States of Repair: Institutions of Private Life in the Postwar Anglophone Novel

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States of Repair: Institutions of Private Life in the Postwar Anglophone Novel

Abstract
This project proposes that one of the most enduring cultural legacies of the Second World War was the welfare state’s fantasy of rebuilding Britain. Beginning with the 1942 Beveridge Report’s promise to care for citizens “from the cradle to the grave,” the welfare state envisioned that managing individuals’ private lives would result in a more coherent and equitable community. Literature records this historic transition in order to narrate its transformative social potential, as well as its darker failures. Midcentury writers Elizabeth Bowen, George Orwell, and Muriel Spark used the militarized Home Front to present postwar Britain as a zone of lost privacy and new collective logics. As the century progressed, influential novelists such as Alan Hollinghurst, Michael Ondaatje, and Kazuo Ishiguro all looked backwards to 1945, registering an unfulfilled nostalgia for a Britain that never was, as well as the need to come to terms with welfare’s decaying remains. Their works index welfare’s limitations, situating Britain’s domestic policies within longer trajectories of colonial, racist, and homophobic violence. Taken together, the authors of my dissertation offer a new literary history of the Second World War, challenging not only the longstanding mythology of the “People’s War,” but also, more urgently, the fragile beginnings of a “People’s Peace.”

In particular, these novels metonymize welfare through their engagement with the built environment, owing to postwar reconstruction’s radical revisions of the home, as well as to the novel’s shared interest in private life. These works invent quasi-administrated home spaces—whether ill-fitting apartments, girls’ hostels, libraries, prisons, hospitals, or schools—to reveal the intimate social effects that follow when infrastructures of collective living displace older structures of private life. In doing so, their novels deploy the welfare state’s fantasy of repair, but they also challenge its logic, inventing untenable living spaces only available in the zone of literature. Instead of the equitable, coherent social citizenry as imagined by the welfare state, these novels introduce us to the debris of its reconstruction: discarded blueprints, semi-inhabitable home spaces, and persistent markers of social inequality that resist grand fantasies of state repair.

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STATES OF REPAIR:
INSTITUTIONS OF PRIVATE LIFE IN THE POSTWAR ANGLOPHONE NOVEL
Kelly M. Rich
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in
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in
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ABSTRACT

STATES OF REPAIR:
INSTITUTIONS OF PRIVATE LIFE IN THE POSTWAR ANGLOPHONE NOVEL

Kelly M. Rich
Jed Esty
Paul K. Saint-Amour

This project proposes that one of the most enduring cultural legacies of the Second World War was the welfare state’s fantasy of rebuilding Britain. Beginning with the 1942 Beveridge Report’s promise to care for citizens “from the cradle to the grave,” the welfare state envisioned that managing individuals’ private lives would result in a more coherent and equitable community. Literature records this historic transition in order to narrate its transformative social potential, as well as its darker failures. Midcentury writers Elizabeth Bowen, George Orwell, and Muriel Spark used the militarized Home Front to present postwar Britain as a zone of lost privacy and new collective logics. As the century progressed, influential novelists such as Alan Hollinghurst, Michael Ondaatje, and Kazuo Ishiguro all looked backwards to 1945, registering an unfulfilled nostalgia for a Britain that never was, as well as the need to come to terms with welfare’s decaying remains. Their works index welfare’s limitations, situating Britain’s domestic policies within longer trajectories of colonial, racist, and homophobic violence. Taken together, the authors of my dissertation offer a new literary history of the Second World War, challenging not only the longstanding mythology of the
“People’s War,” but also, more urgently, the fragile beginnings of a “People’s Peace.”

In particular, these novels metonymize welfare through their engagement with the built environment, owing to postwar reconstruction’s radical revisions of the home, as well as to the novel’s shared interest in private life. These works invent quasi-administrated home spaces—whether ill-fitting apartments, girls’ hostels, libraries, prisons, hospitals, or schools—to reveal the intimate social effects that follow when infrastructures of collective living displace older structures of private life. In doing so, their novels deploy the welfare state’s fantasy of repair, but they also challenge its logic, inventing untenable living spaces only available in the zone of literature. Instead of the equitable, coherent social citizenry as imagined by the welfare state, these novels introduce us to the debris of its reconstruction: discarded blueprints, semi-inhabitable home spaces, and persistent markers of social inequality that resist grand fantasies of state repair.
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INTRODUCTION: STATES OF REPAIR

We have been the dreamers, we have been the sufferers, and now, we are the builders. (Aneurin Bevan, 1945)

I. “A New Jerusalem”

Every few years, when we tune into an Olympics Opening Ceremony, we have come to expect a spectacle of intense nationalist fervor: a showcase of the host country’s history, inventions, institutions, and abilities. It is meant to be breathtaking, solemn, even holy – which is why, come London 2012 (and especially after Beijing 2008), the festivities seemed a bit off. Orchestrated by Danny Boyle, director of Trainspotting and Slumdog Millionaire, the ceremony began with due aplomb, depicting a scene of England’s “green and pleasant land” complete with sheep, a thatched cottage, and fluffy cloud balloons. A Victorian-garbed Kenneth Branagh helped us transition from this idyllic landscape to the smoke and din of the industrial revolution (while, to some confusion, reciting Caliban’s “Be not afeard” speech) as workers labor and smokestacks emerge from the ground. The twentieth century rolls in with a jumble as suffragettes march, poppies blow in the wind, and, with quite a jump forward, a ship (the Titanic? No, SS Windrush) comes on the scene flanked by immigrants from the West Indies. All personages of this historical bric-a-brac then unite their choreography to forge a giant Olympic ring, which ascends to join its four brethren and rain fireworks from the sky.

After paying due respect to queen and country (James Bond parachutes in with Her Majesty; the Armed Forces raise the Union Jack; a choir for Deaf and Hearing Children sign the national anthem), the “present-day” section of the Ceremony begins
with an homage to the NHS. And this is where it starts to get a bit hallucinatory. As an LCD EKG beats around the stadium, children bounce on trampoline hospital beds, and nurses and doctors jive around them, the broadcaster reminds us of the sentiment behind this postwar innovation, quoting the NHS creator, Aneurin Bevan: “No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means.” Yet this section feels worlds away from the history tour’s earlier pomp and circumstance: it is irreverent, playful, even goofy. What makes it so is the deliberate linking of this midcentury welfare institution to the UK’s history of children’s literature: the section ends with the sick children being saved from the Queen of Hearts, Captain Hook, Cruella de Vil, and a giant Lord Voldemort by a veritable army of Mary Poppinses, who descend from the sky in a literal embodiment of the “nanny state.”

In this grandiose history lesson, it’s striking that the present-day begins by paying respect to its post-WWII institutions of care. Yet this is not surprising, both historically and in terms of the themes of the opening ceremony, as the idea of building a “New Jerusalem” had been foregrounded by the ceremony’s first musical selection. Though the opening music sought to represent the different countries in the UK, broadcasting children’s choirs singing representative songs from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, it began and ended with “Jerusalem,” England’s unofficial anthem set to music by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916. With lyrics taken from William Blake’s 1808 poem “And did those feet in ancient times,” the song details the apocryphal tale of Jesus’s visit to England, anticipating the Second Coming of Christ (“And did the Countenance Divine, / Shine forth upon our clouded hills? / And was Jerusalem builded here, / Among these dark Satanic Mills?”) It ends:
This bucolic (and militarized) imagery of England’s “green and pleasant Land” took on greater political significance during the Second World War. As Marina MacKay writes, during wartime “idealised rural England once again became the literary mainstay of nostalgic longings for community and continuity.” But this “New Jerusalem” was not only nostalgic and backward-looking. Indeed, it was used during the 1945 general election as the slogan and rallying cry for the Labour Party, where it gained an association with the new socially liberal policies and welfare institutions brought into being after the war, raising a tension between England past and England to come. In this way, the Messianic temporality of “Jerusalem” has indeed proved prophetic, as the promises made during the war for a better, more equitable Britain have yet to be fulfilled. Post-1945 British cultural production thus keeps circling back to this midcentury originary moment to define its own contemporaneity—demonstrated even (and especially!) in the high-stakes, nationally self-defining spectacle of the London 2012 Opening Ceremony.

1 Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25, Kindle File. MacKay underscores, however, that even though late modernism can be characterized by its newly rural turn, it has always been interested the “meaning of rootedness” and the inheritance of property – an idea that challenges modernism’s association with metropolitan and cosmopolitan life (24). This point is fully explored in Alexandra Harris’s *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists, and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London, Thames and Hudson, 2010).

2 These grand visions of Britain’s postwar reconstruction are also akin to those needed to prepare an Olympic host city for the upcoming festivities. This is the subject of Iain Sinclair’s *Ghost Milk*, in which he writes: “The trajectory from (Patrick) Abercrombie’s...
II. Welfare’s Origins: Wartime’s Peacetime

This project seeks to answer the following question: why do we keep returning to 1945 to make sense of the twentieth and now twenty-first century, and what makes this year such a threshold moment for periodizing British and Global Anglophone literature? While we may attribute the holding power of 1945 to the unprecedented violence of the Second World War, my dissertation proposes instead that it is due to the extraordinary social repair imagined during postwar reconstruction through the British welfare state: whose visions have yet to be fulfilled, and whose structures have largely been dismantled.

We already know how to tell the story of Britain’s Second World War. As the “island fortress” standing alone against the European Nazi invasion, Britain not only occupied an exceptional position among its European neighbors, but also experienced total war, an exceptional form of warfare. Total war meant a collapse or conflation of the boundaries between combatants and civilians, foreign and domestic affairs, military events and everyday home front efforts. The Second World War became the “people’s war,” one that, as Angus Calder put it, “Depended on the willing co-operation of the ruled, including even scorned and underprivileged sections of society, manual workers

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reasoned proposal to the insidious CGI promos of the 2012 Olympic dream is inevitable. The long march towards a theme park without a theme” (Ghost Milk: Calling Time On the Grand Project (London: Penguin, 2011), 11). Sinclair seeks to demystify the mythos around Olympic reconstructions in part by overlaying strata of the past (through history, memory, labor, documentary and film footage) onto the site’s CGI projections, and in part by describing their violences to the present landscape (through its ugliness, destruction, displacement and personal harm).
and women,” making Britain’s people “protagonists in their own history in a fashion never known before.” One of the clearest signifiers of the war’s reach was its state propaganda, whose campaigns sought to organize civilian habits of eating, traveling, speaking, and comportment. In slogans such as “Make Do and Mend,” “Careless Talk Costs Lives,” “Is Your Journey Really Necessary?” and “Your Courage, Your Cheerfulness, Your Resolution Will Bring Us Victory,” the Home Front reminded its populace that even their most private, individual moments could be utilized for the war effort, whether for good or for harm. Such aesthetic and affective appeal has curiously lived on through the iconic, and now endlessly parodied, “Keep Calm and Carry On,” as well as the paraphernalia representing the Second World War in the Imperial War Museum gift shop.

The state’s increased influence during total war has led scholars to emphasize its unprecedented, nearly complete control over the culture industry. This is perhaps best exemplified by Adam Piette’s Imagination At War, which emphasizes how the war machine “fabricated communal feelings and military regimentation, aimed at transforming private imagination into public spirit, turning its soldiers into actors-out of

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4 Ibid., Kindle Location 244.

5 Our current obsession with this poster becomes curioser and curioser once we realize that “Keep Calm and Carry On” was never actually used during the Second World War: it was to be saved for the occasion of national invasion, a time that never came. That we now have adopted it for our own time, or even that we find it “retro,” is a strange state of affairs.
its historical drama,” or Patrick Deer’s *Culture in Camouflage*, which studies “war culture” and its attempt to “make itself identical with culture as a whole, normalizing and naturalizing war as a form of social, political, and economic activity.” I don’t dispute either of these ideas. What I would question, however, are Piette’s and Deer’s ideas regarding war culture’s self-referential aims, as exemplified in Deer’s conclusion:

> Above all, the experience of Britain during the Second World War reveals that modern war culture is self-perpetuating and self-replicating; it normalizes and naturalizes a state of war. Peace is not the end of war culture. Like the authoritarian Air Force in Rex Warner’s novel *The Aerodrome*, it struggles to control history and freeze time. At its core, war culture seeks a postponement of peacetime ‘for the duration’; it seeks an adjustment to a state of permanent war.

Yet peace was certainly part of war culture. In November 1942, Sir William Beveridge published his *magnum opus*, “Social Security and Its Allied Services,” which introduced a vision of a new welfare state to the British Parliament. The report galvanized the British population, who, having withstood two years of intense bombing, welcomed a vision of postwar peace in the midst of wartime precarity. Selling at least 635,000 copies,

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9 We see this as early as January 4, 1941, with the publication of *Picture Post*’s special issue, “A Plan for Britain.” With essays by Maxwell Fry, Julian Huxley, and J.B. Priestley on social issues ranging from employment, social security, city planning, health, and education, the editors of the issue characterized their plan for a new Britain as “not something outside the war, or something after the war. It is an essential part of our war aims. It is, indeed, our most positive war aim. The new Britain is the country we are fighting for” (*Picture Post*, “A Plan for Britain,” edited by Tom Hopkinson, vol 10. no. 1, January 4, 1941 (London, Hulton Press, Ltd., 1941), 4).
this 300-page document produced “the most significant queues of the war” outside His Majesty’s Stationery Office, testifying to its timeliness, as if this new vision put into words what Britain had been fighting for all along. In the Report, Beveridge lays out Three Guiding Principles of Recommendation as to how to conceptualize the brave new world of welfare Britain. The first, and perhaps the most rhetorically grand, reads:

Any proposals for the future, while they should use to the full the experience gathered in the past, should not be restricted by consideration of sectional interests established in the obtaining of that experience. Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind, is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world’s history is a time for revolutions, not patching.11

This call for revolution was as much a postwar imaginary as it was a wartime necessity. As Alan Sinfield suggests, “To win the war, people were encouraged to believe that there would not be a return to widespread injustice and poverty. The war exemplified…a pattern of state intervention and popular co-operation to organize production for a common purpose. And its successful conclusion afforded a rare opportunity to recast British society.”12 Indeed, the transition from warfare to welfare was materially catalyzed by the war: as Marina MacKay writes, “Literally totalitarian conditions on the war’s home front made possible a long-term shift in the balance of private and public ownership, raised taxes for redistributive purposes, and gave the working classes reliable


access to health care and education.”¹³ Thus what we might call a welfare logic of repair existed well before the postwar consensus and its creation of what we now know as the welfare state. Indeed, it is inextricably and unapologetically linked to the events of the Second World War.¹⁴

Yet determining to what extent welfare is merely “war by other means” (to recall Foucault’s characterization of politics, the inverse of von Clausewitz’s idea that war is the “continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means”) is not the purview of this dissertation.¹⁵ That would bring my work too closely into the ambit of WWII scholars who see the war everywhere, without bounds or terminus: a critical instinct I seek to challenge in this project. Even Marianna Torgovnick’s work The War Complex understands the cultural legacy of the Second World War to be centered on its unprecedented wounding technologies:

The war complex—and it is no easy claim to make or, I know, to read—is the difficulty of confronting the fact of mass, sometimes simultaneous, death caused by human volition under state or other political auspices, in shorter and shorter periods of time, and affecting not just the military but also, and even more, civilians: a fact urged on us insistently by World War II, but as insistently deflected. It exposes how life within the nation-state, while necessary and even

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¹³ MacKay, Modernism and World War II, 4.

¹⁴ This in a very concrete sense, insofar as rationing did not end with the war. See also David Kynaston’s Austerity Britain: 1945-1951 (New York: Walker and Company, 2008).

desirable in modern life, can be quite fragile, especially during times of total war, when the sacrifice expected of the military can, and often does, spill over.\textsuperscript{16}

Instead, my project engages war only insofar as it imagines its own postness – a “postwar complex,” we might say – that depends upon a transition out of war and, in the case of Britain’s Second World War, the work attached to creating a welfare state. It takes wartime visions of social repair on their own terms: as real attempts to achieve something like a break in the circuit rather than a continuation of perpetual war. That said, and as the literature bears out, my approach to this historical moment doesn’t exempt this transition from its biases, blindesses, and structural inequalities. The authors in this dissertation not only challenge the longstanding mythology of the “People’s War,” but also, more urgently, the fragile beginnings of a “People’s Peace.”

Though reconstruction offers a dense—even overdetermined—archive for investigating social change, surprisingly little attention has been paid to its influence on British literary culture. Instead, critics of the Second World War tend to focus on the violence of wartime, consigning any consideration of the postwar period to the

\textsuperscript{16} Marianna Torgovnick, \textit{The War Complex: World War II in Our Time} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Kindle Locations 511-515, Kindle File. Mary Dudziak’s \textit{Wartime} also seeks to extend the perceived time (the “when”) of the Second World War (though again, through an American lens), studying the way war seeps over its official boundaries. Her argument about WWII’s earlier start dates (based on a more global WWII in which American’s 1941 entry is already belated) is less compelling than her interest in how law’s writing, definition, and referencing of war extends its afterlife (see especially her anecdote of 1948 Supreme Court case \textit{Woods v. Clyde Miller}, which based its decision on the relationship between war and the postwar housing crisis (Dudziak, \textit{Wartime: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38-9).
conclusion (or more often, coda) of their work. Yet the reconstructive ethos is one of the most salient cultural legacies to emerge from the wake of the Second World War. And it was a predominantly aesthetic discourse, especially when it came to envisioning rebuilding broken, blitzed homes, which became paramount as both the objects and instruments of repair. Popular magazines, pamphlets, propaganda films, and exhibitions gave shape to these imagined futures for Britain’s reconstruction. For instance, Picture Post’s special issue “A Plan for Britain” (1941) juxtaposed expert essays with photography and diagrams about healthcare, housing, and education. Faber & Faber published a series of booklets under the name Rebuilding Britain, with titles such as Civic Design and the Home and Britain’s Town-Country Pattern. The Daily Mail Book of Post-War Homes (1944) featured pull-out centerfolds detailing “the house that women want.”

Reconstruction was also the subject of several popular exhibitions, including

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17 See, for instance, Patrick Deer’s conclusion “The Boom Ends” in Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and British Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jenny Hartley’s “Post-war Post-script” in Millions Like Us: British Women’s Fiction of the Second World War (London: Virago, 1997); Marina MacKay’s coda in Modernism and World War II. A notable exception can be found in Mark Rawlinson’s chapter on “War Aims and Outcomes” in British Writing of the Second World War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

18 For a thorough listing detailing these publications, see Peter Larkham and Keith Lilley, “Planning the ‘City of Tomorrow’: British Reconstruction Planning, 1939-52: An Annotated Bibliography,” (Pickering: Inch’s Books, 2001), especially section 7 on “Published literature on reconstruction planning,” 57-62. See also Holman’s chapter, “Publishing for Peace (1944-1945),” in Print for Victory, 193-245.

19 Millicent Pleydell-Bouverie, Daily Mail Book of Post-War Homes (London: Daily Mail, 1944). The centerfolds, facing pages 24 and 56, unfold into large, color-printed floor plans of the ideal home based on a “nation-wide consensus of (women’s) opinion” (22). The pictures were meant as a substitute for seeing the real thing in Britain’s annual “Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition,” which was suspended during wartime: as the author
“Rebuilding Britain” (1943) organized by the Royal Institute of British Architects; “Britain Can Make It” (1946) organized by the Council of Industrial Design; and the “Festival of Britain” (1951) an event which in many ways marked the culmination of wartime interest in rebuilding Britain.

As a wide-ranging set of discourses invested in postwar futurity, reconstruction rendered in concrete, if not concretely, what Britain was fighting for: not just self-preservation, but also self-improvement. It invited the public into the physical structures of welfare state infrastructure, asking them to imagine sleek blocks of flats, modern schools and health centers, and cities built along perfectly planned blueprints. On the one hand, this logic of reconstruction was a straightforward call for continuity, drawing a line from the prewar past, to the wartime present, and finally to a better postwar Britain. Yet at times it also reflected a more radical call to repair social inequality, a reality exposed by the Blitz as it ripped open buildings, revealing what lurked inside. Wartime violence thus became an occasion to build a “New Jerusalem,” a phrase used to capture, as well as market, the need for widescale social repair.²⁰ Yet as the century progressed, these wartime visions of repairing Britain never disappeared. As I show, literature keeps returning to this midcentury moment, reactivating and adapting its clarion call to reflect the demands of its own contemporary context—making Britain’s postwar a perpetual condition of possibility that we have not yet managed to escape.

notes, “(A)s war conditions make such things impossible you are invited to make your inspection through the following pages” (Pleydell-Bouverie, Post-War Homes, 22).

²⁰ See Holman, Print for Victory, 194; and MacKay, Modernism and World War II, 24-7.
III. States of Repair: The Project

This project surveys post-1945 British and Anglophone fiction that describes this midcentury transition from a warfare state to a welfare state, and its narration of its transformative social potential as well as its darker failures. It pays particular attention to five British and Anglophone novels: Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* (1949), Muriel Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Midcentury writers Bowen and Spark used the militarized Home Front to present postwar Britain as a zone of lost privacy and new collective logics. As the century progressed, influential novelists such as Hollinghurst, Ondaatje, and Ishiguro all looked backwards to 1945, registering an unfulfilled nostalgia for a Britain that never was, as well as the need to come to terms with welfare’s decaying remains. They index Britain’s obsession with rebuilding the postwar world in terms of both physical and social structures: a reconstructive ethos seeking to repair the ruins of war through wide-ranging reforms of private life.

These works show a marked turn to a spatial vocabulary in order to work through the problems of postwar repair, exploring the categories of built space, interior design, ruined structures, and institutionalized domesticity. They metonymize welfare through their engagement with the built environment, owing to postwar reconstruction’s radical revisions of the home, as well as to the novel’s shared interest in private life. From the Italian villa in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* to the dystopian housing estates of George Orwell’s *1984* (which I discuss later in this introduction), my authors turn to quasi-administrated home spaces—whether ill-fitting apartments, prisons, hospitals, or
schools—to reveal the intimate social effects that follow when infrastructures of collective living displace older structures of private life. In doing so, their novels deploy the welfare state’s fantasy of repair, but they also challenge its logic, inventing untenable living spaces only available in the zone of literature, such as the sexual metaphorics of Hollinghurst’s “swimming-pool library” and the wastelands of Ishiguro’s clone dystopia. Instead of the equitable, coherent social citizenry as imagined by the welfare state, these novels introduce us to the debris of its reconstruction: discarded blueprints, semi-inhabitable home spaces, and persistent markers of social inequality that resist grand fantasies of state repair.

