potentially heroic. The novel does allow for the complexity of Tommo and Charlie’s decisions to sign up, leaving a gap which requires the reader to consider their own position on what is ethically right. However, this is the single instance where such a gap is allowed to stay unresolved. Wilson sees another gap in Charlie’s position in the regiment. At one point, Tommo reports that for some of the men, ‘Charlie was beginning to be thought of as a bit of a liability in the company, a bit of a Jonah.’⁵⁹ For Wilson, this creates an opposing view to Tommo’s which can still be seen as sympathetic, allowing the implied reader to see some ambiguity in Charlie’s behaviour.⁶⁰ This scene is the only time a contrary opinion is expressed which is not from an unambiguously sympathetic or antagonistic character. Any sense that Charlie might be disruptive in a negative sense is soon closed down, when, after Charlie is punished, Tommo finds himself thinking of the hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*: ‘I found myself involuntarily changing the words, changing Jesus into Charlie. I sang it to myself under my breath as we were marched away. ‘What a friend I have in Charlie.’’⁶¹ The association of Charlie with Jesus makes explicit the novel’s endorsement of Charlie’s resistance, and directly tells the reader that while Charlie might be disruptive, he is fundamentally heroic, sacrificing himself for those weaker than him. In doing so, *Private Peaceful* closes down any gap

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.102-3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.115.

⁶⁰ Wilson, 2011, p.149.

⁶¹ Morpurgo, p.118.

which might allow the reader to question Charlie's actions or come to their own conclusions about his behaviour, or even really understand why social expectations might cause others to make a different choice. Charlie at the end of the novel is the same as at the start: he is a hero who stands up to the abuses of authority.

Throughout *Private Peaceful*, the theme of authority as repressive is repeated. It is resisted by the teenaged Charlie Peaceful and that resistance is taken up by Tommo after Charlie's death. To a certain extent, then, *Private Peaceful* follows a relatively familiar YA trajectory, exploring the desire to rebel and reject norms and standards imposed upon the young protagonist. However, *Private Peaceful*'s status as a historical novel, and a historical novel about the First World War in particular, complicates this. Although its overt message is about the possibility of resistance, it is also about the relationship between the present reader and the past. Tommo models the novel's ideal engagement with the past: emotive, personalised, and removed from a larger political or social context. The past is there to be learnt from and as a way of exposing power imbalances and injustices – oppressive expectations of the past. There is an attempt at creating a wider context, of course, in the paratext which links the novel to the contemporary debate surrounding the pardoning of those executed. This can be seen as encouraging readers to learn more about this discussion and participate in it. However, the novel does not provide its reader with any insight into the debate, beyond a general model of power being misused and those brave enough to resist being repressed. Through identification with Tommo, the implied reader is explicitly constructed to share an ideological standpoint which is positioned as the 'truth' of the war. There is no extended negotiation of an identity crisis; instead the social expectations of family resolve any disconnect experience. Thus the novel endorses a model of past-present relations which sees the implied reader coming of age through the past. Here, the past is valuable and relevant in its ability to provide lessons which can be taken on.

By making the First World War the setting for the novel's climatic conflict between repression and resistance, Morpurgo reiterates the war's relevance to contemporary adolescents, suggesting that it provides a site for exploring the ways in which power can play out, and offers a model for resistance which might empower the reader in her contemporary life. However, the novel's control of the implied reader, its closure of any gaps which might add nuance, and resistance to debate, means that *Private Peaceful* does not provide any challenge to norms of coming of age and adulthood. The novels' coming of age is without conflict and does not challenge the reader to think

critically. Given the novel's positive reviews and its position in schools, however, this appears to be an endorsed position on the past. In her review, Diane Samuels says that

Morpurgo invites his reader to enter a defining moment in history through the doorway of individual experience [...] It brings alive the holocaust of young men at the beginning of the twentieth century for those who might not even be aware that the killing fields existed.⁶²

Private Peaceful is praised for individualising the past, for bringing it alive, and implicitly for conveying the correct ideological position in relation to the war. Referencing 'a holocaust of young men' and 'killing fields', Samuels also implicitly suggests that *Private Peaceful* provides an introduction to the correct way of reading the violence of the twentieth century; as the novel itself does, she elides historical specificity, and minimises the need to ask the reader to think critically. In the end, *Private Peaceful* models a coming of age which has less to do with negotiating an identity crisis or challenging expectations, and more to do with conveying the correct reading of history. It reaffirms existing understandings of the war as futile and pointless. In doing so, *Private Peaceful* also reiterates the authority of the text, even as it questions the authority of those in power.

2.3 *The Shell House*: Misreading History, and Uncertain Pasts

Private Peaceful models two relationships to the past: the personal relationship to one's own past; and the reader's relationship to historical events. It elides the difference between these two, suggesting that the reader might be able to take on Tommo's experience as a way of engaging with the First World War as a historical event, taking on his experience as their view of the war *and* their negotiation of their identity crisis. *The Shell House*, however, has no such faith in the ability for the past to be understood and incorporated into a present day understanding of self, and as such, its identity crises are less easily negotiated. In Edmund and Greg, the novel models two different relationships with the past: Edmund's view of the past, embodied in Graveney Hall, his ancestral home, is personal and individual. His experience leads to an explicit rejection of expectations. On the other hand, Greg's relationship to the past, for all that it is empathetic and driven by his identification with Edmund, is always at a distance,

⁶² Diane Samuels, 'The Lost Generation' (*The Guardian*, 18/11/ 2003) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/oct/18/booksforchildrenandteenagers.michaelmorpurgo> [Accessed on 11/05/2014].

presented as a cultural construct even as it is driven by personal needs and desires, and as such, his identity crisis remains unresolved. This distance becomes a central part of the novel's construction of coming of age, mirroring Greg's identity crisis. Stephens argues that in historical novels for children 'human desires are [represented as] reasonably constant, and what differs are the social mechanisms evolved to express or contain them' which means that, in these novels, 'history imparts "lessons" because events, in a substantial sense, are repeatable and repeated.'⁶³ As I argued, this is true of *Private Peaceful*. It is also a central conceit of *The Shell House*. However, for all that events may repeat, the novel questions whether the lessons of the past can ever be accessed – or whether the lessons presumed to be learnt are always the most useful ones.

This questioning is made most explicit in Greg's narrative. However, I want to begin by exploring Edmund's coming of age. Edmund may not have the historical curiosity of Greg, but he has the constant reminder of the great house which forces him to be aware of his familial past and the pressures this past places on him: an architectural embodiment of social expectations. In the first scene of the novel, Edmund escapes the house into the grounds of the estate: 'He couldn't face going back indoors [...]. They would be having coffee now [...] in the large room with the windows closed against the spring evening, as if nothing had changed.'⁶⁴ The house represents a (historical) continuity which Edmund no longer feels part of. It appears unchanging and is held up by his family as a signifier of tradition and stability – within it, they can act 'as if nothing had changed'. However, Edmund feels that '[e]verything had changed.'⁶⁵ 'Everything' includes more than just Edmund himself. It also describes a cultural change, which seems to suggest the mythical notion of the war as 'break'. In the garden, Edmund finds himself 'looking in the direction of London, [...] People said that you could sometimes hear the guns, even at this distance. Nothing. He felt oddly disappointed [...].'⁶⁶ The juxtaposition of Edmund's declaration that everything has changed and his listening out for the guns appears to gesture towards the narrative of the disillusioned soldier. It is also indicative of a different expectation of the implied reader from *Private Peaceful*. The reader is told very little about Edmund in this first excerpt and it is only the mention of the guns which signals that this is a First World War narrative. However, the setting up of the soldier

⁶³ Stephens, p.203.

⁶⁴ Linda Newbery, *The Shell House* (London: Red Fox, 2003 (2002)), p.1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

myth suggests that the implied reader is at least familiar with the cultural construction of the war.

As the narrative unfolds, however, it becomes clear that Edmund's sense of transformation (and subsequent identity crisis) is not just about the war. The split between the past of the home front, unable to understand the human and social transformation the war has wrought, and the present of the front, where the new 'reality' of the world is being faced reflects Edmund's sexual and social awakening, his experience of love and attraction bringing him into conflict with the expectations of his family and of Georgian society. This split is a conflict between past and present; however, it is about changing attitudes to sexuality, self, and hierarchal ideas of home and class, rather than about the war. In this way, *The Shell House* subverts expectations. Instead of being a narrative where Edmund comes of age through his experience of disillusionment with patriotic and heroic ideals about war, the front is the site for a narrative of adolescent sexual and social self-discovery – going to war is a positive thing for Edmund. This is stated outright: 'if [Edmund] hadn't been prepared to be a soldier, and therefore kill Germans, he wouldn't have met Alex [his lover]. He would have gone off to Cambridge according to plan [...]'.⁶⁷ The war does not teach Edmund about the futility of war; instead, it allows him to become critical of heteronormativity and class structures. There are certain tropes of the disillusioned soldier myth present in Edmund's narrative: he writes poetry, much of which fits this narrative and, as MacCallum-Stewart points out, the homoeroticism of the First World War is a part of this construction as well.⁶⁸ However, this usually remains at the level of homoerotic longing, or remains implicit and ambiguous.⁶⁹ There is no ambiguity in Alex and Edmund's relationship. The novel leaves the reader in no doubt that theirs is a consummated queer relationship.⁷⁰ Their relationship is not positioned in opposition to the war. Rather, as the above quotation suggests, the war is the site which allows Edmund to discover his queerness, and through that, his opposition to his family's way of life. The war, by removing him from Graveny, allows him to understand and challenge himself in ways in which going to Cambridge and onwards to his eventual taking up of the ancestral house would not. Thus, the war becomes a space for

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.29.

⁶⁸ MacCallum-Stewart, p.182.

⁶⁹ The exemplary novel in this mode is Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting* (1971).

⁷⁰ I use queer here rather than gay because Edmund's sexuality is ambiguous – the novel states outright that Alex is the first man Edmund has been attracted to, and does not mention any sexual or romantic relationships after Alex's death.

challenging expectations and tradition, a space to experience interactions with different sexualities and classes – an initially liberating space, rather than a traumatizing space.

This liberating potential is made clear in his eventual rebellion against the past: burning down Graveney and reducing it to the shell house with which Greg becomes familiar. Edmund's act can be seen as an extreme version of the adolescent rejection of home. Indeed, his whole narrative has as much in common with the coming out narrative of a strand of contemporary YA fiction as the myth of the war.⁷¹ The mapping onto the war of a narrative of coming out is a deliberate, disruptive choice which informs the novel's approach to history more broadly. This disruptiveness can be seen, for example, in the discussions between Alex and Edmund about Edmund's poetry. As noted above, Edmund's poems fit the disillusionment template: they are poems of the horror of war, dwelling on the lack of glamour and heroic opportunity. They are also obviously modelled on Sassoon's and Owen's poetry: 'Last night I saw the ghost of France [...] Her flesh was ravaged and defiled/By those who came to save',⁷² he writes. There is little evidence in the novel that Edmund is not horrified by the destruction war wreaks on the landscape, or the losses incurred. However, when he presents the poem to Alex, Alex complicates its anti-war message:

'Why don't you admit it? The war is the best thing that's happened to you. [...] Not just here,' [...] 'The front. The fighting. All of it. The things you wrote about. If you could choose now – this, or banish the whole war and go back to your old life – you'd choose this, wouldn't you?'⁷³

Alex contradicts not just Edmund, but also the implied reader's assumption that the war is and was necessarily always horrible, insisting instead that the war invited complicated and multiple responses from those who participated in it. Unlike *Private Peaceful*, where the sympathetic characters almost always agree and share a standpoint, *The Shell House* allows for a multiplicity of voices. Alex is allowed to contradict and complicate Edmund's ideological perspective while remaining a sympathetic character. He also reinforces the notion that Edmund's coming of age is about the relationship between past expectations and present experience. That present is a potentially positive space, which could be transformative; it is in some ways a safe space for negotiating the identity crisis.

⁷¹ See Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins' survey of LGBTQ fiction, *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (Landham: Scarecrow, 2006), which outlines the variations on the "traumatic" coming out narrative of rejection and renegotiation with authority.

⁷² Newbery, p.27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.86.

When Alex asks whether Edmund would choose to banish the war, the subtext is whether Edmund wants to take on the responsibilities of the past, 'his old life', figured as Graveney, or attempt to forge a new path. Part of this is about Alex. However, part of it is also about the skills and professionalism which Edmund has gained through the army – and the freedom from familial expectations.

At the climax of Edmund's story, Alex is killed, sending Edmund into an emotional crisis which invokes the language and imagery of shell-shock. Here again, however, *The Shell House* subverts the mythical narrative: rather than have Edmund become disillusioned with the war as a result of the loss of his lover, the death becomes the catalyst for Edmund's final rejection of his old life, as well as the heteronormativity and class system embodied by his ancestral home. After confessing his love for Alex to the local vicar who reacts in disgust, Edmund attempts to commit suicide, but is stopped by one of estate's servants. It is then that he decides to burn down the house. At the Armistice, Edmund is shown having completely rejected his own past: 'He had no home to go to, no family waiting his return, no real name. He must build some kind of life for his new self, the self he had invented over the last year and a half.'⁷⁴ Edmund's coming of age involves a complete rejection of his familial inheritance. His narrative suggests that the past, although necessarily formative, is not necessarily all-defining – the identity crisis may potentially be resolved through rejection of social expectations, although not without extreme sacrifice. It is almost possible for Edmund to come of age without looking back. In this narrative, the war as a social symbol of coming of age is dismissed in favour of the war as a space beyond the normative pressures of home, which allows for self-discovery and reinvention. Significantly, after burning down the house, Edmund disappears back into the army: 'he would have a new identity. Edmund Culworth he decided: a kind of marriage, his name with Alex [...] and serve out the war as a private soldier.'⁷⁵ This 'marriage' is a coming of age moment, a rejection of his family, his class and heteronormative pressures. Edmund reaches a sort of resolution to his identity crisis, transforming into a new person, shaped by experiences but free from class and familial expectations. He does not, however, reject war.

This is not to say that *The Shell House* glorifies the war. Alex's death is treated as horrifying, and Edmund refuses to allow that it might have been worthwhile: 'you'll tell

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.307.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.315.

me that he had the great privilege of dying for his country, dying a hero's death. [...] He died the death of a tortured animal.'⁷⁶ This notion of dying an inhuman death fits the narrative of the myth, and also makes clear that whatever space and enjoyment Edmund gets from the army, he still rejects the 'empty' notions of patriotism and glory in battle. This creates a more martial discourse of warfare, reflecting the nineties' international coalitions and the post-Falklands come down, which saw a mixed public response, but also more broadly a repositioning by the army and soldiers of the army as a profession, not a national calling.⁷⁷ However this narrative also fits the myth's disillusioned rejection of the 'propagandistic' discourse of recruitment. This is flagged in the novel, but not by Edmund, whose reasons for signing up are left ambiguous. Even at the outbreak of hostilities, Edmund is sceptical, asking '[c]an it be right to take up arms, to kill another human being?'⁷⁸ He signs up despite this ethical qualm, but he is positioned as critical even in 1914.

It is in Greg's narrative that the reader encounters the notion of initial patriotic fervour:

Had Edmund, at eighteen, joined up voluntarily, or was he pushed into it by family or school? [...] Had he fallen for all that Rupert Brooke patriotism Greg had been reading about – expecting laurels, nobility and picturesque sacrifice? And what had he found?⁷⁹

Although this is phrased as a series of questions, there is little indication that Greg is really allowing for a different narrative. Instead, the questioning tone of this section indicates Greg's burgeoning emotional and imaginative investment in Edmund. He imagines his own answers to these questions, in line with contemporary cultural expectations of a First World War narrative, stating: 'I bet he swallowed all that Rupert Brooke stuff about honour and glory.' [...] 'If he died in nineteen seventeen – that was after the Battle of the Somme – he'd have seen enough to change his mind.'⁸⁰ The myth of the disillusioned soldier's influence on his imagination is clear here, signalled by the inclusion of Rupert Brooke, whose sonnet sequence '1914' stands in for the larger

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.303.

⁷⁷ Rachel Woodward, 'Not For Queen and Country or Any of That Shit.' In *War, Citizenship and Territory* eds. Deborah Cowen, Emily Gilbert. (London, Routledge, 2008) pp.363-84, p.374; see also Shaw's article, 'Past Wars and Present Conflicts' in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* ed. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp.191-204 and Phil Melling, 'War and Memory in the New World Order' in *ibid.*, pp.255-268.

⁷⁸ Newbery, p.29.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.100.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.109.

imagined enthusiasm for war, and who Greg has been reading as part of a First World War poetry focus at his school, and his view of the Somme as the key turning point from patriotism to disillusionment. There is a contradiction between Edmund's narrative and what Greg imagines for him, a contradiction which is explicitly linked to the war's literary heritage and Greg's role as a reader. Butler and O'Donovan argue that:

It is an established tradition of historical writing [for children] to make use of the parallels between the time depicted and that of composition. There are no postmodern tripwires here, no forcing of readers into a self-conscious awareness of the artificiality and convention-bound nature of the act of reading. Rather, it is an attempt to use the knowledge already present in writer and reader as a booster station, to intensify the immediacy of the past.⁸¹

Butler and O'Donovan's argument is primarily about the way in which historical fiction reflects the present, indicating the use of 'time-travelling' characters as a way for the reader to identify and empathise with a 'distant' past.⁸² Their argument also suggests, however, that historical fiction for children functions on the assumption that the past *is* readable and relatable; the 'time-travelling' characters can come to fully understand it. *The Shell House* conforms to this to a certain extent: Edmund's experience is presented in the novel as accessible to the reader and is often couched in a contemporary language of self-acceptance. However, *The Shell House* does guide the implied reader 'into a self-conscious awareness of the artificiality' of reading about the past, through Greg's experience as an empathetic reader without critical distance, and specifically, through his inability to allow for Edmund's identity crisis as anything but the mythical model. When he first learns about Edmund, he reflects: 'it gave the place an inhabitant he could begin to identify with [...]. Another doomed young soldier, like Wilfred Owen. In 1914 he'd have been eighteen, only a year older than Greg.'⁸³ Greg's interest is piqued by Edmund's youth, which makes him identifiable for Greg. This identification is about Greg's own expectations of the First World War and the futility myth, flagged by the immediate association Greg makes between Edmund and Wilfred Owen, the most iconic 'doomed young soldier'. Even the choice of 'doomed' indicates the way in which Greg's understanding of the war is culturally mediated: it suggests 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', without Greg explicitly connecting his thoughts with the poem. Thus early on, Greg

⁸¹ Butler, p.12.

⁸² Ibid, p.11.

⁸³ Newbery, p.99.

implicitly places Edmund in the futility myth that Edmund's own narrative works to disrupt.

Greg's narrative repeatedly emphasizes the way in which the war's literary heritage creates emotional investment in the war and its writers, while also limiting its potential interpretations. Greg notes: 'The First World War was back in the last century and soon it would have happened a hundred years ago, but for some reason Greg felt closer to it than to other conflicts since.'⁸⁴ The First World War is a site for Greg's emotional and imaginative investment in part because the narrative of the war has been presented to him as more relevant to him than later conflicts. Its experiences are supposedly more accessible, and its coming of age narrative is relatable. The young soldier of the war is presented as equivalent to, and identifiable with, the contemporary adolescent. The youth of many of the soldiers, such as Edmund, makes it easy for Greg to identify with the young men sent off to fight, to want to understand their experiences and their subsequent (assumed) disillusionment. At several points in the narrative, he imagines himself in the war, such as when he thinks about the young men who volunteered in 1914 who 'would leap not into cleanness but into the squalor of the Western Front [...] Jordan would be horribly injured in an attack, and Greg would glimpse his white, sweating face as he was carried away on a stretcher.'⁸⁵ This scene functions to illustrate the way in which the 'language' of the First World War's cultural discourse almost unconsciously infiltrates Greg's thoughts. Greg's engagement with the war moves from the literary to the (imagined) experiential. In these moments, Greg and Edmund's narratives seem to work in parallel, but never quite meet, in part because Greg cannot access Edmund's actual model for renegotiating this identity after the war. Greg's fantasy about Jordan's injury gestures at the eventual fate of Alex, foreshadowing Greg's confused attraction to Jordan and Alex's death. Greg has no way of knowing this, of course, and he never discovers Alex, even as he searches for Edmund. However, the implied reader is invited to spot these connections, placing her in a position of knowledge not granted to Edmund or Greg. Unlike *Private Peaceful*, the implied reader in *The Shell House* is treated to two focalised subjects, focalised through two differing narrative voices. In doing so, the text produces gaps such as this which it needs the reader to close. The narrative makes sense even if these gaps are not closed; however, the novel's ideal

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.113.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.113.

reader will spot the connections and see how they work to underpin its construction of the relationship between past and present, and mapping out different ways of coming of age.

This is a relationship which from Greg's perspective is shaped by intertextuality. In the above quotation, his ruminations start with a paraphrasing of Brooke's sonnet 'I. The Soldier'. Christine Wilkie defines several forms of intertextuality, two of which are particularly relevant in relation to *The Shell House*: '(1) texts of quotation: those texts which quote or allude to other literary or non-literary works; (2) texts of imitation: texts which seek to paraphrase, 'translate' [...] the original [...].'⁸⁶ That the novel is a text of quotation is obvious; however, I want to suggest that it is also a text of imitation, where the implicit intertext is the myth of the disillusioned soldier. The first form of intertextuality feeds into the second; it draws attention to the way in which Greg reads the past through literary references, misreading and missing Edmund because his assumptions around the war shape his understanding of it. I have already discussed the way in which Brooke and Owen appear in the narrative, framing Greg's understanding of Edmund and history, and it is literary history which looms largest for Edmund, not least due to his A-level English class, also represented in the novel. However, other sources are also present: '[h]e had studied [the war] in GCSE History; he had read *All Quiet on the Western Front* and had seen the film; he had watched all the documentaries, with first-hand accounts from elderly survivors.'⁸⁷ Greg's engagement with the past is mediated through a number of different texts, which inform his understanding of the war, but which paradoxically make the war more difficult to access. They give Greg a narrative he can engage with and 'characters' he can identify with, but in doing so, they shape his assumptions about the past, meaning that his reading of the past is already pre-determined. This repeated emphasis on misreading creates a disconnect between the reader's knowledge of Edmund and Greg's reading of the past. This disconnect mirrors Greg's identity crisis, his unwillingness to allow for uncertainty and experiences which contradict the social expectations which shore up his (certain) sense of self.

Interestingly, Greg's initial discovery of the mystery of Edmund's death is only due to his ability to read beyond the expected narrative. When his friend Faith says that Edmund died in the war, Greg is quick to question her: 'How do you know he was killed in the war? The booklet doesn't say that. It says *Believed to have been killed at the time of*

⁸⁶ Christine Wilkie. 'Relating Texts: Intertextuality' in *Understanding Children's Literature* ed. Peter Hunt. (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.130-7 p.132.

⁸⁷ Newbery, p.113.

the fire. [...] That's not the same as *was* killed.'⁸⁸ Faith's assumption is understandable: the First World War is particularly associated with young soldiers dying, but Greg notices the booklet's sleight of hand. This is a critical reading which resists the obvious narrative and allows Greg see the gaps left. He immediately wants to close this gap. 'Faith looked at him. "Why does he interest you so much? He's only one of the people who lived here."/ "It doesn't seem properly finished, left vague like this. There must be something for us to find out."⁸⁹ Part of Greg's motivation is a desire for a conclusion and certainty – he wants to solve the puzzle of the past, but can only think to do so by not disrupting his expectations of the past. This mirrors his own identity crisis, which is shaped by a discomfort around uncertainty and an unwillingness to take new experiences into account. The use of 'vague' indicates a discomfort with ambiguity. This discomfort is also reflected in Greg's struggles with his attraction to Jordan, which veers between close friendship and sexual attraction. At the novel's climax, Greg's parallel to Edmund's crisis after Alex's death, Greg insists that because he is attracted to, and has sex with, a girl, he can't be attracted to Jordan: 'Greg *had* been sure of what he wanted, and last night he had wanted Tanya.'⁹⁰ However, here too the sureness fades. Greg's sexuality remains ambiguous to himself, and to the reader, emphasizing his continued disrupted sense of identity.

Greg's coming of age is in part about the transition from wanting certainty and believing in the possibility of finding answers to an acceptance of ambiguity and instability, also signalled by the novel's open ending. Although the novel does not end with a resolution of Greg's identity crisis, his potential acceptance of uncertainty, linked to his experiences in the novel, gestures at a model of, if not resolving the identity crisis, then at least negotiating it. To some extent, Greg functions as a stand-in for the implied reader, who is presumed to share his cultural knowledge, or at least be aware enough of the myth to follow Greg's logic. His coming of age into insecurity, acknowledging that answers may not be accessible or that a single answer may not exist provides a model for the implied reader's engagement with the past as well. Reading, then, becomes an act of coming of age at the moment the reader accepts ambiguity, uncertainty and open-endedness. Reading can only facilitate this, however, if it is critical and engaged. In contrast to *Private Peaceful*, where reading instils in the implied reader the correct political and

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.248.

cultural position, *The Shell House* opens up the possibility that there is no single correct solution.

The implied reader is placed in a position from which to reach this conclusion. Her access to Edmund's narrative allows her to spot what Greg misses. This is not to say the implied reader is not occasionally aligned with Greg and allowed to believe that he may have found Edmund's fate. Shortly after Alex's death, at a point when Edmund's mourning has taken on a desperate edge, Greg comes up with a new theory about Edmund's death: 'Has it ever occurred to you that he could have drowned in the lake? [...]. You don't have to look far for a reason! Shell-shock...unable to face going back...best friends killed...And then there's the house! [...]'⁹¹ This fits the mythical narrative of disillusionment, as well as touching upon the trauma myth. Furthermore, it (almost) maps onto Edmund's narrative, following Alex's death. A few pages later, Edmund *does* attempt suicide, but fails and resolves to live albeit under a new name, representative of his new identity and reinvention, beyond the heteronormative narrative. Of Greg's imagined endings, this is one which comes closest to what actually happens. It is still not accurate, because Greg cannot move past the myth to imagine Edmund as queer or capable of giving up his status and house, and rejecting the past. The implied reader is initially lead to expect that Greg solves the mystery of Edmund's fate; however, in the end, only the reader is able to do this. That Greg is close, but still not entirely right is implied in his own commentary on Edmund's possible suicide: 'That would explain the vague wording, would it, if no-one knew for sure?'⁹² It is at this point in the narrative that Greg is willing to accept the vagueness of the past, and implicitly, of coming of age. Even as Greg imagines an ending for Edmund, he admits that he may never find out, indicating his progression and his coming of age, through an identity crisis which is ongoing, not resolved by the end of the novel.

I describe *The Shell House* as open-ended. Writing on open-ended children's fiction, Stephens notes: '[t]he degree of openness in the ending depends on the nature and extent of the instabilities represented in the text and on the extent to which they are resolved, but readers may nevertheless impose closure.'⁹³ As I argue above, *The Shell House* dwells on the instabilities of knowing and the impossibility of conclusive answers, particularly in Greg's narrative. Edmund's narrative also ends on a vague note: the last

⁹¹ Ibid., p.270.

⁹² Ibid., p.270.