While each of the novels I engage with addresses the transition from warfare to welfare in its own way, all share a propensity to structure their narrative epiphanies around an individual’s relationship to the state: whether through practices of espionage, homophobic law-making, political alignment with the Third World, or national infrastructure. Their epiphanic force derives from disenchantment with forms of institutionalized or collective care, as well with the reparative logic that adheres to these visions of living together—promises of care and social equality that hurt acutely when betrayed, misused, or simply unfulfilled. Yet these novels are not merely lessons in disillusionment. While their fantasies of organized life are interrupted, even broken by intrusions of the “real” (state actors, bombs, prisons, organ donations), these novels do not completely surrender to a paranoid vision of the world. Instead, they propose alternative configurations of British postwar institutions of care, offering living arrangements such as girls’ hostels, swimming-pool libraries, makeshift sanatoria, and clone boarding schools. While analogous to postwar structures of welfare, these social
constructions challenge and extend welfare’s practices, whether by radically accommodating racial, sexual, and class difference, or, conversely, by extending welfare’s authoritarianism to its extreme. And, as I show, these provisions are often only available (indeed, thinkable) in the space of literature, existing in forms of metaphor, fantasy, and metafiction.

If, as Adam Piette provocatively writes, the war machine “spiritedly exhausted British culture and transformed it into something approaching a theatre of dead mannequins,” my dissertation proposes it did something even more insidious: namely, that the war machine’s attempt to re-vivify British culture transformed it into a theatre of zombie mannequins, periodically re-animated by the energy surrounding the transition from warfare to welfare.²¹ My aim is not to provide an exhaustive survey of the new welfare services and their effect on everyday life, nor to track the swords-to-ploughshares transformation of wartime organization into that of the postwar period. Instead, I examine how, at various points across the postwar period, literature engages the warfare-to-welfare logic of effecting social repair through modes of state organization. This engagement looks necessarily different when articulated in relation to distinct historical moments and social stakes. While each novel harnesses and reacts to the transformative energies and promised social repair of the postwar period, they take a range of different modes—such as detachment, disavowal, rewriting, or (thwarted) revolution—showing the remarkable, even stubborn plasticity to the midcentury logic of repair. After all, if you take the explicitly Messianic assurance of a New Jerusalem—combined with a history

²¹ Piette, Imagination at War, 2.
that only delivers poor constructions, even destructions, of its vision—what else can you do but keep rewriting its original promise?

It might be helpful, here, to read this reanimation of the transition from warfare to welfare in relation to Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” particularly the suggestion that when seizing hold of memories in moments of danger, “In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.”22 The perennial nature of this historical drama is dramatized by the *longue durée* of literature that returns to this midcentury moment, by its indexing of welfare’s limitations in part by situating Britain’s domestic policies within longer trajectories of colonial, racist, and homophobic violence, and in part by showcasing the biases and blindesses of the policies themselves and their imaginative origins. After all, the liberal dream of a more equitable Britain did not include everyone. For all the sweeping rhetoric, visions of the postwar were fired by a limited imagination—one predicated on the nuclear, white, middle-class heterosexual family as the main unit of analysis—and which was unable to imagine other forms of social life. As Virginia Noble notes, “As a matter of both ideology and policy, women’s dependence was intertwined with men’s independence,” as articulated from the very beginning by the Beveridge Report’s assumption that married women did not need insurance, and its failure to foresee (and thus believe) that women would continue to be their own wage-earners after the war.23

And as Jordanna Bailkin has persuasively shown, welfare policies were concomitantly


articulated with those of decolonization, even if this wasn’t always felt by Britons: from the “birth” of the migrant within social science discourses to British programs for hosting young scholars from former colonies, welfare’s economy of knowledge production and infrastructure was deeply racialized. Just as the novels I study draw on the spectacular energy and drive for social reform surrounding the welfare state, they also seek to destabilize this self-regarding mythos, indexing its limitations.

As this project shows, the reach of the postwar keeps surfacing in every era, requiring a long view and survey of British and Anglophone novels. This breadth thus knits together two otherwise distinct fields: British fiction from 1945 to 1979, or works considered as “postwar” British literature; and global Anglophone literature, which also falls under the category of “contemporary” British. The wake of Britain’s 1945 draws a line of continuity between these uneasy periodizing and geographical signifiers, showing that the contemporary is suffused with postwar problematics, and that other geopolitical histories of violence inform the very concept of British identity. This arc from British to world literature demonstrates that British welfare state reparation is one of the paradigmatic languages of the post-45 era. Acting upon even the most venerable of national novel traditions, this ethos of reconstruction modernizes several genres including the country house novel, the novel of manners, the novel of consciousness, the social problem novel, the colonial adventure novel, and the science-fiction novel. The resulting set of fictions thus register the unfinished projects of post-45 not only through the convergent themes of collective living and institutionalized space, but also through their

bent, recursive temporality, which continually redefines the future based on postwar promises of repair. As the spread of novels surveyed here moves farther from the events of 1945, they negotiate its historical and cultural legacy in different ways, processing their “postness” or relationship to the war as belatedness, being stuck in an unchanging present, haunting and intergenerational debt, unfinished labor, or requiring fictionnalization through mythology or counterfactual history.

IV. Methodology: Comparative Postwars

Yet the story this project tells of Britain’s postwar period does not begin in 1945. Instead, my project employs a comparative postwar approach in order to articulate how conditions after the Second World War correspond to aesthetic concerns distinct from those after the First. Critics from Paul Fussell, Vincent Sherry, and most recently, Sarah Cole have taught us how to read the literature of the First World War, and how it generated a modernist ethos characterized by “modern memory,” in which optimistic hope yielded to ironic catastrophe (Fussell); a turn against liberalism that transformed literary reasoning (Sherry); or “intricate, often exquisite formal solutions” to the problems of representing violence, which often centered on the body in pain (Cole).25

25 See Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Vincent Sherry’s *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and Sarah Cole’s *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). A notable dissenting voice amongst these critics and their focus on modernity is Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), which argues that post-WWI sites of mourning were comforting art forms insofar as they invoked memories of the past, whether romantic values, traditional elements, or the sacred.
And as Marina MacKay suggests, modernism’s “abiding preoccupations with ‘the private domain and the landscape of the mind’ potentially explain the time-honoured identification of modernism with the Great War: modernist inwardness versus shattering public failure,” which allows modernism to seem more progressive, even radical in its political stances than the clumsy, bureaucratic, jingoistic wartime state.26 Thus by the time the Second World War came about, authors made what MacKay calls the “guilty compromise” of supporting the war: a self-consciousness sharpened by the avant-garde legacy of wartime dissent.27 Her work thus focuses on modernism’s “self-referential and historiographic late phase: its critical national consciousness, its scrutiny of the links between creative and economic privilege and its rehabilitation of the private life against abuses of collective power” within literature produced during Britain’s Second World War.28 While interwar modernist artistic production turned to linguistic experiment as a response to state failures on the battlefield and in public reason, the end of the Second World War provoked a different approach, requiring new artistic negotiation with state visions of collective justice.29

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27 Ibid., 10.

28 Ibid., 14.

29 It may also be useful in the future to consider this a comparative welfare project. For now, I’ll just note that my project addresses a critical dearth in the burgeoning study of literature and the welfare state. Rather than approaching welfare as a transhistorical category (i.e., Bruce Robbins’ *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)), or through its infrastructural origins (i.e., Michael Szalay’s *New Deal Modernism: American
In this project, I follow MacKay’s injunction to support readings of war aesthetics and politics with an attention to historical particularity, whether of the institutions of war-making or literature itself (i.e., modernism itself as an institution). But I begin where her project ends—Britain’s postwar—showing the legacies of the promises made during the war to have a lasting hold on both British and Anglophone literature from the immediate postwar to the present day. I also focus less on war-making than on these imagined welfare futures, as concentrated in the discourse of rebuilding Britain. The transition away from late literary modernism to postwar literature was concomitant with an era of reconstruction, and its heightened interest in producing living spaces, habits, and domestic practices was concomitant with the welfare state’s promise to provide secure, more equitable living conditions for all its citizens. Peter Kalliney even goes so far as to propose this interest in the domestic as a defining difference between the postwars of WWI and WWII, suggesting that “in contrast to the engineers of London's imperial quarter, who designed ostentatious public monuments (after WWI), the welfare state focused on the family home as an important site of cultural rehabilitation after the war.”

Indeed, the measurement of postwar Britain’s success was often registered through this concept of family and home: as Kalliney writes, “[I]t would be difficult to overstate the importance of the family home as a trope for capturing the social

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*Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), and Michael Rubenstein’s *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010)), my project offers a robust account of the postwar consolidation of the British welfare state, studying the lasting aesthetic effects this had on the social form of the novel.

30 Peter Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2006), 122.
atmosphere of the 1950s. Accounts of the period regularly perform ethnographic surveys of domestic space to rehearse the peculiar salience of class in postwar social life. A wide array of texts preoccupied with the social conditions of the decade—academic, popular, and literary—represent the family home as a space of both remarkable continuity and pronounced change.”

This shift in repair is also reflected in city planning and architectural design, which created what Richard Hornsey describes as an “insidious form of social management,” in which “endless cycles of atomized routines would safeguard the city from any collective dissension or unforeseen events.” Such planning was coded as repair for city inhabitants who suffered from the destruction of their living-spaces during the war: as Hornsey puts it, “By projecting a highly programmed space, the planners and administrators of the early reconstruction could offer a public a comforting framework for imagining a metropolis protected from the possibility of conflict or trauma.”

Taken together, Kalliney’s and Hornsey’s diagnosis of the postwar state’s rehabilitative designs raise the question of what is gained, as well as what is lost, by shifting the culture of postwar rehabilitation from mourning to organized living, from commemoration of wartime events to planning circuits of everyday life. Does such habituation make life more habitable after the war, in a way that can address past (and future) conflict or trauma? Does creating a state of security repair the precariousness and

31 Ibid., 115.


33 Ibid.
injuries of history? Or do these changes engender their own concerns, as they obviate or seek to control what we might consider the realm of private life? These questions, I propose, can be best answered by studying the specific literary form of the novel. Though many cultural genres responded to the postwar sea-change, the novel form is where we can it most saliently registered, as it is traditionally the genre of the individual, domesticity, and, for Bloomsbury modernists, the potential of sympathetic connection. And the novels I track in this dissertation overwhelmingly show that even the best-laid plans of collective living and built space are not enough to safeguard from injury, whether intimate treachery or systemic violence.

By focusing on novelistic depictions of domestic space in relation to discourses of reconstruction circulating during Britain’s WWII, my analysis draws on and extends Victoria Rosner’s study of modernism and the architecture of daily life, which proposes that the “modernist novel draws a conceptual vocabulary from the lexicons of domestic architecture and interior design, elaborating a notion of psychic interiority, to take one example, that rests on specific ideas about architectural interiors.” Modernist artists, especially the Bloomsbury coterie, envisioned the home as a space for social experiment against traditional mores of kinship, gender, and sexuality of the Victorian household; this preoccupation with these private spaces shaped what we now celebrate as a hallmark of literary modernism: the idea of interiority and its imaginative capacities. Rosner opens up this term to include a “cluster of interdependent concepts that extend from the representation of consciousness to the reorganization of home life; revised definitions of

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personal privacy, intimacy, and space; and new assessments of the sexualized and
gendered body,” reflecting a more capacious, materially-informed definition of modernist
interiority.\(^{35}\) I suggest that the period after the Second World War, a time preoccupied
with the reorganization of home life, coincided with and even catalyzed in literature a
need to rethink modernist interiority to match the changing nature of domesticity and the
inhabitation of home space, particularly in light of both the militarized Home Front and
postwar reconstructions.

I consider the midcentury rewriting of the home as its own form of modernism, as
a discourse attending to a wartime break with the past, and what forms this break might
take in the expression and experience of everyday life.\(^{36}\) In doing so, I build on the work
of Jed Esty and Marina MacKay, both of whom read late modernism as a period marked
by a growing awareness of Britain’s diminution, its loss of Empire, and declining global
power—indeed, a return to and revaluation of the idea of British Isles as homeland.\(^{37}\)
Though my study of postwar domesticity is influenced by these studies, I am less
concerned with the “ends” of modernism than with the midcentury transition between


\(^{36}\) On a different note, the postwar saw the renewal of architectural modernism, a style
that finally broke its way into a previously resistant England, and which influenced many
housing projects and interior design during the period of reconstruction. As Richard
Weston notes: “Nowhere offered a more daunting challenge to Modernism than Great
Britain. In the 1920s ‘taste’ was still thought to have ended in the late eighteenth century,
and ‘modern’ meant a contemporary reproduction of antique furniture” (Weston 24, qtd
Rosner, *Architecture of Private Life*, 7). See also Elizabeth Darling *Re-forming Britain:

modernism and post-modernism. In other words, this project considers not only narratives of decline and endings, but also narratives of reconstruction and beginnings—that is, how the modernist injunction of “make it new” turned into “make it anew,” or “make it like new.” This project also diverges from recent work on the anticipatory relationship between the literatures of the First and Second World War: for instance, Leo Mellor’s conceptualization of the “proleptic modernism” of bombsites in British literature, which sees “avant la lettre implications of the prewar culture” in the writings of the Second World War; or Paul Saint-Amour’s study of the counterintuitive phenomenon of a pre-traumatic stress syndrome. If anything, post-WWII reconstruction was predicated on an imagined belated repair of the postwar period after the First World War, which evinced a widespread sense of guilt over Britain’s past reconstructive failures (concentrated, especially, in the figure of the homeless WWI veteran). In the public imagination, creating a more equitable society after the Second World War was

38 Leo Mellor, Reading the Ruins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.


40 See Deborah Cohen’s The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), which compares two very different forms of postwar (WWI) reconstruction: public charity and philanthropy in Britain and lack of state action, where veterans became devoted civil servants (and thus social peace, though they were dependent on charity); versus a state monopoly on welfare in German’s new democratic Weimar Republic but lack of public support, where veterans turned against the state (creating social unrest). Her conclusion is provocative, to say the least: that “states and powerful interest groups alone could not ensure postwar stabilization. The attainment and maintenance of social peace depended ultimately on the institutions of civil society—on the dense layer of voluntary organizations that mediated between the individual and the state” (Cohen, War Come Home, 189).
tantamount to fixing the ills of the First: a startling idea, which redefines repair along impossible temporalities and with often misplaced objects.

As my comparative postwar analysis focuses on the transfiguration of private life, it is perhaps no surprise that Virginia Woolf emerges as a key figure (and point of revision) for many authors in the dissertation, particularly Elizabeth Bowen and Muriel Spark. As Rosner puts it, “No other major novelist of the period was so preoccupied with the critique of Victorian domesticity or so explicit about the relationship of literary modernism to the changing nature of private life,” a quality we can see throughout Woolf’s literary output as well as her critical work.\(^{41}\) Take, for instance, the essay “Mr. Brown and Mrs. Bennett,” where Woolf memorably dates a major change in British personal relations around the year 1910. Not only does she register this change through the domestic character of the cook, who had moved from the lower depths of the home to the main floor and the drawing-room, but she also uses a metaphorics of the home to critique the shortcomings of the Edwardian writers:

> They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. To give them their due, they have made that house much better worth living in. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it.\(^{42}\)

In particular, Woolf—using yet another metaphor of domestic interiority—argues that the Edwardians “looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the

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window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at (Mrs. Brown), never at life, never at human nature.” Looking out the window at human nature thus became a defining characteristic of Woolf’s own literary modernism, which corrected the failings of the Edwardians by training a novelistic gaze on individuals like Mrs. Brown and, famously, Septimus Smith in her 1925 Mrs. Dalloway. But this searching gaze still often required a room of its own—an interior to house interiority—maintaining the private home as a requisite structure for reworking human character. From Jacob’s Room to A Room of One’s Own and the family homes in To the Lighthouse, Orlando, and Between the Acts (originally titled “Pointz Hall”), several of Woolf’s works use the home to explore the creation of subjectivity and individual being. In doing so, these novels create a new form of modernist sympathy, one that refigures the Edwardian look out the window as a form of imagined connection between two human subjects—but in a one-directional gaze, one that still relies on the division between private and public life to produce the individual, whose sense of self is shored up, securely, from an interior vantage point.

43 Ibid., 33.

44 But in a way different than fellow modernist James Joyce, who Woolf describes as having a “conscious and calculated indecency of a desperate man who feels that in order to breathe he must break the windows. At moments, when the window is broken, he is magnificent. But what a waste of energy!” (“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” 37). She was, of course, characterizing Ulysses — which she answered, in part, with her 1925 Mrs. Dalloway, a novel that valued looking out windows rather than breaking them.
But what happens when, during WWII, these windows are blown out and the houses collapse—in other words, when the very stability of inhabitation is in crisis? Many writers found that they could not return to previously established literary styles, forms, and concerns: aesthetic choices that were all in serious need of rethinking in the wake of total war. Given the new precarity of the house and its inhabitants, as well as the new forms of collectivity created and projected by the war, writers had to rethink relationships among privacy, interiority, and interpersonal connection. And as I’ll show, they do so in various ways: by inverting the class structure of the window-gazing and infiltrating the domestic home through espionage (Bowen); using the window for perverse forms of social differentiation and ultimately destroying domestic space (Spark); by employing a queer vocabulary of inhabitation, both through the highly-freighted metaphor the “swimming-pool library” as well as through real non-domestic spaces such as prisons, gay gyms, and toilets (Hollinghurst); by re-investing in a utopian multicultural sanatorium only to divide it across raced lines (Ondaatje); and finally, by constructing a series of hollow, infrastructural shelters for clones (Ishiguro). These works thus delicately

45 Woolf gestures at this motif of crisis in her 1940 talk “The Leaning Tower,” in which she hazards a connection between the great houses and literary proliferation of authors such as Scott, Tennyson, and Trollope, suggesting that there was something about their propertied security that did not question class structures (what she calls “hedges”)—that allowed these authors space to “look; and look away,” and to become “unconscious of his own position and of its security” (Woolf, “The Leaning Tower,” The Moment and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1947), 135).

46 We see this also in the postwar literary movements of existentialism, the concept of “engaged” literature, the nouveau roman, the brutal realism of the Angry Young Men, Adorno’s famous quip about “no poetry after Auschwitz,” and of course, postmodernism.
navigate between the post-WWI turn to redemptive individual interiority, and the post-WWII spectre of mass consciousness and collectivity.

V. Case Study: Orwell’s 1984

Let’s take a case study for how to read domestic space in the postwar period: George Orwell’s dystopian classic, 1984 (1949). This might be a counterintuitive choice for our first close reading, as it would be fair to say that there is nothing particularly homely about 1984. Yet by imagining a world in which English Socialism is a totalitarian state propped up by perpetual war and following the grim fate of protagonist Winston Smith, who wanted to rebel against the state’s utter control over its citizens’ minds and bodies, 1984 terrifyingly invokes aspects not only of totalitarianism, but also, I’d suggest, a dystopian rendering of Britain’s transition from a warfare to postwar welfare state.

While critics at the time read Oceania as the Soviet Union, others took Orwell as “fantasying the fate not only of an already established dictatorship like that of Russia but also that of Labor England,” suspecting that unlike the etymology of utopia’s nowhere, “the frightening aspect of George Orwell’s imaginary world is that it is somewhere—in and around us.” Rations, Ministries, propaganda programs: Orwell’s novel not only retains longstanding “characteristic fragments” of the English scene, which he writes

47 See, for example, Fredric Warburg: “Here is the Soviet Union to the nth degree, a Stalin who never dies, a secret police with every device of modern technology” (Warburg, Publisher’s Report 1948, quoted in George Orwell: The Critical Heritage, edited by Jeffrey Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1975), 247).

48 See Diana Trilling (Nation 25 June 1949) and Daniel Bell (New Leader 25 June 1949) in Meyers, George Orwell, 260 and 262.
about in his essay “The Lion and the Unicorn,” but also specific wartime characteristics that involved contemporary readers in this particular postwar dystopia. As Orwell’s contemporary Julian Symons notes, these references “involv(e) us most skillfully and uncomfortably in his story, and obtains more readily our belief in the fantasy of thought-domination that occupies the foreground of his book.”

Orwell adamantly opposed this reading of his new novel, responding in a few publications that 1984 was “not intended as an attack on socialism or on the British Labor party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have already been partly realized in Communism and Fascism.” The object of his critique was not English Socialism, but socialism as appropriated by Ingsoc; the novel was only set in Britain “in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if

49 This is a testament to Orwell’s conviction that the surface of England that can change “out of recognition and yet remain the same” (The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius (London: Secker & Warburg, 1941), 55). And yet 1984 also marks a real departure for Orwell, as it evinces a deep pessimism about the possibility for mass revolution. The writer of The Lion and the Unicorn was still optimistic about England’s ability to change out of recognition, calling for the popular, common culture to rise to the surface and fulfill its destiny as the “real” England, and arguing that the need for revolutionary change is self-evident—its inequality so undeniable “you have only to look down the nearest street to see it” (Orwell, 10). The writer of 1984, however, has given up on the possibility of change, leaving his readers with the image of a boot stamping on a human face, forever, with even the most self-evident, undeniable facts being mutable by the state.

50 Meyers, George Orwell, 253.

not fought against, could triumph anywhere.”

Despite this authorial statement, I suggest that we cannot divorce *1984* from its postwar British context for reasons that go beyond the simple fact of its publication date. First, and diegetically, Winston dates Oceania’s origins to the immediate post-45 period, sometime around the 1950s. Winston himself was born in 1944 or 1945—though as he admits, Ingsoc’s endless present and historical revision makes any precise dating difficult—and one of his earliest memories, the atomic bombing of Colchester, seems to mark the end of peacetime and beginning of the current, perpetual war. Emmanuel Goldstein’s book later reasserts this mid-twentieth century periodization, though again, in very general, even imprecise terms: atomic bombs were used on a large scale about ten years after their initial appearance in the nineteen-forties, after which a Cold War-like stalemate was instituted; there was a revolutionary period in the fifties and sixties that culminated in the world we know today. Even though the world of *1984* may not have experienced WWII per se, the novel nevertheless dates the advent of perpetual war to the second half of the twentieth century.