⁹³ Stephens, p.42.

information given about him is a poem, wherein he writes ‘One and twenty years of peace/You paid for with your death’, marked as written in April 1939 and signed as Edmund Pearson.⁹⁴ There is no indication of what Edmund has been doing since the Armistice, nor is there any sign of what he will do after having written the poem, although this inclusion does gesture at the connection between the First World War and the other conflicts of the century.⁹⁵ It is up to the reader to decide whether they think they know what happened. As Stephens argues, it is impossible to stop the reader from imposing closure on the text; however, *The Shell House* does leave much open and unfinished. Even though the implied reader knows more than Edmund and Greg, and she has access to *why* and *how* Edmund disappeared, she does not get all the answers at the end of the novel. The novel models a way of coming of age which dwells on ambiguity, insecurity and doubt, implicitly telling the reader that this is not just a question of the relationship between past and present, but this is also potentially true for the reader’s own life and identity. The novel’s ending refuses the expected closure of children’s literature. *The Shell House* suggests that the reader, much like Greg, must accept the potential for an unresolved identity crisis as long as they are unwilling to engage with and accept uncertainty.

However, engagement with the past still forms a significant part of the novel’s construction of coming of age, suggested in the way in which Greg frames his relationship to the past, and how that relationship is facilitated by the education system. The complexity of engaging with the past is signalled early on in the novel through Greg’s observations of the burnt out ruin of Graveney Hall: after learning that there has been some talk of selling the grounds, he thinks: ‘[w]ouldn’t it be better turned into a facility for everyone to enjoy?’⁹⁶ The house, after all, is unusable, and its land is valuable. Furthermore, as he also notes, the house is ‘a relic of an age when the rich were very rich and the poor were very poor’, suggesting the way in which the past can be used to idealise what Greg sees as an oppressive past.⁹⁷ However, he finds himself reluctant to actually endorse tearing the house down, finally concluding that ‘[t]o pull it down would be to destroy the past with it, to state that the twenty-first century had no room left for this

⁹⁴ Newbery, p.299.

⁹⁵ MacCallum-Stewart reads the novel as ending with Edmund’s suicide, but there is no conclusive evidence for this. p.182.

⁹⁶ Newbery, p.39.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.39.

great, sprawling reminder of an older way of life.’⁹⁸ Greg is clearly presented as aware of the complexity of the past in the present, attentive to the possibilities of multiple meanings embodied in the great house and surrounding estates. This foreshadows the novel’s eventual argument for the complexity, which is reflected instability of the past-present relationship, and indeed its presentation of identity as reliant on, but not necessarily beholden to, past and present. Greg’s desire to preserve the house is framed by positioning Graveney Hall as a reminder of an older way of life. It does fulfil this function, but as a ruin and a ‘shell’ it is also a reminder of the distance between past and present, the impossibility of accessing the ‘complete’ past and the futility of doing so. The hall also becomes, through Edmund’s narrative, a symbol of the power of expectations. However, Greg’s point is not presented as wrong in the novel, and his empathetic and engaged relationship to the past, although it is flawed in its desire for a complete narrative, is still sympathetic. It is presented as an equally valid way of understanding himself and his society as Edmund’s wholesale rejection of the past. Both ways are treated as ways of coming of age into a historical narrative, even if one has a resolution and the other does not.

Greg’s relationship to the past is not purely about his interactions with the house, or his search for Edmund; as the intertextuality of *The Shell House* suggests, it is mediated through textual history. This mediation is explicitly represented as facilitated through the education system. Most of the texts mentioned in Greg’s narrative, he first encountered at school. Brooke is introduced in this way: ‘It made him think of a line from a poem they’d looked at in English yesterday – something about ‘swimmers into cleanness leaping’.’⁹⁹ This line repeats throughout the narrative, becoming a way in which Greg frames his understanding of the First World War myth, indicating the influence of schooling. There is rarely any sense that the way the First World War is taught outright states or endorses the mythical narrative of disillusionment or futility. However, the way it makes its way into Greg’s understanding suggests that the canon creates a framework for reading and understanding the war. Greg’s class reads ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ as part of their English Literature coursework; the poem is introduced by their teacher noting, ‘Many people consider Owen to be the more promising poet of [Owen and Sassoon] [...] Who knows what Owen would have gone on to write if he

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.39.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.48.

hadn't been killed?''¹⁰⁰ This frames Owen as a tragic figure, and adds an extra element of irony to the students' encounter with 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'. The teacher's description adds to Owen's authority as the poet-witness of the war. Greg is not unaware of this: he reflects, 'an Owen tragically killed was more interesting than an Owen who survived to become crusty, grey and hard of hearing.'¹⁰¹ This indicates critical engagement, facilitated through the classroom: Greg picks up on the narrative power of Owen as a symbol. However, Owen still becomes his central reference point for Edmund and the narrative of the war more generally. That Greg's investment in the war starts at school is not incidental; it further complicates the past-present relationship by drawing attention to the cultural framing and investment which is facilitated through institutions which create 'canons' of the past. Education is the original site of Greg's engagement with the past, as well as the implied reader's. Furthermore, school is a place for shaping the future, a site through which children are expected to come of age. *The Shell House* problematizes this, questioning whether school alone has enough space for the complexities and vagueness of the past *and* the present, if it can encompass expectations and experience. The novel allows the implied reader a space within which they can consider their own education, and become critical of their own reading practices, both within the education system and outside it.

This also gestures at the position of the First World War in this novel. The war is in some ways secondary in *The Shell House*; it is a novel about coming to terms with doubt and ambiguity, focusing on Edmund and Greg's navigation of their sexualities, their social and inherited responsibilities, their relationships to their families, peers and communities. Much more than *Private Peaceful*, *The Shell House* conforms to the YA *Entwicklungsroman* model: it focuses on a small period of development, and deals much more in depth with the negotiations of individual and community.¹⁰² However, the First World War is not merely a backdrop for the novel, nor could the issues taken up by this novel necessarily be explored in relation to any historical event. Above, I argue that *The Shell House* fits Wilkie's definition of texts of imitation, texts which use intertextuality 'to liberate their readers from an over-invested admiration in great authors of the past, and which often function as the pre-text to the original for later readers [...].'¹⁰³ Precisely

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.46.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁰² See Seelinger Trites, p.9-19.

¹⁰³ Wilkie, p.132.

because the First World War is an event with a lot of cultural investment behind it, including debates over memory, remembrance, and the relevance and value of the past, it becomes the ideal site for the potential liberation of readers from ‘over-invested admiration’ not for authors of the past, but for myths and ‘readable’ single narratives.

The novel ends with Greg at an open day at Graveney Hall, listening to a conversation about Edmund’s fate, where he is described as having died in the war: ‘The old lie, Greg thought. People said that so often that they believed it.’¹⁰⁴ *The Shell House* is in some ways about the comfort of repetition and of the ‘lie’ of the expected narrative – whether that narrative is about war, the past, identity, sexuality or even texts themselves. By modelling Greg as an empathetic reader, aligned with but never identified with the implied reader, *The Shell House* works to disrupt not necessarily the myths of the war so much as the reader’s sense of *knowing* the past. It presents multiple ways of coming of age, for Edmund, for Greg and for the implied reader: there is no single narrative and no single resolution to the identity crisis the characters – and the implied reader – face. What there is instead is ambiguity and in that, a sense of an ongoing and complicated relationship to the past, to cultural mythology and the education system which reiterates it.

2.4 Conclusion

In their survey of how the First World War is taught in British schools, Einhaus and Pennell found that a number of English teachers see the First World War important to teach because ‘it helps the students understand the twentieth century more generally’.¹⁰⁵ These teachers present the First World War as a frame through which to think about the crises and dilemmas of the twentieth century. This framing is mirrored in *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*, with their concern for the implied reader’s engagement with the past. The novels present the past as a guide to understanding oneself in relation to institutions and expectations, negotiating identity *and* historical understanding. Through this relationship to the past, which encompasses national and personal identifications and empathic connections, reading becomes an act of coming of age in *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*. For both novels, the relationship between personal and socio-cultural identity is a central concern. For *Private Peaceful*, socio-cultural

¹⁰⁴ Newbery, p.331.

¹⁰⁵ Einhaus and Pennell, p.53.

identity is contradictory. On the one hand, the novel disavows the nation as empty, associated with the authorities that the novel works so hard to resist. On the other hand, it reiterates a dominant myth, teaching the reader the correct *cultural* reading of the war. The issue is negotiated through the implied reader's identification with Tommo, which keeps them aligned with his position, limiting the ability to see this gap. *Private Peaceful* works as introduction to the myths of both the disillusioned and reluctant soldier, and maps out a form of national identification for the reader. In *The Shell House*, by contrast, the implied reader is presumed to be older, familiar with the futility mythology of the war and its literary heritage. The novel's, and subsequently the implied reader's, relationship to larger communities, political and cultural, is more complicated, framed by national institutions such as school and the army, as well as symbols of the national past such as Graveney Hall. Both Edmund and Greg provide alternatively critical and sympathetic narratives, occasionally conforming to the myth of the disillusioned soldier, but often disrupting it. This alternating disruption and alignment is reflected in the construction of the implied reader: able to spot gaps in the narrative, and capable of making connections that Greg cannot. For both novels, identity is negotiated between expected socio-cultural and personal experiential narratives. However, *Private Peaceful* presents identity without conflict, experience and expectation as more-or-less consistent, both at the level of the plot (Tommo and Charlie do not develop significantly) and in relation to the reader. *The Shell House* does not offer this sense of stability.

I have returned throughout this chapter to these central differences between: the readable and vague past, the identified and disrupted implied reader, and reiterating and questioning the myth. There is a risk of overstating these dichotomies: *The Shell House* does conform to certain tropes of the mythology of futility; its focus on a young officer on the Western Front is hardly a radical approach to the war. *Private Peaceful's* narrative structure is complex, and its focus on the rural poor, as well as its representation of familial consensus between home front and Western Front, challenges the construction of the mythical soldier in some ways. Both novels engage with the First World War because it provides a nationally and culturally invested framework for exploring questions relevant to contemporary adolescents. *The Shell House* begins to embrace the complexity inherent in the conflicting desire to unpick the dominant narratives of futility and disillusionment and to reiterate it which lies at the heart of the nineties' shift. It does not provide its reader with a clear model of coming of age, nor does it offer an easily readable war, or reiteration of the importance of the war. Instead, the novel asks larger questions

about the way the past is passed on to the present, and the role that competing normative discourses – be they national, historical, social, cultural or educational – play in the creation of identity. *The Shell House* echoes the version of coming of age into history also seen in the *Regeneration Trilogy*: an acknowledgement of the complexities and complications of looking to the past as a guide to the present, but not as a point of resolution or as a way of resolving identity crises. The war becomes the site through which Edmund, Greg and the implied reader begin to position themselves in relation to social expectations, and the institutions and organisations which support them. However, it is critical here that Greg does not ultimately come of age, and his path is left uncertain at the end – the novel is not suggesting a clear model for dealing with expectations, but rather emphasizing the struggle to negotiate them in the face of experiences which are not necessarily clear cut. Although the First World War remains the main site for the novel's explorations, its shifting focus between Edmund and Greg, as well as the invocation in both narratives of the Second World War, suggests that the questions the novel asks of the war are not restricted to it. Instead, the First World War becomes the framework for a critical approach to coming of age which can be extended to take in the twentieth century as a whole.

In *Private Peaceful*, the reader is also presented with a vision of the twentieth century, as a cycle of abusive authority and peaceful resistance modelled by Tommo and Charlie, a model which the implied reader is encouraged to apply to the contemporary problem of the government's failure to pardon those executed, as well as their own lives more broadly. However, the lack of acknowledgement of the complexities, not just of the First World War, but of engaging with the past, and of resisting authority, to some extent undermines the novel. This is the past presented as parable; the novel presumes that the value of the past lies purely in its ability to tell lessons to the present. The implied reader, aligned with Tommo and not permitted to gain critical distance from the text, is simultaneously emotively engaged and critically reassured. She may be moved by Tommo's plight, but the authoritative style of the novel implies that all 'right-thinking people' share the novel's scepticism towards the war and the authorities who waged it. In doing so, it also suggests that there is no conflict or disconnect between the experience of the war and the expected response to it. *Private Peaceful* does not allow the implied reader to be challenged; nor does it encourage the reader to seek further information. Whereas *The Shell House* presents the First World War as an event which deserves to be re-thought and re-positioned, *Private Peaceful* tells its readers that the war remains

timeless, its lessons static and as accessible today as in 1917 for those who read correctly, just as *Birdsong* presents the past as open, available to anyone who cares to read it. The age difference between the intended readers of *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* plays a role; however, writing for 10 years and up does not explain the reduction of the ambiguities of war *and* of the questions and crises of the present which *Private Peaceful* exhibits.¹⁰⁶

As in *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration Trilogy*, the novels discussed in this chapter also map a vision of the twentieth century which figures the First World War as a moment of coming of age and a site which can still encompass acts of coming of age into the historical present. However, Barker's and Faulks' implied reader is already committed to the mythology of the war, and particularly the symbolic value of the soldier, and thus committed to an ethical value for remembering the war. There is more at stake in the relationship between novel and reader in *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House*. The focus on the retelling and reworking of the war for younger readers to make them heirs to an ongoing cultural debate which makes these novels important for the larger concerns around adulthood, history and coming of age. Through the lens of coming of age, it becomes clear that *The Shell House* and *Private Peaceful* share adult fiction's desire to explore serious questions about community, futurity, and identity. These young adult novels add another dimension to the crisis of coming of age evident in all these novels: the adolescent's relationship to coming of age, and through that, to the adult world and its institutions. Bringing in the adolescent and young adult fiction also makes explicit questions of uncertainty in relation to the ethics of political and social participation. Whether working with or against the dominant narrative conveyed through the educational system and other public sites, *Private Peaceful* and *The Shell House* respond to and rearticulate the concerns which surround not just the war, but the space occupied by the past in both our public and personal lives, our expectations of ourselves and of the transition into adulthood. *Private Peaceful* ultimately offers an easy narrative of the war which elides its complexities, as well as the complexities of the past century, and of coming of age. *The Shell House* suggests ways in which the First World War may become

¹⁰⁶ A similar simplicity can be seen in *War Horse* (1982): good characters hate the war, and bad characters treat the good abominably. However, *War Horse* at least shows a character who does believe in the war and is seen as admirable and forms a more complex argument about war's impact across national lines. Joey, as a character, does develop, and the implied reader is faced with some complex moral questions about behaviour in war time.

the background to other stories, personal and communal, and through this challenges the present reader to engage with the twentieth century and its ambiguities.

Chapter 3: Coming of Age as a Citizen

3.1 Introduction: Constructing Citizens

In Chapter Two, I studied *The Shell House* and *Private Peaceful* in terms of characters' and readers' negotiation of experience and expectation in relation to their individual view of the world. Although expectations played a large role in these narratives, they are ultimately not narratives of *overcoming* or *transforming* expectations, which is the focus of the novels discussed in this chapter. Looking at gender performance, community participation and the family as a power structure, I argue that the YA novels discussed in this chapter can be read as modelling debates about the 'good citizen'. I analyse Linda Newbery's *Some Other War* (1990), Theresa Breslin's *Remembrance* (2002) and Marcus Sedgwick's *The Foreshadowing* (2005) through the framework of citizenship theory. Through their representation of adolescents struggling to be recognised and acknowledged as adults, these novels present different models of citizenship as a process of changing social and cultural norms. This chapter examines how citizenship practices are enacted, articulated and framed in these young adult novels, arguing that they expose tensions between individual desires and ethics, and community needs and norms. These novels present the resolution of these tensions as intimately linked with the ability of experience to be recognised, acknowledged and accorded authority – changing expectations and norms. Identity crises remain central to these characters' coming of age, but whereas Chapter Two focused on characters' and readers' perspectives on the world, finding 'ways of directly facing up to what truly counts' in Erikson's formulation, here we see active, external effort to change expectations – often succeeding to some extent.

At first glance, these novels share a similar approach to the war: they all feature male/female sibling sets; the male characters become soldiers, the female characters become nurses; all are to varying degrees influenced by the futility mythology, and see protagonists become critical of the war. Perhaps most importantly, all three novels invite questions around participation in 'the national cause'. A major driving force of the plot, particularly in *Remembrance* and *The Foreshadowing*, is being allowed to choose whether or not participate: Maggie and Charlotte (*Remembrance*), Lorna (*Some Other War*) and Alexandra (*The Foreshadowing*) struggle against their parents' normative assumptions to 'do their bit' as nurses, whereas Francis (*Remembrance*) and Tom (*The Foreshadowing*) find themselves rejected for refusing to join the army. Even in *Some*

Other War, arguably the least ‘futile’ of the novels, Alice and Jack find themselves questioning the ethics of their participation. However, these narratives do provide different approaches to their representations of the war. *Remembrance* has five focalising characters, allowing for a diverse set of voices, and is heavily intertextual; *The Foreshadowing* has fantastic elements, including Alexandra’s psychic abilities which are implied in the novel’s title; *Some Other War* is explicitly engaged with the political struggles of the period. These differences mean the representation of participation of each text varies, illustrating the potential multiplicity of citizenship constructions.

As this chapter focuses on the possibility of changing expectations, I use citizenship to indicate a set of practices. Egin Isin and Greg Nielsen suggest that it is productive to distinguish between ‘substantive’ and ‘formal’ citizenship – the former is a set of practices and acts, whereas the latter is a legal status.¹ Although formal citizenship may require a test or similar act, once it is bestowed it does not require any further action. It is a passive identity. Substantive citizenship, by contrast, is a reflexive identity, sustained through a set of rights, responsibilities and practices, and can be conceptualized by smaller communities, comparative to the formalised model, which relies on legal structures. In this chapter, I am using citizenship to indicate a substantive construction, which allows for services rendered to the community *even when there is no formal recognition* to be read as citizenship practices. It is this construction which has been most prominent in the citizenship debates of the past thirty years, debates which have resulted in, among other things, the Citizens’ Charter in 1992, the 1998 Crick report into citizenship training in schools, and the institution of citizenship ceremonies as part of the process of naturalisation in 2004.² The debates surrounding these three examples are all reflective of a concern about what citizenship *is*, as well as how the state can *create* citizens. It was during this period of heightened investment that Citizenship became a subject in its own right as part of the National Curriculum. The existence of the subject alone is an acknowledgement that citizenship requires training and education. The curriculum requirements for the course stress participation and action, rather than a purely

¹ Egin Isin and Greg Nielsen, ‘Introduction’ *Acts of Citizenship* (London: Zed Books, 2008) eds. Egin Isin and Greg Nielsen. Pp.1-15. p.2.

² See Nira Yuval-Davis, ‘Women, Citizenship and Difference’ *Feminist Review* vol.57, Autumn 1997 pp.4-27, p.17; Bernard Crick, *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (accessed through Education England: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/index.html#rep>) [accessed 04/02/2013]; Bridget Byrne, ‘A local welcome? Narrations of citizenship and nation in UK citizenship ceremonies’, *Citizenship Studies* (Vol.16, 3-4, June 2012, pp. 531-44), p.531.

theoretical framework.³ *Some Other War* predates the heyday of these debates, while *Remembrance* and *The Foreshadowing* are published after the establishment of citizenship as a central political topic. I bring them together to suggest the ways in which young adult fiction and the First World War have been productive sites for these discussions, in some cases anticipating the larger cultural debate.

In Kate Brown and Stephen Fairbrass's introduction to their *Citizenship Teacher's Handbook* (2009), they describe two models of 'good' citizenship. A good citizen may be: 'an intellectually angry citizen, one who is concerned about injustice, intolerance and inequality, and is willing to act to challenge authority where necessary.' Alternatively the 'good citizen' is: 'law-abiding, respectful of peers and superiors, respectful of authority.'⁴ This latter model, Brown and Fairbrass suggest, is a product of education as socialization; the student is taught to abide by 'the norms and values of "decent" society.'⁵ This form of citizenship is not *necessarily* uncritical, but it prioritises the status quo and tends to conform to and reiterate normative expectations. The student-citizen is the inheritor of a functioning system which it is their duty to uphold. In the former construction, the student-citizen has a more actively disruptive role; they are positioned as potentially subversive. The focus here is less on upholding, and more on developing – it is this model which has the potential to transform. Whereas Fairbrass and Brown suggest that an individual inhabits a 'disruptive' or 'sustaining' position constantly, I argue that citizenship *practices* are either disruptive or sustaining. In these novels, no one character consistently performs one model or the other. Instead, I argue that the protagonists inhabit both models, but in different contexts, serving different purposes and challenging different sets of expectations.

The focus on practices emphasises the importance of participation in these novels' construction of citizenship and their engagement with its gendered nature. Participation is, particularly for the female characters, a way of empowering through public service to the nation and becomes an argument for their right to citizenship made through work. Studying youth movements of the sixties, Erikson suggests that this kind of 'socially relevant' work 'undoubtedly has potential therapeutic value', but argues that the value of it is inherently bound up with the 'vitality of their communal potential', suggesting the

³ See the National Curriculum Key Stage 3 and 4: 'Citizenship' <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199157/citizenship> [accessed on 08/02/2013].

⁴ Kate Brown and Stephen Fairbrass, *Citizenship Teacher's Handbook* (London: Continuum, 2009) p.7.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.8.

importance of continued recognition for the possibility of transformative change.⁶ Erikson's use of 'therapeutic' makes clear that this kind of work is intimately bound up with the identity crisis, emphasizing the importance of communal acknowledgement, recognition and acceptance as part of the resolution. Thus, in the process of serving and questioning, these characters are also negotiating their identity crises, and in negotiating their own identities, they open up the possibility of transformation. It is through this drive to transform that characters are able to come of age.

Coming into citizenship is itself a form of coming of age. The politicians' and the media's choice to focus on schools as a site of citizenship training is telling in that regard. During the debate about citizenship ceremonies for immigrants, there were 'discussions about having ceremonies for British-born citizens when they reach the age of 18.'⁷ This positions citizenship as something to be achieved. It becomes a rite of passage, linked to becoming an adult. In adolescence, this suggests, one is simply practicing to be able to take on the full mantle of responsibility which arrives at eighteen. Thus, the citizenship status of adolescents is in flux. In her description of YA, Seelinger Trites notes that one of the defining features of the category is its investment in politics:

All YA novels depict some postmodern tension between individuals and institutions. [...] Once protagonists of the YA novel have learned to discursively negotiate their place in the domination-repression chain of power, they are usually depicted as having grown.⁸

YA fiction in Seelinger Trites' description represents negotiations between the individual (adolescent) protagonist and (social and state) institutions, and represents them as on-going, even after the close of the novels. This makes explicit the institutional elements of expectations: these norms are enforced and reiterated through larger institutions, such as the nation, the family and, in First World War fiction, the army. Seelinger Trites suggests that '[t]he role of politics in adolescent literature appears more subtly; relatively few novels deal directly with the role of the state in regulating teenagers' power.'⁹ However, the First World War setting foregrounds the state as an institution through the centrality of soldiering and nursing. Discourses of nation and service are inescapable as part of the mythology of the war. Tellingly, none of the novels in this chapter feature conscientious objectors or female characters who choose not to nurse. To change expectations and

⁶ Erikson, p.36-7.

⁷ Byrne, p.531.

⁸ Seelinger Trites, p.52.

⁹ Ibid. p.22.

transform citizenship, these novels seem to suggest, they must engage with the war's futility mythology and its attendant soldiering and nursing myths.

MacCallum-Stewart suggests that one reason for the persistence of the futility mythology is that much YA fiction and children's fiction seeks to use 'the circumstances of the war to make a moral point – circumstances that are familiar to the general reader and underscored by demands of the British National Curriculum, which encourages ideas of citizenship and unity[...].'¹⁰ By associating citizenship with unity, MacCallum-Stewart suggests that the model of citizenship encouraged by the National Curriculum is 'sustaining', despite the First World War's status as a potentially 'disruptive' moment. In this construction, the National Curriculum is seen as an institution which shapes citizens homogenously. Jessica Pickett notes that, since 1998, schools have been tasked with encouraging 'community cohesion' [...], in response to unease concerning multiculturalism, [...] and *the revisiting of debates surrounding national identity*.¹¹ This manifests in a desire for a unified culture. A sense of community is constructed through shared 'myths'. MacCallum-Stewart, in linking the myths of the First World War and citizenship, draws attention to the mythology's centrality to national identity and citizenship. Breslin, Sedgwick and Newbery sustain or disrupt cultural narratives and myths, and in doing so are intervening in the readers' vision of themselves as participants in a larger culture. Bryan S. Turner describes cultural citizenship as 'cultural empowerment, namely the capacity to participate effectively, creatively and successfully within a national culture [...]'.¹² Cultural citizenship permits a shared sense of identity. However, as Turner argues, 'the idea of a unified, homogenous and integrated national culture' is necessarily problematic.¹³ There should be space for shared narratives, but culture should also empower citizens to think critically about those narratives, for example, through literary re-workings of dominant narratives and the transposition of contemporary myths onto historical narratives. I am using cultural citizenship as a way of framing the complex relationship between the contemporary questions of citizenship, the national uses of the past(s) and the historically changing construction of the concept. All three novels flag their engagement with a mythical war *and* their desire to trouble or

¹⁰ MacCallum-Stewart, p.186.

¹¹ Jessica Pickett, 'Citizenship Education and narratives of pedagogy' *Citizenship Studies* (Vol 14.6, December 2010, pp.621-35) p.62 [emphasis mine].

¹² Bryan S. Turner, 'Outline of a General Theory of Cultural Citizenship' *Culture & Citizenship* (London: Sage, 2000) ed. Nick Stevenson. pp.11-32; p.12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

nuance the myths: *The Foreshadowing*'s use of fantastic realism, in the form of Alexandra's psychic abilities provides an extra layer of performance to its critique of normative narratives and works as a counterpoint to the standard elements of the futility mythology. *Remembrance* relies on intertextuality and the representation of reading as critique to move beyond a citizen-construction based solely on work and participation. *Some Other War*, although less overt, uses well-known figures such as the Pankhursts to frame its gender debate, thus engaging directly with an iconic political history. Cultural citizenship, then, is both a condition of the novels' content, and figures within the novels as part of the negotiation of community, state and self.

Citizenship itself is not a neutral term. As Nira Yuval-Davis argues, war by its very nature links citizenship 'with the ability to take part in armed struggle for national defence, this ability has been equated with maleness, while femaleness has been equated with weakness and the need for male protection.'¹⁴ War makes visible the gendering of citizens, while potentially eliding the problems inherent in this under the banner of the national cause. This is particularly explicit in First World War fiction because women at the time were not citizens, gaining the vote only after the war.¹⁵ Female characters face one kind of challenge of expectations: fighting for access to full adulthood, which includes political and social participation. Alexandra, Charlotte, Maggie and Alice are all struggling to have their involvement in the war translated into political recognition. Male characters face a different set of expectations: their fight is to be heard when they divert from the expectations placed on them, in terms of participating in the war *and* supporting the national cause.

Community, then, is at the heart of this chapter, particularly the nation and the family, and their differing expectations. The family plays a significant role in YA fiction more broadly. Ann Alston argues that, in YA and children's literature, family is positioned as both a starting point and destination. It is presumed to be the central structure/unit to which the individual belongs, and is therefore crucial to constructions of identity.¹⁶ Thus, it is also at the heart of the individual's practice of citizenship, and relationship to the state. Yuval-Davis observes that the family is always implicated in citizen formations and it has long been treated as a unit with a 'set of unitary interests'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Yuval-Davis, p.20; particularly the wars of the first half of the twentieth century.

¹⁵ With various caveats, of course: suffrage was originally granted only to women over thirty, who owned property, were married or were graduates of a university in the constituency they were voting in.

¹⁶ Ann Alston, *The Family in English Children's Literature* (New York/London: Routledge, 2008), p.1.

¹⁷ Yuval-Davis, p.12.