Second, and thematically, *1984*’s fear of the state’s invasion of privacy, concern about perpetual war, and rewriting of the homespace as taken over by the state, all reflect

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52 In letter from Tosco Fyvel about Orwell, Fyvel writes: “Even during his last weeks in hospital, Orwell was keenly interested in the coming election and the chances of his various friends among Labour M.P.s … “Ingsoc”, the totalitarian society, was not represented as arising out of democratic socialism. On the contrary: his imaginary totalitarians who arose in England after an atomic war merely adopted the name of “English Socialism” because they thought it had popular appeal (like the Nazis’ appropriation of ‘National Socialism’)” (Orwell, *Complete Works*, 136).

53 Consider that one of the four unfinished projects Orwell had in mind during the last year of his life (including an essay on Waugh) was a long novel set in 1945, of which nothing survives other than passing references in two letters (Orwell, *Complete Works*, 188).
an engagement with Britain’s transition from a warfare to welfare state, and with how, if at all, we might find our way out of a warfare state. For the protagonist Winston Smith, the only way to escape this bleak landscape—or rather, to make it habitable—is to retreat into secret, intimate acts, such as diary-writing or sex, through which one can disassociate from the masses and assert an individuality and interiority contra the state’s control of everyday life. In this way, we might read the nightmare of 1984 as a particularly modernist one, insofar as it presents a world predicated on the complete dismantling of private life and individuality. Winston’s transgressive practices require a postwar variation of “a room of one’s own”: a space where one can find privacy from Big Brother and his spies, and where one can access an interiority not already infiltrated by telescreens and the Thought Police. Taking this into consideration, I offer in this section a reading of 1984 that requires paying as much attention to Orwell’s sense of the domestic as to political structures, as much to the role of the homespace as to the inescapable spaces created by the state. Yet, as I’ll show, Orwell also questions the redemptive, subject-making ability of this form of interiority, showing it to be a fiction that is ultimately unsustainable in the world of Ingsoc.

From the very beginning, we know that the world of 1984 is not quite right, signaled by the iconic image of clocks striking thirteen. But if the time is out of joint, so too is the space: the rest of the introduction is devoted to describing Winston’s apartment in the Victory Mansions, which really cements the dystopian nature of the world by showing how every aspect of his home is uncomfortable, broken, and almost uninhabitable. This is further underscored by Winston’s gaze outside his window, which gives us a view of a bleak, cold-looking dystopian landscape full of dust and debris,
where “there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters.”\textsuperscript{54} Rather than shoring up the threshold between inside and outside, the window seems to be there only to eradicate interiority, reminding its citizens that there’s no such thing as privacy. Indeed, as Winston looks out, he sees the face of Big Brother, whose “dark eyes looked deep into Winston’s own,” and the police patrol “snooping into people’s windows” (\textit{1984}, 4). And of course, there’s the room’s telescreen, another form of window with the ability to look into Winston’s flat and, presumably, his mind. Windows thus no longer allow for a modernist gaze out the window to contemplate human life. Instead, they are used as tools of the state, described in Emmanuel Goldstein’s book as a “technical advance” marking the moment when “private life came to an end” (214). Incidentally, this is also what makes the Ministry of Love so terrifying, not for its role in maintaining law and order, but rather because “there were no windows in it at all” (\textit{1984}, 6). As we learn from Winston’s incarceration in Part III, prisoners are housed in “a high-ceilinged windowless cell with walls of glittering white porcelain” and a telescreen in each wall, a space that is an intensified version of his Victory Mansions apartment (\textit{1984}, 237).

To escape these degraded homespaces and to find a place of their own, Winston and Julia first seek niches in public places, finding refuge in either a mass of people or the emptiness of open fields. But these are neither sustainable nor inhabitable for them, and they soon invest all their energies in creating a home from a rented room above an antiquities shop. When Winston first sees this room:

\textsuperscript{54} Orwell, \textit{1984} (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1989), 4. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated \textit{1984}. 
[I]t awakened in him a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory. It seemed to him that he knew exactly what it felt like to sit in a room like this, in an arm-chair beside an open fire with your feet in the fender and a kettle on the hob; utterly alone, utterly secure, with nobody watching you, no voice pursuing you, no sound except the singing of the kettle and the friendly ticking of the clock (1984, 100).

As this passage suggests, the room affords Winston and Julia the space to think otherwise—which, for them, means a crude return to the conservative home, complete with domestic habits and gender roles from an indeterminate past England. Yet Orwell doesn’t entirely value this complacent domesticity, which we can see in the following description of Winston’s long-awaited encounter with Goldstein’s book: “Winston stopped reading, chiefly in order to appreciate the fact that he was reading, in comfort and safety. He was alone: no telescreen, no ear at the keyhole, no nervous impulse to glance over his shoulder or cover the page with his hand. The sweet summer air played against his cheek. From somewhere far away there floated the faint shouts of children: in the room itself there was no sound except the insect voice of the clock” (1984, 192). This juxtaposition seems more than a little critical: here, Orwell marks the line between a transgressive enjoyment of the home and its lulling, stupefying effect, underscoring the disparity between the presumed revolutionary potential of reading of the book and Winston’s deeply blissful, sleepy contentment. Winston even goes so far as find that the book “told him nothing new”—part of its attraction as he relaxes in his chair—suggesting that this increased private enjoyment of a house of his own dulls his political energy

55 I realize that to focus on materiality in Orwell—especially objects whose consumption affords private pleasure such as this—might be a perverse move, considering Orwell’s professed political stance against the ills of capitalism and for democratic socialism; until now, the value of objects has never been just for their own sake, but as a purchase into something larger than economic value. The passage quoted above is the closest Orwell gets to showing his anti-capitalist stance (1984, 208).
Of course, this homespace creates only borrowed interiority, as the room had been monitored by Party member O’Brien from the very beginning. That Orwell chooses this room as the scene of their capture only sharpens the utterly doomed nature of their domestic fantasy, especially as a refuge from the violence of the state: when the iron voice emanates from behind a picture, our entrails seem to turn to ice as well, even though we expected this moment (1984, 230).

So far, not exactly modernist: the construction of the home seems rather conservative for a rebellion against the state, though it does give Winston and Julia a form of individuality (though short-lived and clearly scripted.) But despite its complacent comforts, the house also affords them a room with a view, catalyzing what we might call Winston’s variant of the modernist epiphany: as he gazes out the window he sees some glimmer of revolutionary potential in this otherwise foreclosed world. Notably, this moment is only available to Winston in the seeming security of this homespace, in a room where he has time and freedom to imagine without censorship. Of course, his epiphany is also facilitated by the room’s physical remove from the city: rather than seeing a cold, bleak, debris-filled cityscape and the eyes of Big Brother, Winston sees clean, wet flagstones, a pale blue sky between the chimneys, and the figure of a prole woman singing as she takes in the washing. This view opens out into a long meditation akin to Clarissa’s in Mrs. Dalloway or Gabriel’s in Joyce’s “The Dead,” as Winston develops a “mystical reverence” for the prole and the “interminable distances” of the sky. In particular, his contemplation of the prole leads to a transformation in Winston—as he gazes in fascination at the woman’s “characteristic attitude, her thick arms reaching up for the line, her powerful mare-like buttocks protruded,” he realizes “for the first time
that she was beautiful.” It had never occurred to him her “hardened, roughened” and “solid, contourless” body like an “over-ripe turnip” and “block of granite” could be beautiful, especially when her “monstrous dimensions” are compared to Julia’s “supple waist,” but “it was so, and after all, he thought, why not?” (1984, 228). While Winston has previously thought about the proles, it is only here that, to borrow a line from Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, he is made to feel the beauty (and like Clarissa, does so in a rather questionable way.) Reaching an apogee in his statement, “If there was hope, it lay in the proles!” Winston arrives at a belief that things will be otherwise, if not for him. In an epiphanic flash that transforms the conservative nostalgia of the homespace into mythical futurity, he thinks: “In the end their awakening would come. And until that happened, though it might be a thousand years, they would stay alive against all the odds, like birds, passing on from body to body the vitality which the Party did not share and could not kill” (1984, 229).

However, just as their homespace proves to be easily broken or unsustainable, so too does this imagined futurity. Not only is it a myth, but one feels suspicious that the window-gazing caricatures its object of contemplation, and denies that the proles have interiority—indeed, have a habitable life. This is precisely Raymond Williams’ problem with Orwell’s own politics; as he writes in Culture and Society, Orwell’s “principle failure was inevitable: he observed what was evident, the external factors, and only guessed at what was not evident, the inherent patterns of feeling. This failure is the most obvious in its consequences: that he did come to think, half against his will, that the working people were really helpless, that they could never finally help themselves”
And indeed, the proles in *1984* are largely characterized by evident, external factors such as “heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer, and above all, gambling”—activities and characteristics that echo those Orwell isolates in *The Lion and the Unicorn* as England’s underground, unofficiated popular culture (*1984*, 74). While Winston does impart their mythical ability to “persist as a living creature” to “private loyalties they did not question” and “primitive emotions which he himself had to learn by conscious effort” (*1984*, 172), this does not reflect a belief in their self-consciousness as indexed by individual interiority. Thus, similar to how the Party persuades its members that they and their feelings are of no account, lifting them “clean out of the stream of history,” Winston’s window-view of the proles also lifts them out of outside history, attributing their transformative power to structures of feeling that, while certainly existing beyond the reach of Big Brother, are not historically, culturally, or temporally specific. Therefore this futurity, while it is the opposite of nostalgia in its look forward rather than back, is inaccessible as a viable idea of the home for Winston and Julia, even though such a mode of embodied, unthinking inheritance does offer one route out of Ingsoc’s endless present.

In a way *1984* haunts this dissertation as a model of what it looks like to write—in the most maximal way—the work of the state, the future of welfare, and, perhaps most importantly, a society that has not effected the transition (*any* transition) from warfare to welfare. Its dystopian rendering of Ingsoc, and erasure of the individual, serves as an

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56 As David Lloyd and Paul Thomas note, Williams attributed this “inevitable failure” to Orwell’s not actually belonging to the working-class, or as they put it, “From Williams’s point of view, Orwell has no place to stand” (Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1998),177).
important limit case, one that erases all reparative potential from both state infrastructure and domestic architecture. While the novels in my dissertation do at times approach this extreme theorization of the state that harms and the home that (might) heal, they also decidedly inhabit a middle ground, exploring forms of collectivized, institutionalized living—literary welfare, as it were—that offer their own system of benefits and reflect the midcentury interest in how states can imagine everyday life. That said, despite 1984’s exemplarity as the most paranoid vision of the state (meant as a warning or deterrent), it also can be read as an example within the dissertation’s novelistic set. It models a return to the midcentury moment, one that dramatizes the site of the home as a key threshold between privacy and publicness, between the individual and the self. It also models a troubled relationship to those (e.g., the proles) who are outside the reaches of the state, using them as a way to stage narrative epiphany—and in doing so, revealing the exclusions that form the premises of state repair.

VII. Outline

The project begins in the city of London amidst the ruins of the British Home Front. Its first chapter, “A Room of One’s Own? Reviewing Modernist Interiority in The Heat of the Day,” reads Elizabeth Bowen’s 1949 novel as inaugurating a critical skepticism about the wartime promises of postwar repair. Among her contemporaries, Bowen offers the most robust critique of how we might emerge from the shadow of war, attending to the lived experience of social change rather than falling prey to nostalgic yearning, dystopian pessimism, or apocalyptic fulfillment. The Heat of the Day collapses the relationships afforded by modernist treatments of interpersonal intimacy, questioning
the possibility of connection with regard to its invasive, uncertain time. Yet this is also
where Bowen meets her limit, unable to imagine a concrete social reality without these
older models of individual connection. What’s left, I argue, is a deeply troubled novel,
whose formal failures and ungainly treatment of the working-class anticipate the
problems of postwar reconstruction.

My second chapter moves away from the immediate aftermath of war, studying
the increasingly entrenched romanticization of 1945 as a triumph of liberal social
democracy. Entitled “Nowhere’s Safe: Ruined Sympathy in The Girls of Slender Means,”
the chapter reads Muriel Spark’s 1963 novel as a challenge to the burgeoning mythology
of the “People’s War,” as well as the reparative logic of postwar reconstruction. Spark
dramatizes the ideology of warfare-to-welfare Britain by focusing on the May of Teck
Club, a girls’ hostel in 1945 London. When the Club is destroyed by a bomb, the
spectacular event reveals its lodgers’ inherent selfishness and savagery, which starkly
contrast with their idealized communal life. While the novel positions its readers to find
meaning in the ruins of the club, I argue, it eventually repudiates this solace, refusing to
transform state violence into an occasion for redemption. The chapter closes with a
consideration of Hilary Mantel’s 1995 An Experiment in Love, which I read as a direct
rewriting of The Girls of Slender Means. Though Mantel’s rendition of girlish intimacy is
just as bleak as Spark’s, Mantel ultimately re-enchants welfare’s social potential, a
statement of belief that flies in the face of welfare’s Thatcherite demolition.

While the first two chapters focus on the London Home Front, the later chapters
move away from the specific locale of 1945 Britain, addressing contemporary writers
who introduce other histories of violence to narratives of Britain’s Second World War,
and who transpose their concerns with collective living and care onto other structures (the colonial home; an Italian villa; postwar prison; clone institutions). My third chapter, “Empty, Empty Spaces: Unpropertied Intimacy in The Swimming-Pool Library,” examines the network of gay social spaces in Alan Hollinghurst’s 1988 novel, reading them as a counter-welfare state. Rather than use the family home as the standard for narrative social security, The Swimming-Pool Library turns away from propertied domesticity to embrace mobile practices of queer intimacy, whose sites include gyms, bathrooms, prisons, and stations in colonial Sudan. Hollinghurst also uses these spaces to imagine alternative orientations to historical trauma, critiquing the very concept of repair as a form of bad domesticity. His fantastic metaphorics allow us to work against a reparative mandate, suggesting a relationship to history that maintains queerness’s promise and precarity.

My fourth chapter, “Oasis Societies: Caring for Ruins in The English Patient,” reads Michael Ondaatje’s 1992 novel as the outline for a postwar utopia of global welfare. Though critics focus on the novel’s desert romance, I propose that its Italian villa provides an equally romantic vision of a multicultural welfare without the state. As an experiment in postwar collective living and mutual care, the villa is also a fantasy space of cosmopolitan worldedness, one whose degraded boundaries lead to newfound intimacies. However, this miniature community is shattered by the news of Hiroshima, which breaks the spell of uncolonized space and scatters the villa’s inhabitants. While we may compare this destruction to the sardonic disenchantment of Spark’s The Girls of Slender Means, Ondaatje’s novel treats its social dissolution in a more pensive mode, mourning its lost potential.
My final chapter, “Interior Design: Institutional Life in Never Let Me Go,” reads Ishiguro’s 2005 novel as a counterfactual allegory of Britain’s postwar. As a properly historical consciousness is not available to the clone protagonist Kathy, her postwar epiphany is mediated through her abiding relationship with her environment, from empty English country highways to the fantasy of Norfolk as the site of England’s lost-and-found. The novel challenges the reader to contend not only with the clones’ statistical structures of feeling, but also with the ways institutional space shapes their aggregate individualism—a cold vision of the postwar welfare state’s endgame, as well as of the risks of a reconstructive ethos.

In considering the ways fiction reactivates the seam between warfare and welfare, “States of Repair” offers a new approach to contemporary debates over periodizing the twentieth century. It also gives a new vantage point on the literary value, even the canonical vitality, of the Second World War. If the authors of my dissertation are held in both critical and popular regard, it is because their treatment of war activates a reparative imagination whose plans and promises have yet to be fulfilled. By reinstating war as a potent source of social transformation, these works remind us of our compulsory attachment to wartime, even (and especially) after the war is presumed to be over.
CHAPTER ONE: A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN? REVISING MODERNIST CONNECTION IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY

Are we to take it that our own time has been, from the point of view of its inhabitants, irreparably injured—that it shows some loss of vital deficiency? (Bowen, “The Bend Back”)

On January 5th, 1941, Elizabeth Bowen sent a letter to Virginia Woolf expressing her condolences and dismay over the destruction of Woolf’s apartment at 37 Mecklenburgh Square, hit during the first month of the Blitz. Bowen had visited Woolf in July, and it was in reference to that visit that she asked:

And were all those streets that were burnt the streets we walked about? I have never seen them since. When your flat went did that mean all the things in it too? All my life I have said, ‘Whatever happens there will always be tables and chairs’ - and what a mistake.

With bombs raining down across Britain, Bowen’s words registered a new need to come to terms with the obliteration of solid everyday things, especially domestic objects whose existence was taken for granted. The war’s destruction of these things and the rooms that housed them called for a revaluation of the home from Bowen’s generation of writers, who found themselves facing a world uprooted at its very foundations, as well as the increasing intrusion of the state into private life.

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57 Virginia came up from Rodmell every week to Bloomsbury to survey the damage. See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996): 728-731. Bowen’s own London residence, No. 2 Clarence Terrace, was to be bombed just a year later.

58 Elizabeth Bowen, Letter 5 January, MS Autograph, Monks House Papers, University of Sussex Special Collections, Brighton. Bowen’s last letters to Woolf introduce diverging interest in interior spaces, as Bowen begins to write about her rooms in Dublin where she worked as a spy, and of the interiors of various London War Offices.
This generation had also participated in the British war machine to an unprecedented degree. By the Second World War, the British propaganda machine (that originated in WWI and accelerated during the interwar period) reached its fullest development, conscripting authors specifically for their writerly abilities.\(^{59}\) As George Orwell issued broadcasts with the BBC’s Eastern Service, Evelyn Waugh served in Marine and commando units, and Graham Greene worked for MI6 in Sierra Leone, Elizabeth Bowen also “did her part” for Britain during the war, reporting on Ireland for the Ministry of Information.\(^{60}\) (Though Woolf did participate in the war effort, it was mainly through community work in Rodmell: she was not conscripted nearly to the same degree as other authors.\(^{61}\) ) For these writers, all born at the start of the twentieth century, this war service had a discernible influence on their fiction, providing a key backdrop in Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* and short story collection *The Demon Lover*, Orwell’s *1984* and wartime composition “The Lion and the Unicorn,” Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Sword of Honor* trilogy, and Greene’s *Ministry of Fear*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The End of the Affair*. These works all show a sustained attention to Britain’s transformation into a militarized Home Front, and the condemning effects of


\(^{60}\) Even E.M. Forster did his bit through BBC broadcasting and script-writing (i.e., “A Diary for Timothy.”) See also Bowen’s expression of “a sort of despair about my own generation—the people the same age as the century, I mean—we don’t really suffer much but we get all sealed up” (Letter to Woolf, 5 January 1941).

\(^{61}\) And while Woolf did write about the war’s arrival in *Between the Acts*, her other major wartime writings largely delved back to her (personal) past, including her biography of Roger Fry and especially “A Sketch of the Past,” the latter moving extraordinarily between extended meditations on her childhood family life and clipped, diary-like entries about her wartime present (to mark the beginning of each meditation.)
that militarization on intimate, private relationships. To showcase this change, they often use spatial contrasts, comparing older models of domestic life with new institutionalized settings. Thus we have Orwell’s Ministry of Love versus Winston and Julia’s clandestine apartment, Waugh’s military camps versus Ryder’s recollections of Brideshead, the dislocations of Greene’s sanatoriums and hotels, and Bowen’s uncannily haunted estates—all of which show the unsettling effect of war on the home.

We can also see the transformations of wartime through these authors’ literary style. Their fiction restructures the novel form, reflecting an ambivalence about earlier narrative models. Some, like Orwell, turned to dystopian fiction, unable to imagine any recognizable homeliness in the postwar world. Others, like Waugh, fell prey to nostalgia, escaping into the past and its lost structures of domesticity. Then there were those who explored the apocalyptic structures of wartime and their fantastic forms of temporality: ranging from the more predictable horror of war to a depictions offering a perverse sense of enjoyment, including the suggestion that Britain was finally getting its just desserts.

This latter sentiment is exemplified by Graham Greene’s 1940 essay “At Home,” which saw the war as a judgment day for Britain’s past crimes. Greene suggests, perversely, that the English feel at home in wartime because it is a world that is falling apart: “If a cracked cup is put in boiling water it breaks, and an old dog-toothed civilization is

62 We see this in the postwar literary movements of existentialism, the concept of “engaged” literature, the nouveau roman, the brutal realism of the Angry Young Men, Adorno’s famous quip about “no poetry after Auschwitz,” and of course, postmodernism.

63 See also novels of the deep past of England, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner’s The Corner That Held Them (1948), about a 12th-century convent in Norfolk, and even Woolf’s pageant play in Between the Acts.
breaking now.⁶⁴ Though these authors take widely varying approaches to the war, they all share an aversion to addressing how their readers are to live now. They look away from the social forms created during war, turning to either the past or speculative future as a way to recast the stakes of the present moment.

Among her contemporaries, it is Elizabeth Bowen who offers the deepest engagement with how her readers are to live under the shadow of war, and what this might mean for the postwar future. Instead of turning to nostalgic yearning, dystopian pessimism, or apocalyptic fulfillment, her fiction registers the dynamics of social change in real time. While her short fiction echoes her contemporaries’ experimental writings, I suggest that her 1949 novel The Heat of the Day, though written in a more traditional form, is the more interesting case study for postwar sociality, particularly for its extreme ambivalences (and indeed, sheer failures). Set in 1942 London, the novel centers around the upper-class Stella Rodney, her lover Robert, later revealed to be a German spy, and Harrison, a British counterspy. Harrison is in the midst of blackmailing Stella, promising Robert’s immunity in exchange for a sexual relationship. And though these intertwined love and espionage plots are the main focus of The Heat of the Day, the novel also entertains other minor storylines, including the inheritance plots surrounding Stella’s son Roderick and Mount Morris, Robert’s family and their Irish Big House, Holme Dene; as well as the coming-of-age story of Louie Lewis, a working-class girl whose husband is away in the army.