This is as much an idealised construction of the family as a unified national culture is an idealised dream of the imagined community. In practice, '[d]ifferent members of the family – nuclear and extended – have different social positionings, powers and interests within it.'¹⁸ The family thus mimics the state/nation, both in its idealised form and in its internal power relations.¹⁹ I am not suggesting that the two are identical, but rather that, particularly in the context of YA fiction, the family can be seen as an equivalent normalising framework to the nation. Alston argues, 'true happiness it seems is impossible without the love and support of a dedicated family.'²⁰ However, that 'security can become confining and limiting.'²¹ The protagonist frequently has to negotiate for more liberty within the familial confines, which 'reflects the children's move into adolescence; as they grow up they gain increased freedom and power.'²² This negotiation is particularly central to coming of age. The tension between the dream of the idealised home, and the reality of the normative and occasionally restrictive power balance of the family unit both motivates and limits the protagonist. Seelinger Trites argues that: 'studying parental figures in YA novels shows how often adolescent characters embrace repression as a precursor to empowerment [...].'²³ It is often through falling in line with parental power that an adolescent is granted limited freedom. As a consequence, YA fiction has been seen as a site for 'sustaining' citizenship. In these novels, however, I argue that their representation of power negotiations provides a space for questioning the construction of the family, particularly in relation to normative ideas of gender, sexuality and power.

The family and the nation/state also provide potentially contradictory loyalty claims, as individuals belong to their families, but they also belong to the imagined community of the nation. Rogers M. Smith suggests that this idea of belonging can be seen as a citizenship claim: individuals can be citizens of their families, with rights and responsibilities equivalent to those owed to the state.²⁴ I argue that these groups provide

¹⁸ Ibid. p.13.

¹⁹ I use the term state/nation to invoke both the legal framework of a country and the 'imagined community' of the nation. The nation provokes love and loyalty and these discourses work to empower the state as a legal and practical apparatus. The two are not equivalent, but in the modern nation state, they are inextricably linked.

²⁰ Alston, p.1.

²¹ Ibid.p.77.

²² Ibid.p.102.

²³ Seelinger Trites, p.55.

²⁴ Rogers M. Smith, 'Modern Citizenship' in *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* (London: SAGE, 2002) eds. Egin Isin and Bryan S. Turner, pp.105-14, p.105.

two potentially conflicting sites of recognition, and present differing expectations. This conflict is particularly evident in the treatment of gender: although familial recognition is often complex for both male and female characters, national expectations are presented as allowing female characters to transcend the domestic space and earn their formalised, public recognition. Alexandra, Charlotte, Maggie and Alice are all struggling to have their participation in the war translated into political recognition, yet ultimately, their national participation changes familial expectations *as well as* presenting an argument for the expansion of the franchise. However, this argument is problematized through the centrality of futility to the mythology of the war – if female characters can no longer support the national cause, how does that affect their recognition? Can they still transform expectations of gender without conforming to expectations of participation? Male characters face a different set of expectations: their fight is to be heard when they divert from the normative expectations placed on them. There is a distinction here between formalised recognition, a set of legal expectations alongside social expectations, and unspoken social norms. For male protagonists, however, the ideologies of family and state/nation align. Tom and Francis' refusal to conform and participate is seen as a rejection of their responsibilities towards both state/nation *and* family. Discursively, as Benedict Anderson argues, the nation is described 'in the vocabulary of kinship [...] or that of home [...]. Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied.'²⁵ The notion of being 'naturally tied' echoes essentialist constructions of the family. The nation appears natural and worthy of (uncritical) loyalty, while also reinforcing the ideal construction of family. The two discourses of nation and family/home are interlinked, propping up each other's idealised models. In *The Foreshadowing*, *Some Other War* and *Remembrance*, the protagonists' search for an ethical and individually empowering citizenship has to be balanced against their need to belong to the nation, as well as the family.

The desire for home and belonging is the underlying force of citizenship and remains so in these novels. It is the conflict between this longing and the expectations which permit belonging and the experience of the individual which is at the heart of these novels and the identity crisis more broadly. However, these same needs can also be catalysts for change, as characters choose to prioritise experience and their own sense of right and wrong over communal expectations *in order to serve the community*, either

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991) p.143.

through participation or advocacy for change. The protagonists negotiate their desire for belonging, their idealised notions of family and home, and their own ethical and political positions against the backdrop of the First World War. The model of disruptive and sustaining citizenship practices provides a framework for considering how these conflicting pressures are represented, as well as the possibilities of social transformation. In this chapter I begin by looking at how female characters use the national cause as an argument for greater political rights and how their experience enables them to change expectations and resolve their identity crises. I then move on to examine male characters and the theme of protest versus participation. All three novels, present versions of the reluctant and disillusioned soldiers, contrasting willing warriors with ethical soldier-witnesses (though not conscientious objectors), ultimately coming down ideologically on the side of the latter. This is complicated, however, by debates around the ethics of participation. I argue that these male characters are disruptive in their gender performance, as well as in their politics, but the novels finally endorse participation over protest, even as they end on a sense of open-endedness. Ultimately, these are novels which encourage and confirm the possibility of change – albeit through participation in mainstream service to the nation.

3.2 Female Citizenship and Doing One's Bit

James Campbell observes that, post-1975, there was a rise in representations of the female experience of First World War alongside a feminist re-reading of the war canon and of the literature of the period in relation to the war.²⁶ There are broadly two interpretations of the war's impact on women's lives. The increasingly dominant one is the myth of a liberating war, articulated in Sandra Gilbert's 1983 essay 'The Soldier's Heart'. Gilbert provides a compelling description of wartime Britain as 'festival of female misrule in which the collapse of a traditional social structure' meant that women could enjoy powers and freedoms previously denied to them.²⁷ She describes 'trousered 'war girls' [...] [l]iberated from parlors and petticoats alike,' who 'beam as they shovel coal, shoe horses, fight fires, drive buses, chop down trees, make shells, dig graves.'²⁸ This narrative of the war as a site of female liberation appears in the romance novels of

²⁶ James Campbell, 'Interpreting the War' in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp.261-279, p.272.

²⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women and the Great War' in *Signs* Vol. 8, No. 3, Women and Violence (Spring, 1983), pp. 422-50, p.437.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.429.

Catherine Cookson, the Imperial War Museum, and Andrew Marr's 2009 documentary, *The Making of Modern Britain*, to name a few examples.²⁹ This presents the liberation of women as 'disruptive', fitting Gilbert's vision of feminism as a troubling force, a continuation of the intentionally disruptive politics of the suffragists and, most obviously, the suffragettes. Yet this narrative has its critics, who argue that the war was not liberating, nor a period of female empowerment. Samuel Hynes argues that the gendered nature of the war meant that the previously radical women's suffrage movement became less threatening, because it was subordinated to the national *male* cause.³⁰ This reading suggests that the popular mythology of the war conflates women's increased freedom with their service in the national cause. As such it complicates the idea of women's suffrage as radical: women *earned* their citizenship at the precise moment they gave up fighting for themselves and moved into step with the national masculine narrative.³¹ In this interpretation, women's suffrage is a reward for their efforts in sustaining the status quo. There is a tension between these two narratives which is evident in all of these novels: on the one hand, female empowerment is treated as disruptive and radical; on the other hand, women's increased freedom comes from their sustaining war-work. This places the female YA protagonists in an awkward bind – serving the state, while being critical of it. This dilemma is reflected in the source of their identity crisis: balancing their experiential ethical development with their desire to change expectations, a change which is most likely to happen through service to the nation.

The protagonists' work as nurses becomes part of the solution to this bind.

MacCallum-Stewart argues:

Female characters, initially located on the home front, make it difficult to utterly dismiss the civilian response to war as unilaterally ignorant, or to present sentiments as linear throughout the war. This is often avoided by simply sending the heroine to the fight (nursing) and often making them suffer a bereavement (their first lover).³²

This plot model is explicitly linked to the journey of the disillusioned soldier, positioning (as discussed in the introduction), the nurse as the female equivalent of this myth. The

²⁹ Deborah Thorn convincingly critiques this myth in 'Making Spectaculars' in *Evidence, History and the Great War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), pp.48-66.

³⁰ Hynes, p.87-88; this is particularly true of the suffragettes, who ceased their campaign of property damage at the outbreak of war.

³¹ This is reminiscent of the current dominant discourse on immigrants seeking citizenship, stressing the need to earn citizenship. See Byrne, p.533-4.

³² MacCallum-Stewart, p.183.

nursing myth can elide the tension between disruptive empowerment and sustaining service to the nation: female characters can gain further rights while also participating in the male (dominant) narrative. Here too, the young protagonists are contrasted with their parents, who then come to represent the ignorant home front. Yet this interpretation risks oversimplifying these novels. *Remembrance*, *The Foreshadowing* and *Some Other War* all show the protagonists' negotiation of the tension between participation and critique, empowerment and witness to male futility.

The representation of the female characters' negotiation of family and nation, and their negotiation of war and work is central to their citizenship practice and how they claim their right to formalised citizenship. As Yuval-Davis notes, citizenship has historically been positioned as 'the entitlement of men, not only as individuals, but also as "representatives of a family (i.e. a group of non-citizens)"' which primarily manifests in a privileging of men in the public sphere, whereas women are associated with the private and domestic.³³ Femininity is associated with domestic virtues. It is therefore not surprising that the female characters in these novels begin in the home. The only exception to this is Maggie, who works in the family store, but on equal footing with her brother, John Malcolm (although, as I discuss below, this does not earn her equivalent political acknowledgement). Even Alice, who is already working at the beginning of *Some Other War*, is in a domestic position. Alice is a lady's maid in a country house, whereas Newbery chose to present her brother, Jack, working as a groom – an outdoors, active job which heightens the contrast between the siblings. Domesticity is the structuring force of her life almost as much as it is for middle class Alexandra, Charlotte and Lorna. For these four characters, their domestic positions limit their participation in the cultural, social and political sphere of the community, and it is their struggle against this expectation which dominates their identity crises. The movement from the family to the (public) community causes tensions between normative femininity and the ideal of participation in all of the novels.

This tension is represented most explicitly in *The Foreshadowing*. Alexandra's main conflict is with her father, who stands as the guardian of the status quo. At the beginning of the novel, she says: 'I tried again to persuade Father to let me help around the wards, but still he refused. He says it's not fitting for a girl like me, and once his mind

³³ Yuval-Davis, p.12.

is made up, it usually stays that way.’³⁴ This establishes Father as the determiner of what is (normatively) right and wrong, establishing the expectations placed on Alexandra, and sets up the central conflict of the first half of the novel: whether Alexandra will be allowed to ‘do her bit’. She is turned down due to her gender and her class status. Alexandra is expected to preserve the domestic and the familial; (paid) public service is not respectable. At one point, she observes that her main purpose is to be married and, implicitly, produce (male) citizens, hidden from the public sphere.³⁵ Alexandra identifies this desire for normality and constraint as central to her conflict with her parents: ‘I’m their dutiful daughter. That’s who they want me to be. And if I show the slightest sign of being difficult or strange they simply won’t accept it. How I long to do something!’³⁶ Father’s understanding of community is limited to the masculine and (hetero)normative. The world he represents is one unable to accommodate change. However, Alexandra’s desire to help out at the hospital and to go into nursing, represents a desire for active citizenship not for political gain, but because of a sense of ethical responsibility towards the community – it is her ethical development which further fuels the conflict. This kind of participation straddles disruptive and sustaining practices. It certainly disrupts her father’s idea of female citizenship, but it is fundamentally about service and sustaining the nation. Yet power is part of service. As Alexandra notes: ‘When you’re a little girl no one takes you seriously. You’re not allowed to help people.’³⁷ Unless you have a political voice (which Alexandra is excluded from by her gender, her age, and her non-normative psychic abilities), you cannot choose to participate. This is Alexandra’s identity crisis and it echoes Stevenson’s notion of the central tension of cultural citizenship: ‘the struggle for a communicative society that is fearful of the threat of normalisation, exclusion and silence.’³⁸ In *The Foreshadowing*, the tension between domesticity and participation reflects this struggle. Alexandra’s choice is not explicitly between being critical or conforming. Instead, it concerns the commitment to ethical responsibility in the face of social expectations, represented by the father.

The war itself is less crucial to the tension between Alexandra and Father than it is in the conflict between Father and Alexandra’s brother, Tom. The war justifies her eventually going to serve on the wards – at the encouragement of her soldier brother,

³⁴ Marcus Sedgwick, *The Foreshadowing* (London: Orion Children’s Ebook, 2005), p.6.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.21.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.52.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.21.

³⁸ Stevenson, 2010, p.276.

Edgar – but it is not her primary motivation for wanting to work at the hospital. Instead, it provides an added impetus to an existing desire to help. In *The Foreshadowing*, the nation is not explicitly invoked as a reason to leave the domestic. In *Remembrance*, however, Charlotte makes a clear reference to national service when she appeals to be allowed to leave her domestic setting. She argues that ‘[w]e are now in the second summer of fighting and trained nurses will be needed if it lasts another year.’³⁹ The ‘we’ here is the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. Charlotte’s choice to join the Red Cross is linked to the events of the war, and the need to participate in the work of the nation. The novel opens with Charlotte putting on her Red Cross uniform. When her mother questions the respectability of her outfit, Charlotte responds: ‘It is a Red Cross uniform, Mother, and we are at war. I’m not trying to look respectable. I’m trying to be useful.’⁴⁰ Just as in *The Foreshadowing*, the desire to experience usefulness and helpfulness are contrasted with the restrictive expectation of (feminine) respectability embodied by parents. However, in *Remembrance* this need to be useful is explicitly linked to the nation at war. Charlotte’s appeal is to a national cause which supersedes the familial authority of her mother. It permits her active entrance into the public sphere, but connects this activity to the war, thus implying that it might end with the war as well. However, within the space provided by the war, Charlotte’s citizenship practice has disruptive potential. Her rejection of respectability is linked to her uniform, which is to say her gender performance. By shifting the focus from ‘respectable’ to ‘useful’, she rejects the implicit passivity of appearance as a feminine aspiration.

Charlotte is presented as aware of the (potential) significance of her shift from private figure to public nurse:

‘And what if I did think that women should be the same as men?’ demanded Charlotte. [...]

‘Do I have to remind you of all the ways that men are superior to women?’ said John Malcolm, his eyes teasing.

[...]

‘That proves that you miss the point. You should not talk of superiority, but of equality.’⁴¹

³⁹ Theresa Breslin, *Remembrance* (London: Corgi, 2002 (2014)), p.12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

Charlotte uses language familiar to contemporary debates about gender issues, arguing for her right to be seen as equal to men such as John Malcolm. Charlotte is not an explicitly political character, nor is she implicated in the journey of disillusionment as clearly as Maggie and Charlotte's brother, Francis, are. Her citizenship practices work in favour of the national cause, yet they still transform expectations of women, both in historical terms and in terms of the myth of the war. As Janet Watson argues: '[w]hen the trench took over the cultural history of the war [...] the only real role left for women, if they were acknowledged at all, was one of impediment or at best ignorance [...].'⁴² This separation of male and female narrative, which prioritises the male perspective, makes it relatively easy to dismiss the female experience of the war time as either supporting or unknowing. Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter argue that this is still true today, when media narratives around war '[cast] women as other and external to the soldier, most typically as wives, girlfriends [...].'⁴³ Women are spectators of war, not part of it. However, in *Remembrance*, Charlotte is presented as seeing her work as equivalent to John Malcolm's: '[Charlotte] understood his feelings. Her own motivation in offering to help at the hospital had come from a feeling of obligation to assist the war effort, and to be in some way "part of it all".'⁴⁴ Being part of the national cause acts as an equaliser. As long as both John Malcolm and Charlotte are working for the same cause, their relationship to the nation and their citizenship position is (at least nominally) the same. War-work gives Charlotte a stronger platform from which to demand social acknowledgement and adjusted expectations, including implicitly female suffrage. Furthermore, as a character, she also demands room for women as part of war – and as their own mythical figure.

This model of citizenship allows for disruption only through the sustaining of a larger cause. The expectations of gender, held up by Charlotte's mother, can be disrupted as long as Charlotte's larger loyalty is to the state, fulfilling patriotic expectations. Indeed, although her mother is disapproving for the first half of the novel, she does not stop Charlotte from joining the Red Cross – unlike Father in *The Foreshadowing*.⁴⁵ Soon, the novel has Charlotte reflect that, 'her mother was now secretly proud that her daughter was contributing, especially when Francis was not.'⁴⁶ Thus, despite initial resistance and a

⁴² Janet S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.220.

⁴³ Rachel Woodward and Trish Midd, *Sexing the Soldier* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.81.

⁴⁴ Breslin, p.56.

⁴⁵ Charlotte's father is dead; furthermore, Francis presents him as 'quite radical' and not necessarily a man to abide by conventions – as opposed to their mother.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.74.

clash between private respectability and public usefulness, Charlotte's citizenship is accepted both within her family and the larger community as a consequence of her being part of the *national* cause. By contrast, the middle class female character of *Some Other War*, Lorna, is more disruptive, and duly struggles more against her family. Even before the outbreak of war, Lorna is regarded as a troublesome figure: she has 'had a University education, an unusual thing for a woman. She was a suffragette, to her father's frequent embarrassment; she had been arrested outside Buckingham Palace in May along with Mrs. Pankhurst [...].'⁴⁷ Lorna's relationship to her family is complicated: on one hand, her university attendance indicates some measure of acceptance of female empowerment; on the other hand, her politics are an embarrassment. As with Charlotte, there is no indication that her parents can prevent her from doing what she wants, but they disapprove and make clear to Alice, engaged to their son, that Lorna is not conforming to expectations of respectable femininity. For Alice, however, Lorna is a positive figure of female emancipation and she becomes Alice's mentor and citizenship model – not unlike Charlie Peaceful modelling coming of age for Tommo in *Private Peaceful*. 'Lorna's forceful personality swept aside all difficulties as if they didn't exist. Alice looked at her admiringly, thinking of the new possibilities suddenly available.'⁴⁸ Significantly, Lorna's, and subsequently Alice's, engagement with war-work is framed as an adoption of the national cause ('real war-work' implies a value judgement in favour of service to the nation), but it is also an explicitly political choice; nursing is a gateway to new possibilities for female citizenship practices.

What distinguishes Lorna from Charlotte is that her political commitment does not fade, nor is it bound up with the war. By the end of the narrative, Lorna has become disillusioned with the war and by proxy, the national cause. She states: 'I'm going to work as a pacifist, [...]. Yes, I shall live in London and earn my living by teaching, and meanwhile write articles and pamphlets [...]. There must never be another war.'⁴⁹ Lorna's citizenship practices are disruptive within the novel. She moves from being a supportive citizen to becoming a critical and engaged voice, going so far as to *write* about politics in opposition to to her parents, representing the dominant political voices of the day. In doing so, Lorna becomes a site for debate about what virtuous and ethical politics would look like. Again here her role is similar to Charlie Peaceful's in *Private Peaceful*.

⁴⁷ Linda Newbery, *Some Other War* (London: Barn Owl Book, 2002 (1990)), p.27.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.67-8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.196.

However, Lorna does express internal conflict, and she is clear-sighted about disrupting the expectations of her family, of the nation and even of her former hero, Emmeline Pankhurst. Lorna's disruptive citizenship comes out of a series of identity crises as her experiences drive her further from the expectations of her family, leaving her outside the national narrative. Because of, rather than in spite of, this conflict and crisis, she remains heroic within the novel, expanding the mythical ideal of the nurse to something that transcends the war.

Alice eventually follows her to London, ending the novel with the goal to work to end war. It is Lorna who facilitates Alice's coming of age into a critical mode of citizenship, and as such, she functions as the female ideal in the novel. However, Alice, not Lorna, is the protagonist of *Some Other War*, and her position in the novel is therefore more significant. There is a class difference between Lorna and Alice, which means that work is not necessarily presented as emancipatory for Alice. Although she enjoys her work to some extent, she works at Greenstocks, the big house in the village, because it is the respectable place to work. When the war breaks out, she longs for more meaningful work: "Neither [Jack nor Edward] will be happy until they've done their bit," her mother said. Alice [wished] she could do her bit; knitting and sewing [...] wasn't enough, when Jack and Edward were risking their lives.⁵⁰ Alice's definition of more meaningful is bound up with the national ('do her bit'), the local (Edward) and the familial (Jack and her mother). As with Charlotte, it is also bound up with a desire for equality with the soldiering boys. It is also set in opposition to the 'feminine' practices of sewing and knitting, which crucially are approved of by Lorna's parents – they are respectable, and tied to the domestic and private. However, for Alice private service is not enough; she needs experience of the public war as well as experience of it in her private life. Her commitment must take the form of active, *public* service, out in the larger community.

Whereas Alexandra and Charlotte's desire to work is placed in opposition to their parents' desire for respectability, Alice is supported by her family. Her desire to work as a nurse is presented as a contrast to Madeleine, who she worked for as a lady's maid, and her family: Madeleine's fiancé has not volunteered for non-combatant duties, and no one in the big house appears to be contributing to the war effort.⁵¹ As Fox and Agnew note, big houses in First World War narratives function as a way of manifesting social changes:

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.64.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.55.

the changing relationships within the framework of the house provide a microcosm of broader societal changes.⁵² Alice's rejection of Madeleine and Mrs Morland's war efforts is symbolic of her new empowered citizenship position and the potential for reconfiguring social expectations of her gender and class. This position, however, is reliant on the war and her commitment to the cause. It is the war which allows for this transformation of class and gender roles. Thus there is again the subtext of impermanent change. However, unlike Alexandra, whose narrative becomes more personal and less explicitly concerned with the war, or Charlotte, who remains broadly in favour of the war throughout, Alice goes through the traditional journey of disillusionment. She decides to remain as a nurse until the end of the war, but the loss of Edward, and Jack's increasing sense of the war war's futility mean that she too becomes critical of the war. It is significant that the catalyst for Alice's disillusionment is her fiancé and her brother. Unlike Lorna, Charlotte, Alexandra and Maggie, Alice does not go to the front. Instead, her disillusionment comes through what she learns from those at the front, her experience as a nurse in Britain, but most importantly the loss of Edward and the future she had envisioned for herself. In *Some Other War*, the primary motivations of the characters are ascribed to family loyalties or potential political gain. Only Edward speaks about patriotic reasons for joining up and therefore it seems almost inevitable that once he disappears from the narrative, disillusionment becomes the dominant theme of the novel. As this happens, Alice's citizenship practice also becomes more disruptive, as her experience distances her from the national narrative.

Indeed, Edward's death triggers a second identity crisis for Alice, one which has been foreshadowed through her growing sense of concern about the ethics of nursing men back to health to send them to the front again. Her experience means that she can no longer be content with meeting the expectations of national war service; a citizenship based on service to dominant political expectation cannot satisfy Alice's ethical concerns. Instead, *Some Other War* ends with Alice's eventual decision to move away from the village to London with Lorna, in order to work in the East End with orphaned children. Alice thinks that going with Lorna 'would give her [...] a new aim in life, a sense of doing something worthwhile.'⁵³ Service to the nation is reframed here as service to disadvantaged communities. This model of service and citizenship is not simply an

⁵² Agnew, p.79.

⁵³ Newbery, p.230.

equivalency of female citizenship to male citizenship; instead it is a transformation of the idea of citizenship into a critical act. It is worth noting here that Lorna is moving to London to do pacifist work, publishing pamphlets and campaigning for peace, emphasizing how much the move to London is a reconfiguration of female citizenship as a continual campaign for acknowledgement. In supporting Lorna's disruption, Alice herself becomes more disruptive. Alice's citizenship straddles the line between disruptive and sustaining, particularly taking into consideration the way she conforms to the myth of the (disillusioned, critical) nurse; however, the end of the novel suggests the work of disrupting and transforming expectations is not yet finished – formalised female citizenship is not the end of the journey.

Maggie's narrative in *Remembrance* shares a superficially similar arc. However, she alone amongst the female characters works in a munition factory, at least initially. Maggie, like Lorna, is introduced as a politically conscious character: 'Maggie faced [John Malcolm], hands on hips. "Do you think it is fair and right that a woman is not treated equal to a man in this society today? [...]"'⁵⁴ Maggie uses language familiar to a contemporary reader to make her point. Furthermore, she makes it to her twin brother, her equal in all things, except for their gender, highlighting the difference between their political possibilities. This conversation also marks Maggie out as a character who sees injustices and actively works to right them. She is presented as discursively complex, able to utilise multiple citizenship positions. Her argument for leaving the store and going to work in the munitions factory is primarily economic – she will make more money there – and secondarily national. However, in her interior monologue we learn that she is also motivated by a desire to become more independent. This would appear to place her partly in contrast to Charlotte and Alexandra's ethical and national reasoning. Although she chooses to go into factory work following her father's and Francis' (Charlotte's brother) discussion of the munitions shortage, we are told that learning about these is also when Maggie realises that she 'relied on others to tell her what was going on. It suddenly occurred to her how vulnerable that made her.'⁵⁵ This revelation of her own political vulnerability in the context of the family prompts a minor identity crisis. She begins to educate herself by reading the newspaper, and here she learns about shortages of bullets and the subsequent need for more women to work in the factories. Her choice of war-

⁵⁴ Breslin, p.20.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.64.

work is implicated in several different citizenship discourses: political gain; economic betterment; ethical responsibility to the imagined community of the nation; but also implied critique of the government which has allowed this shortage *and* enabled her continued ignorance. If contemporary models of sustaining citizenship see ‘citizens being defined in terms of respect, good behaviour, self-regulation and educability,’ Maggie both conforms to this *and* brings out the contradictions within that definition.⁵⁶ Her behaviour is in line with the government. Yet it is motivated by her experience of vulnerability, which in turn prompts her empowerment through independent reading and research, challenging expectations of feminine behaviour. Her citizenship practices are transformative, but in support of the national cause. Thus Maggie’s citizenship is initially sustaining in its acts, yet disruptive in its reasoning.

This disruptiveness is also evident in Maggie’s relationship to her family. She is presented as disempowered in the domestic space. Despite having the same education as John Malcolm and working alongside him in the family shop, ‘[h]er father and brother usually read the newspaper after dinner while she cleared up. Then they discussed it with each other while she and her mother knitted or darned [...].’⁵⁷ Her reading happens in her free time. Being informed is not seen as part of her responsibilities, as it is for her brother and father. It is John Malcolm’s support which finally sways her father into letting her go to work in the munitions’ factory – unlike Charlotte, there is an implication that Maggie’s family *could* prevent her from doing the work she would prefer. And even John Malcolm’s support is not a sign of a shift in familial respect: ‘Despite the fact that she now worked in the munitions factory and had first-hand knowledge of armaments, Maggie couldn’t help but note that her twin brother addressed anything of import to her father or Alex.’⁵⁸ Although Maggie has economic power independent of her family, works in the national cause and in many ways fulfils all the criteria for an independent and liberated woman, she is not recognised as a citizen by her family. Her exclusion from the dominant political discussion of the day is presented as one of the motivating factors behind her independent reading and eventual critique of the war and the nation which sustains it. Maggie’s character arc subverts the expected narrative of adolescence *and* citizenship. For the other characters in these novels, it is work which allows them to come of age. Work allows the female protagonists more political power and this is in turn

⁵⁶ Pickett, p.627.

⁵⁷ Breslin, p.64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.91.

recognised by their parents and family; they become adult citizens. Maggie, however, fails to fully come of age through work, because her citizenship is ignored by her family; she is unable to transform their expectations of her initially, because they will not acknowledge the reality of her new socio-economic position.