If this is beginning to sound convoluted, rest assured that it is: The Heat of the Day is a novel that can’t make up its mind, moving in fits and starts amidst recognizable

generic forms. Yet despite its formal shortcomings, Bowen’s novel has achieved an extreme pride of place in literary criticism. This is due in large part to increased scholarly interest in midcentury fiction, especially in relation to Britain’s Second World War.

Featured in monographs by Leo Mellor, Jenny Hartley, Mark Rawlinson, Patrick Deer, and Adam Piette, Bowen’s work has become synonymous with wartime literature, characterized by its use of the phantasmagoric and dramatization of wartime surveillance. These critics are especially drawn to Bowen’s short stories and their experimental, hallucinatory form, which Bowen attributed to wartime’s social upheaval and peculiar collective consciousness: “The stories had their own momentum, which I had to control. The acts in them had an authority which I could not question. Odd enough in their way—and now some seem very odd—they were flying particles of something enormous and inchoate that had been going on. They were sparks from experience—an experience not necessarily my own.”

To some degree, *The Heat of the Day* continues to

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65 Even the syntax of the novel is convoluted, which critics read as an effect of living under wartime: see, for instance, Anna Teekell’s excellent analysis of double negatives, which she reads as symbolic of its “espionage-based epistemology: it is the grammar of Stella’s refusal to believe Harrison’s story, and her refusal to disbelieve it as well” (“Elizabeth Bowen and Language at War,” *New Hibernia Review* 15:3 (Autumn 2011), 63, accessed November 11, 2012, DOI: 10.1353/nhr.2011.0031). See also Heather Bryant Jordan’s reading of the novel’s passive voice as evoking “the torpor and convolutions of the war years” (*How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 164.)

66 CF Leo Mellor 157-65, Jenny Hartley 95-105, Mark Rawlinson 99-103, Patrick Deer 168-91, Adam Piette 4. Here, WWII and Bowen scholarship does overlap, with Bowen scholars focusing on her wartime production in a manner delimited to wartime itself—studying the impact of the war on women and the home (Kristine Miller), the wartime uncanny and ghostly phenomena (Petra Rau, Lee Rumbarger), or the war’s new social ocassioning of espionage and treachery (Lee) or the undoing of the individual, what Bowen called “uncertain I” (Neil Corcoran).

channel the exhilarating collectivity that made Bowen’s collection *The Demon Lover* so innovative, especially in its portraits of wartime London.

Yet Bowen’s wartime novel offers a provocative challenge beyond the aegis of her short fiction: namely, how to balance the innovative demands of wartime with the formal demands of the novel. The fate of the novel genre was very much on Bowen’s mind, evident in her pithy “Notes on Writing a Novel,” published in *Orion* in 1945, and her postscript to the first U.S. edition of *The Demon Lover*, in which she noted: “A novel must have form; and, for the form’s sake, one is always having to make relentless exclusions.”68 Yet *The Heat of the Day* also critically fails in its formal demands through its relentless inclusions, trying to be all things but succeeding in none. In what follows, I outline these failures, and show their significance for the novel’s evolving social form.

On the one hand this text innovates within the novel form by questioning the possibility of interpersonal connection, especially with regard to its invasive, uncertain time. Bowen achieves this by weaving various structures of romance, domesticity, and inheritance into her novel, only to destroy the secure relationships we expect them to produce. Yet despite this intricate novelistic scaffolding, Bowen is unable to imagine a concrete reality that exists without these older models of sociality. After all, her novels are largely uninterested any collective other than the family: if they do extend their social orbit, it is only to the dying planet of Anglo-Irish aristocracy, what Bowen herself knew best. Though she is clearly piqued by wartime’s psychological merging of consciousness and

68 Bowen, “Postscript By the Author,” *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 217.
the uncaring equality of bombs, in the end, she doesn’t take them seriously as a vehicle for social change.

This is why I ultimately read *The Heat of the Day* not as a quintessential wartime novel, but rather as a postwar novel troubled by the potential of postwar sociality. In this case Bowen’s unease results in a palpable drag on the novel’s forward momentum, especially in its final chapters, which take place after the narrative climax. Devolving into a series of nested endings, the novel offers a series of worries over how the postwar period will remember the war, and spirals into side plots addressing who will inherit England: the mass-interpellated working-class or naïve upper-class youth. *The Heat of the Day* is thus a novel haunted by its non-productive recursivity. While it returns to the Second World War as a site of meaningful plenitude, it eventually leaves its reader with nothing but dead-ends and a non-starter for the postwar period. In doing so, it inaugurates a new tradition for the postwar British novel, in which novelists return to the midcentury to illustrate its failed potential, testifying to the degree to which Britain is trapped by its postwar promises.

**I. Spaces of Disconnect: Registering the Postwar in *The Heat of the Day***

One productive way to understand the literary impact of the Second World War is to take a comparative postwar approach, reading *The Heat of the Day* for its revisions of other literary responses to war: in this case, modernism. Bowen’s fiction speaks most clearly to that of her most intimate predecessor, Virginia Woolf, as well as of the Edwardian modernist E.M. Forster, who she once named as her greatest novelistic
Amongst the British modernists, Woolf and Forster shared the deepest interest in the potential, as well as limitations, of individual connection. Their fiction often coalesces around epiphanic moments connecting disparate characters, such as Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mr. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe of *To the Lighthouse*, Henry Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel of *Howards End*, and Dr. Aziz and Fielding of *Passage to India*. These epiphanies—enabled by characters’ exceptional personhood, signaled stylistically by interior depth—hold the rare possibility to transcend social differences and, as Forster puts it, to “only connect.” Their fiction thus dramatizes what Lionel Trilling called the “liberal imagination”: the belief that, in the midst of life’s extreme complexity, individuals can still reconcile their private and public selves without recourse to political dogma, relying instead on a sense of morality, private sentiment, and aesthetic appreciation.70

Yet for Forster and Woolf, this possibility stays critically *in potentia*, characterized by the “not yet, not there” separating Aziz and Fielding. While their fictions invest in individual intimacy as the most authentic, desirable form of connection, they also signal intimacy’s inevitable failure through a deployment of irony. As we witness these characters attempting to “only connect,” we also know that such relationships are not enough to effect social change, at least not in the current political or historical climate. This modernist deferral is critically open-ended as to the fate of this liberal imagination: should it remain a negative possibility, or should future generations


rebuild the world in such a way as to privilege these interpersonal relationships? These questions loomed ever larger with the coming of the Second World War, which threw social strata into disarray with its promises (and experiences) of democratization. What seemed a distant possibility became a new reality, creating new ambivalences over the very desirability of connection across classed, gendered, and raced borders.71

Elizabeth Bowen is the preeminent inheritor of this modernist sensibility, described by biographer Victoria Glendinning as “what happened after Bloomsbury; she is the link which connects Virginia Woolf with Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark.”72 As a transitional figure, Bowen stands torn between modernist principles and what she sees as the new sociality of war: a communal consciousness, united under the threat of the Blitz; a democratized Britain, brought to fruition through a postwar welfare state; and an administrated population, whose private life is infiltrated by the state to an unprecedented degree. The Heat of the Day positions itself right at the threshold of this social transition, anticipating the reconstructions of the postwar era while still holding onto the ghosts of modernism past. Through its social ambivalence and formal failures, we encounter modernism’s postwar fate: its appeals and its limits, its attempts at revivification and eventual death-throes. Ever the consummate domestic novelist, Bowen effects this transition by attending to the wartime transfiguration of interior space, and its accompanying effects on private life. This is also a modernist preoccupation: as Victoria Rosner shows, the aesthetic we know as modernist interiority is indelibly shaped by

71 Hence, perhaps most famously, Orwell’s unsavory treatment of the proles in 1984, discussed in the introduction to this dissertation.

authors’ engagement with architectural interiors. Bowen attests as much in her criticism on E.M. Forster, noting the influence of Forster’s “place-feeling” on her own work:

Intense sense of locality, and deference if not subjection to its power could in itself make distinguishable, did nothing else, the Forster atmosphere. My own tendency to attribute significance to places, or to be mesmerised by them even for no knowable reason, then haunted by them, became warranted by its larger reflection in E.M. Forster. Formerly I had feared it might be a malady.

Indeed, Bowen’s oeuvre is consistently preoccupied with the effects of place on characters’ personal development. These relationships often fall into one of two categories. First, there are novels centered around aristocratic Big Houses, contrasting their protagonist’s bildung with the other inhabitants’ moral lassitude, ghosts of lovers past, and the imminent decay of Anglo-Irish life (The Last September, A World of Love.) Then there are stories without a domestic center, leaving the main character to haphazardly come of age amidst temporary housing, relatives’ apartments, vacation rentals, hotels, and schools (The Death of the Heart, Eva Trout, The House in Paris). For Bowen’s characters, the home environment matters as much as the people who live there, their characters being as much the product- of windows, bedrooms, and dining-rooms as they are of lovers, friends, and relations. Indeed, one gets the sense that characters actually could grow up correctly if only they had the right surroundings, in terms of both domestic architecture and historical context.

Bowen’s literary treatment of domestic space changed remarkably during the Second World War. Gone were the interiors of modernist interiority in postwar novels: those private rooms creating space for individual thought and creativity, their boundaries

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73 Rosner, Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life, 2.

74 Bowen, “Passage to E.M. Forster,” 5.
providing generative play between public and private lives. Instead, the homes of the Home Front were stripped open, both by unprecedented physical damage and by management by the state. In Bowen’s short fiction, the home is destroyed (“Oh, Madam…”), haunted (“The Demon Lover”), darkly fantastic (“Mysterious Kôr”), or at best, a myopic shelter from the realities of war (“Sunday Afternoon”). For these stories, domesticity affords no peace, functioning mainly to produce an unsettling uncanniness. Yet The Heat of the Day reflects a very different literary project. Here Bowen adapts the deformations of domestic interiors for the novel form, linking them with the drama of individual development: Stella’s rented rooms don’t quite fit her taste; her son Roderick shows nothing but ineptitude regarding his future inheritance of Mount Morris; Wisteria Lodge, nursing home to Roderick’s Cousin Nettie, is described as a “powerhouse of nothingness, hive of lives in abeyance”; and Holme Dene, Robert’s family’s home, is characterized as a “swastika arms of passage leading to nothing.”75 Many critics have picked up on the heightened domesticity of Bowen’s wartime literature, arguing that it must be considered in light of its midcentury contexts (the interwar celebration of domesticity, architectural modernism, or women’s war work) rather than that of the Anglo-Irish Big House, the other major domestic axis in Bowen’s fiction.76 While my reading of The Heat of the Day does attend to the historical specificity of its domestic

75 Bowen, The Heat of the Day, 226 and 289. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated Heat.
environ, I argue that its transformation of the novel’s social form is unintelligible without reading it alongside its modernist literary predecessors. The novel requires that we read it both backwards (as a revision of modernism) and forwards (as a commentary on the postwar period)—a proleptic temporality that originates from the crucible of war and is demanded by wartime imaginings of postwar repair. As Robert says to Stella, “Don’t quarrel now, at the end, or it will undo everything from the beginning. You’ll have to reread me backwards, figure me out—you will have years to do that in, if you want to” (*Heat*, 304). This temporality characterizes many of the novels I discuss in this dissertation, and helps to explain the constant re-iteration of 1945 as a meaning-making moment.

The domestic and political energies of the novel come to a head during the narrative climax, when Robert finally admits to Stella that he is, in fact, a spy. This scene takes place in Stella’s apartment, a space made doubly precarious by enforced blackout conditions as well as by Harrison’s surveillance:

> She had then to turn and shut the door behind her, so that lamplight from here should not travel through the bedroom window Robert had uncurtained. In her infestation by all ideas of delinquency, any offence against the black-out seemed to her punishable by death: it could be the signal for which Harrison had been waiting—posted as he could be, as she pictured him, by some multiplication of his personality, all round the house. (*Heat*, 311)

Under these conditions, the windows of Stella’s apartment gain heightened significance, becoming imbued with their own language. These apertures risk revealing too much of the secret life within, a life whose individuality is emphasized by the impersonal multiplication of Harrison’s personality all around the house. Yet this is no valuation of the life within: by staging the scene in Stella’s claustrophobic apartment, Bowen critiques
the couple’s style of romance, previously described as a “hermetic world, which, like the ideal book about nothing, stayed itself on itself by its inner force” (Heat, 97). Robert speaks directly to this hermeticism when he asks Stella: “You have been my country…are you and I to be what we’ve known we are for nothing, nothing outside this room?” (Heat, 307). This question contains echoes of a modernist ethical impulse that seeks a synthesis between private sentiment and public feeling, dramatized by the boundaries of domesticity (i.e., the room of their own). But in this instance, the desire for connection also paves the way for political detachment, and, eventually, treason.

Thus confided in, Stella shoulders the burden to respond. She is caught in a double-bind: while to empathize would be treasonous, to refuse would carry its own intimate treachery. In a burst of sympathetic connection, she suddenly aligns with his way of thinking (“he had been right: time makes the only fatal differences of birth” (Heat, 312)). The moment then reaches epiphanic proportions when she tries to imagine life without Robert, turning a photograph of his around to face the wall: “The ice broke; she had to hold on to the chimney-piece while she steadied her body against the beating of her heart… She tried to say ‘Robert!’ but had no voice. She looked at the door: it was incredible that anyone loved so much should be still behind it” (Heat, 312). As if by magic, Robert opens the door, and they fall into each other’s arms. The narration then turns away from the couple, as if to give them privacy: “If there were any step in the street of sleeping houses, it was impossible it should now be heard by the two blotted out. To anyone silently posted down there in the street, the ranks of windows reflecting the paling sky would have all looked the same; it was in this room that an eyelid came down over the world” (Heat, 312-3). Here again is the view from the window. In this iteration,
however, we lose sense of the permeability—indeed, communicability—between the private interior and public exterior. From Stella and Robert’s perspective, it is impossible to hear Harrison’s step in the street outside; from Harrison’s perspective, it is impossible to see into Stella’s and Robert’s room. Bowen effects this stylistically by erasing the specificity of persons and place: Harrison’s step becomes “any” step, and his character “anyone,” Stella and Rodney become “the two blotted out,” and their apartment window becomes indistinguishable from the others in their street. This moment signals the dangerous endgame of only connecting. In pledging allegiance to the individual over forms of collectivity, these characters have lost the ability to communicate beyond themselves. And while interpersonal connection may shield Stella and Rodney from the spying reach of the state, it also forms a damning complacency, causing them to turn a blind eye to the rest of the world. In the end nowhere’s safe. Attempting to avoid Harrison’s notice, Robert exits the building through a rooftop skylight, only to fall to his death.

This scene spells a breaking point with Stella, who, until this point, had been the most sympathetic character in the novel. The rest of *The Heat of the Day* is spent grappling with who, exactly, will replace Stella as the reader’s avatar and ethical model for how to live in the postwar world. Bowen tests this responsibility on the younger generation, focusing on Louie, a working-class girl, and Roderick, Stella’s son and a soldier who is to inherit their family home. Through the actions of these minor characters, the reader witnesses two very different crises over what to make of the novel’s central wartime drama, and, more generally, the historical legacy of the war for the postwar period. Furthermore, Bowen’s treatment of Louie and Roderick evinces an ambivalence
toward, even distaste for, wartime’s burgeoning social democratization. (Their very names—Louie Lewis and Roderick Rodney—signal a lack of faith in their individual personhood.) In particular, it is in Bowen’s revulsion towards Louie where we see the limits of her social imagination, a critical shortcoming of a nevertheless very talented writer. But it is also symptomatic of the midcentury novel writ large, caught in between residual and emergent literary forms of social connection (modernist individualism v. postwar collectivity). For as this project demonstrates, Bowen is not the only novelist with a modernist hangover: try as it might, the postwar British novel can’t let go of the humanizing power of interiority, and keeps returning to this midcentury moment as a frame for this problem.

II. “Who Was Feeling?”: The Problem of the Working-Class

Bowen writes Louie Lewis with a hand that is strikingly, even unconscionably, heavy. Introducing her character as one lacking self-consciousness, Bowen describes Louie’s main object to be “to feel that she, Louie, was, and in the main she did not look back too willingly at what might have been said or done by her in pursuit of that” (Heat, 13). This pursuit is accompanied by a marked lack of historical perspective, as “Louie had, with regard to time, an infant lack of stereoscopic vision; she saw then and now on the same plane; they were the same” (Heat, 15). Both shortcomings find synthesis in Louie’s abiding love for the newspaper, which gives her a point of view:

[H]ow inspiring was the variety of the true stories, which made the war seem human, people like her important and life altogether more like it was once. But it was from the articles in the papers that the real build-up, the alimentation came—Louie, after a week or two on the diet, discovered that she had got a point of view,
and not only a point of view, but the right one. Not only did she bask in warmth and inclusion but every morning and evening she was praised. (*Heat*, 168)

Compared to Stella, Louie is incapable of being an individual, a flat character lacking her counterpart’s rounded interiority. As Marina MacKay puts it, “In Bowen’s patrician treatment, the working-class Louie finds some comfort in this massification, in her new-found synchronicity that is almost a direct instantiation of Benedict Anderson’s theory of newspapers and nationalism.” Yet this massification enables various types of connective possibilities, providing Louie with a comforting nationalism imagined as kinship: “War now made us one big family…She was re-instated; once again round her were the everlasting arms” (*Heat*, 169). This feeling recalls the ferment of wartime democratization, the *jouissance* of being in it together so characteristic of the Second World War. There was of course some irony to this new fellow-feeling—namely, that it took a war to create it. The Queen herself captured this well, remarking when Buckingham Palace was hit: “I’m glad we’ve been bombed. It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face.” Bowen’s turns of phrase underscore this irony, acknowledging Louie’s newfound sensibility as yet another form of wartime conscription, a re-instatement that surrounds her with everlasting arms.

Bowen uses wartime social ferment as a way to test the viability of modernist connection, especially across Louie’s and Stella’s class difference. The working-class Louie recalls Leonard Bast of E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* as the novel’s experimental

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subject with the most to gain and also the most to lose. Indeed, we might read them as literary recipients of modernist social welfare, one whose upward mobility relies more on individual connection than individual contribution. This experiment begins after the women’s two plot-lines finally (and improbably) converge in a restaurant, after which Louie walks Stella home. When Louie returns to her own flat, she has a form of sympathetic epiphany contemplating the “effect of (Stella’s) person”:

Louie felt herself entered by what was foreign. She exclaimed in thought, “Oh no, I wouldn’t be her!” at the moment when she most nearly was. Think, now, what the air was charged with night and day—ununderstandable languages, music you did not care for, sickness, germs! You did not know what you might not be tuning in to, you could not say what you might not be picking up—affected, infected you were at every turn. Receiver, conductor, carrier—which was Louie, what was she doomed to be? She asked herself, but without words. She felt what she had not felt before—was it, even, she herself who was feeling? She wondered if she would ever find Stella’s house, the steps at whose foot they had said goodnight in the dark, again; still more she wondered if she would want to. ‘But this is not goodbye, I hope,’ had been said—but what, how much, had she meant to mean? (Heat, 278)

First of all, this moment reverses the polarity of the modernist epiphany, giving us exceptional insight into the mind of the working-class character. What we find is surprising: instead of receiving the comforts of the masses, Louie “dwell(s) on Stella with mistrust and addiction, dread and desire” (Heat, 278). This ambivalence stems from the gap between the two women’s social stations: as much as she might imaginatively tune into Stella’s being, Louie could never actually be her. Stella thus inspires Louie with a dangerous, even infectious dissymmetry, which alerts Louie to her own status as “receiver, conductor, carrier” of other people, which she describes to her roommate Connie as “like being crowded to death—more and more of it all getting into me” (Heat, 275). While modernist fiction raises this sensitivity as a privileged and desirable feeling,

See Miller’s comparison of Stella and Louie’s war work and class, 145-6.
here, it signals an uncomfortable precarity. Unlike the characters of Helen Schlegel and Clarissa Dalloway, who actively seek connection with strangers Leonard and Septimus, Louie has no choice but to receive and obey other people’s inclinations. Indeed, her thoughts culminate with her transformation into an automaton, dissociated from herself (“now her lips seemed bidden: ‘A soul astray,’ they repeated with awe, aloud” (Heat, 279)). This form of connection might even be worse than Louie’s conscription into wartime nationalism, making her into an unwilling host of other people’s dramas.

Bowen gives one more twist to the modernist epiphany when Louie decides to visit Stella’s apartment. As discussed in the previous section, Bowen tests the modernist epiphany using domestic architectural elements (i.e., the window), recalling the famous window-scenes in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. This time, however, it is Louie who seeks out Stella, rather than Clarissa imaginatively reaching out to a deceased Septimus Smith. The journey seems longer and more daunting to Louie; gazing at the posh row of flats, she “quail(ed) at the unsparingness of (the street’s) expensive length,” feeling “outwitted” by the architecture of the houses that “seemed to cheat and mock her.” Only then, confronted by these unyielding exteriors, does it dawn on Louie that there might be no special, individual connection between her and Stella; that their previous goodbye had not signaled the desire for more interaction (“for goodbye, and nothing but that, she now saw it was” (Heat, 328)).