In *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry argue that utopian and dystopian fiction maps a coming of age through their protagonist's political awakening, wherein the protagonist 'comes to recognize the faults of his or her society, and rebels against it.'⁵⁹ There is a similar political awakening at work in Maggie's narrative. This journey is not entirely dissimilar to Lorna's in *Some Other War*. However, Maggie is a focalising character. She is also an adolescent at the start of the narrative. By comparison, Lorna is in her early twenties and the reader only sees her through Alice's focalization. Maggie, then, has more disruptive *potential* within the text, but she is also a more complex and tricky character to define. This complexity can be seen in her movement from munitions to nursing. The factory is a site for political debate, filled with women looking to empower themselves through the national cause: 'That's one good thing this war has done which is for good. There can be no more talk to keeping to your place [...].'⁶⁰ The war has created opportunities for women, yet there is no guarantee that this is a permanent change. Some of the women argue that they should resist being forced back into domesticity, leading Maggie to reflect: 'these topics were similar to those that Francis Armstrong-Barnes talked about. [...] Now that she could see where it might involve an actual struggle for power, she had a disturbing moment of fear. These were the politics of dissension.'⁶¹ Unlike Lorna in *Some Other War*, Maggie holds back from the logical conclusion to her politics. Her loyalty to the local and the national community still appears to limit her full commitment to 'the politics of dissension.' There are class and gendered tensions at play here, as well. Maggie approves of these politics when the middle class, male Francis argues for them, but sees them as threatening in the context of the working class and female munitions factory. Maggie ends up leaving the munitions factory and becomes involved romantically with Francis, suggesting that the politics of reform and transformation are more achievable through male, middle class citizenship practices, and the conventional

⁵⁹ Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.9.

⁶⁰ Breslin, p.117.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

heteronormative family model. It is crucially also Francis who first acknowledges and recognises Maggie's political power, and helps facilitate it through encouraging her reading and recommending books.

However, it is not Francis' influence which causes her to leave the munitions factory. Maggie's move to nursing is an ethical decision, taken after reading one of Charlotte's books on wounds sustained in battle: she reflects on 'the medical facts placed before her, and then she thought of the consequences [...] of having acquired this knowledge [...] now she knew that she must alter her life.'⁶² This knowledge of what munitions do to the body exposes the interconnectedness of her work and the death of soldiers in the war; her sense of herself as an ethical citizen means that she can no longer work at the factory even if it allows for political gain. Instead, she turns to nursing, work which is mythically equivalent to soldiering. Nursing is also more in line with sustaining notions of gender performance. As Faulks notes, the classic citizenship model positions women as (unpaid) carers, seeing their public role as explicitly linked to children and the ill.⁶³ The role of nurse in some ways simply gives the traditional caring role a national dimension. Maggie's work as a nurse is accordingly seen as more worthy by her family, in line with their expectations of female service and citizenship. It gains her recognition in a way that munitions did not and thus it is arguably a sustaining act. Yet it is her experience of ethical awakening which leads to her choice to become a nurse. This is a moment of rejection of the government and rejection of the war: 'To tell in this plain way the violence of the act showed it as the obscenity it was.'⁶⁴ Her perspective becomes *more* critical at the moment that she becomes a recognised part of the larger national community – and the mythology of the war.

This ethical awakening is crucial to Maggie's negotiation of her identity crisis and her citizenship position. The expectations she is attempting to transform are shifting, and thus so is her practice of citizenship. As for all of the female characters, her negotiation of experience and expectation as a citizen is complicated: by her gender, by her class, and by her relationship to her family and the nation. Alice, Lorna, Charlotte, Maggie and Alexandra all fit into the joint mythical narratives of increased female freedom in the war and the futility myth; these narratives are also implicated in citizenship discourses where citizenship is earned through proving oneself to be part of the nation as a whole. Although

⁶² Ibid., p.162.

⁶³ Faulks, p.57.

⁶⁴ Breslin, p.161.

the nation features to varying degrees in these novels as justification for female characters working, all the novels make reference to a responsibility to a community beyond the family, whether that community is understood as local or national. Focusing on the First World War allows the authors to explore the value, but also the problematic aspects, of ethical responsibility and belonging to a community. This tension is of course one of the crises of coming of age, and it is further heightened by the historical context. Newbery, Breslin and Sedgwick are also portraying the struggle for female suffrage, which necessarily creates a more complicated relationship with the nation. Equally, it means that the characters' very act of insisting on their right to participate and work publicly for the nation becomes disruptive. All of the novels reflect on the limitations placed on the characters by their gender, from Alexandra, chafing under Father's vision of her life, to Lorna and Maggie's larger reflections on society's normative gender expectations. The girls react against these restrictions, and their desire to change expectations and claim their right to citizenship is, particularly at the beginning of *Some Other War* and *Remembrance*, linked to equality – of gender and, to some extent, class.

This is not to say that the novels present a singular coherent model of citizenship. The protagonists move between disruptive and sustaining practices, sometimes embodying both at the same time as they work through the process of coming of age. There is a gap between the exterior actions of the characters and their interior understanding of themselves which complicates the idea of being *either* a sustaining or a disruptive citizen. However, in their act of presenting female characters refusing to acquiesce to the historical status quo *and* presenting this movement into the public sphere of citizenship as a struggle against expectations, the novels suggest that both coming of age and acts of citizenship are struggles and require negotiation. All three also suggest that transformation of expectations is possible; it was possible during the First World War and may therefore also be possible in the present.

3.3 Male Citizenship and Doing What's Right

For female characters, the transformation of expectations is relatively straightforward: they want to be publicly acknowledged as political, responsible citizens and be able to take up a critical, engaged role in public life. Their transformation is social and cultural, but it is also implicitly and explicitly bound up with legal changes of the period. For male characters, the transformation of expectations is less clear. The legal dimension is

lacking; instead, the expectations which cause identity crises for male characters is primarily cultural. Edward, Jack, John Malcolm, Francis, Alex, Edgar and Tom are represented as coming of age in relation to a martial model of masculinity: the happy warrior, a proud patriot who is made heroic through his service to the country. This idealised model of masculinity is present in these novels as part of the historical setting. However, heroic martial masculinity has broader appeal than just as a recruitment tool. Graham Dawson argues that heroic masculinity is part of British national self-definition, claiming that '[i]dentification with these heroes [...] offers the assurance of a clearly recognisable gender identity and, through this, the security of belonging to a gendered national collectivity that imagines itself to be superiors in strength and virtue to others.'⁶⁵ Living up to the ideal of the heroic warrior here is an obligation to the national as a whole. Conversely, cultural and social investment in the heroic warrior can work to unite the national community.

However, the heroic warrior is not the only model of masculinity in wartime (or otherwise); as Trish Winter and Rachel Woodward point out:

in the figure of the warrior-hero, we find the most extreme expression of hegemonic masculinity... [However] the widely circulated masculinity of the warrior-hero is not the only military masculinity; the figure of the warrior-hero is accompanied by a range of other figures of the soldier that may be dominant or less dominant in different historical and cultural contexts.⁶⁶

Indeed, arguably the First World War is a key moment in the masculine expectation of the warrior, as the disillusioned and traumatised soldier myths both present a transition from hero to victim. Gail Braybon summarises the 'model' First World War soldier as 'young, straight from school or university, and idealistic. [...] And they are the victims of politicians and generals who exploited their idealism.'⁶⁷ The First World War soldier does not come of age into heroic masculinity, but rather finds themselves in an identity crisis, between on the one hand continuing to try to inhabit and sustain heroic masculinity or to admit to falling short and potentially change the definition of masculinity. This potential for transformation is central to male characters in the novels I discuss in this chapter, in part because it reflects YA's larger concern with models of masculinity. Kerry Mallan argues that YA novels about war provide space for alternatives to the heroic, progressive

⁶⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.282.

⁶⁶ Winter, 2007, p.61.

⁶⁷ Gail Braybon, 'Winners or Losers' in *Evidence, History and the Great War* (New York: Berghan Books, 2005), p.86-7.

narrative, which marginalises female characters and elides the violence and trauma of war.⁶⁸ Thus these novels have the potential to allow for a subversion of not just hegemonic masculinity, but gendered constructions of citizenship, and the equivalence made between national citizenship and masculinity. This suggests disruptive citizenship practices, not dissimilar to those modelled by Alexandra or Maggie. In this section, I argue that the male characters in these novels present different ways of negotiating ethical citizenship, and respond to and inhabit different models of masculinity. Central here is participation and their reasons for going to war are bound up with their coming of age as disruptive or sustaining members of a community. The male characters move through their identity crises, inhabiting various models: the heroic warrior, the sensitive patriot, the traumatised victim and the reluctant witness. These latter three models present a reaction to and disruption of the first, suggesting the ways in which experience can inform a desire to change and disrupt dominant expectations. The novels ultimately suggest that the reluctant witness is the most productive citizenship model, allowing male characters to participate as part of their process of transforming expectations, resolving their identity crisis through critical citizenship acts.

The heroic warrior model, as I suggested above, is associated primarily with the start of the war. Edgar in *The Foreshadowing* is both typical and exceptional: an enthusiastic soldier, he is not 'sensitive' or intellectual. Rather, he is unthinkingly patriotic. Within the family, he functions as the ideal man: "Edgar is fine," Father said. "He's a strong young man." [...] Tom ignored him [...]."⁶⁹ Edgar's choice to join up confirms his belonging as a citizen and as a man, as opposed to Tom, who professes pacifism. Edgar is also notably unreflective: Alexandra observes that Edgar 'never seems to worry about things, he just does them, whereas Tom worries about everything and everyone.'⁷⁰ As a participant in the nation who is supportive of the nation, Edgar fulfils all the expectations of sustaining citizenship as well as heroic masculinity, and gains a clear sense of loyalty and belonging. He also supports and reinforces Father's masculinity and authoritative citizenship. Most of the scenes in which he appears involve him being drawn into an argument with Tom, such as the scene following Tom being given a white feather:

⁶⁸ Kerry Mallan, 'Challenging the Phallic Fantasy in Young Adult Fiction' in *Ways of Being Male* (London: Routledge, 2001) ed. John Stephens, pp.150-163, p.150-2.

⁶⁹ Sedgwick, p.5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.12.

'But it's true,' Edgar said. 'You don't want to go to war. [...] There's a name for people like you.'

[...] 'You have to do your bit.' [...] 'That's all that counts,' [Father] said.

'What?' asked Tom. 'Going to war? Killing?'

'Not killing,' Edgar said. 'Doing your bit. That's all. Fighting for what's right.'⁷¹

Edgar and Father mirror each other linguistically, reinforcing their ideological link. Their language focuses on service to the nation, but implicit in this is a model of heroic citizenship. The difference made between 'fighting' and 'killing' is significant. Killing is an individual act, whereas fighting is a collective act. 'Fighting for what's right' implies a moral justification, which originates in the imagined community of the nation – a community from which, by implication, Tom (and Alexandra, recording the conversation) are excluded. This distinction is, of course, central to the paradigm of heroic masculinity – fighting is a sign of strength and determination, as long as it is for the 'greater good'. Dawson suggests that the appeal of heroic masculinity is that '[t]hose boys and men who wish and are able to identify with [heroes] may feel themselves to be in possession of the secrets of masculinity and freed from the anxieties about being "unmanly"'.⁷² Living up to the expectation of the heroic warrior allays anxiety and can work to resolve the identity crisis. Initially, Edgar seems to conform to this. He gains familial and cultural approval, secure in his sense of home and belonging. Yet the implied reader is aligned with Alexandra and her sympathy for Tom, rather than Edgar. The (moral) superiority of non-heroic masculinity is supported by the revelation that Edgar is traumatised by his war experience. When he returns home on leave, he still speaks the language of 'doing one's bit' in front of his father, but Alexandra hears him 'calling out in his sleep. Crying out. [...] he began to whimper, like a beaten dog. It went on and on, then stopped. It started again, not so loud, and stopped again.'⁷³ This represents the war's real effect on him, as opposed to what he tells his parents. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that while on leave, Edgar and Tom make up, with Edgar admitting that Tom's view of the war is the correct one. Edgar's traumatic experience transforms him from being the continuation of his father's – and by proxy, the nation's – ideology, to sharing a more critical, outside

⁷¹ Ibid., p.26.

⁷² Dawson, p.283.

⁷³ Sedgwick, p.53.

perspective, and endorsing alternative models of masculine service as equally valid.⁷⁴ Despite starting out as a patriotic figure, whose status as a (male) citizen is unimpeachable, Edgar becomes a symbol of the need for the transformation of this model of service.

The service of the sensitive patriot is a different matter. In both *Some Other War* and *Remembrance*, the sensitive patriot takes the place of the heroic warrior; here it is not unthinking investment in masculinity that is represented, but rather duty, service and citizenship are foregrounded. In *Remembrance*, John Malcolm functions as the symbol of early optimism. Similarly to Edgar, he is presented as typically masculine. He is less intelligent than his sister, Maggie, but is physically strong and handsome. He is presented as joining up out of naiveté and a sense of adventure, which take priority over national duty. Local belonging is also part of his motivation: “I so wish I was going now, with the rest of the lads,” said John Malcolm. “It’s so frustrating to be left at home and not be part of it all.”⁷⁵ This indicates a sense of communal duty. Participation becomes an implicit requirement for true belonging, as well as a measure of masculinity. Like Edgar, John Malcolm dies in the war. However, there is little implication that he was disillusioned when he died. Their deaths are framed very differently. Alexandra sees Edgar’s death in a vision, and concludes: ‘No one was brave [...] there was only horror and fear and utter bestial panic as Edgar’s party arrived in the wrong place, as they killed and were killed [...]’⁷⁶ This is a futile death, not just because it was the result of a mistake (disrupting the notion of an organised, heroic army), but also because there was no bravery, destroying the idea of the heroic warrior stoically facing death. Edgar’s death renders his citizenship meaningless; his death, rather than shoring up the values he espouses, destroys them, particularly when taking into account the identity crisis he suffered beforehand, disavowing heroic masculinity to Tom. Alexandra notes that ‘Mother and Father cling desperately to the idea that their son died a hero’s death, as if that makes any difference.’⁷⁷ The hero remains symbolic, but for Alexandra (and for Tom), he is a symbol of the need for the transformation of expectations.

In *Remembrance*, however, John Malcolm’s death is less conclusive, reflecting his status as dutiful patriot, rather than heroic warrior – although his death contains elements

⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, p.268.

⁷⁵ Breslin, p.55.

⁷⁶ Sedgwick, p.119.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.119.

of the latter model. The battle he dies in may be meaningless, but he dies heroically. Even Maggie, who is critical of the war, finds that when she hears from a fellow soldier how John Malcolm died, she 'was glad to know that her brother had been resolute and brave. To know that he had died thus [...].'⁷⁸ John Malcolm's death is held to be meaningful and his model of masculinity is positive, albeit anachronistic. His death comes at the midpoint of the novel, and it is the point at which the narrative commits fully to the disillusionment myth. His sacrifice marks the end of unquestioning participation for Maggie (and to a lesser extent, Charlotte). Whereas Edgar's death works to confirm what has already been established as true through the sympathetic perspective of Alexandra, John Malcolm's death operates more subtly. His death is not a deconstruction of his masculinity, but marks the end of uncritical, sustaining citizenship practices. The novel suggests that for his values to continue, a more critical approach must be taken to society and the nation which sends good young men to war. Ultimately, John Malcolm's death symbolises a moment of coming-of-age for both Maggie and Charlotte, making them more critical and potentially disruptive, while still finding John Malcolm's model of dutiful citizenship honourable.

The focus on heroism and on dutiful masculinity in John Malcolm's narrative places him somewhere between the sensitive patriot and the heroic warrior. By contrast, *Some Other War's* significant death is Alice's fiancé, Edward, who fits more clearly into the model of the sensitive patriot model suggested by Braybon. Sensitive, middle class, reflective and well read, Edward is not a central character in the novel; his main function is as Alice's love interest. Yet his paradigmatic function is important. It is Edward who explains the reasons behind the war, when Alice protests that surely it is Belgium's war: 'Allied countries have to help each other in a crisis like this one. The Germans haven't tried to invade England yet, but they would do if they got the chance.'⁷⁹ Edward's justification for joining the army is focused on the national cause and it is presented as reasonable. Alone amongst the novels, *Some Other War* explores the reasons for fighting in some depth, rendering Edward comprehensible and sympathetic, as well as making the national cause less immediately questionable. This adds to the impact when Edward does become disillusioned:

'I couldn't even talk to my own parents about it, when they came to visit me,'
Edward continued. 'There's no way of communicating – it's like coming back

⁷⁸ Breslin, p.249.

⁷⁹ Newbery, p.39.

from the grave...’ [...] ‘It’s as if the reality we know about – the bungled decisions, and the maiming and disfigurement, and the hopeless slaughter, all that belongs to some other war...’⁸⁰

This is the classic language of the disillusionment narrative: generational difference is highlighted, as is the incompetence of the army brass. ‘Hopeless slaughter’ chimes with the language of the war poets. This passage is evocative and emotional. In it, Edward also moves from sensitive patriot to critical witness, a shift in his citizenship construction.

This is further emphasised in his contrasting the ‘reality’ of the war, with the ‘reality’ of the home front. The war is the only reality that counts – everyone outside the war is unable to understand, and therefore also unable to critique it accurately.⁸¹ It is this indescribability which keeps Edward from being a true reluctant witness; the experience of war remains a masculine experience. However, James argues that, for male protagonists, death can function as an inscription of ideal masculinity and enshrine their perspective as correct.⁸² Thus it is Edward’s criticism which provides the title of the novel, and it is his position as a male, middle class soldier, who begins with faith in his country, but becomes disillusioned with the way the war is being fought and loses his idealism, which maps onto the expected model of the war. His death is the main tragedy of the text, providing a critique of the ‘good’, soldierly death while still sustaining his norms of service and masculine participation. As Mallan argues, the vulnerable body makes ‘the violence and reality of war become unpalatable truths which destroy the appeal of the heroic myth.’⁸³ Thus Edgar’s death presents a version of the traumatised soldier myth and, like John Malcolm’s death, marks a shift from martial masculinity to a more sensitive and vulnerable masculinity. On the other hand, Edward’s death confirms the rightness of his perspective and narrative. His death enshrines him as the ultimate symbol of the war, which, implicitly, will provide a template for the transformed expectations of the male citizen.

In *Some Other War*, this new (male) citizenship model lives on in Jack. Jack begins his narrative in a similar position to John Malcolm; however, his desire to join the army is more complicated. The army provides an escape from an untenable work situation, and part of its appeal is that the army acts as a space for ‘everyone fighting as

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.161.

⁸¹ Here Edward is also invoking Campbell’s idea of ‘combat gnosticism’, where only those at the Front can ever truly understand the war, and can never truly convey the horror to those at home.

⁸² James, p.53-5.

⁸³ See Anderson, p.7-9; Mallan, p.153.

equals', a transformation of class expectations and increased access to equal citizenship.⁸⁴ However, personal glory is also a motivator: 'he and [...] the boys he had been at school with, had talked of enlisting. They had thought only of the adventure, the opportunity to prove themselves, the glamour and excitement of it.'⁸⁵ Jack becomes a soldier for more complex reasons than Edward's political and national motivation, or John Malcolm's unthinking sense of duty. Jack is focused on his individual position, and his class status. Jack's participation is, however, crucial, both to his construction as a citizen and his gender performance. The novel repeatedly stresses how brave Jack is. He is '[...] one of the first boys in the village to take the King's shilling, and the youngest too.'⁸⁶ Jack is perceived as a model of ideal masculinity by his immediate community, a better citizen than his former employer, Phillip, who signs up reluctantly. This hierarchy of participation is implicitly supported by Alice, Lorna and Edward; thus Jack's bravery is held up as a virtue to be approved of by the implied reader. Thus Jack also straddles models of masculinity, complicating elements of the heroic warrior, while also having his bravery and service repeatedly emphasized.

Heroism, in the both the myths of the reluctant and disillusioned soldier, is less about fighting (although bravery in battle remains important), and more about protecting the men that the hero fights alongside. At the front, Jack rescues Philip; he also acts as a protector to Will, a 'fair-haired bloke that looks like a girl' who is underage.⁸⁷ There is a hierarchy of masculinity here, positioning Jack as superior to Philip and Will. While the war may be futile, bravery is still valorised – and this bravery is linked to full participation, sustaining both the national-citizen model, and a model of masculinity bound up with martial prowess. *Some Other War* reiterates the privileged position of the soldier: Jack is the focalising voice of the disillusionment narrative, but the value of his opinion is based on the fact that he is a heroic soldier, in the model of the heroic warrior. However, as Jack becomes more disillusioned, his masculinity and citizenship status also become more complicated. Just as Edward complains of distance between his 'reality' and the home front, Jack's sense of belonging moves from the home front to his unit. The unit is portrayed as a domestic grouping, cooking for each other, cutting each other's hair, and Jack's protection of Will can also be read as parental.⁸⁸ This performance of home

⁸⁴ Newbery p.38.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.38.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.42.

⁸⁷ Newbery, p.53.

⁸⁸ Newbery, p.131-135.

disrupts the 'natural' link between home, family and nation. It in turn disrupts the notion of national-citizenship, insofar as loyalty is felt first towards the unit, and the unit is distinct from the nation. On the one hand, all soldiers represent the nation, and are positioned as its ideal citizens. On the other hand, they are removed from the physical nation, and outside the (heterosexual) family model.

The war works to both sustain and disrupt Jack's citizenship practices and, in turn, his masculinity. Early on, Jack associates soldiering with securing *heterosexual* masculinity: 'he wanted to prove himself as a soldier first, before seeking other forms of initiation into manhood.'⁸⁹ Soldiering is equated with heterosexual performance, which is linked to the home front and sustaining the nation. Towards the end of the novel, however, Jack has a queer 'lapse':

Jack watched Stephen's progress through the dappled shade, aware only of his beauty; his slight, well-proportioned body [...]. Stephen, poised on the edge of the diving board, saw Jack looking at him and smiled, and Jack turned away abruptly, suddenly visualizing the pale, slender body mangled and mutilated like those he had seen in No-Man's-Land.⁹⁰

Here there are two things here which disrupt the link made earlier between soldiering and heterosexuality. Jack's gaze is homoerotic, if not explicitly sexual, disrupting his secure sense of his own sexuality and implicitly, his connection to the nation, in the form of his fiancé, Harriet, and his unborn child. Furthermore, Jack is projecting the violence of war onto Stephen's body, and it is this imagined transfer which fully brings the horror of war home to him. It is through this experience of disconnect from the heterosexual-national expectation that he becomes fully critical and disillusioned. It is at this point in the narrative that there is no 'going back'; his sustaining citizenship practices, just as his position as the masculine ideal, are disrupted by his experiences of longing, attraction, and potentially alternative family construction. Jack's masculinity, then, is more complicated than Edward's, yet, in certain ways, Jack conforms as much to the classic disillusionment narrative. At the end of the novel, he has become the inheritor of Edward's model of masculinity: youthful, critical and less stereotypically patriotic than the comparative Victorian mode of masculinity. His experiences disrupt his notions of masculinity and citizenship; yet these are contained within the war. Homoeroticism is an inherent part of the myth of war. Anthony Easthope argues that '[i]n the dominant

⁸⁹ Newbery, p.93.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.155.

versions of men at war, men are permitted to behave towards each other in ways that would not be allowed elsewhere, caressing and holding each other, comforting and weeping together, admitting their love.⁹¹ The heroic warrior model permits a sensitivity that would not normally be allowed in civilian life. By the end of the novel, Jack is potentially critical, but his criticism is sanctioned by his earlier heroism. He is also reintegrated into the heterosexual imaginary: Stephen is dead and Jack is married with a child. His masculinity remains with the hegemonic model of male citizenship. Even Jack's disillusionment does not significantly disrupt his citizenship position, but his transition from heroic warrior to reluctant witness suggests the potential for transforming masculinity.

Edgar, Edward, and Jack all present variations on the theme of the disillusioned hero, somewhere between the heroic warrior and sensitive patriot. By contrast, Alex, in *Remembrance*, presents a different model of heroism. Working class, underage and motivated by revenge – he wants to kill the Germans who killed his brother, John Malcolm – Alex does not easily map onto the disillusioned soldier. Like Jack, he begins as a pro-war character. However, he is restricted by his age and is, as a child, consigned to domesticity. Early in the novel, he explicitly compares himself to Maggie: 'At the moment even his sister, who was a girl, was doing more than him.'⁹² Alex perceives himself to be even further removed from political power than his sister. This contrasts with the empowerment he feels when he is permitted to join in with recruitment exercises: 'Alex thought he would burst with pride. For the next hour, while the makeshift recruiting office was open, he stood to attention behind the two soldiers ready for further orders. And he watched closely everything that went on.'⁹³ Not unlike Jack, the army provides Alex with a clear sense of community and belonging, where he has power in the sense of acting as part of and on behalf of a group, with a clear sense of expectations and identity. When Alex joins the army, it is in response to two sets of loyalty: towards the imagined community of the army (represented by the recruiting officer) and towards his family, specifically his brother. Both of these loyalty claims are about identity and a desire to have an (accepted) group identity, now that John Malcolm is dead. These dual claims both translate into a hatred of Germans, which appears to be an act of sustaining national citizenship. The recruiting officer who signs up Alex notes that 'It was a few years since

⁹¹ Anthony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do* (London: Paladan, 1986), p.66.

⁹² Breslin, p.112.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.49.

he'd seen that kind of enthusiasm, and it gladdened him to know that there were still some young men who wanted to fight back against tyranny.⁹⁴ Alex may not express any explicitly patriotic sentiment, but he is implicated in a national model of citizenship, and specifically the ideal of the heroic warrior.

Unlike John Malcolm or Francis, Alex's narrative is not primarily about his participation in the army. The community of the army proves unsatisfying; in his first attack he finds that '[t]here was no excitement, no joy of marching forward together to defeat the enemy, only a dull tense pain of dreadful anticipation in his gut and then an explosion of gunfire and confusion.'⁹⁵ For Alex, battle holds no opportunity for heroism or pride. His participation is not presented as worthwhile on an individual or national level, nor does it satisfy Alex's need for community or revenge. In the heat of one engagement, Alex is separated from his battalion, and finds himself in a ditch with a German soldier, revealed to be a young boy:

Alex tightened his grip on his rifle. He knew what would happen now. [...] The enemy would recognize his uniform and try to beg for mercy.

But the boy said nothing. [...] His neck was exposed. Alex swallowed the bile from the back of his own throat. He stared at the boy awaiting death by his hand. Then with a quick movement Alex flung his rifle from him, crouched down onto the earth and put his in his hands.⁹⁶

The German boy – Kurt – disrupts Alex's desire to participate as a soldier and, by implication, as a national citizen. Kurt is a mirror of Alex: they are a similar age, both children caught in the war. The moment their eyes meet is a moment of mutual recognition of shared humanity, beyond the safety of home, nation and family. Alex's decision *not* to kill Kurt is not just an ethical decision. It is also what Isin calls an act of citizenship, acts which 'create new possibilities, claim rights and impose obligations in emotionally charged tones; [...] and, most of all, are the actual moments that shift established practices, status and order.'⁹⁷ Alex's act of not killing disrupts his performance of masculinity and citizenship, which he equates with soldiering; he becomes simultaneously a child again (in the act of mirroring) and a disruptive citizen (in the recognition of his ethical obligation to an equal). He disrupts the expectations not just of the army, but in a less obvious way, of masculinity: his bravery is the act of not killing

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.219.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.258.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.269.

⁹⁷ Isin, 'Introduction', p.10.

and taking on a 'feminised' caring role. In resisting the urge towards violence – an urge based on his own experience of loss as well as national and cultural expectations – Alex becomes the potentially most transformative model of masculine citizenship in the novel. He also creates the possibility of a movement away from national citizenship, to a definition which can encompass responsibilities to those beyond the national border, citizenship based on human rights, not on national identification.

This citizenship model emerges from Alex's resistance to violence and his desire to care; he suggests a model of masculinity which could translate into model of citizenship based on human rights – on empathy and shared humanity. As such, he is also outside the three 'classic' models of First World War mythical masculinity. His questioning of the war is not based on a broad sense of witnessing, as with Edward; nor is it based on feelings of affection or loyalty towards fellow soldiers. Rather it focuses on cross-cultural empathy and the potential for refusing violence. It also creates a new model of bravery: Alex's final dilemma is whether to sacrifice himself: 'Kurt's best hope was with the German doctors [...] But Alex knew that if he gave himself up he might be shot.'⁹⁸ This provides a transnational model of ethical citizenship which is not tied to the national cause and disrupts the idea of the state as all-seeing or inescapable. Alex's experience of war do not just lead to disillusionment. They lead to a re-thinking of his place in the world and his responsibility to the other. However, Alex, although a focalising character, is secondary to the central trio of Maggie, Charlotte and Francis. Furthermore, for all that his act of not killing and then subsequent rescuing of Kurt is disruptive, it is also outside the national myths of the war. Margot Norris argues that imagined communities 'can have tremendous political potency', while 'imagining oneself in communion with a dead enemy [...] tends to be confined to poignant fantasies of individual identification and empathy.'⁹⁹ Alex's affection, empathy and care is individualised, and does not extend beyond Kurt into a larger political movement.¹⁰⁰ This is reflected in Alex's description of his experience of the war: "I was cut off with another lad..." [...] Alex looked around at the faces of his family. He would wait [...] before telling them the full story of his last days of the War.'¹⁰¹ For Alex to be recognised

⁹⁸ Breslin, p.275.

⁹⁹ Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p.10.

¹⁰⁰ Although Alex's model of human rights-based citizenship arguably wins out in the long run, through the post-Second World War settlement.

¹⁰¹ Breslin, p.299.

as a citizen of the nation and family, he must disavow his acts. He cannot transform the expectations of masculinity, citizenship or nationhood, because his experience is too far beyond the norm. In some ways, Alex ends the novel by coming into a new identity crisis; he has achieved some measure of social acknowledgement, but at the cost of keeping his experience of the war to himself, for a while at least.

Remembrance ultimately endorses Francis as the main model of male citizenship. He fits more easily into the model of critical participator, both sustaining and disruptive. Francis – and, albeit to a lesser extent, Tom in *The Foreshadowing* – deviates from the myth of the disillusioned soldier, as he begins the narrative as anti-war. Francis and Tom, much like Charlie in *Private Peaceful*, have less of a journey to go on in relation to the war, positioned as they are as the reluctant soldier from the start. They are represented as discursively correct and do not change their opinion of the war, being reluctant witnesses. As such, they are indicative of a shift in the myth of the war which happened since *Some Other War* was published in 1990. The main tragedy is not (just) the loss of optimism and naiveté, but the violence of the war, the class and familial power imbalances it exposes, and the communal conflict it breeds, provoking an identity crisis in the male characters, who do not change their opinions, but face heightened social consequences. The latter is reflected in the representation of the social pressure put on male characters to join up: both Francis and Tom are given white feathers. This is framed explicitly as a judgement upon their masculinity: “It is usually very easy to tell the type of man who will not join up,” said the older woman. “They have a certain weakness in the features.” // “Cowards cannot hide their cowardice!” the younger woman cried out [...].¹⁰² Francis’ masculinity and citizenship is called into question and he is publicly rejected by at least part of his community. A similar event takes place in *The Foreshadowing*: Tom is handed a white feather while out with his family.¹⁰³ He gets no support from his parents or local community, however, just as no one protests against Francis’ feather. Their status as visible ‘deviants’ from the masculine and national norm places them outside the community of the state/nation.

However, Francis and Tom *are* seen favourably by other focalising characters. Their exclusion comes (primarily) from the relatively faceless community – significantly, the white feathers are given by strangers – and from their parents. This is most explicit in

¹⁰² Ibid., p.100.

¹⁰³ Sedgwick, p.25.

The Foreshadowing, although Francis also receives his share of judgement from his mother, leading to an exacerbation of the pain of the disconnect between expectations and experience that is not seen in *Private Peaceful*, for example, or in *Some Other War*. However, their female peers – Maggie and Charlotte in *Remembrance*, Alexandra in *The Foreshadowing* – support them. Both novels also allow significant space for the articulation of their arguments; their reluctance is not ultimately associated with cowardice. Tom’s aversion to killing is discussed above, and explicitly contrasted with Edgar and his father, two models of hegemonic masculinity. For Francis not going to war is a more explicitly political position:

‘Who in their right mind would want to go to war? [...] What makes a human being want to kill another who has done him no personal harm? Patriotism. The one thing that can unite people. It takes priority over religious differences, or class, or money, or social position [...]. Men and women will die for their country, and unscrupulous leaders use this.’¹⁰⁴

Francis explicitly critiques nationalism, significantly incorporating both men and women into a model of sensitive patriotism; there is no suggestion of bloodthirst here. Francis’ argument creates a dichotomy between the state (which is manipulative and potentially cruel) and the citizenry (who are good and dutiful, and misled by the state). The values of this citizenry – respect, dutifulness, and trust in government – are still seen as good; these are the values embodied by John Malcolm. Yet Francis becomes the symbol of the new form of citizenship; as he implicitly argues, this form of sustaining citizenship is no longer safe. There is a need to be critical, well-informed and sceptical of government, because the war reveals a government which is always already potentially dishonest.

Despite being established from the novel’s start as anti-war, Francis does eventually join the army. Given that both John Malcolm and Alex are also sent to the front, it strikes me as significant that Breslin feels the need to place Francis there as well. It does not, as I note above, change his view of the war; however, as the symbol of new citizenship in the novel, it seems that he *has* to go, otherwise he is not a credible critical voice. This is particularly interesting given that Francis is not portrayed as brave. He struggles to deal with his own emotions, as well as the breakdowns of those around him: ‘Was it the man’s crying that made him uncomfortable? [...] Did he despise the man because he had the courage to weep? He had little experience of this.’¹⁰⁵ This indicates

¹⁰⁴ Breslin, p.14.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.214.

the lack of male emotional intimacy Francis experiences – unlike Jack. It also prefigures his own breakdown, which results in him being sent behind the line as a staff officer. This lack of ‘manliness’ manifests in his relationship with Maggie: ‘Maggie turned to the trembling man by her side [...] and pulled him against her. [...] “Lie quiet here for a bit,” she murmured, and she cuddled him against her own body.’¹⁰⁶ She is empowered through her war-work. By contrast, Francis’ work disempowers him. Even though he never wanted to be a soldier, falling short of the heroic warrior ideal still makes him feel disenfranchised and potentially limits his social recognition.

However, this disempowerment does not last; by the end of the narrative, he stands as the character with the greatest power to transform. Francis declares that ‘I will write an account of what I saw and did. It will serve as some sort of record for the future.’¹⁰⁷ His purpose is to warn others and to make the point that the government cannot be trusted, that the populace must educate themselves to be critical: the same points he makes at the beginning of the novel. As Campbell notes, British readers of war poetry are trained to see ‘the poet as a witness to the slaughter of the Western Front, the man whose biography remains important because he was actually there and can thus provide us with the Truth of War [...].’¹⁰⁸ However, whereas Campbell argues that the power of this figure is precisely his inability to fully transmit the experience of war, in *Remembrance*, this is both possible and a moral good. To be properly critical and to be allowed a voice in the narrative of the war and the nation still, one must participate and witness. By sending Francis to the front, Breslin reiterates the narrative of the soldier as the *true* witness to the war and the reluctant witness as the most influential model of masculinity. It is Francis’ narrative which will serve as the template for a new model of disruptive citizenship, as he subverts the heroic narrative, but retains his social power. Thus he is allowed to enter the public debate through writing about the war. By contrast, Maggie says ‘I would like to do some work which helps spread the use of books. It appeals to both my organising skills and my belief that Knowledge, more than anything else, can overcome oppression.’¹⁰⁹ Whereas Francis acts as a creator of new models of citizenship, transformation expectations, Maggie’s role is to disseminate, secondary to Francis’ superior position as participant and re-teller – and citizen.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.254.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.302.

¹⁰⁸ Campbell, 1999, p.210.

¹⁰⁹ Breslin, p.295.

Like Francis, Tom in *The Foreshadowing* signs up unwillingly, although his motivation is revealed to be losing his brother at the moment when they had finally come to recognise each other as equals:

I felt I understood [Edgar] he said [the war] terrified him. He told me to go on trying to be a doctor. [...]When I heard, I wanted to die too, and I couldn't think of any easier way to do it, than to come out here.¹¹⁰

Tom is already traumatised when he signs up. Edgar's recognition of him as citizen and admission that Tom's perspective is correct is the only recognition he receives within the narrative, and without it, he loses his sense of belonging to the nation and to his family. His masculinity and his citizenship are both compromised. However, he does not present a disruption, necessarily. At the moment of compromise, he sublimates himself to the national narrative, disappearing into the army to die. Significantly, this is presented as a *familial* trauma, rather than a consequence of the disillusionment narrative, marking Tom out as a different model of masculinity than the sensitive, traumatised intellectual embodied by Francis and, to a lesser extent, Edward. At the novel's end, Tom is injured and sent home to his family, whereas Alexandra remains at the front. She ends the narrative as an active citizen; Tom remains passive, relegated to the domestic sphere where his troubles initially began. Tom presents the extreme of the disillusionment myth – he is entirely passive and entirely a victim, and is not in a position to become a critical citizen. In *The Foreshadowing*, disruptive citizenship is possible only through activity and active participation, and thus there is only one new proposed model of citizenship – embodied by Alexandra, not by Tom.

The citizenship practices of the male characters are more ambivalent than those of the female characters and subsequently the success of the novels in presenting the possibility of transformed citizenship expectations is less straightforward. The novels all to a greater or less extent critique the construction of the heroic warrior and the notion of masculine service as necessarily martial. Yet at the same time, even the reluctant witness gains his power from *servicing*; without participating in the war in the armed forces, it seems, male characters cannot be disruptive. In having this as a criteria, the novels end up sustaining a model of citizenship which sees service in the armed forces as part of masculinity (or at least the willingness to defend the nation and serve in the army if asked). However, these novels also suggest that the transformation of masculinity remains

¹¹⁰ Newbery, p.268.

unfinished; whereas the female characters appear to have their identity crises solved by the end of the novels, Jack, Francis, Alex and Tom remain in limbo, their narratives unfinished – and their transformation still in process.

3.5 Conclusion

In these novels, a successful coming of age is an act of transformation, not just of self, but of larger social expectations. It is for this reason that, with the possible exception of Maggie in *Remembrance*, the female characters' coming of age narratives feel, overall, more complete. From Alexandra, working away from her family, having succeeded at her quest, to Alice, striking out for London and work in the East End, the female characters come of age twice: firstly by leaving the home to work and secondly, by gaining social acknowledgement, thereby transforming the social expectations placed upon them.

Alexandra and Alice provide interesting contrasts in their transformations: Alexandra's defiance of expectations is explicitly bound up with her family, whereas Alice arguably transforms political expectations in her commitment to social work. By the end of *The Foreshadowing*, Alexandra reflects: '[o]ne day, I might go home to my parents. I will write to them soon. I don't know what they will say, but for now, I am happy.'¹¹¹ Her life is now hers to live on her own terms; although she allows for the possibility of returning home, it is not at Father's beck and call, but rather when she is ready. She accepts the uncertainty of their response to her change as well, but does not let that change her mind. In short, she has transformed herself from dutiful, feminine daughter, to working adult woman, a citizen in her own right. On the other hand, Alice does not break with her family – there's no evidence in the text that her mother disapproves of her choices, or that Jack sees her decisions as questionable. However, Edward and Lorna's parents, who as middle class conservatives stand in for a nationalist narrative of the war, voice their disapproval of Lorna's choices and Lorna openly admits they will be disappointed at her choice to become a pacifist and move to London. In spite of this, Alice sees her future moving in a similar direction:

There could be no more looking back; Greenstocks was in the past now, irrelevant. [...] [S]he thought, with a sudden intuition that her future would lead her to London, away from the village. Lorna would be living in the city, for her pacifist work.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Sedgwick, p.276.

¹¹² Newbery, p.230.

There is a clear indication here that Alice's social and cultural expectations have changed – or rather, that she is intending to continue the work of changing them. She refuses to be limited by expectations of femininity *and* class expectations, instead intending to leave her village and work against deprivation and the class system.

For Alice and Alexandra, as well as to a lesser extent, for Maggie and Charlotte, the end of war sees their identity crises resolved or settled; they have gone through ethical dilemmas and faced up to the gap between experience and expectation, and resolved it through their transformation of expectations. Thus at the end of each narrative, they have a sense of purpose and *acknowledgment*; a desire to serve, but also a clear sense of how to serve ethically. Erikson argues that this is the key marker of coming of age, arguing that there is 'an age-specific *ethical* capacity in older youth' the development of which is the 'true criterion of identity'.¹¹³ It is this ethical capacity which is presented as at the heart of the citizenship practices of both male and female characters, but which is most sustained in female citizenship practice, evident in their transformation from domestic to public, from dependence on family to independently seeking their way in the world. In doing so, they also resolve experience and expectation. For female characters, although they struggle and resist familial and social expectations, their service and citizenship is acknowledged and their experience recognised as significant – both in the novels themselves and in their meta-textual addition to the myths, of the nurse, but also to the *futility* myth more broadly. This is further bolstered by the implied readers' knowledge of female suffrage's implementation, an act foreshadowed in the novels' language of female participation, service and power.

Female coming of age is marked by the implicit legal recognition of suffrage (even if, historically, none of the characters would be old enough to meet the requirements of the Representation of the People Act of 1918); however there is no such legal change to mark the transformation of male citizenship. For the male characters – and Francis and Tom in particular – their leaving home is not necessarily voluntary, and the price they pay for leaving the home is potentially higher: Edgar and John Malcolm do not return home at all; Francis and Tom are traumatised by the war; Jack loses Stephen, who dies in front of his eyes. These losses and traumas are less easily overcome and this is reflected in the endings of these novels, which – with the exception of Francis' ending – are inconclusive. Jack returns to marry a woman he does not love; Tom is back with his

¹¹³ Erikson, p.39.

parents after having been shot by Alexandra (in order to save him); even Alex, whose experience of war is in some ways the most ethically 'easy' to process, comes home to find that he must be silent about what has happened to him. Francis alone is given a clear ethical task to do in writing about his experiences, which integrates his experience into his expected life, and allows him to make an argument for the need to transform expectations of male service and citizenship. However, it is too easy to dismiss the male characters' coming of age as citizens as less powerful than the female characters' purely in terms of conclusiveness of their endings. If transforming female citizenship means leaving the home, and learning to serve ethically while also gaining social acknowledgement, it follows that the reverse might be an ethical transformation of male citizenship. When *The Foreshadowing* has Tom return home, acknowledging his vulnerability and allowing him to no longer have to fit into the model of the heroic warrior, it implicitly suggests that Tom's experience has changed Father's view of him, changing familial expectation of male citizenship. Similarly, Francis' ability to accept his own traumatised response to the war and articulate this to his mother and to Maggie encourages them to accept a transformed model of masculinity. Jack sits less comfortably here. However, he ends *Some Other War* determined to be a different kind of father to his new-born son, producing in turn a new kind of man – a potential generational remaking of expectations.

As these summaries suggest, for female characters it is a social and *legal* transformation which allows them to come of age. For male characters, coming of age is more rooted in familial recognition, in a disruption of familial expectations. This may be seen as a reflection of a contemporary crisis: as Kim Reynolds observes, YA fiction often engages with the perception that 'at all levels in Western society families – once the bastion of children's security – are failing to work, and that this is both a symptom and part of the cause of national and international cultural failures.'¹¹⁴ This failure is part of the post-Cold War identity crisis, coming out of the eighties rhetoric on family values. However, in *Some Other War*, *Remembrance* and *The Foreshadowing*, the authors suggest that rather than return to family values, a transformation of the family model is needed. *Remembrance* gestures most clearly to this: at the end of the war, Maggie finds that her father 'was less voluble, less assured in his observations on the state of the world. Her mother, although still physically frail, still self-effacing, seemed more quietly in

¹¹⁴ Reynolds, p.153.

control.¹¹⁵ War has transformed the gender roles in the family, allowing for masculine vulnerability and female self-assurance. This mirrors the transformation of age politics: the children have gained more experience than their parents in all of the narratives, and their views and engagements with the world begin to hold more weight – particularly in terms of the novels’ readers. The novels propose that new models are needed and go some way towards creating them, in terms of male vulnerability, female ethical service and in re-balancing the power between parents and children. The balance between male and female transformation – resolved and unresolved, legal and social, moving between disruptive and sustaining in turn – suggests that change is possible for adolescents, and that it remains needed.

Of course, it is important not to overstate the radicalness of these novels: they move between sustaining and disruptive positions as much as their characters do; they are embedded in the national myths of the soldier and nurse; and in their focus on women’s citizenship and right to work, they show what is now seen as an accepted transformation. Then there is the limited diversity of the characters: although they come from both working and middle class backgrounds, and from rural and urban settings, they are all white and *British*. Despite *The Foreshadowing*’s Brighton setting, there is no evidence of Indian troops in England; and although *Remembrance* does have an Irish character, she is a British patriot and the Easter Rising is not mentioned at all in the novel.¹¹⁶ *The Foreshadowing* and *Remembrance* also both include glimpses of non-white British experiences of the war (Alexandra notes that ‘Blighty’ is a borrowing from Indian troops and John Malcolm is described as ‘aware of his own place here with men from Newfoundland and South Africa, from India and Australia and New Zealand, men from Tyneside, Northumbria and Wales.’).¹¹⁷ But these are *glimpses* only – these troops do not speak or feature beyond a brief reminder of the war’s status as world-wide and Britain’s status as an empire. There is no sense of conflict present here: particularly in John Malcolm’s reflection, there is only a sense of unity and shared purpose, eliding several tensions at the front. Thus these novels invite an empathetic understanding of the past which is nonetheless restricted to the dominant group at the time – they function cross-culturally only as a reiteration of the centrality of white British experience to the re-telling

¹¹⁵ Breslin, p.280-1.

¹¹⁶ *Some Other War* does deserve special mention here as in the trilogy, Newbery does go on to present Irish characters who are conflicted about British colonialism in Ireland.

¹¹⁷ Sedgwick p.150; Breslin, p.126.

of the First World War. However, the inclusion of these glimpses may at least provoke curiosity and act as impetus for the reader to find out more about the historical context of the Empire at war.

Ultimately, these novels and their representation of citizenship practices seek to encourage, rather than to critique, even as they lean towards disruptive citizenship within the historical context of the war. This encouragement to change also suggests Landsberg's reasoning for the importance of prosthetic memory: through building empathy and understanding for the past, the novels suggest a politics for the contemporary based on a greater respect for difference. In this model, returning to the First World War in these novels is not just about the importance of remembering, mourning and not repeating the horror and the violence. These are novels about ongoing ethical struggles between experience and expectation which suggest that there are repeatable models for overcoming social expectations and that by engaging empathetically with the past, these can be learnt and emulated. What is remembered becomes the success of female transformation and the beginning of male transformation through coming of age. What is also central here is the struggle: whether sustaining or disruptive, citizenship and coming of age are both work, and require service and effort. Transformation, most of all, demands a willingness to constantly re-evaluate and reassess one's ethical and cultural position – whether it is Alice and Maggie considering their work and how best to serve, Alex deciding not to kill Kurt, but rather give himself up in Kurt's stead, or Edgar reaching out to Tom to admit that he has come to share Tom's view of the war, coming of age in these novels is a difficult, ongoing, and complex process, made more so by the expectations which always press down on the characters. By framing their narratives through participation and citizenship, Newbery, Breslin and Sedgwick keep the focus squarely on the effect of the characters' experiences on the world around them, and the possibility of change, as opposed to Tommo's arc in *Private Peaceful*, even if that change is limited by convention. This may make these novels more anachronistic, but it does also make them more hopeful: they gesture towards the future, not just for the characters, but for their readers.

Chapter 4: Nostalgic Reflections, Restorations and Memories

4.1 Introduction: Reading Nostalgically

In this chapter, I read Pat Barker's *Another World* (1998) and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child* (2011) as nostalgic fictions. Both novels are on the surface anti-nostalgic in their refusal to allow the past be a refuge. However, I argue that their representation of nostalgic characters and their positioning of the First World War ultimately makes them texts which expose both the weakness and potential of nostalgic engagement. The novels present characters who look to versions of historical events as a way of understanding failed identity crises and, as such, are seeking either (in the case of Nick in *Another World*) an alternative model of expectations, or (in the case of Paul in *The Stranger's Child*) as a site for vicarious experiences which can substitute for one's own. Unlike the young adult novels of Chapter Three, these texts suggest that transformation of expectations has its limits, particularly when drawing on the past. Yet in these novels, looking back also presents a potential way of using previous events to reconfigure the present, even if this potential is not clear to the characters in the novels themselves. *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child* both represent history as a series of sites for re-thinking the present and making clear the failures of the present. This intervention into the way the past is reproduced and re-told for contemporary audiences is informed by the characters' and the texts' anxieties about contemporary adulthood and their nostalgia for a (seemingly) simpler time. Alastair Bonnett argues that nostalgia is simultaneously a longing for a more straightforward life, and a longing for a time when emotions were more intense.¹ This can also be read as a desire for youth, although I complicate that in this chapter arguing that characters long for a time they themselves did not live through. In both *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child*, failing to come of age and the instability of adulthood are seen as motivating and inviting a nostalgic, backwards gaze. In this chapter, nostalgia provides a framework for discussing the treatment of the war as a point of origin, as a disruption between the ideal past and problematic present, and as a dramatization of the historical consequences of failing to satisfactorily resolve the identity crises of adolescence.

The themes of this chapter intersect with the previous three chapters: *Another World* functions as a response to the memorial cycle which *Birdsong* and the *Regeneration* trilogy are part of. *The Stranger's Child*'s positioning of schooling, and

¹ Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p.30.

academia as sites of collective remembrance reflects on similar themes to those that appear in Chapter Two. This chapter also functions as a companion to Chapter Three: however, whereas the novels discussed there look outward, *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child* focus on interior conflicts, exploring cultural crises through the characters' struggles with finding a satisfactory model of expectations and thus experience coming of age 'correctly'. These novels touch on the three central notions of coming of age which have circulated throughout this thesis: the war and its young participants; the war as a central historical moment of coming of age; and the war as an event which must be made relevant for the next generation. However, these novels distinguish themselves from the previous texts in this thesis because they function as commentary on the nineties' shift and the changing nature of First World War representation.

I argue that these novels are inherently nostalgic. However, I am distinguishing their nostalgia from the popular understanding of the term as retrospective, conservative and reactionary. John Kirk notes that 'nostalgia carries with it a number of negative connotations'; it is perceived as 'a sentimental response to the fear of change, a reaction which distorts the past in a search for, or assertion of, some lost golden age.'² This popular understanding focuses on nostalgia's longing for the past, seeing this as an inability to deal with the present, as well as an idealisation of a past which is misinterpreted or distorted in order to fit with what Svetlana Boym describes as the nostalgic's desire for 'a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment.'³ Nostalgia is also linked with a desire for childhood, for the time before a 'coarsening of our senses' which is associated with adulthood.⁴ *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child* explore an ambivalent relationship between the First World War and the present. They present nostalgic characters, while simultaneously critiquing the simplification and celebration of these characters' visions of the past. Both novels engage explicitly with the writing and re-writing of history; their intertextual and metatextual approach makes the belief in a 'true' or singular vision of the past impossible; the home which they seek to return to, or the model of adulthood which they idealise is impossible to recreate. Yet

² John Kirk 'Recovered Perspectives' *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.40.4 (Winter, 1999), pp.603-626 p.605-6

³ Svetlana Boym *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p.49.

⁴ For an in-depth discussion of childhood and nostalgia, see Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, 'The Dimensions of Nostalgia' in *The Imagined Past* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.1-17, p.5.

Nick's misreading of his grandfather, Geordie, in *Another World*, and Paul's meticulous digging at Cecil's family secrets in *The Stranger's Child* emphasise these characters' longing for that certainty and continuity. Both are driven by their nostalgia to attempt to recover and reconstruct the past and its potential as a way of negotiating their crises in the present; in order to create a stable sense of self, or a place of belonging, even as they know they will fall short of this. That this nostalgia is suggested in the *pleasure* both Nick and Paul find in their interactions with specific models of the past – Geordie for Nick, Cecil for Paul. Although Nick finds his grandfather's illness difficult, his memories of Geordie are a reassuring contrast to the chaos at home. As for Paul, his research into Cecil gives him a sense of purpose, belonging and power. The connection between the characters' crises and looking to the past is further reflected in the novels' scepticism of reliable narration: both novels contain moments which disrupt or disturb any confidence in the real and the knowable, whether through the gothic elements of *Another World*, or through *The Stranger's Child*'s revelations of untruths in previous sections.⁵ These moments disrupt the nostalgic backwards gaze, but they also invite a deeper engagement with the past, and particularly, they suggest paying closer attention to what is assumed to have been lost. Bonnett argues that nostalgic longing has the potential to be 'a moment of creativity, of discord and danger' suggesting political possibility.⁶ This interpretation focuses on nostalgia's disruptive potential, as it becomes a mode of critiquing the contemporary, opening a space for uncertainty and instability, and allowing for a more complex analysis of the relationship between past and present. These novels are nostalgic fictions precisely because they represent negotiations between the desires of their characters for stable pasts, and the underlying suspicion that these are an impossibility.

These novels complicate the notion of nostalgia as 'safe' or conservative. In my analysis of them, I draw on Boym's description of two forms of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. She argues that '[r]estorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity.'⁷ The restorative version is very close to the popular understanding of the concept. It is closely associated with the idea of heritage and the national past as a unified narrative, usually a

⁵ Boccardi argues that realist narration becomes an object of nostalgia after 1979; I do not get into that here, but it is worth noting in relation to the 'fantastic' disruptions of *Another World* and repeated re-writings of events in *The Stranger's Child*.

⁶ Bonnett, p.10.

⁷ Boym, p.vxiii.

heroic march forward. Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, allows for the gaps. It may still long for continuity and a single vision of the past, but this kind of nostalgic also appreciates the fact that this is an impossible desire. Both forms are closely allied with reimagining the past. 'The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot' which is incorporated into a narrative which articulates (usually national) origins.⁸ These narrated origins are closely linked to the idea of home which should ideally be 'a collective one. Never mind if it is not your home; by the time you reach it, you will already have forgotten the distance.'⁹ Restorative interpretations elide uncomfortable aspects of the past, writing new stories where the historical record is silent, creating totalising histories. It is not simplistic or always a conscious misreading of historical events. However, its restoration is always an attempt to reinstate a completed narrative where gaps or ruins might disrupt or disprove the preferred vision. By contrast, reflective nostalgia is deliberately multiple and conflicting. It too is drawn to the point of origin, but it can never find it: 'the home is in ruins, or [...] has just been renovated and gentrified beyond all recognition.'¹⁰ This can be seen in the novels' landscapes in particular: the declining Newcastle industrial spaces or the Sawle home, Two Acres, being repurposed. Whereas restorative nostalgia uses the past to justify the present, eliding any sense that the home might have moved or be unreachable, reflective interpretations recognise and dwell on the impossibility of return. Boym argues that '[t]his defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future.'¹¹ For the reflective narrators, this act is not a way of erasing the gaps in the narrative; rather, it is a way of exploring them, of engaging with how they came to be and to mourn for that which has been lost without necessarily recapturing or recreating it.