Yet as she stands before this strange line of homes, Louie still hopes to connect with Stella. Listening to “the sunless toneless reverberation, from planes of distance, of the victory bells,” Louie imagines, “That could but being heard—from behind which window out of this host of windows?—by Mrs. Rodney. Louie stood still to listen again,
in company” (*Heat*, 328-9). With this, Bowen writes a reverse staging of the modernist window-scene, where someone of privilege looks out their window to contemplate the outside world. And in a touching moment, Louie tries to memorialize this connection: “She stood face up, one hand instinctively grasping one of the spearheads of railings topping an area, as though to bridge, forever, in some memory of the body’s the sound and scene” (*Heat*, 329). However, this bridging is immediately interrupted by the entrance of someone else’s memory: that of Robert’s death. Though Louie is ignorant of the recent event, the experience nevertheless comes upon her like some Benjaminian flash, putting her yet again in the position of receiver, conductor, or carrier of other people’s drama—and here, trauma:

> But then instantaneously she was struck, pierced, driven forward into a stumbling run by anguish—an anguish, striking out of the air. She looked round her vainly, blindly, for her assailant. Flee?—no, she was clutched, compelled, forbidden to leave the spot. She remained pacing to and fro, to and fro, like a last searcher for somebody said to be still alive, till the bells stopped. (*Heat*, 329)

Here, Louie relives the violence of Robert’s fall, both the physical force of the body hitting the ground and the psychic anguish of bearing witness to the event. While the directionality and agency of the violence is unclear, what is certain is that she cannot leave (“clutched, compelled, forbidden to leave the spot”), and that she is charged with a responsibility to care for the trauma (laboring like a “last searcher for somebody said to be still alive”). Like Louie’s previous sympathetic epiphany, this haunting raises the question of the unequal labor involved in working through an event you haven’t experienced (a dubious inheritance she will share with Roderick as he contemplates the fallout of his mother’s drama). When Louie finally learns of Robert’s death, she “received, in an unbearable flash, the import of that street in which she had that morning
stood” (344). Realizing Stella’s romantic involvement with Robert, Louie loses her perception of Stella as refined, respectable, and worthy of admiration. This time, the flash fully reverses the form of modernist sympathetic epiphany, allowing her to divest from Stella’s person and to see her not as a special individual (“a wanderer from some better star…a creature too good for the world”) but as someone like everyone else: “There was nobody to admire: there was no alternative. No unextinguished watch-light remained, after all, burning in any window, however far away. In hopes of what, then, was one led on, led on? How long, looking back on it, it had lasted—that dogged, timid, unfaithfully-followed hope!” (Heat, 346). Stella’s own fall from grace leads not only to Louie’s own relaxation of respectability—and ultimately, to an illegitimate pregnancy—but also to a return to seeking comfort in massification. Now that individual connection is rendered undesirable, Louie reverts to the passive security of being one of many, returning her interiority once more to the complacency of the crowd. Thus tested (and failed), Louie ceases to be of interest to Bowen. Whatever sensitivity she might have had is irrevocably lost, culminating with her callous reaction to the death of her husband, which re-legitimized her pregnancy (“So if I had worried, it would have been wrongly, for nothing” (Heat, 370)). This favoring of her role as an “orderly mother” instead of mourning her husband reflects the worst possible form of social complacency, and disqualifies her once and for all as a viable model for postwar personhood.

A View of Reconstruction: The Working-Class Home

While, for Bowen, the upper-class home is represented as an exceptional site that sparks Louie’s psychic drama, the working-class home is represented as a vast wasteland
of the London suburbs, with a mind-numbingly similar array of windows. Immediately after Louie’s being “struck, pierced” by the ghost of Robert’s fall, Bowen recounts Stella’s journey to visit her son Roderick, an uneasy trip on a slow, halting, one-class train. As if to reflect the homogenizing nature of this infrastructural space, Bowen withdraws narrating from Stella’s point of view. This shift is easy to miss, as it is signaled abruptly within the space of a sentence: “Sunday short-distance travelers getting in and out, in and out of the carriage in which sat Stella found themselves being eyed with a sort of frozen attention by the woman in the corner: they shared an uneasy feeling that she was for some reason trying to learn their faces” (Heat, 329). Freed from Stella’s viewpoint, Bowen is able to give a more unsavory portrait of her main character from the vantage point of the other train travelers, describing Stella’s presence as “like an image, upright against the grime-impregnated tapestry of the compartment, dead gloved hands crossed in her lap, palms up” (Heat, 329).

While this abstraction to the collective recalls Bowen’s earlier descriptions of wartime London, focalized through the war-besieged population, it also reflects a paradigm shift within the novel. Gone is the excitement and romance of war: in its place we find a de-mythologized England, with vistas of disrepair not attributable to the violence of war. Bowen achieves this through yet more window-gazing: but instead of Louie’s longing vigil outside Stella’s impenetrable apartment, here, we are given a landscape-portrait of random embankments, railings, and yards seen by Stella from her train window. When Stella manages to glimpse inside some of these homes, she finds a bleak picture of working-class life, almost sociological in its family typology:
Prominent sculleries, with bent-forward heads of women back at the sink again after Sunday dinner, and recessive living-rooms in which the breadwinner armchair-slumbered, legs out, hand across the eyes, displayed themselves; upstairs, at looking-glasses in windows, girls got themselves ready to go out with boys. One old unneeded woman, relegated all day to where she slept and would die, prised apart lace curtains to take a look at the train, as through calculating whether it might not be able to escape this time. Children turned out to play went through with the mime of it, dragging objects or pushing one another up and down short paths where vegetables had not been able to be sown. It was striking how listlessly, shiftlessly and frankly life in these houses—and what else was life but this?—exposed itself to the eyes in the passing or halting trains: eyes to be taken, one could only suppose, to be blinded by other preoccupations. *(Heat, 330)*

This—even more than in her dismissive treatment of Louie Lewis—is where Bowen shows her cards most frankly. For she seems to say: even if you are granted a view inside these homes, you will learn nothing, be given no epiphany. You will only learn the desolation of everyday life, which no one can escape. *(Even children’s play is a simulacrum, situated symbolically in infertile ground.)* By the time she reaches the question—“and what else was life but this?”—the reader is primed for anything else, grateful that the novel will not continue in this vein. To quote a propaganda campaign of the time, Stella’s journey is really necessary, insofar as it will lead us past the listlessness of this life.

But if Bowen’s window-gazing does not lead to a modernist epiphany—indeed, expressly refuses it, especially if we contrast her treatment of the old woman with Woolf’s in *Mrs. Dalloway*—it does create a restlessness around the site of the family home. For not only are we granted a view on the its cast of characters, but also the very structure of the home, whose architecture allows for this domestic travesty with its prominent sculleries, recessive living-rooms, and lace-curtained tombs for the unneeded elderly. These excesses were precisely the targets of postwar reconstruction, which
promised to counter the outmoded family home (its labor, its wasted space, its unsightliness) with modern kitchens and labor-saving appliances, open floor plans, natural light, and even separate dwellings for old people, all situated in a more neighborhood-friendly, networked array of living spaces. The literature of reconstruction was not without its judgment: indeed, its logic often relied on an underlying distaste for the working-class—not only for their homes, but also, implicitly, for their general behavior. They were the substrate population of postwar improvement schemes, effected through the mass clearance of the slums and the re-housing in high-density high-rises. While Bowen’s condemning gaze inside the home echoes this postwar course of reconstruction, her novel lacks any sense of the planning imagination. This is reflected in the conclusion to this train episode: “It was not to be taken into account that from any one train there should be looking any one pair of eyes which had no other preoccupation, no other resort, nothing; eyes themselves exposed forever to what they saw, subjected to whatever chose to be seen” (Heat, 330). Completely dissolving any hint of agency, this sentence reduces Stella’s subjectivity into one of radical passivity. As usual, Bowen’s tortured syntax reveals a facet of her own social ambivalence. The sentence’s final clause suggests her version of authorial hell and the fate of the postwar author: to be nothing but a pair of eyes, gazing in presumable horror at the world. While this reminds the reader of the reforming work to be done, it also underscores an aversion

See the Ministry of Health’s Housing Manual, both 1944 and 1949 editions, as well as the supplements to the 1949 manual (1949 and 1952), which detailed special accommodation needs from the elderly, apprentices, students, single workers, and the disabled—showing how normative the plans for housing really were (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1944, 1949, and 1952). See also the wealth of Mass Observation reports on the family home, particularly An Enquiry into People’s Homes (1943), which studied what kinds of housing people wanted after the war (London: Advertising Service Guild, 1943).
to the fate of the general populace, who Bowen can only imagine in types, or through the limited consciousness of her working-class characters.

III. “You Want Me to Be Posterity?”: Problems of Inheritance

Of course, the class drama between Stella and Louie is not the only site that augurs the future of postwar Britain. Bowen also gives us Stella’s son, Roderick Rodney, another model for postwar personhood who raises questions about the generational gap between mother and son. His character has been a non-person throughout The Heat of the Day, figured as a hapless youth who lacks a capacity to reflect on the gravity of war and peace. By the end, however, Bowen instills Roderick with newfound psychological sensitivity, transforming him into a mouthpiece for his generation’s sense of historicity. An uncharacteristically long passage in which he meditates on his role of “being posterity” turns into a didactic speech on the role of art and history:

“I wish I were God,” he said. “Instead of which I am so awfully young—that’s my disadvantage. The only hope would have been my having happened to say some inspired thing, but now there hasn’t been that I shall be no good for about another fifty years—because all I can do now is try and work this out, which could easily take my lifetime; and by that time you’d be dead. I couldn’t bear to think of you waiting on and on and on for something, something that in a flash would give what Robert did and what happened enormous meaning like there is in a play of Shakespeare’s—but, must you? If there’s something that is to be said, won’t it say itself? Or mayn’t you come to imagine it has been said, even without your knowing what exactly it was?… Or are you telling me, then asking me, because I am young, and so ought to later into time? You want me to be posterity? But then, Robert’s dying of what he did will not always be there, won’t last like a book or a picture: by the time one is able to understand it it will be gone, it just won’t be there to be judged. Because, I suppose art is the only thing that can go on mattering once it has stopped hurting?…” (Heat, 337)

This twisting, vexed language reflects Roderick’s ambivalence over his role as postwar interpreter, first through convoluted verbs (“would have been my having happened to say”; “now there hasn’t been that I shall be no good”), and then through an escalating
series of questions about the nature of his responsibility. This labor would be injurious both to Roderick and to his mother, who risks waiting indefinitely for her son to grant her a flash of meaning. Roderick finds little solace to this project of “being posterity”: indeed, its only recuperative aspect is that “art can go on mattering once it has stopped hurting.” Even this idea is questionable—what begins as a statement turns interrogative. Roderick’s sense of inadequacy in the face of Stella’s war is symptomatic of the wartime artist and the challenge of creating art out of historical hurt. (It also speaks to why so many late-twentieth century authors return to the site of the Second World War, the site of their parents’ trauma.)

The prospect of infinite labor facing Roderick is a yet another element distinguishing Bowen from her modernist predecessors. In their valuation of epiphanic sympathy, modernists figured connection as a near-instantaneous forging of insight. For Bowen, however, the postwar artist faces a lifetime of attempting to make sense of the past, a form of responsibility without end.\(^{81}\) While the characters of The Heat of the Day are cognizant of this need, its potential for success is uncertain. The best possible result is an infinite cycle of working through other people’s problems, a Sisyphean form of labor. This model of relationship to the past is ultimately a non-exit from the dead-ends of WWII trauma, leaving us with the question of how desirable such an inheritance really is.

Another View of Postwar Reconstruction: The Big House

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\(^{81}\) While other postwar novelists such as Waugh, Orwell, and Beckett agree upon the importance of this work, Waugh cheapens this labor by turning immediately to nostalgia, Orwell refuses its viability, and even Beckett (of “I can't go on, I'll go on”) stays in the more abstract register of the infinite.
Later in the novel, Bowen shifts the grounds of Roderick’s psychological drama from the problem of creating art to that of administrating property. The shift occurs as Roderick surveys Mount Morris, the family Big House of his future inheritance. The year is now 1944, the narrator having accelerated two years forward from 1942 through historically punctuated paragraphs (“1942, still with no Second Front, ran out…Cryptic were new 1943 block calendars. February, the Germans capitulated at Stalingrad; March, the Eighth Army broke through the Mareth Line…”) (Heat, 347). These matter-of-fact timelines convey a sense of war’s imminent end, not only to the reader, but also, seemingly, to the characters. By the time we reach 1944, Roderick has begun to view Mount Morris through the lens of his forthcoming inheritance, feeling a new sense of administrative purpose. Echoing the planning imagination of the time, he says to Donovan, the property’s caretaker: “Mount Morris has got to be my living. To start with, I’ll have to learn—go to one or another of those agricultural set-ups for two, three, four years. Everything’s got to be done scientifically these days; one can’t just go fluffing along as an amateur” (Heat, 353). His language reflects the professional energy underwriting postwar reconstruction: the new discourses of planning that transformed the art of domesticity into a science.

In the end, however, Mount Morris’s fate remains unclear. That the decaying estate can be thus transformed is cast into doubt by Donovan’s reminiscence over the property’s previous owner, Mr. Morris, who also loved to dabble in improvement schemes that were never followed through: “‘There was nothing to show in the end of it all, said Donovan. ‘However, the master had a great time with ideas’” (Heat, 354). This may be taken as a prediction for the postwar world: big on wartime ideas, but with little
to show afterwards. It also shows us the other side of the reconstructive coin: that of historic preservation. After all, the National Buildings Record (NBR) was set up in 1940, a scheme meant to document buildings of national importance, whether through photograph or other artistic renderings. As I’ll discuss later, Bowen was well acquainted with the labor in preserving the Big House, as the last inheritor of her own ancestral seat, Bowen’s Court. Her occasional writing would continue to vacillate between these two vistas of postwar domesticity, both during and after the war: moving from the decaying, abandoned Big House to the newly built, mass-occupied homes of reconstruction.

Yet there’s another reason why the future of Mount Morris hangs in the balance: the possibility of its heir perishing in the war. For as Roderick sleeps in the old master’s bedroom, he feels the fear of death for the first time. (This caused undue anxiety for Rosamond Lehmann, who upon reading The Heat of the Day, wrote Bowen to ask “whether Roderick is at Mount Morris now.”) As he reflects upon the possibility of his own death, he finds himself yet again caught in a web of the dead’s demands:

Recollecting that he ought to make a will, he in his own mind mildly reproached his mother for her failure to prompt him. By a written will one made subject some other person—but he saw that what worked most on the world, on him, were the unapprehendable inner wills of the dead. Death could not estimate what it left behind it. […] Roderick reflected that, as things were, there would be nobody but his mother to be his heir, either: he felt this with chagrin for both himself and her—between them, they should have come to something further than this. (Heat, 353)

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82 See Holman, Print for Victory, 206-207. The NBR was an independent body from the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, established in 1908, until their merger in 1963, and eventually, their 1999 merger with English Heritage.

The final chapters of *The Heat of the Day* ask the reader how to come to something further than this; that is, how to think their history beyond the war’s, and how to make one’s own postwar world inhabitable in ways other than reanimating or housing the ghosts from the past. Yet the novel cannot imagine what that world would look like, other than an insidious, unthinking collective (Louie) or the Sisyphean labor to make sense of the dead (Roderick). In light of this, Roderick’s monologue on art and war takes on an ironic cast. At the very moment when Bowen visualizes the escape velocity required to break from the interwar, she falls back into its grasp, returning to her previous fidelity to a different posterity.

And tellingly, perhaps, the rest of Bowen’s *oeuvre* avoids returning to the Second World War.\(^{84}\) In fact, her two subsequent novels revolve around hidden relics from the First World War, encrypting the interwar period as the only history worth remembering. *A World of Love* (1955) centers on the protagonist’s discovery of her mother’s old love letters, which were written by a fiancé killed in the First World War and hidden away in the manor’s attic. This novel largely recapitulates Bowen’s earlier fictional treatments of the interwar Irish Big House.\(^{85}\) *The Little Girls* (1963), on the other hand, moves beyond

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\(^{84}\) However, though her fiction never returned to the Second World War (or indeed, to London), Bowen’s personal life was completely entrapped by it, particularly her love affair with the Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie (the dedicatee of *The Heat of the Day*). This romance would haunt her for the rest of her life, as documented in their recently published diaries and love letters. Bowen was obsessed with maintaining the hermetic world they created during the war, even after Ritchie’s 1948 marriage to his cousin Sylvia Smellie: theirs was the real-life affair fueling the fictional Stella and Robert, equally lacking in fulfillment. See *Love’s Civil War: Elizabeth Bowen and Charles Ritchie: Letters and Diaries, 1941-1973*, ed. Victoria Glendinning and Judith Robertson (2009).

\(^{85}\) Though, as Lara Feigel points out, Charles’ presence continues to haunt *A World of Love* through the absent figure of Guy, and the centrality of the written letter (*Love-
the interwar to the postwar period, recounting the story of three childhood friends brought together again after many years. Yet like *A World of Love*, the action begins with the discovery of a long-forgotten treasure—a box the women had buried during their schoolgirl days, right before the start of the First World War. This is why *The Heat of the Day* presents such an anomaly within Bowen’s *oeuvre*: its narrative form looks forward rather than backward, a move Bowen is clearly not accustomed to making (and whose fiction never will again). It is a novel more anxious about the demands of an uncertain postwar future, crystallized in the work of postwar reconstruction.

**IV. Two Visions of the Postwar: Bowen’s Court and “The Bend Back”**

If Bowen’s fiction leaves us in a morass of residual and emergent social energies—all gestures, none actualized—her non-fiction puts a stronger point on their stakes, enumerating the social and aesthetic implications of postwar reconstruction. And, in what should now be a familiar move, she does so through primarily through lamenting the fate of domesticity, acknowledging the decline of the Big House and older forms of social connection, while showing a marked anxiety around the reconstructed domesticity to come.

From 1939-1941, Bowen wrote her memoir *Bowen’s Court* (1944), a tribute to her family and, more importantly, her family estate, of which she was the first female heir. Beginning with her 18th-century ancestor Henry Bowen through nine subsequent generations, *Bowen’s Court* assembles a genealogy held together by the same common

denominator: the Big House, which “stamps its own character on all ways of living.” It isn’t until the afterword that we are finally brought up to date with the catastrophe of her present moment. Written in Christmastime of December 1941, *Bowen’s Court* ends with Bowen sitting in her London apartment, looking out the window at Regent’s Park while meditating: “I have written (as though it were everlasting) about a home at a time when all homes are threatened and hundreds of thousands of them are being destroyed. I have taken the attachment of people to places as being generic to human life, at a time when the attachment is to be dreaded, as a possible source of too much pain” (*Bowen’s Court*, 454). These words expressly recall Bowen’s personal turmoil of being attached to both wartime London and neutral Ireland. As Bowen points out, Ireland’s neutrality allowed the Irish to remain attached to their places, in stark contrast to Britain’s status as the “island fortress.” Yet despite this controversy, Bowen still acknowledged how much she cared for Bowen’s Court, calling it the “one private image—one peaceful scene” that sustained her during war (*Bowen’s Court*, 457). She was also canny enough to recognize that this peaceful image could only have been forged by war: “War has made me this image out of a house built of anxious history” (*Bowen’s Court*, 457). This leads to her following prophetic meditation:

> It will be more difficult when the war is over to keep in view this absolute of peace. It will be likely to be obscured by minor achievements and false promises. We must be on our guard when peace, practicably coming, loses poetic status again. The peace of the image can never be realized: staying human, as we must stay human, we shall still fumble and blunder—but along better roads? We shall not really see a new heaven and a new earth. But we did once see peace, in the heart of war-time. That is the peace to remember, seek and ensue. (*Bowen’s Court*, 457)

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86 Bowen, *Bowen’s Court* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 449. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *Bowen’s Court*. 
Bowen’s prediction came true. Postwar Britain was inexorably shaped by its wartime imagination of peace. Architects, state propaganda, popular magazines all produced similar images of peacetime Britain, whose symbolic power was most often concentrated in depictions of the home. Reconstruction, when it came, was often perceived as only achieving the “minor achievements and false promises” Bowen warns about, quickly losing its poetry. The very syntax of Bowen’s writing performs this, undercutting its lyrical musings on the human with an ungainly infrastructural query (“—but along better roads?”). This ambivalence about the postwar’s concrete reality, along with the wish to remember a wartime peace, reveals the inherent conservatism of Bowen’s idealism.

Straddling a prewar and postwar world, Bowen’s Court concludes mired in a wartime apotheosis, with no foreseeable way out. In an appropriate end to its saga, the house was abandoned by Elizabeth in the 1950s, and finally demolished in 1961.

Bowen’s occasional writing also shows a sustained interest in what makes for an inhabitable world, combined with an ambivalence about the burgeoning welfare state. As she asks in her 1950 essay “The Bend Back,” “Are we to take it that our own time has been, from the point of view of its inhabitants, irreparably injured—that it shows some loss of vital deficiency?” The essay reviews the literature of her contemporaries, noting how many of them return to the golden days of lost times, making a nostalgic “bend back” to childhood or other historical eras—something she herself would do in both A World of Love (1955) and The Little Girls (1963). Yet in 1950, Bowen still believed it was the job of the writer to re-engage their readers with their own time, especially after

87 Bowen, “The Bend Back,” The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen (London: Virago Press, 1986), 55. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated “Bend Back.”
the shock of war: “Now, after a second war, with its excoriations, grinding impersonality, obliteration of so many tracks and landmarks, heart and imagination once more demand to be satisfied - to be fed, stabilised, reassured, taught. The demand is, that writers should re-instate the idea of life as livable, lovable” (“Bend Back,” 55). Here we find Bowen seeking her own form of literary welfare. Echoing Beveridge’s call for revolution, Bowen asks literature to provide nutrition, education, and security for the hearts and minds of the British people, a literary counter welfare state.

Yet for Bowen, what constitutes a more livable state of affairs does not sync up with the state’s reorganization of everyday life, especially its postwar housing programs. Indeed, as she notes, it is hard to escape the lure of nostalgia when “aggravated to malady-point by our disrelish for and uneasiness in the present - the aching, bald uniformity of our urban surroundings, their soulless rawness” (“Bend Back,” 59). With this, Bowen’s essay devolves into a complaint against the work of postwar reconstruction, recalling her ambivalence at the end of Bowen’s Court about the “better roads” of postwar Britain:

Where is the eye to linger, where is fancy to dwell? No associations, no memories have had time to gather around the new soaring blocks of flats, the mushroom housing-estates. And, will they ever do so? - where shall they find a foothold? Nothing rustles, nothing casts a feathery shadow: there is something frightening about the very unhauntedness of ‘functional’ rooms. Atmosphere has been conditioned out of the air. Nor even, among all this oppressiveness of brick and concrete, do we feel secure—all this, in a split second, could become nothing. Nor, stacked and crowded upon one another in our living and moving, do we feel in contact: personal isolation has increased. (“Bend Back,” 59)

These final comments critique the two central tenets of the postwar housing boom: first, that providing housing would necessarily provide security to its citizens, and second, that the architecture of daily life would contribute to a new sense of community, both through
the newly networked family home as well as through city planning in general. The end of this essay ultimately casts doubt on the benefits of welfare promises to make culture available to all, wondering whether such a democratic stance actually breeds discontent: “Is this an age of frustration—or simply one in which many more people ask more of life? Education, literacy, discussion, aesthetic experiences of all kinds, have widened the boundaries of our self-consciousness. At its best, democracy breeds the sentient person—it is in the nature of such a person to seek fulfillment” (“Bend Back,” 59). 88

Of course, through speaking in the plural, Bowen is also speaking for herself: her background led her to be suspect of the small house of city planning, as well as, more broadly, the will to democratization. One could read into Bowen’s essay all the trappings of status and authorial prestige: a milder, classist cousin of T. S. Eliot’s Notes Towards the Definition of Culture. Yet the challenge still remains of making people feel at home in their present, insofar as “more and more of us are being cast in the mould of those to whom no present time ever has been ideal” (“Bend Back,” 59). Remarkably, as the previous passage suggests, this calls for a renewed ghosting of the home: as Bowen implies, it is more frightening to have an unhaunted house than sheer functionality, more desirable to have memory than a clean slate. Yet this does not imply a return to Bowen’s wartime uncanny, whether to the thinning membrane between the living and the dead, or to the exhilaration of a merged collective consciousness. Rather, the illusion of the “postwar” comes from a necessary forgetting of the dead for the sake of the living:

Raw history, in its implications, is unnerving; and, even so, it only chronicles the survivors. A defeat accompanied every victory; faiths failed; millions went under leaving behind no trace. If the greater part of the past had not been, mercifully,

88 See Alan Sinfield’s chapter “Class/culture/welfare” in Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain (New York: Continuum, 2004).
forgotten, the effect upon our modern sensibility would be unbearable: it would not be only injustice and bloodshed that we should have to remember but the dismay, the apathy, the brutalising humiliations of people for whom there was no break. How few, all down history, have been the favoured few—of the past as a whole we might say, ‘We are well out of it!’ The human dilemma, the dilemma inherent in being human, was at no time less than it is now. As things are, the past is veiled from us by illusion—our own illusion. It is that which we seek. It is not the past but the idea of the past which draws us. (57-8)

This is Bowen’s philosophy of history, one both sobering and disturbing. On the one hand, the forgetting of the past is necessary, even merciful in order for us to carry on; on the other, this creates the dilemma of a widespread, generalized survivor’s guilt in being “well out of it,” and the problems of an illusory relation to the past, the subject of Bowen’s critique. Her language carries a coldness only hinted at in The Heat of the Day, one that hinges on a new approach to the idea of mass-consciousness. Instead of the exhilarating merging of minds brought on by the Blitz, or the dreaded postwar rise of the unthinking working-class, Bowen proposes a third take on the individual and the crowd: that is, the winners and the losers, or the few who lived and the many others who died, unable to leave a trace. And as the possibility of our consciousness is predicated on the forgetting of the dead, any return to the past will be necessarily veiled, its truth obstructed by our own modern sensibility. Indeed, this passage raises the potentially damning question of why we are drawn to studying histories of violence: for after all, what is it that we hope to see?

Caught between the enchantment and disenchantment of violence, this meditation raises a question we may well put to Bowen’s own novel The Heat of the Day: that is, whether it exists as an unnerving form of raw history, or whether it aids in our forgetting the violence and uncomfortable transformations created by the war. I read The Heat of the Day as attempting to do both at once, moving between a hospitable and hostile habitat
for those desiring a romantic picture of Britain’s finest hour, especially as a pre-history for Britain’s postwar period. As Petra Rau suggests, aspects of Bowen’s novel “might just predict the process of restoration as a return to a ghostly past, indicating a distinct feature of British post-war culture: a nostalgic obsession with a partly mythical moment of consolidated national identity and the shadows of Empire.”89 And it’s true; at moments the novel seems to give into the trap of nostalgia, what Bowen characterized as an “emergency, 1940 fondness” for those who had suffered the violence of the Blitz.90 Yet to diagnose the novel as suffering the ills of imperial or national nostalgia would also be to bypass the questions raised by Bowen’s secondary criticism about the ethics of looking backwards, and the balance between forgetting and remembering. In evoking the recent historic past, she does not indulge in the same “bend back” as other novelists. Instead of making the landscape of the Second World War attractive and likable, The Heat of the Day is shot through with ambivalence—not just about the romance of the “People’s War,” but also, more agonizingly, about the limitations of postwar peace.

Coda: “London’s Creeping”

I want to return, now, to Bowen’s The Heat of the Day, to make one more foray into its revisions of literary modernism. But this time I want to focus expressly on E.M. Forster’s Howards End (1910), as a conspicuous source for the end of Bowen’s wartime

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novel. Both works grapple with how to translate private sentiment into public feeling, how to think about the inheritance of property, and how to imagine connection across class lines. For these novelists, such rifts prove too vast to cross, resulting in novelistic solutions resting on uneasy and rather contrived social syntheses, whether through the inheritance of Howards End by the bastard son of Leonard Bast and Helen Schlegel, or by Louie Lewis’s newly-legitimized illegitimate child upon the death of her husband, Tom. The apparent unease of these social syntheses reflects the authors’ abiding ambivalence with democratization: a cultural elitism that comes from their self-conscious affiliation with dying social institutions (Forster and the Victorian liberal intellectual; Bowen and the Anglo-Irish aristocracy).

As mentioned earlier, Bowen named Forster as her biggest literary influence, especially when it came to the writing of place or what Bowen called Forster’s “place-feeling.” And this is after all the main concern of Howards End, which takes the family home as a metonym for England itself, asking, as Lionel Trilling writes, “Who shall inherit England?”91 The novel also circles around the liberal paradox of how to reconcile the life of the spirit with the material reality of property, resulting in what Daniel Born has called “most comprehensive picture of liberal guilt in this century” that is played out through dramas of domestic space.92 Thus it is striking that both novels end with a rural retreat away from London, described with strikingly similar form, language, and sensibility:


92 Born, “Private Gardens, Public Swamps,” 141.
From the garden came laughter. “Here they are at last!” exclaimed Henry, disengaging himself with a smile. Helen rushed into the gloom, holding Tom by one hand and carrying her baby on the other. There were shouts of infectious joy. “The field’s cut!” Helen cried excitedly—“the big meadow! We’ve seen to the very end, and it’ll be such a crop of hay as never!”

Across the canal the hills rose, bare, above the other bank’s reflected oak trees. No other soul passed; not a sheep, even, was cropping anywhere nearby. A minute or two ago our homecoming bombers, invisibly high up, had droned over: the baby had not stirred—every day she saw him growing more like Tom. But now there began another sound—she turned and looked up into the air behind her. She gathered Tom quickly out of the pram and held him up, hoping he too might see, and perhaps remember. Three swans were flying a straight flight. They passed overhead, disappearing in the direction of the West. (Heat, 372.)

There’s a lot to say about the resonances here: both endings take place outside the home, and rejoice in nature, whether growing crops or flying swans. And both center on an illegitimate child—“Tom”—whose futurity is enigmatically, even spiritually linked to this vision of a restorative nature. This sense of potential repair also comes from the marked transitions away from a source of past harm (Henry Wilcox’s reveal that he trespassed his late wife Ruth’s final wishes; “our homecoming bombers”) to a scene of present natural bounty and resolved social conflict. This, in turn, raises the question of whether we as readers accept these final gestures of novelistic reconciliation, particularly under the modernist injunction to “only connect.”

Yet there is trouble in paradise, not only in light of the personal abysses that had to be traversed and betrayals effected in order to arrive at these social syntheses (i.e.,

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94 For a good reading of this along the lines of Forster’s belief in art and culture, see Leslie White, who reads *Howards End* in light of his later writings such as *Two Cheers for Democracy*, arguing that Forster ultimately desired “not a marriage but a salutary disconnection of disparate sensibilities” in order for the Schlegels and their beliefs not to be subsumed by the imperialistic, rational Wilcoxes (“Vital Disconnection in *Howards End,*” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 51.1 (Spring 2005): 44, accessed January 22, 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20058751?origin=JSTOR-pdf).
Margaret’s shiver, the death of Louie’s husband), but also in light of their domestic structures. For just at the moment that the Schlegels feel they’ve achieved proper spiritual possession of Howards End (“peculiarly our own,” Margaret says), we are reminded of the wider threat to the Big House’s rural idyll:

“All the same, London’s creeping.”
She pointed over the meadow—over eight or nine meadows, but at the end of them was a red rust.
“You see that in Surrey and even Hampshire now,” she continued. “I can see it from the Purbeck Downs. And London is only part of something else, I’m afraid. Life’s going to be melted down, all over the world.”

This vision of creeping suburbia sits uneasily with the reader, particularly after the Schlegel’s hard-won inheritance of Howards End. As Born argues, Forster includes the encroaching rust of London to remind his readers that “any attempt to waft away the odors of the abyss is not only intellectually dishonest but also damaging to one’s liberal ideals; and that the spirit of Bast competes with Mrs. Wilcox for the privilege of hovering over the final scene in the meadow.” But the result is more than just dishonesty or damage to ideals: it is an elemental revulsion to this urban architecture, that can only be envisioned in apocalyptic terms. It is impossible to the pastoral joy of “such a crop of hay as never!” without remembering that it is competing with a vision of rust and decay, or, in Forster’s mind, global meltdown. Of course, by the time Bowen was writing *The Heat of the Day*, these terms were close to being realized, both at home (the London Blitz) and abroad (the fire-bombing of Dresden; the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). And while Bowen may share Forster’s patrician yet mildly apocalyptic distaste for London suburbia, *The Heat of the Day* throws these questions into greater relief. Its

95 Forster, *Howards End*, 332.
96 Born 1.
question is not Trilling’s formulation of “Who shall inherit England,” but rather: “What, exactly, will this England look like? Will there be anything left to inherit?”

97 Hence Hepburn’s reading of the swans flying to the West: “The West was guarantor of the reconstruction of Europe. From the West – Western Europe, the US – came the moral and financial resources to reconstruct war-ravaged Central and Eastern Europe” (“Trials and Errors,” 135-6).
CHAPTER TWO: “NOWHERE’S SAFE”: RUINOUS RECONSTRUCTION IN THE GIRLS OF SLENDER MEANS

Long ago in 1945 all the nice people in England were poor, allowing for exceptions. (Muriel Spark, The Girls of Slender Means)

The first chapter of this dissertation dealt with authors’ reactions to war as a contemporary phenomenon: that is, writing that was written concurrently (or nearly so) with actually living it on the ground. These works (by authors including Bowen, Greene, Green, and Waugh) tend to be the substrate for literary criticism of the Second World War, read as a testament to the immediate experience of living with the war – more so, even, than living through it. It is a literature of the wounding of war to both bodies and buildings, as well as the myriad emotions that are produced by its social upheavals, such as anxiety, pleasure, fear, and boredom.

Of course, and as the previous chapter discussed, the temporality of the Second World War was skewed, and in a very particular way: it was taken as much by the violence of war as with its eventual repair, “postwar reconstruction” being a very palpable, very inspiring war aim. And in Elizabeth Bowen’s case, to grapple with the immediacy of war meant a deep unease with the imagined future to come: one whose rebuilding, modernization, and even democratization would erase those characteristics that made the home inhabitable, not to mention knowable. In short, her depiction of domestic life was largely motivated by the fear of postwar reconstruction: fear that it would actually deliver on its promises.
With this second chapter, we jump forward in time to the year 1963, a decade and change after the end of the Second World War. After extended years of wartime austerity (with rationing finally ending in 1954), Britain was finally experiencing a boom of domestic postwar prosperity, with wages up, unemployment down, and living standards generally on the rise, despite international sea-changes such as accelerating decolonization and the 1956 Suez Crisis. As Conservative PM Harold MacMillan put it in his 1957 “never had it so good” speech:

Let’s be frank about it; most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms, and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime—nor indeed ever in the history of this country. What is worrying some of us is “Is it too good to be true?” or perhaps I should say “Is it too good to last?”98

However, amidst this prosperity, postwar Britain did not see a full realization of its wartime dreams of building single-family dwellings. (It was also the year the author of the Beveridge Report, Sir William Beveridge, died: a fact both coincidental and symbolic.) Frustrated by slow growth and unrealistic visions, building had begun to embrace other visions of domesticity, specifically the high-rise, whose popularity began in the mid-1950s and continued into the late 1960s.99 While the high-rise at first was a utopian vision of affordable, mixed housing, its shoddy construction soon give way to physical decay, social undesirability, and crime.

Thus by the time this chapter’s central text arrives on the scene—Muriel Spark’s 1963 *The Girls of Slender Means*—enough time had passed from the end of the Second World War.

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World War to be able to address not only the war’s mythic consolidation into the “People’s War,” but also to begin deconstructing the myth of the People’s Peace, or the plenitude projected by wartime’s postwar imagination. Indeed, what we find in *The Girls of Slender Means* is an author motivated by what welfare could do and what it couldn’t do – that is, what social forms were activated, and what were decidedly not, by welfare state infrastructure.

Of course, Muriel Spark was not the first to critique the failures of the postwar period. The literature of the Angry Young Men exploded onto the scene in the 1950s, including Kingsley Amis’s debut novel *Lucky Jim* (1954), John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), and John Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958). Again, the space of the family home was the battleground and stage for critique, shifting away from the spectacle of ruined, stripped-open domesticity (the central preoccupation of 1940s Blitz literature) to the Angries’ claustrophobic, misogynistic renderings of family life. Their works signaled a profound, unanswerable discontent with the political and economic effects of postwar consensus, a masculine-stylized affect that Peter Kalliney describes as “a complex negotiation of an unstable gender position—in which both exaggerated heterosexuality and the domestic responsibilities implied by marriage and a family are highly esteemed—and the continuing existence of undiminished class anger under conditions of material prosperity.”

Postwar literature also engaged the discourse of reconstruction through its turn to dystopian fiction, presenting readers with nightmarish visions of Britain’s administrated future. Works such as George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*

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100 Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger*, 30.
and Graham Greene’s short story “The Destructors” (both 1954), Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and later, J.G. Ballard’s *High-Rise* (1975) questioned the very nature of Britain’s new-found social consensus, asking whether the collective logic of wartime should also have sway over a peacetime society. For these writers, the people of the “People’s War” were already seeped in violence, making any state they built inevitably totalitarian. In this literature, the collective is always suspect, and welfare infrastructure always tantamount to ruthless social control. Indeed, if the Second World War taught us anything, it was the British’s ability to organize (and organize well) under the banner of state violence, throwing the very concept of peacetime consensus into immediate question.

This chapter argues that Muriel Spark occupies a distinctive place in these considerations, as an author who offers an original and compelling reconfiguration of the novel’s social function in the postwar moment. Critics typically address Spark’s work through its ambiguous style, assimilating it within a trajectory of modernism to postmodernism, through reference to her own fraught national and religious identities, or through historicizing her fiction’s political referents. But how might we place Spark within a history of social forms? What does she have to teach us about rebuilding Britain, especially through her restructuring of the novel? Furthermore, how does she do so without recourse to either wartime sentimentalization, masculine class anger, or dystopian critique, three options which have received considerably more attention, yet remain strangely silent on the realities of the postwar world?

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101 A recent example of this can be found in David Herman’s introduction to the 2008 *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on Muriel Spark (“‘A Salutary Scar’: Muriel Spark’s Desegregated Art in the Twenty-first Century,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.3 (Fall 2008): 473-86, accessed January 12, 2011, DOI: 10.1353/mfs.0.1548).
Rather than place faith in war’s transformative power, or conversely, invite a recapturing non-institutionalized space, Muriel Spark insists her readers take stock of how they live now. Her fiction studies what type of social intimacies are left for those in domestic spaces that, like those of the postwar welfare state, are administrated but not completely totalitarian. Though savage and satirical, Spark does not give up on the idea of society. Indeed, her novels offer insight into diverse social worlds, letting an ethic of cohabitation displace the more recognizable dynamics of familial domesticity. From the schools of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) and final novel *The Finishing School* (2004), to the boarding-houses of *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963) and *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988), from the nursing home in her first novel *The Comforters* (1957) to the abbey of *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), Spark focuses on the problems of communal living, a hallmark of the midcentury transition from warfare to welfare. Her work also offers a female monogendered alternative to earlier authors’ visions of all-male communities, whether based on camaraderie or self-destructive violence (e.g. *Lord of the Rings* and *Lord of the Flies*, both published in 1954). To this, Spark’s 1963 *The Girls of Slender Means* marks a significant departure, joining Mary McCarthy’s *The Group* (also published 1963) and Jacqueline Susann’s *The Valley of the Dolls* (finally published 1966), which center on groups of women and their elective affinities.

Despite her *oeuvre*’s focus on communal living, Muriel Spark’s novels are not only interested in the social aggregate and its representations. Rather than Orwell’s boot stamping in a face forever, they allow autonomy and individual decisions to matter—
resulting in surprising betrayals and lingering injuries, keenly felt. As such, I suggest Spark’s work is most legible in relation to literary modernism, not just modernist aesthetics but also its social investment in the radical potential (and limitations) of individual connection. Also under duress to address a newly postwar world, modernists turned to narrative interiority in the traumatic wake of the First World War, as a way to make space for epiphanic moments of sympathy between individuals. By employing a comparative postwar approach, this article will show how Spark’s unusual formal demands upend this modernist narrative architecture, destroying its physical structures of domesticity and revealing its brand of sympathy to be inaccessible as a postwar structure of feeling. This, then, will clear way for Spark’s contribution to postwar literature, a literary reconstructive logic that critiques the historiographic reconstruction of Britain’s Second World War.

While the jewel of Muriel Spark’s oeuvre is, at least within literary criticism, the 1961 *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*—a novel deeply engaged with the spectacle of fascist authority—I contend that her 1963 *The Girls of Slender Means* has more to teach us about the forces at play in the Second World War, and its warping of domestic life. Recounting the fate of “The May of Teck Club,” a hostel in wartime London existing “for the Pecuniary Convenience and Social Protection of Ladies of Slender Means,” the novel follows a group of girls as they negotiate the pressure to stay beautiful, graceful, and

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102 In this way, I diverge slightly from Marina MacKay’s reading of the influence of Catholicism on *The Girls of Slender Means*, which suggests that Spark’s “savage ironising of comforting national mythology can be explained and domesticated by the religious principles underlying her scepticism about a secular version of the New Jerusalem” (Mackay, *Modernism and World War II*, 145).
poised during the lean times of total war.”\textsuperscript{103} Turning its focus away from Brodie’s “familiar attractions of fascism” (to borrow Judy Suh’s formulation) and towards the mechanisms of collectivity, \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} raises the less attractive, but still critical problem of what it means to live together under a welfarist ideology, sharing resources, power, and space.\textsuperscript{104}

As its title indicates, \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} plays with the nexus between deprivation and deprivatization, a warfare-to-welfare logic that began with the Beveridge Report and ended with postwar consensus. Set in 1945 between V-E and V-J Day, and against the backdrop of Labour’s ascent to power, the novel raises the question of whether a society forged by war would likewise band together under the causes of social welfare. It does so by combining its characters’ limited financial means and wartime austerity measures, which are savagely satirized by Spark. The girls pervert the original meaning of state rationing, creating their own systems of control: in the May of Teck Club, deprivation is noble not for its patriotism but as a dieting tool. The novel’s title also recalls the dreaded means tests of earlier welfare systems, often a humiliation to those in need of state assistance, a reality powerfully documented by George Orwell’s \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} (1937). Acknowledging popular objection to means tests, the new welfare state clearly defined itself against them, using an egalitarian logic of contribution-based

\textsuperscript{103} Muriel Spark, \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} (New York: New Directions, 1998), 9. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated Girls.

benefits for all rather than free allowances for some.\textsuperscript{105} This is also the financial basis of the May of Teck Club, whose diverse inhabitants pay a small fee for room and board. The Club thus functions as a literary test case for the warfare-to-welfare state, both in its microcosmic likeness and its difference as a quasi-domestic, gendered alternative. But before focusing on the May of Teck, \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} begins at a national level, signaling a wider critique of 1945 Britain:

Long ago in 1945 all the nice people in England were poor, allowing for exceptions. The streets of the cities were lined with buildings in bad repair or no repair at all, bomb-sites in which decay had been drilled out, leaving only the cavity. Some bomb-ripped buildings looked like the ruins of ancient castles until, at a closer view, the wallpapers of various quite normal rooms would be visible, room above room, exposed, as on a stage, with one wall missing; sometimes a lavatory chain would dangle over nothing from a fourth- or fifth-floor ceiling; most of all the staircases survived, like a new art-form, leading up and up to an unspecified destination that made unusual demands on the mind’s eye. All the nice people were poor; at least, that was a general axiom, the best of the rich being poor in spirit. (\textit{Girls}, 7)

This opening gives us a spectacle of ruined structures and exposed interior spaces. Yet unlike Games’s future utopia, these denuded buildings don’t evoke a modernity worth fighting for. Instead, Spark’s language turns this logic on its head, asking us to question the productivity of wartime damage. It does this in part by employing a fairy-tale tone, satirizing the romance of the war in a manner both familiar and discomfiting. But it also achieves this through a remarkable juxtaposition between social axioms and physical ruins, depicting a wartime landscape devoid of human life before we encounter the girls of slender means. By doing so, Spark’s opening unsettles the longstanding association of

the Second World War as the People’s War.\textsuperscript{106} What’s more, this passage begs the question of what new art-form the war would occasion, its series of analogies reaching for an apt style of representation to fit the strangeness of the scene. Following the spatial cues of the opening passage, this article proposes that \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} most saliently registers the transition from warfare to welfare through its attention to built space, and its characters’ inhabitation of the May of Teck Club. Reading the Club’s physical architecture alongside its social structures allows us to see the novel’s skeptical engagement with Britain’s postwar fantasy of repair, one that imagined that reconstruction—the gleaming schools, health centres, and housing flats of wartime propaganda—would result in new forms of social equality. It will do using three approaches: first, through a comparative postwar approach, using the work of Virginia Woolf to expose Spark’s narrative innovations; second, by bringing the reconstructive logic of \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} into sharper focus; and lastly, by turning to Hilary Mantel’s 1995 \textit{Experiment in Love} as an adaptation of Spark’s 1963 novel, which continues its work for a generation faced with the ruins of the postwar welfare state.