I use nostalgia to mean a mode of reading – and misreading – which depends on the interpretative intentions of the nostalgics themselves. Boym argues that the past, in the nostalgic paradigm, does not as such exist; rather, it is in the re-reading that it comes alive. I argue that this nostalgic interpretation can be both a deliberate misreading and an unconscious one. Ultimately, facticity is less important than the emotional needs and desires of the nostalgic, fulfilling a desire for identification and the shoring up of identity.

⁸ Ibid., p.49.

⁹ Ibid., p.44.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.50.

¹¹ Ibid., p.50.

The *potentially* deliberate nature of this misreading illustrates the cultural power of nostalgia. Both restorative and reflective versions engage with a mythological past, and the dominant cultural narrative, and it is this which appeals particularly to those for whom the past is not memory, but history. However, nostalgia is necessarily also linked to memory, because it is to do with identity, needs and emotional connections. It is here that this concept to some extent crosses over with prosthetic memory, particularly in Landsberg's reading of white immigrant narratives and the desire to re-write the past in order to belong, which I explore further in the section on *The Stranger's Child*. As with Landsberg's argument about prosthetic memory and the importance of distinguishing personal and prosthetic memories, the danger of nostalgia is in its lack of acknowledgement of the act of construction.¹² This is *disguised* in restorative and *highlighted* in reflective nostalgia. The nostalgic framework is both a reading strategy performed by characters in the texts and a structure of longing which informs the texts themselves.

Another World and *The Stranger's Child* are novels with a similar interest in the past and a similar use of coming of age. On the surface, however, they appear to be very different novels, presenting heterogeneous approaches to the war and to the relationship between past, present, history and heritage. *Another World* is a novel about the death of veteran Geordie and the passing on of his memories, and the murder of children by siblings in the past and present. Geordie's slow death happens alongside his grandson Nick's growing suspicion that his daughter and stepson might be re-performing a Victorian tale of murder as their antipathy towards Nick and his new wife's son becomes more evident. By the end of the novel, these two narrative strands intersect, suggesting an inability to escape the past which is emphasised by the sudden reappearance of Geordie's traumas from the war. *The Stranger's Child* represents that past and the present without framing the former as memory. Beginning in 1912, it follows the (cultural) evolution of the fictional Georgian poet, Cecil Valance. The first section sees him writing the poem, 'Two Acres', which becomes his afterlife: he is killed in the war (not shown in the novel) and the rest of the text concerns itself with working through the evolution of the memory of the war, with Cecil as the central figure holding the different sections together. Recurring themes are apparent, however: both novels share an interest in the *use* of the dead soldier, particularly in the way the soldier and his attendant myths are marshalled for

¹² See Landsberg, p.2-3.

imaginative and emotional purposes. Both texts are engaged with the act of creating and repurposing memorials and biographies. Catherine Belsey argues that '[t]he more totalising the narrative, the more readable the history; but the process of translation itself, the act of *making* history, is erased.'¹³ These are novels interested in exposing the act of making histor(ies), but more than that, they are engaged with what drives people towards these 'readable' histories. They track the longing behind restorative nostalgia through their characters, while portraying the possibility of reflective interpretations in their structure. However, this is further complicated by their approaches to coming of age.

The nostalgic readings in these texts touch upon coming-of-age themes in different ways: the beautiful young man who dies in war appears in both texts as a 'readable' site of lost potential; as students of a curriculum which offers up the myths of the war as the correct interpretation of the past; and as the future of remembrance as the generation with first-hand experience of the war disappears. In *Another World*, the adolescent children also function to undermine Nick's restorative nostalgia, gesturing at the possibilities of a more reflective approach. Meanwhile, Geordie's trauma makes him regress and relive the defining event of his adolescence, the moment Nick misreads as cementing Geordie's masculinity. Nick wishes to 'fix' his adulthood and come of age into the stable model of expected masculinity he projects onto Geordie; however, rather than sorting this crisis, Nick becomes a warning of the consequences of restorative identification. In *The Stranger's Child*, Cecil Valance's appeal draws in part on his youth, but also that, in dying young, he is open to nostalgic identification and reinvention, answering the needs of those who look back. Chief among these is Paul who, in engaging with Cecil and Daphne, wishes to substitute Cecil's coming of age for his own, attempting to acquire Cecil's experiences and structures of belonging through his research and writing on Cecil. These novels reiterate the war's construction as a moment of troubled coming of age, complicating its effect on the individual. They also depict extended identity crises, as the flawed coming of age processes depicted do not create a secure identity, but rather leave Nick and Paul still searching for a resolution.

The characters draw on a variety of sites, people and events for their nostalgic reconstructions, including the poetry of the war, the memoirs of the twenties and thirties, the re-imaginings of the war in the sixties, and the fictionalised representations of the

¹³ Catherine Belsey, 'Reading Cultural History' in *Reading the Past: Literature and History* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000) ed. Tamsin Spargo, p.106.

nineties. The novels move between the symbolic 'grand' narratives and individual stories. Thiepval stands in for the value and the problems of collective remembrance in *Another World*, and Geordie functions as a site of nostalgic reading for Nick in terms of his masculinity, shored up by his participation in the First World War. In *The Stranger's Child*, the Valance house, Corley, functions as a metaphor for the changing times and the decline of the present. Equally, Cecil becomes a sign of nostalgia for Paul, symbolising a lost glamour and queerness, values which are enhanced by Cecil's position as a war poet. John Su argues that sites such as these provide a chance for the texts to 'draw upon not only memory but also nostalgia, when they claim to recover not only what should have been remembered and preserved but also relationships and communities that *could have been*.'¹⁴ Reading them nostalgically, rather than as sites of factual events reveals potential other, perhaps even new, narratives. This potentiality is particularly attached to youth, albeit not always positively: the trope of the wrong son dying appears in both *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child*. Yet the possibility of renewal and change is still there.

In nostalgic fiction, the potential for transformation comes out of representing the past, and mapping the different nostalgic investments in events, sites and texts. Belsey argues that '[r]epresentational priorities change as values change, and history at the level of the signifier records these shifts in values.'¹⁵ This is part of her argument for a new form of cultural history and historiography, but a similar impulse informs these nostalgic fictions. *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child* are part of what Todman argues is a narrowing down of representational priorities with regards to the war, while simultaneously representing this shift.¹⁶ The First World War has many signifiers which work together to create the mythology of the war; part of the power of these texts is to make these signifiers, such as the dead young man, ambiguous and ambivalent signs, questioning their purpose in the context of the mythology and in present society. These texts are engaged both critically and textually in the representational shift, and part of their nostalgia is linked to this sense of changing remembrance. These texts, then, have historiographic aspects which are central to the notion of reading and (reflective) nostalgia they contain. They trace the creation of myths about the war, and engage with the (nostalgic) desires which underpin these myths. The historiographic impulse is central

¹⁴ John J. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.12 [emphasis in original].

¹⁵ Belsey, p.107.

¹⁶ Todman, p.221.

to the focus on reading in the texts and my use of reading as an analytical framework in this chapter. It is the act of revisiting which creates history, and, as I have argued in previous chapters, the question of reading the past is routinely presented as part of coming of age and coming to terms with the present.¹⁷ However, to be able to do this, there needs to be an existing framework and this framework is constantly changing and developing, on both a collective and individual level.¹⁸ These novels present two different versions of the war, yet both operate within the frameworks of restorative and reflective nostalgia, frameworks which both complicate and emphasize the degree to which the collective and the individual are inextricably bound up together.

In his book, *Soldier Heroes* (1992), Graham Dawson points to the importance of cultural myths, arguing that '[c]ultural imaginaries furnish public forms which both organise knowledge in the social world and give shape to the phantasies within the apparently "internal" domain of psychic life.'¹⁹ In this chapter, I understand nostalgia as a way of making sense of and reshaping (particularly masculine) cultural imaginaries in order to furnish a vision of the past which makes up for what is lacking in the present. In doing so, I follow Su in arguing that nostalgia can offer 'palpable images of human needs that are not being met. If nostalgia does not necessarily assist individuals in articulating solutions to these needs, it at least enables them to register the needs themselves.'²⁰ In *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child*, these needs are shaped by anxieties around coming of age. The nostalgic gaze is presented as a way of coping with the fact that Nick and Paul do not feel secure in their adulthood, in their masculinity, in their claims to belong in a historical and communal space. However, it is not their nostalgic readings of the past which create these crises. Rather, I am arguing that their nostalgia is a symptom of their failed coming of age experiences. In these nostalgic fictions, the desire for certainty and the characters' belief that they have found a stable and secure reading of the past is constantly undermined by the gaps and uncertainties of the novels. Both novels are ambivalent at best as to whether the characters' coming of age will be possible. Yet both suggest that there is a value in nostalgia and that, in acknowledging the gap-filled, uncertain past, this may help create a new future and a new version of coming age.

¹⁷ Belsey, p.105-6.

¹⁸ Joep Leerssen, 'Novels and their readers, memories and their social frameworks' *Performing the Past* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010) ed. Jay Winter, Karen Tilmans, Frank van Vree, p.251-2.

¹⁹ Dawson, p.48.

²⁰ Su, p.175.

In *Another World*, I read the representation of Nick's understanding of Geordie as a construction of nostalgic masculinity and secure identity. Nick moves between understanding and misunderstanding Geordie – and by proxy, the war – in part because he is struggling to create an alternative set of expectations to shore up his own, failing, masculinity and thus resolve his identity crises. In doing so, Nick repeatedly fails to recognise Geordie's past trauma and misreads the contemporary repeating of that trauma in his own family, with consequences for his children in particular. In *The Stranger's Child*, I read Paul as the main source of nostalgia in the text, arguing that he perceives his class and sexuality as lack for which his research and identification with Cecil, the war poet, seeks to compensate. Paul reads Cecil as both modelling a queer life, and as an aspiration in class terms, and in doing so, reads him restoratively, attempting to create a single narrative of Cecil which Paul can inhabit. In doing so, Paul both disrupts dominant narratives about sexuality and reiterates the very class structures which exclude him. His attempts to take on Cecil's experience ultimately come up against the reliability of expectation and fail, exposing the impossibility of restorative nostalgia and implicitly suggests the need for reflective approaches to the past.

4.2 *Another World*: Nostalgia and the Past Returning to the Present

Another World is a representation of the long shadow of the (unrecognised, unacknowledged) past, including the First World War, in families and their homes. The novel also functions as a commentary on the state of First World War commemoration in the 1990s – a memorial cycle of which Barker is herself a part. This metafictional dimension is evident in the novel's central themes: trauma and familial violence, particularly childhood violence, complicating and in some cases critiquing Barker's previous themes of gender and sexuality. Crucially, it is a novel which resists and disrupts the idea of innocent children, and childhood as a sacred or protected space. Even the notion of the naive young man sent off to be slaughtered in war is dismantled, creating a critique which links the experiences of childhood to the continuing identity crisis of adulthood. In some ways, *Another World*'s deconstruction of childhood innocence is the inverse version of *Remembrance*'s Alex plotline, insisting that the war's violence is not a state of exception. Given this anti-sentimentalism, *Another World* could appear immune to nostalgia reflected in its use of present tense. Present tense suggests a rejection of the idea of longing for the past, creating a clear split between the 'now' of the novel and the

past of Geordie and the house Nick's family move into. However, Geordie's flashbacks are also in present tense, suggesting the fragility of this form of narration, and its potential to be mistaken for certainty.²¹ I argue that nostalgia plays a significant part in the memorial culture Barker critiques and in her representation of disturbed adulthood. In this novel, nostalgia is a symptom of a larger crisis of adolescence and adulthood.

At the end of the novel, Fran, along with the children, teen Miranda, pre-teen Gareth and toddler Jasper, visit Yorvik Viking Centre, going on a ride which travels backwards 'pulling them away from the present.'²² Their journey backwards takes them past historical figures who 'slip past and vanish: an air-raid warden from the Blitz, an unemployed man in a cloth cap, a First World War officer, his arm raised, cheering, a lady in crinoline and so on'.²³ This journey can be seen as a symbol of the past in the present – the past encountered is fragmented, appearing in glimpses and not necessarily tied to a specific narrative. Although they are momentary, each of the figures of the ride stand in for a larger cultural myth, and they all have a certain amount of nostalgia attached to them. It is this nostalgia which makes them appealing as a commercial ride. Their position as part of a (commercial) entertainment product glosses over the unpleasant aspects of these mythical moments: the destruction of the Blitz, the hard grind of poverty, the violence of the First World War. These figures allude to the past, yet evade it at the same time. As I will suggest in this section, it is this act of simultaneous remembering and forgetting which is drawn out in *Another World*, asking questions about the act of remembrance and the role of nostalgia in representations and constructions of the past, and the relationship of nostalgia to coming of age – individually and nationally.

Although, like most of Barker's novels, *Another World* features third-person narration which moves between characters, the protagonist of the novel is Nick. It is his point-of-view which bookends the novel, and he is its most prominent focaliser. Two generations removed from the war, it is his perspective on his dying veteran grandfather Geordie which is at the heart of the novel's positioning of the First World War in the present. This is a relationship which is based significantly on Nick's *reading* of Geordie. Nick remembers that '[o]nly Grandad, silent, wreathed in blue cigarette smoke, never changed; belonged only to one world.'²⁴ Geordie is compared to Nick's father – a

²¹ It is productive to consider this in relation to *Private Peaceful's* use of past and present tense, where present tense is linked to emotional involvement and past tense is used to invoke certainty

²² Pat Barker, *Another World* (Chatham: BCA, 1999 (1998)), p.231

²³ *Ibid.*, p.231.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.54.

headmaster at a private secondary school, playing the role of middle class authoritarian. Geordie appears in Nick's understanding as a constant. He inhabits a single, coherent world, embodying a secure model of masculine adulthood. By contrast, Nick sees his father crossing between two worlds – home and school – and code-switching between the two. Nick's own performance of class and masculinity is also shifting, changing depending on who he is talking to; he lacks a coherent sense of self. Anne Whitehead argues that a recurring theme of Barker's work is the failure of masculinity, which manifests in *Another World* in Nick's character.²⁵ He struggles to deal with his fragmented family, fails to be an authority figure for his daughter, Miranda, or step-son, Gareth, and seems unwilling to recognise the threat Miranda and Gareth pose to his and Fran's son, Jasper. Whitehead argues that Nick 'prefers not to have to confront the more disturbing aspects of reality and his desire to forget represents a defensive reaction.'²⁶ This inability to accept or face up to the reality of his family – whether it is the elision of his father, his misreading of Geordie, or his inability to acknowledge the potential violence of the children – is presented as a failure of Nick's masculinity. It is equally a failure of his adulthood. Nick's connection of his failing adulthood to Geordie's perceived success is simultaneously perceptive – Nick's crisis is not unique, and the sense of failed masculinity is, in fact, a historically recurring crisis – and restoratively nostalgic, as Nick fails to see their similarities.

Instead, Nick sees Geordie as his opposite: he is constant and reliable, where everything else around Nick is fragmented, changeable and treacherous. Su suggests that '[t]he fantasy of return that drives these [nostalgic] narratives enables the articulation of disappointment with present social conditions'.²⁷ In this case, Nick's nostalgic reading is bound up with his disappointment with adulthood and his own sense of failure to understand and live up to the expectations of masculinity, even if Nick fails to fully realise this. Geordie, for the majority of the narrative, appears as an object of nostalgic masculine performance for Nick. Geordie is presented as a survivor:

[Nick] starts to think how much longer his grandfather has had than his father, how much longer he's had than he might have had. Lucky to survive the bayonet wound. But even without that – Loos, the Somme, Passchendaele – the odds must always have been stacked high against his reaching twenty.²⁸

²⁵ Whitehead, p.22.

²⁶ Ibid., p.19.

²⁷ Su, p.173.

²⁸ Barker, p.127.

Here again, Nick contrasts his father and grandfather. His father's death becomes another failing, a softness which Geordie has overcome despite the odds. In his consideration, Nick gestures towards the two central aspects of his understanding and nostalgic idealisation of Geordie – his position as a veteran and as a working class man. Dawson argues that '[m]ilitary virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance have repeatedly been defined as the natural and inherent qualities of manhood, whose apogee is attainable only in battle.'²⁹ This does not map entirely on to Nick's admiration of Geordie, as Nick acknowledges the horror of Geordie's experience of the First World War. Yet the values associated with British military masculinity are central to Geordie's appeal, and made even more impressive by Geordie's youth when he went off to war. Stoic endurance, the sublimation of suffering, the silent carrying on despite violent experiences or physical injury are all associated with the idea of 'an ordinary man who, by living long, had become extraordinary.'³⁰ This is a version of the soldiering myths, but one which focuses on the ordinariness of survival. It is this which structures Nick's assumption that Geordie has been stably and certainly himself from the cusp of adulthood. In Nick's reading, Geordie became an (stable, admirable) adult through and despite his war experience. The war is an ambivalent event in Nick's reading, and yet it retains a powerful nostalgic appeal in its ability to shape and shore up adult identity.

This is also reflected in Nick's understanding of Geordie as a 'real' working class man, as opposed to Nick's father's crossing between middle and working classes.³¹ Early on in the novel, Nick observes how 'the streets run in parallel lines down to the river, to the boarded-up armaments factory, [...]. Before the First World War 25,000 local men worked in that factory.'³² This is an image of decay and decline, which contrasts with the productivity and community of before, and sets up the war as the pivotal moment of transition. Even the workforce is displaced: 'Now it employs a few thousand who drive in from estates on the outskirts of the city.'³³ This is a process of cultural fragmentation which mirrors Nick's perception of his own life. Colin Davis suggests that in representations of the past as revenant, always on the brink of recurring or reasserting itself, the present is structured by 'the perceived isolation, fragmentation and relativity of

²⁹ Dawson, p.1.

³⁰ Barker, p.71.

³¹ Indeed, the myth of the heroic, stoic working class man functions as a counterpoint to the soldiering myths present in *Another World*, subverting the middle classness of those myths, and adding another dimension to the representation of suffering in the myth.

³² *Ibid.*, p.11.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

the postmodern condition.³⁴ Nick's own life bears this out: his dysfunctional, fractured family is the centre of the novel's violent impulses, and is marked by a sense of disconnection and isolation from each other. By contrast, Geordie appears to Nick to be a link to this disappeared community of working class families and friendships. Boym argues that '[m]odern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values.'³⁵ Although Nick's nostalgic reading of Geordie and the working class past he embodies does not glorify the past to this point – as the passage above indicates, Nick is shown to be aware of the hardship of Geordie's life, even excepting the war – Geordie still appears to embody a stability and link to a community which Nick does not have access to, a community with clear values and shared expectations and experiences.

Nick's inability to negotiate a secure adult identity are reflected in an inability to recognise the inner lives of himself and his family. Reflections are a recurring theme of *Another World*, gesturing at the many mirror-events which structure the narrative, most obviously the parallel narrative of the Fanshawe murder (siblings Robert and Muriel murdering their younger half-brother, James) and Nick's daughter, Miranda, and step-son, Gareth's, violent impulses towards their half-brother, Jasper. This establishes an ambiguous link between Nick and William Fanshawe, father of the family, but Nick refuses to acknowledge this connection: 'Nick's gaze tracks from one young face to the next, and a gust of despair sweeps over him. Not his own – Fanshawe's.'³⁶ He comes close to recognising his own fears, but at the last moment, he displaces them onto William Fanshawe. Whitehead suggests that this refusal to face the reality of his present is reflected in Nick's inability to recognise his own reflection throughout the narrative.³⁷ Most significant here is Geordie's wartime mirror, which is presented as having had an appeal for Nick from childhood:

Whenever Nick asked, Geordie took [the mirror] down and let him look into it, but the reflection that peered back at him was blurry, swollen, distorted by the irregularities in the metal, never the clear reflection you got in glass. Only it didn't break. Grandad dropped it on the floor once, to show that it didn't break.³⁸

³⁴ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p.156.

³⁵ Boym, p.8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.104.

³⁷ Whitehead, p.19-20.

³⁸ Barker, p.57.

The mirror here functions in two ways. It illustrates, as Whitehead notes, Nick's inability to fully recognise and identify himself, but it also gestures towards what Nick finds appealing about Geordie: his constancy, and his ability to survive (the mirror does not break). Furthermore, Geordie's ability to recognise himself in the mirror (he uses it to shave) suggests that Geordie is more secure in his masculinity and the expectations he lives through.

Geordie's stability sets him up as a contrast to Nick, but he is also an object of nostalgia: for Nick, for whom he symbolises a stable, communal masculinity which Nick is unable to attain, but also for Helen, and, implicitly, the reader. For the majority of the novel, Geordie remains the sympathetic, potentially heroic figure Nick sees him as, and this position is intimately bound up with his position as a veteran of the war. It is as a veteran he comes to Helen's attention, but it is also his experience of the war which shores up his coherent identity in Nick's reading of him. For both, he is a working class variation on the disillusioned soldier; Geordie is at once both a warrior and a heroic victim of more powerful people, deserving of Nick and Helen's sympathy, but also their admiration and respect. However, Geordie's trauma begins to disturb Nick's ability to read Geordie as a model of secure masculinity. In his discussion of Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*, Leese argues that Barker's use of shell-shock 'signals the repression of men, their status as victims of, and rebels against, imposed gender roles.'³⁹ Barker uses her characters' inability to integrate experience to disrupt normative notions of masculinity in *Regeneration*. Geordie's late in life traumatic flashbacks do disrupt his gender performance, rendering him vulnerable. His trauma is mirrored by his collapse from age and cancer. Barker does not shy away from frank descriptions of his failing body, which gesture towards the failure of his apparently constant masculinity and the collapse of his adulthood, as he requires more and more care even as his mind stays sharp. His trauma is further linked explicitly to the crisis of family relations, stemming as it does from the death of his brother, and thus is just as much about growing up as it is about his gender. Furthermore, his trauma is also linked to the violence of domestic life as well as the war, expanding on the *Regeneration Trilogy*'s movement away from the war as the original site of trauma.

Geordie's traumatic episodes are primarily reported by Nick: 'His nights, recently, have been terrible to endure. Terrible to witness. Worse than that, he's actually become

³⁹ Leese, p.175.

quite dangerous.⁴⁰ It is difficult to say whether 'endure' refers to Geordie or to Nick and Geordie's daughter, Frieda. Certainly 'witness' refers to Nick's experience, thus presenting Geordie's failing body and the associated failing of adult masculinity as a crisis for Nick as much as it is for Geordie. Yet it is not just the failing of Geordie's body and mind which changes Nick's vision of Geordie. Nick appears to some extent more comfortable when he is able to speak for Geordie and take on his experiences. By contrast, Geordie's decision to begin speaking about the war disrupts Nick's vision of him:

All through Nick's childhood Grandad had said nothing. His body with its ancient wound, as hard to decipher as the carving on a rune stone, had been left to speak for him. Over the past twenty years, the time he should have been dead, he's talked endlessly, delivering his stark and simple warning, but now they've come full circle. There he is again, silent, under the wreath of smoke.⁴¹

The imagery of constancy remains present, even as Nick tracks behavioural change. Geordie is associated with ideas of 'ancientness' and a 'rune stone', which positions him as almost preternatural. He becomes a symbol of the past for Nick, a sign of a stability which has now passed. His speaking out then has to be re-worked in order to fit into this image of stability and so Nick describes Geordie's witnessing as a single 'stark and simple warning'. In doing so, Nick misreads or ignores the nuances of this message, seeing it as (just) a warning against war, when it is also an implicit warning about what is happening in Nick's family and specifically between his children.

This nostalgic construction of Geordie is part of Nick's positioning him as a secure link to the past. However, this construction is fundamentally flawed, and as such requires Nick to misread and misinterpret Geordie in order to retain a consistent narrative. Kirk, in his construction of nostalgic memory, argues that '[t]he structure of feeling of nostalgic memory turns on this tension, then, between recovery as reification of subjectivity and history or recovery as process – an insistence on presence and continuity bound up with inevitable change and reconstruction.'⁴² Nostalgia at once prioritises the personal perspective and requires a sense of 'objective' connection with the past. Geordie's position as an object of nostalgia is complicated by his participation in the memory process. This tension between being an object and subject of nostalgia is central to his relationship with Helen, the woman interviewing him for a book on veterans of the

⁴⁰ Barker, p.59.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.163.

⁴² Kirk, p.611.

First World War. Her relationship to Geordie, again described by Nick, is painted as (pleasantly) combative: 'Helen, with her Oxford First. Geordie with his board-school education, shovelled into one dead-end job at the age of fourteen and then, aged eighteen, into another. It was an unequal contest. Geordie won.'⁴³ They are described here as opposites and in opposition: they differ in class, education, gender and age – and Nick makes clear which of these positions he finds more attractive or desirable, ignoring any points of similarity between Helen and Geordie. However, this does not stop him from returning to Helen as a source of comfort at the end of the novel, nor does it blind him to Helen's effect on Geordie, making him more lively and active again. Nick's observations of Helen and Geordie, then, are also marked by jealousy: that Helen gets the access that Nick to some extent refuses in his inability to let go of Geordie as an unchanging symbol. Of course, Helen herself is also a nostalgic reader. However, given her acknowledgement of subjectivity, hers is more a reflective nostalgia, less invested in masculinity and working class identity for her own sake. As with Sarah in the *Regeneration Trilogy*, Helen seems immune to the crises which consume Nick (and Geordie). It is through Helen's notes and recordings that Nick is able to access Geordie more completely, and these which reveal the trauma at the heart of the novel.

This is not to say that Helen's relationship with Geordie is free from misreadings. Rather, she appears to want a vision of the past which maps onto the fragmented and disrupted concerns of the present. In her project, she attempts 'to get Geordie to frame his war experience in terms of late-twentieth-century preoccupations. Gender. Definitions of masculinity. Homoeroticism.'⁴⁴ This is an attempt to re-write Geordie's experience to fit a contemporary paradigm, and reflects a desire to reconfigure adulthood as always already compromised. It also suggests the shifting nature of the soldier's mythical status in the war: sensitivity becomes more important in the nineties. However, Helen's foci also acknowledge a desire to see normative expectations of masculinity transformed. The novel implicitly questions what a contemporary audience gets out of reading about the First World War. Helen draws attention to how looking back on, and investigating the past can also potentially distort it. These acts of seeking answers to contemporary concerns risks presenting versions of past events which are not immediately recognisable to those who witnessed them. Su argues that 'if nostalgia does not assist directly in

⁴³ Barker, p.83.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.83.

imagining a better future, it enables a more precise sense of how previous systems of social relations failed to address genuine human needs.⁴⁵ Helen's questions about gender and sexuality map onto Nick's concerns about his own masculinity, drawing attention to the nostalgic desire of both of them to grasp *how* Geordie was changed by the war and what that means for their discontent with present normative expectations and how that affects lived experience, specifically of masculinity. Both attempt to read Geordie as a site of potential for what could have been a better future, but has been co-opted by the disappointing present. However the conversations between Helen and Geordie, and later Helen and Nick, open the avenue for a more honest view of the past, which accommodates both the positives and the negatives, allows for the discussion of trauma, and may, in turn, allow for the transformation of expectations.

Another World questions the reasons of Helen and Nick for returning to the past. It also explicitly draws attention to the audience for the past, and particularly the war. Nick moves from noting that 'Helen was interested in the reasons for these changes, in the social forces that had obliged the young Geordie to repress his memories of fear, pain, bitterness, degradation, because what he had thought and felt at that time was not acceptable' to observing that since the sixties, there has been an audience which 'couldn't get enough of fear, pain, etc. The horror, the horror. Give us more. Suddenly a large part of Geordie's experience was "acceptable", though still not all.'⁴⁶ This move from Helen's (academic) interest in the war to a non-specific popular interest draws attention to the complex and ethically problematic relationship between memory, history and collective interest. There is a tension between Helen, Geordie and the assumed audience's desires. Catharine S. Brosman notes that writing about war operates around a central ethical tension between reporting/representing war and fetishizing it – on one hand, representing war can gesture towards the horror of war and the effect of war on those who fight. On the other hand, war is entertainment; it provides a vicarious thrill for the reader, an intensity of emotion which is not necessarily found anywhere else.⁴⁷ This tension is present and questioned in *Another World*. Through Helen's writing, Barker is able to question the range of desires behind the memorial wave of the nineties of which she herself is part, and question why the past holds such appeal. None of the motives for

⁴⁵ Su, p.175.