\textbf{I. Windows and Sympathy}

modernist authors responded to the unthinkable catastrophes of war with innovative literary modes, turning to fragmentation, irony, the breakdown of connection and communication, and individual interiority as a way to register and respond to wartime violence. In turn, scholars such as Marina MacKay and Patrick Deer identify this nexus as a powerful marker against which to measure the literariness of the Second World War. MacKay’s work focuses on the historiographic nature of modernism and WWII: while authors embraced modernist inwardness in relation to the failures of the First World War, authors during the Second World War were more reflexively self-critical, reflecting on Britain’s diminution. Deer, likewise, focuses on the newly-national aspects of what he calls the “modern war culture” that developed in the Second World War: rather than rely on modernist fragmentation and irony, this new war culture “offered a modern cultural tradition that claimed to cure and unite the diverse, fragmented spheres of everyday life. But it did so in the name of war, and we are still living with the consequences.” This modern war culture notably diverges from Paul Fussell’s classic account of modern memory as produced by the First World War, which reflects an ironic structure of events by which optimistic hope ended in ironic catastrophe. We might read WWII’s modern war culture as upending this structure, imagining the darkness of war as ending in new forms of social equality. This is one way to begin addressing the differing stakes of the two world wars as engaged through literature: while the First’s shattering of the public

107 See Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory; Sherry, The Great War and the Language of Modernism; and Cole, At the Violet Hour.

108 MacKay, Modernism and WWII, 8. See also: Jed Esty, A Shrinking Island.

109 Deer, Culture in Camouflage, 6.

sphere spurred a modernist ethical retreat to the individual, the Second’s will to national unification was harder to wholeheartedly dismiss, and led writers like Muriel Spark to consider the new ways the state shapes everyday life.\textsuperscript{111}

I turn to Virginia Woolf as a modernist comparison to Muriel Spark because, taken together, these two writers give a compelling account of how domestic architecture structures how we assume ourselves to be inside and outside wartime violence, staging the encounter between these two spheres.\textsuperscript{112} Both their fiction and life writings are inextricable from this topic, including Woolf’s post-WWI trilogy \textit{Jacob’s Room}, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, and \textit{To the Lighthouse}, as well as her wartime memoir \textit{A Sketch of the Past}; and Spark’s \textit{The Girls of Slender Means}, \textit{The Hothouse by the East River}, \textit{The Mandelbaum Gate}, and her autobiographical \textit{Curriculum Vitae}. In each of these texts, domestic space provides a powerful index of what effect war has on individual and psychic interior life. In particular, both Woolf and Spark rely on the window to stage their narrative epiphanies, which \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} calls directly into focus:

\textsuperscript{111} Despite the deeply critical, pacifist stances that characterized many artists’ reactions to the First World War, several mid-century writers made what MacKay characterizes as “the guilty compromise” of supporting the Second (MacKay, \textit{Modernism and WWII}, 10). Several now canonical authors did extraordinary service for the wartime state in the Second World War, including George Orwell and his broadcasts for the BBC’s Eastern Service, Elizabeth Bowen’s spying on neutral Ireland for Churchill, Evelyn Waugh’s military service in Marine and commando units, and Graham Greene’s recruitment by MI6 for work in Sierra Leone. Such direct war service had a discernible influence on these authors’ fiction, which reflects a marked preoccupation with changing nature of private life under wartime, and the ruination, repurposing, or sheer obliteration of the homes of the Home Front.

\textsuperscript{112} Virginia Woolf, of course, provides the paragon modernist example, for as Victoria Rosner avers, “No other major novelist of the period was so preoccupied with the critique of Victorian domesticity or so explicit about the relationship of literary modernism to the changing nature of private life” (Rosner, \textit{Modernism}, 15).
Windows were important in that year of final reckoning; they told at a glance whether a house was inhabited or not; and in the course of the past years they had accumulated much meaning, having been the main danger-zone between domestic life and the war going on outside: everyone had said, when the sirens sounded, ‘Mind the windows. Keep away from the windows. Watch out for the glass.’ *(Girls, 8)*

As a symbolic threshold between inside and outside, public and private, the window can be read as a way of understanding the changing relationship between domestic interiors, wartime events, and psychological interiority. Laura Marcus locates this window-trope as a critical legacy of literary modernism, particularly in reference to the ways Woolf uses the window to suggest “transparency and opacity, connection and separation, clarity and distortion, and the relationship between past and present, or the ways in which the present becomes the past.”¹¹³ In particular, Victoria Rosner’s work on modernism and the architecture of private life has helped to establish a baseline against which Spark’s fenestral language comes into relief, particularly in relation to modernist interiority and its relationship to the rich material histories of modernist interior design.¹¹⁴ However, while Rosner’s account of thresholds examines modernist renovations of Victorian domesticity, especially along classed and gendered lines, Spark’s windows register a different set of boundaries: namely, the physical, damaging intrusion of the state into the private home, a war no longer going on outside. Through a reading of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel that provides a model of how domestic life engages with thresholds, we can see how *The Girls of Slender Means* presents an acute turn away from

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the modernist model of psychological and material interiority, especially in relation to wartime violence.

Many readers will remember that *Mrs. Dalloway* uses the window-threshold to stage Clarissa’s private epiphany at the end of the novel, as she meditates on the death of Septimus Smith.\(^{115}\) The architecture of this epiphany comes earlier, in a scene detailing how the shell-shocked veteran threw himself out his Bloomsbury lodging-house window rather than face another meeting with the ultra-rational Doctor Holmes. However, it is Clarissa who provides the novel’s fullest instantiation of the modernist epiphany, in an imagined connection to this perfect stranger. After writing several permutations of this connection, including bodily echo, vicarious projection, empathetic assertions of similarity, and comparative self-critique, Woolf ends her modernist operation by giving Clarissa the following revelation:

> But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him — the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room.\(^ {116}\)

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\(^{115}\) This moment is also critically triangulated by the appearance of the old lady in the opposite room, who like Septimus, we have encountered earlier in the narrative. Clarissa is taken by the woman, watching her as she gets ready for bed. We might read this as a vision of her future self, a quieter spectacle of death in the midst of the party. However, the figure of the old lady does not offer the same quotient of epiphanic transformation as Septimus, instead generating an observational, even descriptive mode (“It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed.”) Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981), 185.

\(^{116}\) Woolf, 186.
This moment is crucially altered in the British edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which omits what is arguably its cruelest line: “He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun.” Despite this editorial discrepancy, Clarissa’s epiphany still relies on a moment of radical sympathy, one that conjures the connective possibilities between two strangers. And yet the scene also falls short of complete connection, as Clarissa returns back to her party, back to life, refusing to recapitulate Septimus’s deadly fall.

The distinction between these two characters is further enhanced if we attend to each character’s relation to their home spaces and the architecture of their respective interiorities. Where the room entraps Septimus, whose only escape is to cross the window’s boundary between life and death, for Clarissa, the little room is still habitable, affording her a room of her own for private, individual contemplation. While domestic objects present themselves as possible suicide-tools for Septimus (the knife too clean, the gas time-consuming, the razors packed away, only the window left), for Clarissa, they are a source of care, even pleasure: “No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank.” And while Septimus’s is a top-down event, escaping from the ministrations of his doctor by throwing himself out from the window, Clarissa’s is a sideways escape into a little adjoining room. We might read this domestic architecture as the very means of her epiphany, catalyzing her imaginative reach out to this stranger as well as her return to her party, two very different forms of hospitality.


118 Woolf, 185.
This is not to say, of course, that this is Woolf’s celebration of the enabling effects of domesticity: as others have suggested, we can read this scene as a precipitate of Clarissa’s claustrophobia, whether a flight from the stifling boundaries of the home, or inversely, a flight into interiority contra the terror of an urban environment.\footnote{See Anthony Vidler, “Bodies in Space/Subjects in the City,” \textit{differences} 5:3 (1993), accessed November 16, 2015, \url{http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:9074/} and Rosner, 149-150.} It also is a moment of some irony. Similar to E.M. Forster’s “no, not yet” at the end of \textit{Passage to India}, it signals the potential for radical social connection between two disparate individuals through its very lack. Indeed, Clarissa’s feeling of gladness is an ironic sign of critique on Woolf’s part, as she does not equip her protagonist with the means to see the cruelty of her feelings. Instead, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway} addresses the postwar social fragmentation between civilians and veterans by creating a room of one’s own, a critical space-making gesture that cordons off the violence as though sequestering some problem guest. Though the exterior trauma of war shoots through and interrupts the private, interior home space, Clarissa’s epiphany ultimately suggests that anything can be domesticated and made interior, possibly even redemptively so, through acts of individual apprehension and sympathy.\footnote{Think also of the bracketed war in \textit{To the Lighthouse}’s “Time Passes,” or the fraught inheritance of Jacob’s shoes in \textit{Jacob’s Room}.} That this assimilation takes place at such a distance from the original event, and that it mediates such a violent precipitate, just shores up the terms of the epiphanic structure and its connective, transformative power.

If the First World War was integral in producing one of the central tenets of literary modernism—namely, the connective possibilities of modernist interiority contra the violent failures of the state—then the violence of the Second World War with its
unprecedented Home Front required a reconsideration of the very boundaries between public and private, military and civilian life. Recalling the tableau of stripped buildings that opens *The Girls of Slender Means*, Spark immediately signals the lack of any stable interiority, whether structural or psychic. Likewise, her focus on the Girls, rather than the singular Mrs. Dalloway, signals an emphasis on group experience, institutionalized through the May of Teck Club. As with the Brodie set, a handful of these girls come into focus: Selina, the most slender and savage; Joanna, a rector’s daughter and Selina’s pious, morally upright foil; and Jane, a plump, bookish girl, this novel’s Sandy Stranger. Yet compared to *Brodie*, *The Girls of Slender Means* analogizes social differentiation using institutional space. Devoting a considerable amount of time to an architectural blueprint of the Club, we find that its organization neatly maps onto the social status of the girls. From the first floor’s young, schoolgirl virgins, the second floor staff and temporary members, the third floor old maids, and the fourth floor’s sophisticated coterie, the novel makes it difficult to imagine any roundedness in these characters, any side rooms affording interior, modernist, individual epiphanies.

These changes to the structure of the novel blast open a modernist architecture of interiority and connection and sharply qualify the power of its narrative epiphany. Rather than have the grounds of this epiphany be squarely intersubjective (i.e., the imagined connection between Septimus and Clarissa), it relies on what we might call the Club’s infrastructural elements: a lavatory window, whose bars admit the passage of only the thinnest girls in its own slender means test; a taffeta Schiaparelli dress, the Club’s one object of luxury that circulates for special occasions, and which also only fits the slimmest of girls; and the “Two Sentences” from Selina’s correspondence “Poise
Course,” which the top-floor girls respectfully listen to every morning and evening
(“Poise is perfect balance, an equanimity of body and mind, complete composure
whatever the social scene. Elegant dress, immaculate grooming, and perfect deportment
all contribute to the attainment of self-confidence” (50)). These shared elements combine
in the most horrific of ways at the end of the novel, when a bomb—dropped years earlier
in the Blitz—explodes belatedly in the garden, causing the May of Teck Club to catch
fire. The top floor girls are trapped by this fire, unable to escape except through a
lavatory window leading onto an adjacent roof. Dramatically, this is the very window the
girls had used to test their slimness, and which only some, still, can succeed in squeezing
through. The elegant Selina, of course, is able to slither through to safety. As her fellow
housemates stand trapped, waiting in fear and anticipation, Selina returns through the
lavatory window, moving back into the smoke and din:

She was carrying something fairly long and limp and evidently light in weight,
enfolding it carefully in her arms. He thought it was a body. She pushed her way
through the girls coughing delicately from the first waves of smoke that had
reached her in the passage. The others stared, shivering only with their prolonged
apprehension, for they had no curiosity about what she had been rescuing or what
she was carrying. She climbed up on the lavatory seat and slid through the
window, skilfully and quickly pulling her object behind her. Nicholas held up his
hand to catch her. When she landed on the roof-top she said, ‘Is it safe out here?’
and at the same time was inspecting the condition of her salvaged item.

Poise is perfect balance. It was the Schiaparelli dress. The coat-hanger
dangled from the dress like a headless neck and shoulders.

‘Is it safe out here?’ said Selina.
‘Nowhere’s safe,” said Nicholas. (Girls, 125)

Spark masterfully draws this into a suspended moment in time, so we can feel the force
of its revelation and the extent of its savagery. In a sort of delayed decoding, the narrator
obscures the actual object until the very end, prolonging our own apprehension of what it
could be: the naming of the object moves from the neutral “something fairly long and
limp and evidently light in weight,” to the hopeful “He thought it was a body”; then to the indeterminate “What she had been rescuing/what she was carrying” (Girls, 125). And when she reaches the rooftop, though Nicholas can surely see the dress, it’s still registered as a nondescript object: the fact that it is not identified as such speaks to the trauma of the event, his inability to take it all in. It takes a strong narrative intrusion to finally name the object for what it is. Though the multiple namings of the object are reminiscent of the various permutations of Clarissa’s modernist epiphany, here they don’t afford space for flights of sympathetic imagination, but rather lead to a singular, horrifying revelation. Here there’s no little side room to retreat to, and no returning to the party: Spark reverses the epistemology of the window so that the danger is within the domestic structure, and the safety seems to be in the world outside. With no division between domestic life and state violence, the home implodes soon after, sinking into its center and killing one of the Girls. But it is Selina’s decision to return for the dress that gives this moment its true horror. Her action makes the window a two-directional portal between danger and safety, adding another layer of porosity and precarity so that, as Nicholas’s final line suggests, nowhere’s safe.

The event not only ruins the Club, but also reveals the Club’s sociality to be rotten—and perhaps to have been rotten all along. For this epiphanic event is witnessed through the eyes of Nicholas Farringdon, a civil servant and aspiring writer who is infatuated by the girls of slender means, especially the carefully poised Selina. Just as Septimus does for Clarissa, the girls make Nicholas feel the beauty and the fun of life,
compared to the boredom of his slowly concluding war work. Upon meeting them, he begins to craft a “poetic image” (65) of the Club as a “miniature expression of a free society...held together by the graceful attributes of a common poverty” (Girls, 84-5). His transition from the work of war to an interest in the girls’ welfare is motivated as much by boredom as idealism, the winding down of the war machine creating not a postwar euphoria or even complacency, but rather a situation of arduous work, bleak rooms, and a need for new preoccupation. While the girls have no such pretensions or fascination with their own lives, Nicholas insists on reading them as a microcosm of an ideal community. The novel’s epiphany reveals the true nature of the Club to Nicholas, undoing his vision of a community made sympathetic by common poverty. Witnessing this savage act of salvage and betrayal, he surreptitiously makes a sign of the cross, converting to Catholicism then and there: as he later concludes in his personal notebooks, “A vision of evil may be as effective to conversion as a vision of good” (Girls, 140). Nicholas’s epiphany is thus also a negative one: where Septimus makes Clarissa feel the beauty, fun, and new sympathetic openness precipitated by the news of his death, here, Nicholas’s belief in the Girls crumbles, as the house he built up in his mind comes figuratively and literally tumbling down. Rather than suggest the potentiality of interpersonal connection, this postwar epiphany is experienced as a painful break, a crisis of connection in ruins.

II. On Repair: From Ruins to Reconstruction

121 See: “Winding-up was arduous, it involved the shuffling of papers and people from office to office; particularly it involved considerable shuffling between the British and American Intelligence pockets in London. He had a bleak furnished room at Fulham. He was bored” (Girls, 60).
So much for all the nice people of the Second World War; as promised, the novel proves an exception to this rule, neatly mirroring the rule’s polarizing logic through a damning reversal of good and evil. What remains unaddressed, however, is the challenge of the novel’s opening description, to find a new art-form within the ruins of the Blitz. A comparison to modernism and the First World War can only take us so far: while it helps give insight to changing mores of human character and interpersonal connection, it is unable to account for the more proximate, infrastructural damages that shape *The Girls of Slender Means*. The novel, too, is not satisfied to end with Selina’s betrayal. Instead, it concludes with a series of nested endings, a protracted coda that includes the ascent of the Labour government, London’s celebration of V-J day, and a final nod to the recurring present-day frame narrative. What I want to focus on, however, is Spark’s return to the scene of the club, a gesture of mourning and remembrance of Joanna’s fiery fall. Up until this point, the novel has challenged the mythos of wartime Britain and the ennobling effects of violence, participating in a form of historiographic reconstruction. However, in its final pages, it makes a marked turn to the concept of physical reconstruction, which until now has remained merely foreshadowed.

As recent studies have shown, British late modernism reflects a marked inward turn, perceptible in the rising discourses of home anthropology (Jed Esty) and self-critical national historiography (Marina MacKay). Postwar reconstruction, I propose, offers yet another version of this inward turn, perhaps even its endgame. In the quest to plan a postwar Britain, the literature of domestic reconstruction toggled between a desire for conservation and radical transformation, a dialectic that would continue to influence the formation of the postwar welfare state. However, what is shared is an acknowledgment of
the vast damage incurred by wartime Britain, which, as Spark herself indicates, required new interpretive and representational demands. This aestheticization of violence sits uneasily with the reality of wartime damage, especially as injury was the catalyst of political change. If, as Mark Rawlinson explains, “Material events of military conflict, notably lethal wounding, require symbolization and discursive mediation if war is to function as an instrument of political policy,” then we should be equally cognizant of the politics of postwar repair, which rely on tableaux of ruined buildings in order to underscore the need for reconstruction—more so, even, than bodies in pain. Indeed, the absence of the wounded body seems a prerequisite to postwar reconstruction: after all, it is difficult to move forward when reminded of the claims of the dead. To a certain degree, *The Girls of Slender Means* challenges this by reinserting the wounded body back into the landscape, puncturing the generic optimism of “long ago in 1945” with the particular horrors of Joanna’s death (*Girls*, 7). Yet her death is ultimately superseded by an attention to the remains of the Club, and the signification of their ruinous spatiality.

When Spark brings us to the site of the Club, she does so not through its former inhabitants, but through Nicholas and Joanna’s father, the rector. Rather than using the narrator’s sardonic voice to set the scene, Spark sets up this ruin-gazing as a moment of potential revelation for the two men, who have returned to gain closure for Joanna’s death. Up until now, the two men have circled awkwardly around the subject of Joanna: an awkwardness exacerbated by the fact that Nicholas lost her recorded recitation of “The

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122 Rawlinson, 4.
Wreck of the Deutschland,” the only material testament left to her existence.\textsuperscript{123} Without this last evidentiary trace of Joanna, Nicholas and her father return to the ruined Club, not just for closure but also, we feel, for empathetic traction. We might read this contemplation of ruins as a version of Woolf’s sideways, modernist room, giving the two men a chance to reflect upon Joanna’s death, and setting up a potential moment of real connection. Upon arrival to the site, they find this tableau:

They came to the site of the May of Teck Club. It looked now like one of the familiar ruins of the neighbourhood, as if it had been shattered years ago by a bomb-attack, or months ago by a guided missile. The paving stones of the porch lay crookedly leading nowhere. The pillars lay like Roman remains. A side wall at the back of the house stood raggedly at half its former height. Greggie’s garden was a heap of masonry with a few flowers and rare plants sprouting from it. The pink and white tiles of the hall lay in various aspects of long neglect, and from a lower part of the ragged side wall a piece of brown drawing-room wall-paper furled more raggedly. (\textit{Girls}, 137)

This description of the Club’s site harkens back to the novel’s descriptive opening lines, giving us a blasted ruin-site to read in all of its stripped-apart detail. Now, however, the ruins are no longer generic, but familiar: instead of the staircases to nowhere, we have the particular paving stones of the porch; instead of the “wallpapers of various quite normal rooms,” we have the brown drawing-room wall-paper, whose color, we know, was fiercely detested by the Girls (\textit{Girls}, 7). Spark personalizes the postwar landscape of damage, making its details diegetically resonant and forcing us to confront our own attachment to the May of Teck Club. Notably, she also largely omits the narrator’s

\textsuperscript{123} Lyndsey Stonebridge’s reading of \textit{The Girls of Slender Means} underscores the pivotal role the voice plays in the Girls’ group psychology. To Stonebridge, even if Nicholas was able to retrieve Joanna’s voice, Spark’s novel ultimately suggests he wouldn’t be able to hear it: he is too busy imposing his own ideal of the Club onto its actual inhabitants. (“Hearing Them Speak: Voices in Wilfred Bion, Muriel Spark and Penelope Fitzgerald,” \textit{Textual Practice} 19 (2005), 458, accessed January 12, 2013, DOI: 10.1080/09502360500329745.)
metafictional commentary that was woven through the opening: rather than characterize ruin-gazing as viewing a stage or a new art-form, her description is flatter, barer. This then raises the question: is this damage now mere damage, without the figurative pretensions of artistry and the enchantments of violence? Or does The Girls of Slender Means now figure as the new art-form, performing its novel literariness through our reading of it? Furthermore, if the novel’s previous epiphany taught us that a vision of evil is equally persuasive as one of good, what, if anything, is the vision of ruins supposed to catalyze in us? One answer can be found in the characters’ own response to the ruins of the May of Teck:

Joanna’s father stood holding his wide black hat.