⁴⁶ Barker, p.82-3.

⁴⁷ Catharine S. Brosman, 'The Functions of War Literature', *South Central Review* (1992 Spring, Vol.9(1)), pp.85-98; p.88-90.

turning to the past are simple. Even the audience's desire for horror is mediated by the acknowledgement that it is their shift in taste or understanding of the war which permits Geordie to speak and begin to come to terms with his experiences in the war. Furthermore, the novel implies that Nick's analysis is too simple: it is not just horror which makes the public return to the First World War, and his desire to examine it is not purely an engagement with a familial past.

Rather, the turn to the past can potentially signal a desire to find some meaning in the war which will in turn give meaning to the present. Nick is not exempt from the same impulses he attributes to the public he dismisses: to insert himself into the story, to see the experience of war as desirable or in some other way, affirmative. Caring for Geordie, he finds himself identifying and 'play-acting' Geordie's experiences and language. Describing the effects of Geordie's trauma, he observes: 'Night's being turned into day, the upside-down time of the trenches, funk holes by day, working parties and patrols at night. Geordie's living to the tick of a different clock.'⁴⁸ This language borrows heavily from established tropes of the war, particularly the idea of the reversal of time in the trenches.⁴⁹ It is also indicative of how much Nick feels involved in Geordie's world – it is only in the last sentence that it is made clear that this is Geordie's trauma, not Nick's. Nick is aware of these slippages. Speaking to Helen about an incident when he chased down a sleepwalking Geordie through the Newcastle streets, he says: 'I spent part of last night crawling on my hands and knees across bloody No Man's Land.'⁵⁰ He mentally caveats this: 'Load of pretentious crap [...]. He'd been nowhere of the sort.'⁵¹ This immediate self-correction gestures towards the same awareness which also allows Nick to see the popular response to the war as a hunger for horror and pain, for experiences the audience themselves have not had, suggesting a reflective critical approach. However, this awareness does help Nick see that his own response to Geordie is heavily structured by his own concerns about his masculinity and failings as a father. Nick's positioning of Geordie as a restorative symbol of nostalgic masculinity has led him to identify with him beyond an empathetic link. Instead he imagines himself as *part* of the war, taking on Geordie's identity and experiences, albeit briefly. It would be wrong to say that these moments are enjoyable for Nick – pleasure is certainly not the main motivation for his

⁴⁸ Barker, p.148.

⁴⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 (1975)), p.52.

⁵⁰ Barker, p.168.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.168.

involvement with Geordie and it is not the dominant emotion associated with his retelling of the sleepwalking incident. However, his 'slip' of calling it No-Man's Land gestures at the attractiveness of the intensity of that experience. Nick acknowledges the horror and trauma of the war, but at the same time, the momentousness of the experience clearly appeals on some level.

Nick recognises that this dramatic impulse of self-insertion into the war is ethically questionable, negating or minimizing Geordie's actual experiences and memories. Nick's impulse speaks to the influence Geordie has on him, as well as gesturing towards the complex relationship to the past which survivors have. Brosman argues that:

just as guilt for surviving may motivate a former combatant to re-experience in fiction or verse his war time memories, a sense of guilt on the part of those who did not fight in recent wars – too young, too old – can explain the taste of some for war writing.⁵²

This idea of war writing as catharsis and a chance to expunge the guilt of not knowing is interesting to consider in the context of Nick's focalisation, and contributes to the reflective element of his nostalgia and his occasionally critical approach to the expected response to the war. Geordie is clearly a central figure in Nick's life, a huge influence over his understanding of himself, and his central model for functional adulthood. He also functions as a 'war text' for Nick. However, Nick's drive to understand and identify with his grandfather is not just about the war – it is as much about Nick's desire to discover a roadmap for solving his identity crises or, failing that, find an event to pin the loss of stable expectations to. His longing leads to a critical misreading of Geordie, and what Geordie is trying to tell Nick about the war and about himself. When, at the end of the novel, it is revealed that Geordie killed his brother and is unable to be clear on whether this was a mercy killing or murder, it mirrors the crisis in Nick's own life, where Miranda and Gareth both appear to want to kill Jasper, whether consciously or unconsciously. However, although Nick identifies the war as an ambivalent, transitional space, he does not carry that analysis over to adolescence as a potentially liminal (violent) space, despite Geordie's hints. In doing so, Nick also misses an opportunity to assert himself as a good father – and as a stable adult.

Nick is aware of the tension between Geordie and Harry (even after Harry's death) throughout the novel. He notes that after Harry's death, Geordie's 'mother [...]

⁵² Brosman, p.95.

turned to him and said, “It should have been you.”⁵³ Nick links this to Geordie’s cancer: ‘I think he needs to believe it’s the bayonet wound that’s killed him. I don’t pretend to understand it, but I don’t think it’s just confusion or ignorance. He wants to believe it.’⁵⁴ Nick’s narration circles around the knowledge of the connection between Harry’s death and Geordie’s recurring nightmares, Geordie’s obsessive return to his youth which echoes the troubled dreams and ‘hauntings’ of Miranda and Gareth. In much the same way, Nick appears aware of the mirroring of the tension in the Fanshawe house – even before the reveal of the murder: a toddler killed by his half-siblings – and the tension in his own family. Indeed, when a painting of the Fanshawe family is revealed in the house he and his wife are renovating which indicates the murderous tensions in the family, Nick notes that: ‘Probably the same thought occurs to all of them, but it’s Miranda, her voice edging up into hysteria, who finally says what they’re all thinking. “It’s us.”’⁵⁵ The fact that Nick believes that they *all* have the same thought shows that he is not ignorant of antagonistic currents in the children’s relationship, but he represses this and ignores it, thus exposing Jasper to the violence of his half-siblings much as Nick leaves Geordie without a family member to confess to. Given a chance to acknowledge the family in crisis, with the past appearing as a very clear warning, Nick chooses to ignore these messages because they do not correspond to his restorative desire: to see Geordie as a stable figure and through Geordie, recover his own sense of stability.

The potential violence of the children is exposed during a visit to the beach, where Gareth attacks Jasper by throwing rocks at him. This event becomes pivotal, shifting Nick and Fran’s abilities to lie about what is happening between the children. During this visit, however, Miranda muses that: ‘When she was old [...] she’d look back and think how happy she was today, because she was young and the sun was shining and Dad was still alive. And none of it would be true.’⁵⁶ Significantly, this observation is given to an adolescent character on the cusp of the coming of age transition, clear-eyed about the changes between childhood and adulthood, gesturing towards this understanding of adolescence as a moment of *clarity*, as opposed to the crisis of adulthood. By the end of the narrative, Nick is trying to erase what he knows about Geordie and about his own family, unwilling to face up to the idea that uncertainty and violence may have always

⁵³ Barker, p.59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.59.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.216.

been a part of coming of age. Instead, he seeks comfort in the graveyard where ‘the innocent and the guilty, the murderers and the victims, lie together beneath their half-erased names, side by side, under the obliterating grass.’⁵⁷ The end suggests that Nick remains committed to his misreadings. Miranda’s prediction that a nostalgic desire for an idealised past will override a willingness to face up to the past proves true. In *Another World*, restorative nostalgia appears dominant, only disrupted by trauma or violence – and even that proves possible to elide or re-write. However, the gaps between Nick’s assumptions and readings open up for a reflective reading. Although the text itself forms part of a nostalgic look back at the war, by relocating to the present and having Nick as a central focaliser, the gaps and ambiguities of the narrative create a space for reflecting on the consequences of Nick’s restorative desire’s consequences, and what it might mean to allow that what he desires – secure models of adulthood, masculinity, family – may never have existed.

4.3 *The Stranger’s Child*: The Nostalgia of Gaps

Nick’s nostalgia is explicitly familial, and although it is class-driven, it is ultimately specific in its attachment to Geordie. Thus Nick’s understanding of the First World War – although he acknowledges other cultural influences – does seem to be dependent on Geordie’s (expressed) experience of the war. By contrast, in *The Stranger’s Child*, nostalgia is often removed from familial connections. Through its structure of related, but not necessarily linked episodes spanning from 1913 through to 2009, the novel presents a version of a historical overview of the changing status and understanding of the First World War, examining the mythologies which Nick both rejects and unconsciously buys into. *The Stranger’s Child*, then, is about the drive to *acquire* an emotional investment in the past and the ways in which this can be facilitated, as well as its ethical and cultural consequences.

In her chapter on American immigration narratives and the use of prosthetic memories as a way of assimilating into a new ‘American’ identity, Landsberg argues:

Memories cannot be counted on to provide narratives of self-continuity. Memories of the past do indeed structure identity, but no single “real” memory determines identity. Which in a range of memories determines identity is at least partly the result of the agency of the rememberer.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.278.

⁵⁸ Landsberg, p.64.

Implicit in her argument is that this is equally true – if not more so – for prosthetic memories as it is for ‘organic’ memory. Yet where organic memories can at least be presumed to have a basis in the lived experience of the individual, prosthetic memories have no such requirements and can be adopted from whoever and wherever, and often take the form of what could be described as restoratively nostalgic narratives. In the context of American immigrant self-imaginings, Landsberg argues that, significantly, in these reworkings of the individual’s identity, ‘inclusion in the American nation does not change or challenge the notion – or complexion – of America but instead reinforces it. [...] the immigrant narratives reveal how limited the possibilities were for prosthetic memories.’⁵⁹ In *The Stranger’s Child*, Hollinghurst presents various nostalgic renditions of the past which, particularly in the case of Paul Bryant, takes on the form of prosthetic memory. However, whereas Landsberg’s immigrants attempt to take on the signifiers of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and erase any traces of their ‘otherness’, Paul vacillates between what he wants to hide (his class and educational background) and what he wants to make more public (his queerness). Thus the object of his nostalgic desire is Cecil Valance, a First World War poet. Cecil as a nostalgic figure fulfils several roles for Paul: as a setter of queer expectations that otherwise do not exist and as a vicarious experience of class and authority Paul cannot access due to his status as illegitimate and working class.

Paul’s personal restorative nostalgia is mirrored by the broader cultural transformation of Cecil Valance and the First World War in relation to the shifting mythologies of the war. *The Stranger’s Child* documents the way in which the memories and myths surrounding the First World War and the war poets, are in constant flux. Individuals and groups can edit or reject aspects of the mythology that do not fit in with the immediate needs of the present, whether the nostalgic individual or group. In the second section, ‘Revel’, which takes place in 1926, a biography is being compiled of Cecil, at the behest of his mother, and mythmaking is already in full force. This takes two forms. The first is monumental, linked to Cecil’s effigy and Corley Court itself. Cecil’s memorial seems to his former lover, George, to ‘place Cecil in some floating cortege of knights and nobles reaching back through the centuries to the Crusades. George saw them for a moment like gleaming boats in a thousand chapels and churches the length of the

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.79.

land.⁶⁰ Here Cecil implicitly comes to symbolise the continuity of the nobility, naturalising his power even in death and presenting him (and arguably the war he fought in) as an ideal representing certainty – fulfilling the ideal of the heroic warrior. It is this performance of continuity, evident in the effigy and in the estate of Corley, which is in turn disrupted (Corley is remodelled and subsequently sold off), imaginatively restored (in Paul’s biography of Cecil) and finally revealed as impossible in the following sections. The other mythical strain is the re-writing of the past around the First World War, which is flagged up in the same scene as George’s reflections on Cecil’s effigy. While George is in the chapel, Cecil’s would-be biographer and editor, Stokes enters. The two have a conversation about Cecil and specifically the poem for which he is most famous: ‘Two Acres’. This poem was composed for George (but publicly presented to his sister, Daphne) in 1913. Yet Stokes argues that ‘the War made his name, you’d have to agree; when Churchill quoted those lines from “Two Acres” in *The Times*, Cecil had become a war poet...’⁶¹ When George protests that the poem predates the war, Stokes dismisses this: ‘Yes, but isn’t there often, in our poets and our artists, a prophetic strain? [...] Or if not that precisely, a fore-knowledge, a sense, perhaps, of the great inevitable that most of us are deaf and blind to?’⁶² What Stokes is doing here is not just a reappraisal of Cecil’s work through the lens of the Great War; he is creating a new ‘memory’ of the poem, which disconnects it from its original source(s) (both George and Two Acres, the house) and substitutes a new meaning related to the war and the nation. This new understanding is in line with a new national narrative and, specifically, the sub-myth of the disillusioned soldier: tragic poet, killed in battle, yet able to speak to the national response to the war.

This theme of reconfiguring of the past in order to create more ‘acceptable’ or exciting narratives recurs through the novel. Most central is the re-writing of Cecil’s life and relevance to the war which is mirrored by Paul’s attempted re-writing of his own life. *The Stranger’s Child*’s representation of nostalgia, both individual and collective, is intimately bound up with unreliable narration, further emphasised by the gaps it leaves in the narratives. The ‘big events’ of the narrative, including marriages, deaths, births and divorces, as well as both the First and the Second World War, happen in-between sections, and are retold later either in dialogue or through remembered narration. Thus

⁶⁰ Alan Hollinghurst, *The Stranger’s Child* (London: Picador, 2011), p.153.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.162.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.163.

experiences which are first presented as factual are later revealed to not be, often several people observe or remember the same events differently, and ultimately certain questions are left unanswered. When Paul is first introduced, his initial meeting with Daphne and her family is summarised afterwards as a time when Paul had been saying ‘things he normally avoided saying, about his father’s plane being shot down, and his mother’s illness, and even his exploits at school’.⁶³ This suggestive description *implies* that these are things that Paul finds embarrassing about himself, but that they are true memories. Indeed, Paul repeats the assertion later with Peter, offering his father’s death as the implicit reason he did not go to university.⁶⁴ Yet in the final section, it is suggested by Jenny Ralph, one of the people present at Paul’s initial encounter with Daphne and her family, that Paul’s story is not true: she maintains he was illegitimate, tracing her suspicions back to his changing story about his father’s death.⁶⁵ There is no conclusive answer here. The implicit authority of the text is with Jenny (she gets the final say about Paul). However the reader cannot be confident that her version is true either – after all, Jenny has a vested interest in discrediting Paul, as the author of a biography of Cecil which she feels has slandered her family. This unreliability is reflective, suggesting the impossibility of an ‘objective’ version of historical events. Thus the novel to some extent sides with Paul and Stokes over George Sawle, asserting that, because visions of the past are so caught up with identity creation, they can never be fully ‘true’. Instead, these imaginings and readings of the past are always subjective. Indeed, the novel argues, this may in fact be why nostalgia is so powerful – it requires active, imaginative engagement.

The power of nostalgic imagination is presented in multiple characters’ lives, but most clearly in Paul’s, where his desire for a restorative connection with Cecil intersects with his engagement with the mythology of the First World War. This mingling of personal narration (focused particularly on Cecil and Paul’s shared queerness) and national mythmaking (in his contribution to the myth of the disillusioned soldier (poet)) to create his own narrative is a repeated theme of Paul’s story. It is made particularly explicit during the sequence set at a literary conference at the University of Oxford where Paul sees Dudley Valance, the keynote speaker, arrive. He perceives Dudley as:

still visibly a casualty of the Battle of Loos, other less palpable things seemed to hover about him, which were famous phrases of his brother, in *Georgian Poetry*,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.263.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.546.

or the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Paul felt, in some idiotic but undeniable way, that he had very nearly seen Cecil himself.⁶⁶

This is during the section set in 1979-80; the idea that Dudley is still 'visibly' a casualty of a specific battle is a projection, a desire to read the traumatic and disillusioned soldiering myths of the First World War onto Dudley's body. This is further emphasized by Paul's nostalgic projection of *Cecil* onto his brother. Dudley cannot be seen for himself: rather, he is reimagined as a historical artefact, a symbol of the war. More specifically for Paul, he is a restoration of Cecil, complete with quotations of Cecil's work surrounding him. A similar re-writing can be seen when Paul runs into Daphne in the street in London. He is described as shocked to see her there, seeing her as 'a Victorian, she had seen two wars, and she was the sister-in-law, in a strange posthumous way, of the poet he was writing about. To Paul her natural habitat was an English garden [...].'⁶⁷ Daphne is 16 in 1913, and therefore more accurately described as an Edwardian. Furthermore, Paul's assumption of her 'natural habitat' suggests his investment in Daphne as a specific symbol –upper class and consistent, a figure for him to aspire to, not to be equal to – and, of course, another tribute to Cecil. His restorative desire for artefacts and connections to Cecil leads him to (sub)consciously imagine her into an imagined narrative of her past which appeals to him.

Paul's perceptions of Daphne and Dudley are explicitly bound up with his investment in Cecil. This investment extends to the point of possessiveness; Paul is repeatedly shown to resent any effort to restrict access to Cecil, desiring a complete vision of him, while at the same time jealously guarding what he's told and what he discovers. Indeed, he equates information with property, noting that only some people get access to it: 'people who had [information] liked to protect it, and enhance its value by hints and withholdings.'⁶⁸ Describing information as 'a form of property' suggests a commercial investment, positioning Paul as simply interested in material about Cecil as a way of enriching his work. There is a (coded) class element here: Paul's status as outside those in the know echoes his inability to pass among the upper class Ralph/Keeping clan, or even with the solidly middle class Peter, as well as his feeling of alienation at the University of Oxford event. This class link is underlined by Rob's later observation that Paul's eventual Cecil biography had 'the old guard trying and failing to close ranks' –

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.372.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.426.

protecting their impervious status.⁶⁹ This comment also suggests part of Paul's motivation for latching onto Cecil; Cecil becomes a gateway into a class experience Paul is otherwise excluded from and can only glimpse through 'hints and withholdings'. Paul's initial interest in Cecil may predate 1967, but it is the meeting with Daphne and Jenny Ralph which seems to solidify his nostalgic investment in the poet; as if by taking on Cecil's memories in some form, he will 'experientially' become a member of the family. Paul's restorative nostalgia becomes something akin to 'prosthetic' memories, memories which grant him the experiences which will allow him to be acknowledged as part of the class and age he aspires to.

Paul's identity crises, then, take on rather different forms than Nick's in *Another World*, yet the characters share a similar sense of having been born *without* a clear set of expectations to embody. In both cases, father figures are important – Nick's codeswitching father makes Geordie's masculinity more appealing to Nick, whereas Paul's lack of a father displaces his understanding of himself as part of a continuity (in this context, it is surely no coincidence that Cecil is an older son, the inheritor). However, Paul does not have a family link to Cecil, nor are his identity crises explicitly about masculinity. Instead his initial interest in Cecil is connected, on the one hand, to his desire to belong to a family and class that is not his (symbolised by his attendance at Daphne's birthday party, hosted by her daughter), and, on the other hand, his need for a model of expectations for life as a gay man. Significantly, his obsession is deepened during a visit to Corley with Peter Rowe, who becomes Paul's lover. Their affair is consummated in the garden of Corley, making it a crucial site of Paul's coming of age into sexual activity and linking his sexuality to Cecil's. To some extent, then, Paul's Cecil becomes a symbol of everything Paul is not: confident, upper class, accepted as artistic, and able to be (voraciously, in Paul's eventual retelling) queer, as well as a beloved national icon through his connection with the First World War. Cecil begins to take over Paul's life: Paul's diary is described as 'a book in which the sparse record of his own life was now largely replaced by the ramifying details of others', suggesting the way in which he takes on Cecil's experiences as his own.⁷⁰ Thus his identity crises are not motivated, as Nick's are, by a desire for solid expectations to live up to. Paul rejects his own experiences and the expectations of heteronormative society, instead taking on Cecil's experiences, and

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.524.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.501.

desiring to live up to similar expectations – yet he pins these desire to being accepted and recognised by Cecil’s family, which is repeatedly presented as an impossibility.

I see Paul’s investment in Cecil is restorative, partly because it is predicated on Cecil’s death. This makes it easier for Paul to project his desires onto him and which presents a finished narrative which Paul can shape into a complete (gapless) story. It is nostalgic, however, because in creating his completed vision of Cecil’s life, Paul imagines a more intense and significant world and time. This is clear when Paul is describing Dudley and Daphne; he sees them as connections to Cecil, but also as figures who have experienced more important and world-changing events than him, figures whose lives have had a glamour that no longer exists and which Paul can only gain an imitation of, at best. This association with significant events illustrates an investment in the past which is at least partially caught up with a national mythology. Boym argues that ‘[r]estorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory. The two might overlap in their frames of reference, but they do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity.’⁷¹ In *The Stranger’s Child*, this overlap centres on the mythology of the war and its aftermath. Because the mythology of the war is multifaceted, both restorative and reflective narratives can refer to it.

In Paul’s case his dependence on the myth of the disillusioned soldier (and poet), and its attendant implicit ideas of queerness, is ultimately restorative; he looks to the myth to shore up his ‘certainty’ of Cecil’s sexuality and in doing so, he looks to resolve his own crises of class and sexuality. By recruiting the national soldier-myth into his desired queer narrative, Paul transcends what could be ‘just’ a queer biography. It is also significant that Paul’s reworking of Cecil Valance’s life does not just implicate Cecil: it also names George Sawle and Daphne’s second husband, Revel Ralph, suggesting a network of queer male narratives. This nostalgic restoration of a whole life is created to comfort Paul, and also to create a set of ‘expectations’ of queer life that he can model himself on, which do not rely on him actually finding other queer people and potentially facing rejection. Instead, he is inserted into a community *and* through the figure of the soldier, a national narrative. However, ultimately what he creates is a set of prosthetic memories which *do* require recognition and reciprocation from the family who Paul has imagined the memories *for*. Boym suggests that ‘[t]he past for the restorative nostalgic is

⁷¹ Boym, p.49.

a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot'.⁷² It is when Paul tries to turn this snapshot into something he can live within that he struggles. By drawing attention to this, the novel implies that a reflective approach might have allowed Paul more freedom, made him less reliant on the recognition which restorative nostalgia requires. However, by linking the subversive queer narrative to the myths of the First World War, Paul to some extent resigns this world to the past, unwilling to engage with the tension between these two narratives. The novel returns repeatedly to these contradictions, as the novel itself and its characters fluctuate between restorative and reflective.

These contradictions are evident in the novel's representation of the histories of its characters and its buildings; they are at once restorative and reflective, inviting storytelling and investment. The First World War and its mythologies are central to this. As the novel progresses further away from 1913 and the subsequent war, the war becomes simultaneously less accessible and more attractive. This is particularly reflected in the shifting representation of Corley Court. During Peter's memorial, one of his former students describes the house as:

what...er, Peter used to call a "violently Victorian house," [...] We can see now that Corley Court was as seminal to Peter's work, as it was to be to my own. His two ground-breaking series, *Writers at War*, for Granada, and *The Victorian Dream*, for BBC2 were in a way incubated in that extraordinary place, cut off from the outside world and yet [...] bearing witness to it...in so many ways.⁷³

The description of Corley as both cut off and witness suggests the exclusivity of its vision of the war. It inhabits a privileged position of preserving and disguising the past from the march of progress. As such, it becomes a valuable symbol of the changes and transformations of past century and, crucially, incubates both Paul's and Peter's research. Their respective interests are a useful way of exploring the apparent contradictions of restorative and reflective nostalgia. Paul's interests in the First World War and queerness seem more transgressive, while Peter's love of Victorian aesthetics is obviously conservative. Yet Peter's enjoyment of the past can be disentangled from the rest of his life. Paul's intimate interest in Cecil and the war is private, but in claiming Cecil's relevance and significance in the present, Paul is also insisting on his own value. He is juxtaposed with Peter, more secure in his queer and middle-class identity, whose interest

⁷² Ibid., p.49.

⁷³ Hollinghurst, p.528.

in the Victorian is aesthetic and hobbyist. Peter 'had signed a petition to save St Pancras Station, and at Corley too he loved the polychrome brick and the fierce Gothic detail which were such an amusing challenge to more gracious notions of the English country house'.⁷⁴ His nostalgia is reflective, insofar as the aesthetics of the Victorian are presented as a 'challenge'; however, he also describes the potential disruptiveness of Corley as 'amusing', suggesting a playfulness to his engagement which is not present in Paul. Peter does not yearn for completeness in the same way Paul does. Instead, he enjoys the clashes between past and present, clashes that cannot fully be won by either side. Although Peter describes the rooms in Corley which Dudley remodelled as 'disappointingly bright and inoffensive', he is not leading a crusade to restore it nor, as implied by the description of him at his memorial service, does his work solely concern Corley and Victoriana.⁷⁵ However, a willingness to accept fragmentation in and of itself does not make nostalgia reflective. Peter's love of the Victorian is, rather, a surface nostalgia, fundamentally neither restorative nor reflective, but rather willing to accept gaps, without the desire unpick or examine these further.

Peter also functions as a counterpoint to Paul in terms of his identity crisis. Significantly, the consummation of their relationship is important to Peter, but not revelatory; his friendship with Daphne's daughter is enjoyable, but not defining; and his time at Corley inspires his career, but it is not implied to have taken over his life. In Dupont's and Paul's speeches, Rob picks up on the sense that although 'Peter was "marvellous", "inspiring" and "howlingly funny", and everyone who knew him adored him, he was really no more than a dabbler', the diametric opposite of Paul, who is barely liked, hardly humorous, but passionately committed to his subject.⁷⁶ Peter's reflection on Corley's inhabitants in relation to the boys he is teaching also underlines this contrast. Whereas Paul idolises Cecil, Peter is more sceptical. Reflecting on teaching Cecil's poems, Peter observes that '[t]he boys had been tickled to read poems about their own school, and young enough not to see without prompting how bad most of them were.'⁷⁷ The Cecil presented here is a curiosity which adds appeal to Corley, but is ultimately mostly interesting as a lesser version of the mythical disillusioned soldier poets. Indeed, Peter makes this comparison to figures like Wilfred Owen clear:

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.269.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.269.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.531.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.291.

[Cecil's] life was dramatic as well as short, and now everyone was mad about the First World War – the Sixth Form all learned “Anthem for Doomed Youth” by heart, and they liked the Valance war poems he had shown them. There was something a little bit queer about several of these poems; something he suspected in Dudley, too.⁷⁸

Cecil is implicitly positioned as a lesser Owen here. His importance is further undercut by the dismissal ‘everyone was mad about the First World War’, which is associated with school children. He is reduced to a symbol: the dead young soldier, the queer soldier-poet – these are not unique figures. Thus Peter’s assessment of Cecil (and Dudley) as queer is little more than an aspect of their mythical function as historical artefacts, not something Peter explicitly connects with himself. Peter does not need them; he is already comfortable with his sexuality, pursuing Paul and bringing him into the school, his home. Peter does not need to look to the past to find a place for himself, and as such, he’s not a nostalgically driven character.

Peter focalises Paul’s initial encounter with Corley Court and Cecil’s memorial, and his commentary suggests the ways in which Cecil, as a symbol, is not substantial enough to bear the weight of Paul’s identity crises. Cecil is not significant enough to give Paul the certainty he craves. This is also implied in the sequence during which Paul goes to the University of Oxford conference on First World War literature. Here, real life academics are marshalled to dismiss Cecil – Paul Fussell is said to have dismissed Cecil as a less talented Rupert Brooke.⁷⁹ But the lack of certainty and recognition extends beyond just Cecil, as made clear through Paul’s observation of ‘Professor Stallworthy, whose life of Wilfred Owen had fought rather shy of Owen’s feelings for other men. Paul suddenly felt shy of them too.’⁸⁰ This ‘shyness’ reiterates the relative outsider status of Paul; although he has grown more comfortable with his sexuality, the combination of sexuality and perceived expertise – framed by the prestigious university Paul wanted and failed to go to – undoes his confidence, making him unable to speak up for his opinions and knowledge. This failure of certainty is bound up with the First World War: a site of *implied* homoeroticism, which nonetheless disavows or downplays its own queerness, the First World War becomes an event which obscures the past, seeming to promise vicarious experience and identification, and then rescinding them. This movement between accessible lives and obscurity is facilitated through the war created through literary

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.362.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.439.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.439.

production, re-tellings and re-imaginings. The mythical soldier-poet, queer, young, beautiful, disillusioned and dead is a shifting signifier, at once restorative in his presumed ability to present a consistent symbol, yet also reflective insofar as his queerness is both central and disavowed. His death means that he can no longer speak for himself, thus allowing for both uncertainty and identification.

The use of the First World War in *The Stranger's Child* exposes the failures of prosthetic memories and their promise of recognition, belonging and the possibility of fully coming of age. Owen (and Cecil) can only be queer when the establishment allows them to be so. And while Paul's identification with Cecil eventually allows him a form of belonging in that his name becomes entwined with Cecil's forever through his (scandalous) biography, this doesn't fix his identity crises. Unlike Peter, whose memorial suggests that he is almost universally liked, Paul still appears uneasy, an outsider. In the narratives Landsberg studies on (white) American immigration, gaining 'a sense of belonging in the present' requires the 'disavowals of the past'.⁸¹ The personal past of the outsider has to be dismissed in favour of a 'public' past which is recognised by the dominant group. However, by choosing Cecil, Paul chooses a too public new past for himself; furthermore, Cecil's instability mirrors Paul's own shifting backstory, his inability to sustain a stable identity. As with Landsberg's immigration narratives, the new version of himself promises inclusion, yet ultimately cannot deliver it. Daphne's family is never going to accept Paul as part of their group, no matter which version of Cecil he creates and tries to substitute for his own past and memories.

Paul is not the only character to take on an experience of someone else's past as their own, or to tie their significance to the mythical idea of the soldier. The 1926 section of the novel shows Daphne retelling the story of the death of a soldier serving with Dudley:

'He heard the shot and he saw the black flower open on the boy's brow, and he was dead, right beside him.' She'd rather muffed the story, which Dudley told, on very rare occasions, with a shaking hand and choked throat, and which wasn't really hers to tell. She felt the horror as well as the rather striking poetry of it all so keenly that she hardly knew if she was Dudley's protector or betrayer. [...] In truth, other people's traumas were hard to bear steadily in mind.⁸²

Daphne experiences the 'horror as well as the rather striking poetry' which she recognises as not her own, yet nonetheless takes ownership of in that moment. She tells the story in

⁸¹ Landsberg, p.78.

⁸² Hollinghurst, p.212.

part to insist on her right to part of the myth-making going on during the weekend and to make a clear claim on Dudley's past as her own.⁸³ This foreshadows Paul's later sense of having ghosts take over his diary. However, Daphne, as Dudley's wife, who lives with his trauma, arguably has some right to the adoption of his memories as her own.

Furthermore, she has the self-awareness to worry that she may be either obscuring the truth or exposing more than Dudley can bear. By the end of the paragraph, she has dismissed the event as 'other people's traumas', suggesting that she is unwilling to accept this 'prosthetic' as her own. This movement suggests the way in which artefacts of the past, seem to simultaneously offer immediacy, yet cannot constitute an identity in themselves – the presumed intensity of the experience cannot necessarily survive retelling. Instead, the gaps between the event and the storytelling suggest the impossibility of ever fully explaining the experience of the war. This is also implied by the lack of representation of the war in the novel itself; the text seems to suggest that experience of combat, of seeing a beloved killed in front of you, cannot *really* be accessed, no matter the strength of the desire. This is why Paul's attempts at taking on Cecil's past end up further exposing his own 'shortcomings' of class and sexuality, and alienating himself from the very family he wishes to belong to. The nebulousness of the war means that he must shift and change his story, and as such, it cannot substitute lived experience: the imagined past cannot be borne 'steadily in mind' and provides an uneven basis for negotiating experience and expectation. The best that can be hoped for is partial acceptance – or coming of age through working to transform expectations. Paul never fully arrives at this knowledge, opting instead for the false comfort of restorative nostalgia which actually hampers his ability to fully come of age.

Nostalgia is presented as both appealing and troubling in *The Stranger's Child*. It moves between liberating, entertaining, constraining and deluding. Ultimately, the restorative nostalgia which enables prosthetic memories and promises certainty in the novel is undermined by the expectations dictated by class, heteronormativity and other established power structures. However, the appeal of the past remains potent and contains the potential to attract those whom are discontent or restless in the present. As such, *The Stranger's Child* does not necessarily expose restorative nostalgia as a sham. Instead, it offers its own form of reflective nostalgia, suggesting that the past may never lose its hold on us, but it is worth examining and re-examining the lessons learnt from it, and who gets

⁸³ Indeed, an argument could be made that this is Daphne constructing the myth of the traumatised soldier.

to share in a sense of ownership of that past. The representation of Paul's identity crises and his subsequent nostalgic readings of the past, paired with the unreliability of the focalisers throughout the narrative, suggest an engagement with the past which is sceptical, but playful. Thus the novel allows for (restorative) enjoyment, even as the nostalgic is encouraged to turn a critical eye on the representation of the past, and thus avoid simply re-iterating or creating new restorative versions of the past, which ultimately cannot transform either individuals or communities.

4.4 Conclusion

Boym ends *The Future of Nostalgia* with the observation: 'Survivors of the twentieth century, we are all nostalgic for a time when we were not nostalgic. But there seems to be no way back.'⁸⁴ *The Stranger's Child* and *Another World* explore this impossibility of return and how it might contain seeds of new ways of engaging with and (re)presenting the past. Both novels trouble the assumption that before the twentieth century, things were simpler, better, or more innocent. As I suggest above, these texts are in some ways overviews of different models of the British twentieth century: the short twentieth century (1914-1989) and the extended twentieth century (1914-2001). They both reflect on the twentieth century as a whole, mapping in particular the changing position of the working class (in *Another World*) and the growing acceptance of homosexuality (in *The Stranger's Child*), but gesturing at larger trends through these foci.⁸⁵ They also act as overviews of the memory cycles of the First World War, gesturing at the war poets, the late twenties memorial boom, and the sixties as key sites of nostalgia in their own right.⁸⁶ *Another World* and *The Stranger's Child* are conscious of presenting several periods of history at once, gesturing to other events as well as those presented within the novels. Equally, they are carefully curated versions of the twentieth century, emphasising the First World War's symbolic value. This underlines the question of whether there is a resolution to the characters' identity crises, which allows for an ethical engagement with complex and complicated historical narratives.

⁸⁴ Boym, p.355.

⁸⁵ The novels' commitment to complicating the relationship between past, present and coming of age makes these gaps and omissions all the more significant. Geordie's 'grafting on' involves his grandson, not his son; Paul and Peter were both born after the Second World War, yet the section preceding theirs takes place in the twenties. Omitted entirely from *Another World*, the Second World War is only obliquely referred to in *The Stranger's Child*.

⁸⁶ For an overview of the history of First World War remembrance cycles, see for example: Graham Galer, 'Myths of the Great War' in *Global Society* (18:2, 2010), pp.175-195.

In *Another World*, it is Nick who maps the changing status of the war in the twentieth century. He links Geordie's present ability to speak about his experience to the sixties generation, describing them as 'fresh from a visit to *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the *Dies Irae* of Britten's *War Requiem* pounding in its ears,' noting that after these cultural encounters, the "readers" 'couldn't get enough of fear, pain, etc.'⁸⁷ These textual references function as parent-texts and intertexts for *Another World* itself. Nick's connection between the desire for proxy-experiences of fear and pain and these texts is central to his understanding of the sixties cycle, and it functions in part as a critique of the pious anti-war assumptions surrounding the works. *Oh! What a Lovely War* (play: 1961, film: 1969) is an anti-war play; Britten's *War Requiem* (first performed in 1962) was commissioned for the consecration of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral, and has been held up as a consolatory work, intent on celebrating the healing of wounds after the Second World War. They are explicitly *not* intended as works which invite desire for 'fear, pain'. Yet they fed into a greater interest in the war, which inevitably contains prurient elements, as Nick suggests, and mark the war's shift from personal experience to cultural event. Furthermore, the sixties' boom encouraged further reconsiderations of the war. It is the parent-predecessor of projects such as Helen's study of veterans' memories (which can be seen as being predated by Owen's 'witness' poetry in *War Requiem* and the 'true voice of the trenches' heard in the songs of *Oh! What a Lovely War*).⁸⁸ By implicitly connecting the sixties' boom with pleasure, Nick is condemning a nostalgic interpretation of the war which reduces it to a single, easily shared shorthand which can then in turn be easily consumed. Yet his own assumption of the war's single message, its meaninglessness and futility, is itself a product of the 'narrowing of focus', a product of the sixties focus on 'fear, pain' as opposed to heroism and bravery. It is this single message which allows him to elide Geordie's individual experience: for Nick, Geordie's war is reduced to a series of named battlefields and the message of Owen's poetry, because it fits with Nick's cultural understanding of the past and his desire to not engage with his present.

This tension between the individual story (experience) and the larger (expected) narrative is perhaps most evident in the Thiepval sequence. Nick believes that 'you should go to the past, looking not for messages or warnings, but simply to be humbled by

⁸⁷ Barker, p.82-3.

⁸⁸ Howard Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p.126.

the weight of human experience that has preceded the brief flicker of your own few days'; reflecting on his visit, he says that 'Thiepval succeeded brilliantly.'⁸⁹ It fulfils *his* expectations of the war. However, he is accompanied by Geordie, who is described as 'attempting to graft his memories on to Nick [...] and perhaps, in spite of Nick's resistance, he'd come close to succeeding. Something important happened to Nick at Thiepval and he'd never come to terms with it.'⁹⁰ Whitehead argues that what Nick has not come to terms with is Geordie's implicit confession of his part in Harry's death.⁹¹ However, through the phrase 'grafting on', it appears the Nick thinks he is supposed to take on Geordie's experiences himself, as opposed to accepting and processing the disruption of his nostalgic vision of Geordie as an idealised model of working class masculinity. He is deliberately ignoring the *personal* revelation of Thiepval (which is bound up with his nostalgia and his unstable adult identity), and sublimating it into a collective lesson on the horror of war.

The desire for grafting on is placed with the generation which survived the war. It is Geordie who worries about the war being forgotten, not the children he speaks to, or, to a certain extent, Nick. This is the opposite of the relationship between the past and present in *The Stranger's Child*, where Paul attempts to wrest the 'truth' from the past, despite the resistance of Dudley, Daphne and others, in order to acquire its experiential value for himself. This is not to say that there is no desire to pass on experience or knowledge. Cecil records his experience at the front in poems. Both Daphne and Dudley publish memoirs about the war and about their lives, several years after the end of the war. Narrating experience and recording memories, then, are still important to the central narrative of *The Stranger's Child*. However, the ownership of the past is presented as primarily the prerogative of the expected narratives: narratives of upper and middle class, presumed heterosexual figures. Paul's version of the past does not fit these expectations, and so, for all his prosthetic memories, he cannot be integrated into these stories. Whereas in *Another World*, this imperative to pass on is problematized by the impossibility of grafting on lived experience, in *The Stranger's Child*, it is the present's insistence on creating its own versions of the past in defiance of the past's perspective which is problematized. This difference may be explained by the periods which the novels are writing into: *Another World's* focus on the family, on what might be called postmemory,

⁸⁹ Barker, p.73.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.74.

⁹¹ Whitehead, p.21-2.

reflects a nineties' moment of anxiety around the traditional family, masculinity, and how those concepts intersect with the post-Thatcher conception of the working class. *The Stranger's Child*, on the other hand, was published after the last veteran of the war had passed on and thus is less interested in veteran experience – Daphne is a focaliser, Dudley is not – but more interested in how information is gathered, maintained, and controlled. Its focus is also on the creation and to some extent, the failure of, queer histories.

However, in both novels the nostalgic desire for communication between the generations is central to their vision of (a potential) resolution of the characters' identity crises. This can be in part seen in the tracing of how the next generations encounter the war. Interestingly, there is a significant difference in the texts' approach here. Whereas *The Stranger's Child* traces a timeline of inherited interest, albeit with varying levels of emotional investment, *Another World* suggests that the nineties' generation may well be the last to feel a true connection to the past. In *The Stranger's Child*, Paul discovers that one of Peter's former students is also writing about Cecil, albeit that he 'doesn't give two pins about, you know, the biographical side [...] he's very much a textual editor [...].'⁹² Nigel Dupont, like Paul, is influenced, by Peter and by Corley Court. However, Dupont's interest is literary and text focused; his emotional investment is less obvious. Furthermore, it is explicitly tied to his adolescence, as he comes of age in the sixties cycle. The next link is Rob, coming of age in the nineties cycle, drawn in by Paul's book, which he reads excerpts of as a student. This in turn leads to his interest in the papers of Herbert and the 'mystery' of Cecil and his sexuality.⁹³ Dupont's approach is primarily academic and Rob's main focus is the technology of recall as well as a side interest in gossip. It is not emotional in the way that Paul's engagement is, and certainly lacks the immediacy of Nick's ambivalent longing for an understanding of the past in *Another World*. In *The Stranger's Child*, adolescents are presumed to bear the emotional burden of carrying the war on. Yet even as the interests sown in adolescence become the academic focus of the adult, the emotional-nostalgic element of remembrance is lost.

In *Another World*, the relationship between the next generation and the memory of the war is dealt with implicitly, rather than explicitly – Nick does not express a desire to pass on his emotional engagement with Geordie to Miranda. The one scene of Miranda and Geordie together is marked by small talk and Nick's acknowledgement of how far he

⁹² Hollinghurst, p.484.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, pp.523-4; p.555.

and his daughter are from each other, emotionally.⁹⁴ The recurring theme of violent encounters between siblings in the novel compounds Nick's culpability in this violence through his unwillingness to speak to Miranda about Geordie. This oversight emphasises Nick's desire to ignore what is happening in his family, and Nick's need for Geordie to embody a nostalgic ideal masculinity, effectively keeping Geordie to himself. Nick's lack of communication becomes particularly significant considering Miranda's position in the haunting narrative of the novel; she seems at times possessed by the past. Furthermore she, more than any other character, seems to acknowledge the power of memory and the past; she spots the Fanshawe portrait's relation to their family and she is clearly aware of how easily the past is re-written and misread. However, it is only Nick, with his knowledge of the Fanshaves' story and his subconscious awareness of Geordie's ambivalent guilt, who would be able to piece these together. Miranda is left uninformed and troubled, able to see the clues of her family's dysfunction, but unable to link them. This lack of passing on knowledge in *Another World* becomes a festering issue which exacerbates existing crises. It also means that the next generation – Miranda, but also Gareth – has no emotional connection to the war, no way of negotiating or considering the war's position in their lives. Gareth's main interaction with the war is in the form of a game – 'Is it truly an ancient WWI triplane heading straight for you at Warp 9?' – and as part of the Time Wagon in York.⁹⁵ For Gareth, the war is simply another historical setting. Nick's refusal to face up to his own crisis and therefore Geordie's, prevents Gareth and Miranda from fully accessing the past, and having a chance to come of age through an emotional context for their own experiences and their link to past events.

These failed communications betray a concern for the texts' own potential ability to invoke an emotional response in relation to the war. Both novels display a desire for the war to still be *important*. Their nostalgia is not just for their own understanding of history, but also for a cultural acknowledgement of the war's centrality to the twentieth century and contemporary society. That the emotional transference of the nostalgia of the first and third generations fails to take in the fourth and fifth generations expresses concern for the war's status, which is plotted onto adolescents and young adults. These texts represent restoratively nostalgic characters, albeit with reflective elements. However, the novels themselves are reflective, critiquing remembrance traditions while

⁹⁴ See Barker, pp.125-6.

⁹⁵ Barker, p.96.

still insisting on and desiring that the war be remembered and held as central. In combining the two forms of nostalgia, they suggest that different forms of nostalgia are always linked, informing and shaping each other. Fundamentally, all nostalgia comes back to a similar desire: for the past to continue to be relevant, a longing to pass on the loss and melancholy which informs the nostalgic's relationship to the past. In the failure of this action, *The Stranger's Child* and *Another World* question whether coming-of-age through history is possible or desirable, whether emotional engagement with the past can be sustained, and whether any one historical moment can really be held up as 'crucial' to an understanding of the contemporary. And yet, at the same time, these texts desire all those things to be true – for their nostalgia to not just be a longing for the importance of the past, but also the confirmation of it.

In *Another World*, Geordie's desire to pass on his experience and Nick's nostalgic misreading of his desire critiques expectations of narratives which ignore or edit individual experience. In *The Stranger's Child*, the same consolatory desire can be seen, albeit in a way which ultimately repositions the war as a disruption which allows for new narratives and experiences to emerge, even if the dominant myth persists. *The Stranger's Child* also focuses on the desire of those who came of age through the past to control the telling of it, standing in opposition to the present's rewriting in service of their own needs. The relationship between past and present is implicitly competitive, and there is little time for personal and emotional exchanges such as Geordie attempts. This can be seen both as a response to the state of remembrance culture after the last surviving veterans died, but also to the changing way the war is spoken about. Todman, writing in 2008, argues that now 'the utility of these myths [about the war] has less to do with creating new models through which to interpret the world than with the maintenance of existing paradigms.'⁹⁶ In *The Stranger's Child*, this is the defining feature of Paul's engagement with the war. His desire is less about communicating with the past, but rather about misreading for personal satisfaction (and potential gain), creating the stable expectations which he himself lacks. This is seen most clearly in Paul's almost obsessive desire to establish Cecil's queerness. By contrast, *The Stranger's Child* meta-textually longs for a more honest acknowledgement of the gaps and uncertainties of the past, celebrating these as a truer way of coming to terms with the past, the present and the self.

⁹⁶ Todman, 2008, p.436.

The First World War, in these novels, becomes the site of return for the characters as they work through their identity crises. Both novels make clear that nostalgia may not fix these crises, but ignoring or refusing to deal with the past definitely will not. Whereas the young adult fiction in chapter three ended on hopeful uncertainty, and both *Birdsong* and *The Ghost Road*, albeit in very different ways, dwelt on the hope for a better future, or at least the possibility of learning from the past, there is no potential redemption or moving forward here. Both endings dwell on circularity and repetition: Nick's scattered family suggests his continued ability to ignore the crisis in his family and in himself, while Rob's desire for complete knowledge gestures at the continued supremacy of the single, easily consumable narrative. Here is no coming of age into a new version of adulthood, nor are there any signs pointing towards a new vision of the past – except in the meta-textual warnings and examples these novels provide.

Conclusion

5.1 Uncertainty, Coming of Age and the First World War

This thesis has two aims: first, to argue that there is clear thematic crossover between adult and young adult fiction in terms of representation of the First World War, and second, to show that reading young adult and adult fiction alongside each other reveals coming of age as a central theme of the nineties' shift. These novels are as much an exploration of, and response to, anxieties about adulthood and adolescence which circulate in popular discourses of the nineties and beyond, as they are novels about the First World War. The engagement with these anxieties is no less complex in young adult fiction, nor is there necessarily less of a desire for consolatory and closed endings in adult fiction. Although there are generic differences in presentation, style and narrative between adult and young adult fiction, productive models of accepting and embracing uncertainty and multiplicity through coming of age narratives exist in both categories. The novels in this thesis which embrace uncertainty, allowing the First World War to be contradictory, and thereby creating space for national identity to be fragmented and leave the identity crises unresolved, have the potential to be coming of age novels twice over. They are about their protagonists' coming of age, but they also play a crucial role in changing the cultural meaning and associations of the First World War. These novels present both individual and cultural identity crises as a series of ethical dilemmas: the disconnect between experience and expectation in these novels is echoed in the distinction between acting ethically or normatively. The First World War has become a site for challenging normativity and for returning to anxieties and tensions always already present in the mythology, but also in contemporary discourse around identity, history and coming of age.

This thesis has also staked out a claim for the First World War as a site of the century's coming of age: the war becomes the framework through which the century can be understood.¹ The mythology of the war is riven by contradictions and ambivalences, as shown through the range of myths which surround the figure of the soldier alone, myths which have changed and adapted to present needs. These instabilities allow for the exploration of uncertainty that these novels embark on. The texts frame the war as a moment of transition: emphasising or revealing a lack of confidence in stable models of

¹ For an overview of these, see Winter and Sivan, pp.6-39.

adulthood, but also opening up potential for transformation – national, communal and individual. Thus putting the war in this context of coming of age facilitates moving beyond the question of representations of the First World War’s “mythicality”, “ahistoricity” and lack of creative imagination’, as Renard summarises the debates.² Furthermore, this focus on transition and crises of identity in relation to adulthood and adolescence also moves the discussion of these texts beyond the questions of trauma and cultural memory which have dominated the reading of particularly *Birdsong*, the *Regeneration Trilogy* and *Another World* in the early 2000s. In doing so, I go beyond the effect of the war to considering the need for, and potential of, transforming norms and expectations.

In the *Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts* (2017), I argue that:

the post-1990 novels of the First World War suggest the continuing power of the war to make us face up to the possibilities of multiple narratives and visions of the past – and encourage us to revisit the classic narratives of the war in order to map out the origin of this power and to re-read and re-remember these texts through the framework of uncertainty, ambiguity and ultimately, possibility.³

In this thesis I have further emphasised the importance of coming of age to ‘the continuing power of the war’. I have argued that the novels discussed in this thesis use the war to heighten characters’ identity crises. However, as I suggest above, the war also opens up possibilities for transformation. This is clearest in the novels discussed in Chapter Three, which move between disrupting and sustaining expectations, ultimately endorsing the transformative power of female citizenship and arguing for a new vision of male citizenship. It is when characters feel uncertain or become unstable and uncertain figures in relation to the state and the family that these texts are at their most interesting and most potentially disruptive, allowing characters and readers to come to terms with the idea of not knowing. However, possibilities are also evident in other novels: for example, *The Shell House* offers re-assessment of the past through its representation of queer narratives and questions the educational canon, arguing for greater ambiguity when engaging with historical events. Chapter Four’s nostalgic fictions are less hopeful, offering a reading of the present which suggests that the transformative possibilities of uncertainty are being missed. Instead, society, communities and individuals attempt to

² Renard, p.16.

³ Stern-Peltz, p.15.

create coherent, consolatory narratives which elide contradictory experiences and voices, and cover up gaps in knowledge and understanding. Through their representation of the creation of these stories, however, these novels offer the reader a chance to reject this view of the past *and* the present and instead, particularly in the case of *The Stranger's Child*, enjoy the playfulness and potential of uncertainty. Again, uncertainty is bound up with coming of age and the constructions of adulthood and adolescence. It is in the moments where certainty fails that new models of adulthood, which sees it as a more open, flexible and less progressively forward-moving structure, can begin to be imagined. Coming of age can then be re-thought as an ongoing, life-long process, rather than a short, transitional shift with a clear ending.

The First World War's ability to encompass these multiplicities makes it an important site to return to, and its representation a crucial object of study. The mythology of the war is part of the British national mythscape. However, the myths of the war are multiple, often contradictory, and evolving and adapting, as the shifting myths of the soldier show. They are by their nature dependent on understandings of the past which contain gaps and grey areas, even if they are used to produce a 'gapless' narrative. The questions of multiplicity, uncertainty and national identity are even more pressing at present, given the ongoing centenary celebrations and the pressure, both from the state and the very nature of collective commemorations, to create a coherent sense of what the war meant and how it has shaped British identity(ies). Furthermore, the mythical scope of the war makes it an ideal site for investigating the intersections of class, gender, education, the state, community, sexuality, political participation, and citizenship. The model of coming of age used by these novels means that even the least uncertain and conservative of them, such as *Birdsong* and *Private Peaceful* have to engage with identity crises as part of the construction of their characters. The importance of this study, then, lies in its combination of a contemporary and a historical focus: it is the combination of a significant event with the contemporary understanding of coming of age which makes these novels a useful site for investigating our current approach to adulthood, opening up these other social and cultural categories for investigation and engagement.

These novels have their shortcomings. The fact that they are all Western Front novels, primarily about white British characters, and indeed, rely heavily on the myth of the disillusioned soldier in particular (even if they engage with the other myths) and the futility mythology more broadly, speaks to a lack of variety which is perhaps inherent to the myth. However, even within these limitations, the best of these novels combine a

wide range of issues – class, gender, family construction, education and normative pressures, power imbalances between individual and state – through their construction of characters’ coming of age experience, allowing for complexity and multiplicities which are not to be found in the more restrictive narratives in *Birdsong* and *Private Peaceful*. In their complexity, novels such as *The Shell House*, *The Eye in the Door* and *The Stranger’s Child* significantly shift the reader’s understanding of the First World War and its importance to the present, as well as challenging the contemporary desire for a clear and stable definition of adulthood.

This ability to shift and change the reader’s opinion is particularly central to the importance of studying novels which children and young adults encounter, given the power of these books to shape attitudes and understandings of the past and the present. As such, the framework of this thesis could be extended into children’s literature alongside young adult fiction: picture books such as Michael Foreman’s *War Games* (1993) and *Archie’s War* (2014) in particular would be worth studying. As Beckett notes in her 2012 book, *Crossover Picture Books*, this is a growing field of study, and alongside the rise in graphic novels, provides a crucial site for considering the themes developed in this thesis. The boom of children’s and young adult fiction published in the year up to and through the centenary, such as Linda Newbery’s *Tilly’s Promise* (2014), Tony and Tom Bradman’s *My Brother’s Keeper* (2014) and the short story collections *Only Remembered* (2014) and *War Girls* (2014) would also be a ripe area for study. It would be interesting to explore whether the shift I have defined in this thesis bears out through these novels, or whether the didactic pressure to ‘teach the war’ may have reduced the gaps and instabilities which make *The Shell House* and novels like it so productive. Finally, perhaps the most interesting extension would be exploring the representations of the war through a postcolonial lens. Novels such as Sebastian Barry’s *A Long, Long Way* (2005), Jamie O’Neill’s *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001) and Kamila Shamsie’s *A God in Every Stone* (2014) are explicit coming of age narratives which draw on the British mythology of the war in order to present the war as a starting point for the independence struggles of Ireland (in Barry and O’Neill’s novels) and India and Pakistan (in Shamsie’s novel). In doing so, these novels explicitly draw on and re-work the *Bildungsroman*’s association of adulthood and nationhood, reconfiguring both coming of age and the representation of the war.⁴

⁴ This analysis is indebted to Esty’s reading of modernist novels of youth, see p.16-9.

It is the focus on positive transformative power in particular which distinguishes my approach from previous readings. The war in the nineties' shift and beyond is a crisis which opens up for potential change or adjustment of normative expectations through new experiences, rather than an end or 'merely' destruction. These novels use coming of age as a way of understanding society, as a way of being open to change and to accept and even celebrate uncertainty. This vision is not complete in any of the novels, but it does suggest that there is a mode of engaging with the past which is socially conscious, attentive to the present, and willing to see uncertainty not as an invitation to closing down gaps in narratives, but rather as an opportunity for the discovery of more narratives. In doing so, these novels begin to allow for identities which are multiple and flexible, and which invite a greater sense of interaction and cross reading between adults and adolescents, with a view to a more complex understanding not just of the past and the present, but for the future as well.

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