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,

The rector said to Nicholas. “There’s really nothing to see.”
“Like my tape-recording,” said Nicholas.
“Yes, it’s all gone, all elsewhere.” (Girls, 137)

This ghostly remnant of the Club offers a different form of Spark’s negative epiphany: an emptiness, or refusal of epiphany. The rector’s impersonal, exaggerated language also suggests the wider ramifications of this disappearance: rather than a personalized loss of the individual Joanna, his words reflect the impossibility of the Club itself, and the eviscerated idealism Nicholas attached to its sociality. Perhaps the only consolation Spark gives us is that unlike Clarissa Dalloway’s feeling of gladness at Septimus’s suicide, such affirmation is impossible in The Girls of Slender Means. Instead, these ruins of war resist being made interior or domesticated, letting ruins, as it were, be ruins.
This provides a stark challenge to those seeking meaning in ruins, whether it be consolation, sublimity, catharsis, or a catalyst of mourning. Indeed, as the rector’s conclusion suggests, it challenges the impulse to represent the ruins at all. By suggesting there’s nothing there to see, Joanna’s father offers a commentary on Britain’s wartime self-mythologizing, and the transformation of the Second World War into Britain’s “People’s War.” *The Girls of Slender Means* uses the ruins of the Club to access this historiographic national consciousness, only to conclude that it may be kenomatic, the mythology of the People’s War founded on an emptiness. Yet unlike Selina’s dramatic betrayal, this moment reads more like a disappointment, a muted iteration of the previous fiery spectacle. The characters find an uneasy peace in this emptiness, relieved of the burden to find redemption or retrospective plenitude in the ruins.

An even more obvious variation of Spark’s refusal of the narrative epiphany can be found in her later novel *The Hothouse by the East River*, published in 1973. Set in postwar New York, the novel follows the disturbing and dreamlike lives of its two main characters, which, as it emerges, were killed by a V2 bomb years ago in 1944 wartime London. Yet the protagonists cannot accept this fact until their home space is physically destroyed, demolished to make way for a new block of apartments:

They stand outside their apartment block, looking at the scaffolding. The upper stories are already gone and the lower part is a shell. A demolition truck waits for the new day’s shift to begin. The morning breeze from the East River is already spreading the dust.
Elsa stands in the morning light reading the billboard. It announces the new block of apartments to be built on the site of the old.
‘Now we can have some peace,’ says Elsa.\(^{124}\)

Peace for the dead, perhaps, but also peace for the living: both *The Hothouse by the East River* and *The Girls of Slender Means* express a wariness of the uncanny, vivifying power the War holds for both its characters and its readers. Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means* critiques both the reparative logic of social reconstruction as well as the historiographic reconstruction of the Second World War as Britain’s finest hour. It asks us to consider that to live in this myth may be outstaying one’s welcome, tantamount to occupying a home already slotted for destruction. Put differently, it may be the very overvaluation of war that is war’s unfinished business, and the source of cultural unrest.

Despite her literary skewering of WWII and its history’s mythical hold, Muriel Spark’s autobiography *Curriculum Vitae* fully participates in a rosy-tinted revaluation of the war. Like many authors, Spark actively did her part for WWII Britain, finding work in a black propaganda unit headed by Sefton Delmar. Yet she was also a generation younger than authors such as Orwell, Bowen, Waugh, and Greene, and unlike them, not yet established on the literary scene. As a younger, working middle-class woman just starting out in the world, Spark lacked cultural (and actual) capital, and as *Curriculum Vitae* shows, thought of the war as both an escape from a stifling marriage and as a way to gain much-desired life experience. In her chapters on the war, Spark speaks her experience at the Helena Club, a lodging-house for “Ladies from Good Families of Modest Means who are Obliged to Pursue an Occupation in London.” While recognizably the origin of the fictional May of Teck, Spark has only the kindest things to say about the Helena Club as a memoirist, calling it “absolutely charming” and ruled by “a presiding angel,” Mrs. G.S. Taylor (who wrote affectionately to Spark upon reading

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the novel.)\textsuperscript{126} Combining the resiliency and luck of youth with the familiar trappings of the People’s War, Spark’s autobiography challenges the reader of \textit{The Girls of Slender Means}, their affective registers being nearly irreconcilable.

However, there is one evident overlap between the two Clubs: namely the strange, almost inconceivable fact of their complete physical demise. Compared to the May of Teck, the Helena Club was destroyed not by a bomb, but rather by a postwar “course of total reconstruction, probably to make a hotel.”\textsuperscript{127} Spark is clearly shaken by this complete transformation in \textit{Curriculum Vitae}, noting: “I had stayed so often in that club in Lancaster Gate, it seemed incredible that it was no more.”\textsuperscript{128} This incredulity is one of the few signs Spark gives as to the losses of the Second World War in her autobiography, a marked inversion point where her cheerful “keep calm and carry on” manner gives way to a colder reality. While this moment doesn’t make recourse to the black humor or total devastation that characterizes Spark’s fiction, the Helena Club’s destruction nevertheless signals the need for a new style of representation, one that she refuses to engage in the

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}, Kindle Locations 1871-2.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}, Kindle Location 1886. Today, the club exists as residential, luxury flats complete with gym, spa, and swimming pool. See: http://idoxpa.westminster.gov.uk/online-applications/propertyDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=LITPKERP0ZM00.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.}, Kindle Locations 1887-1888. Another notable autobiographical account of wartime home spaces is her essay “The Poet’s House,” first broadcasted on the BBC Home Service on July 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1960, recounting a chance encounter with the house of Louis MacNiece during World War II. Like \textit{Curriculum Vitae}, it contains none of the satirical flash or devastating wit of her fiction: indeed, Spark offered in answer as to why she became a writer: “I think I must have felt that by some sympathetic magic I could draw from the poet’s possessions some essence which would enable me to get down to my writing,” with the house becoming “a symbol of what I was to attempt to make of my life” (Spark, “The Poet’s House,” \textit{The Informed Air: Essays}, ed. Penelope Jardine (New York: New Directions, 2014), 23).
space of her autobiography. We might read Spark’s fiction as taking on this task, as the new art-form that, like Joanna, finds the right words for the event. Indeed, if we return to the language of the novel’s secondary epiphany, we find it is not entirely negative: though Joanna’s father characterizes the ruins as nothing to see, he also notes that while it’s all gone, it’s also all elsewhere. This should give us pause, for where else might it (Joanna, the Girls, the Club, idealism) be?

Spark’s answer can be found in the floating poetic fragment that interrupts the language of the empty epiphany, a line from John Drinkwater’s “Moonlit Apples” that Joanna used in her recitations: “At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows” (*Girls*, 137). The entire novel is overlaid with these fractured poeticisms, some directly attributed to Joanna’s elocution lessons, while others are purely literary utterances unattached to character (or even, it seems, narrator). This particular line, of course, is no random choice: like Joanna’s habit of choosing “the words for the right day,” it recalls and even metaphorizes The May of Teck Club, gently reconstructing the prior trauma of the rooftop into a quiet domestic scene (*Girls*, 128). It also provides a remarkable contrast to Nicholas’s lost recording of Joanna reciting “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” not only in content, but more hauntingly, in form. Here, the individual Joanna has been replaced by the work of the novel, which remembers her through a fragmentary, yet reconstructive, gesture. As this poetic interruption demonstrates, while material structures may crumble and fade away, the space of literature can house epiphanic moments, crystallizing them through figurative language that is mobile, iterable, and translatable.

*The Girls of Slender Means* stretches these loci of wartime damage, taking the long view of ruins repaired, reconstructed, and repurposed. It takes into account archaeology of
structures that we have come to inhabit, and whose history we have perhaps forgotten as we move further away from the Second World War.

III. Coda: Hilary Mantel’s Experiment in Love

Though largely overlooked in the literary and critical canon, *The Girls of Slender Means* has enjoyed a degree of popularity, testified to by its numerous adaptations as a radio play (1965), a three-episode mini-series for BBC TV (1975), and most recently, a theatrical version by Judith Adams (2009). Each adaptation has had to negotiate the novel’s alternating viewpoints and historical vantage points: the radio play, for instance, presents *The Girls of Slender Means* as Nicholas’ autobiography, doing away with an omniscient narrator and relying instead on him; the television drama tints BBC stock footage of the Blitz in sepia to underscore the storybook “long ago in 1945.” However, the most compelling transformation of Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means* is not its translation to stage, screen, or sound. Instead, it can be found in Hilary Mantel’s 1995 novel *An Experiment in Love*, a direct rewriting of Spark’s novel and an uncannily faithful extension of it for the next generation of girls of slender means. In an interview with Mantel from 1998, Mantel notes that while many critics in Britain say she was influenced by Spark, she finds Spark’s Catholicism (and her own lack of religious faith) to differentiate them, finding more “fellow-feeling” with her contemporary Margaret

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Atwood. Likewise, the protagonist of Mantel’s early novel *An Experiment in Love* (1995) eschews any relationship to Spark’s 1963 novel, concluding, “We haven’t the class for Girls of Slender Means.” Nevertheless, *An Experiment in Love* can be read as closely negotiating with, even rewriting Spark’s 1963 novel.

Focusing on a group of young women in Tonbridge Hall, a residence hall in a London university, *An Experiment in Love* details the color of the girls’ everyday lives, the austere discomforts of their communal living-situation, and the minute oscillations between betrayal and care that characterize girl sociality. Like the perverse relationship introduced between slenderness and wartime rationing in *The Girls of Slender Means*, Mantel’s novel focuses on the girls’ eating habits and what is allotted to them by the state, creating a complex amalgam from wanting as both desire and lack. In particular, her protagonist Carmel McBain develops an anorexia intimately bound to her position as a working-class scholarship girl, as pride, discipline, and shame profoundly shape what she allows herself to eat, on top of what little she can afford to. But the most obvious rewriting of Spark’s novel occurs in the novel’s climax, in which the residence hall goes up in flames; a girl dies a terrible death as the others watch, huddled in safety outside; and a precious fox-fur coat is salvaged by Karina, Carmel’s childhood friend and enemy. Even the mechanisms of this epiphany are familiar. The fox-fur is once again revealed by delayed decoding (“She was holding something over her arm; it was a strange draping softness, something limp and slaughtered. My hand crept out to it: Lynette’s fox fur”)

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131 Hilary Mantel, *An Experiment in Love* (New York: Picador, 1995), 18. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *Experiment*.
(Experiment, 245)); the death is staged at the window (“Outlined against a window, I saw
a single figure; a silhouette, a blackness against red. It was Lynette. I knew her at once: I
would have known her anywhere” (Experiment, 242)).

What I want to highlight here, however, is not merely that Hilary Mantel rewrites
The Girls of Slender Means, but more importantly, that Mantel continues Spark’s work
beyond its time, translating and updating it for the next generation of readers. While
Spark’s 1963 The Girls of Slender Means was positioned to destroy the myth of wartime
sociality that underwrote the formation of the postwar welfare state, Mantel’s 1995 An
Experiment in Love was positioned to mourn its demise, situated after the end of the
Thatcher era and its dismantlement of welfare programs. Like Spark, Mantel is very
canny about her literary historiography, setting her work as a retrospective on an origin
story: just as the narrative action of The Girls of Slender Means looks back to the 1945
ascent of Labour, An Experiment in Love looks back to the 1970 ascent of the Tories,
capturing a naïve time with the plenitude of perspective.132 As Mantel recounts in the
opening pages:

It was the year after Chappaquiddick, the year Julia and I first went away from
home. All spring I had dreamt about the disaster, and remembered the dreams
when I woke: the lung tissue and water, the floating hair and sucking cold. In
London that summer the temperatures shot into the mid-eighties, but at home the
weather was as usual: rain most days, misty dawns over our dirty canal and cool
damp evenings on the lawns of country pubs where we went with our boyfriends:
sex later in the clammy, dewy dark. In June there was an election, and the Tories
got in. It wasn’t my fault; I wasn’t old enough to vote. (Experiment, 2)

132 Thatcher herself even makes a cameo appearance near the end of the novel as
Secretary of State, being “the Guest” at Tonbridge Hall’s Guest Night banquet:
unsurprisingly, the girls twitter at her, and she is described as wearing a dress “of the
shape that is called ageless, and of a length that is called safe,” with hair in curves “like
unbaked sausage rolls” (Experiment, 216).
Like Spark’s opening onto 1945, these lines orient us not only in a specific time and place, but also in a specific social sensibility. However, unlike the satirical “nice people of England” (Girls, 7), Mantel immediately begins with a collective, girlish “we”: one that, by the late 1960s, is both in charge of their sexuality but also rather uneasy about it. This girlishness also has an uneasy relationship to politics: not only is it too young to vote, and therefore politically passive, but as the Chappaquiddick reference suggests, it is also intensely precarious, even disposable. If Senator Ted Kennedy could shake off the death of his colleague Mary Jo Kopechne, so too, the reference suggests, might government drop its duty of due care for young women, leaving them behind to drown in their own quiet disasters. In a way similar to Carolyn Kay Steedman’s Landscape for a Good Woman (1987), An Experiment in Love seeks to give voice to those subjects excluded, sometimes violently so, from being given an account in official politics and culture. It is a deeply sociological book, one that takes the material formation of societies seriously, even of girls of slender means.

Of course, Mantel’s novel is not mere mourning for welfare ideology, just as Spark’s novel is not mere indictment. A large part of An Experiment in Love shows welfare’s uneven effects, as felt by the protagonist in relation to both her working-class family and her various classmates as she becomes more upwardly mobile. An Experiment


134 Steedman’s work is particularly relevant here, especially regarding Mantel’s characters and their constant negotiation with envy for material things, which Steedman locates as a central, legitimate structure of feeling for working-class women. Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.)
*In Love* continues to reveal these class-based fault-lines, so strikingly incongruent to Britain’s self-narrative of rising postwar equality. Indeed, in her reminiscence about her scholarship days, Carmel directly associates her new schoolmates’ affluence with the early postwar period: “When I think of the early lives of these girls—of Julianne, let us say—I think of starched sun-bonnets, Beatrix Potter, of mossy garden paths, regular bedtime, regular bowels: I see them frozen for ever in that unreclaimable oasis between the war and the 1960s, between the end of rationing and the beginning of the end” (*Experiment*, 124). One way to gloss the title of the novel, then, is to read it as a reference to the welfare state itself, being an experiment in love that—as the novel bears out—does not turn out to be a striking success. These class divides ultimately lead to the tragedy of the novel, Karina’s theft of the precious fox-fur coat. What’s more, we learn that Karina locked her roommate Lynette in their room, leaving Lynette to perish while she escaped to safety. This escalation of violence suggests a cold prediction, one in which the divisive energies of welfare and its aspirations actually destroy social cohesiveness.

Yet unlike *The Girls of Slender Means*, this violence does not provide the negative epiphanic spark of the novel. Instead, Mantel’s epiphany occurs in a moment of radical connection between Carmel and Karina. Just as the enormity of Karina’s crime dawns on Carmel, a wind rises and pastes Karina’s nightdress to her body, revealing a pregnant belly about five to six months gone. This catalyzes a flashback to an earlier scene where Carmel viciously kicked Karina’s baby-doll, an event that turned their easy, innocent friendship into one of jealousy, comparison, and ambivalence. This remembrance leads Carmel to decide not to give Karina away, a complicit and perverse
act of repair. The novel ends with the two girls linking hands and running away from the
dormitory fire, a moment of almost inconceivable defiance, alliance, and tenderness. *An
Experiment in Love* thus gives one more turn to Spark’s negative postwar epiphany,
moving along a dialectic of care and harm, connection and disconnection. It proposes
that, while welfare might be a failed experiment in one particular kind of love—the “all
the nice people” postwar thesis of warfare to welfare—it might also create other forms of
love, unanticipated by its initial planners as well as its detractors. As Carmel queries: “It
struck me that perhaps Tonbridge Hall was drawing us together: who is my neighbour?”
(*Experiment*, 201). I read *An Experiment in Love* as both inhabitant and neighbor of
Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means*, living within its novelistic infrastructure while also
carrying out a duty of literary care for the questions and problems created therein. If, as
James Vernon suggests, “Social theorists may talk of the death of the social, yet we still
inhabit its increasingly shabby infrastructure,” Spark and Mantel testify to this.\(^{136}\) Though
Spark’s criticism of 1945 may eviscerate wartime nationalism and the mythology of
postwar repair, it doesn’t leave us with nothing to see: instead, it creates a literary space
that future novelists can inhabit, and that we all, to some degree, have inherited.

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Locations 3107-3108. He elaborates: “[The] material world provided by postwar social
democratic welfare states, just as in Britain the new hospitals and schools of the welfare
state were frequently housed in the old workhouses.” Vernon, “Hunger, the Social, and
States of Welfare in Modern Imperial Britain,” *Occasion* v.2 (December 20, 2010): 7-8,
welfare-modern-imperial-britain](http://arcade.stanford.edu/occasion/hunger-social-and-states-
welfare-modern-imperial-britain)
CHAPTER 3: “AN EMPTY, EMPTY PLACE”: UNPROPERTIED INTIMACY IN *THE SWIMMING-POOL LIBRARY*

Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*)

Sometimes I think that shadowy, doorless little shelter—which is all it was really, an empty, empty place—is where at heart I want to be. (Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library*)

This chapter marks a critical hinge-point for the dissertation and the way it has been tracking literary returns to the Second World War, and their uneasy negotiations with the wartime promises of a more equitable postwar Britain. Moving forward in time to 1988, Alan Hollinghurst’s first novel *The Swimming-Pool Library* views Britain’s Second World War in terms of its longer 20th century, shifting away from the insular obsession with the London Home Front so that other epochs take on weight: interwar Oxford and colonial Sudan; the long reach of the 1885 Labouchere Amendment before its 1956 repeal; and the period just before the AIDS crisis. As these items suggest, Hollinghurst’s historical remapping encourages the reader to see the Second World War and its aftermath alongside other social histories, shaping its trajectory in relation to a history of colonial and in particular, homophobic violence. In relation to this historicity, the idea of “post45” seems to lose literary status as the central periodizing marker for the twentieth century. However, it is the very encryption of the postwar period that leads to the novel’s shattering epiphany: an epiphany that, as I’ll show, gains its significance and power from the spatialized and welfarist logic of postwar reparation. That said, *The*
Swimming-Pool Library models a different relationship to 1945 than the previous two chapters. Rather than have 1945 emerge as the only event-horizon, the novel doubles and displaces 1945’s status as a periodizing marker in relationship to 1983—its narrative present and the final moment before the AIDS crisis—borrowing and transposing the energies of post-45 into post-1983.

In this chapter, I read The Swimming-Pool Library as a novel that works through a deeply ambivalent relationship to Britain’s postwar period through a marked preoccupation with architecture and built space. Despite Hollinghurst’s clear interest in these topics, surprisingly few have remarked upon their significance: those who have theorize his architectural turn either as symbolic of queer experience (i.e., transient spaces that mirror the lives of gay characters\(^\text{137}\)) or as a tour of queer spaces (i.e., the enabling structures of clubbing in The Spell\(^\text{138}\)). With regards to The Swimming-Pool Library, Dianne Chisholm has focused on its recognizable queer institution of the gay bathhouse, studying how Hollinghurst’s literary representation provides an alternative

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\(^{138}\) Bart Eeckhout, for example, reads the epistemic gaps of The Stranger’s Child as a queer narrative organization that ruptures both the traditional, continuous timelines of heteronormative family history and the history of these family’s country homes. Likewise, Allan Johnson reads The Spell’s structural motifs of the buried temple and the open plane as producing a “considerable dismissal of any desire to seek permanence, or to seek immortality through the structures of a text or the structures around us,” underscoring their transience and ultimately inhabitable nature. See Bart Eeckhout, “English Architectural Landscapes and Metonymy in Hollinghurst’s The Stranger’s Child,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.3 (2012), Accessed April 4, 2014, DOI: 10.7771/1481-4374.2042; and Allan Johnson, “Buried Temples and Open Planes: Alethea Hayter and the Architecture of Drug-Taking in Alan Hollinghurst’s The Spell”, *Textual Practice* 27:7 (2013): 1177-1195, accessed March 26, 2014, DOI: 10.1080/0950236X.2013.821156.
way of doing history and thinking historically to that of social historians. Yet the challenge of Hollinghurst’s novel lies in the fantastic nature of its spatial metaphors and meditations, exemplified by the conceptual queerness of its evocative title. How can we account for the specifically literary imaginations of space produced in Hollinghurst’s novels, those structures and modes of inhabitation that are not immediately recognizable either as queer epistemological metaphors (closet, grave) or queer social sites (club, bathhouse, cinema)?

In what follows, I study the concept of space through three interlinked approaches. First, I consider it as a structural problem raised by the narrative form of The Swimming-Pool Library, which alternates focalization between Will Beckwith, a young gay man in his prime, and the memoirs of Charles Nantwich, an older gay peer. By moving between Will’s narrative present of 1983 and Charles’ past, the novel creates an absent center around the postwar period. Though this may at first seem like a strictly temporal problem, as I will show, it impels us towards questions of space, both as a running theme for the novel and as a question of narrative form. Secondly, I approach the empty postwar space of the novel historically, suggesting that we contextualize it in light of Britain’s postwar period of architectural and social reconstruction. This approach is particularly important considering the secret encrypted in this seemingly empty space: Charles Nantwich’s arrest and imprisonment under the Labouchère Amendment and the

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postwar anti-gay pogroms that landed thousands of gay men in jail before the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1967. By attending to the spatial ethos of reconstruction — manifested in the rise of both architectural planning and interior design, as well as social conservatism and sexual containment — the novel’s attention to how its characters inhabit domestic and city spaces becomes more legible, registering the fraught spatial politics of the postwar period. Thirdly, I study the novel’s negotiation with reconstruction’s spatial and social institutionalizations, whether through representations of bad institutionalized domesticity or fantastic meditations on impossible structures of inhabitation like the swimming-pool library.

I. The Absent Center: Narrative Structure in The Swimming-Pool Library

Set in the summer of 1983, The Swimming-Pool Library tells the story of Will Beckwith, a young gay man and future peer, who is enjoying “the last summer of its kind there was ever to be,” “riding high on sex and self-esteem” in what he calls “my time, my belle époque.”140 The fantastic, suspended temporal space of this summer begins with Will having quit his job at the Cubitt Dictionary of Architecture, a gesture that echoes Charles Ryder’s architectural painting work in Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited. What lies on the other side of the summer is less than clear: at the beginning of the novel, the only hint we get is a description of “a faint flicker of calamity, like flames around a photograph, something seen out of the corner of the eye,” though the novel’s dedication to Nicholas Clark, a friend of Hollinghurst’s from Oxford and one of the first victims of

140 Alan Hollinghurst, The Swimming-Pool Library (New York: Random House, Inc., 1988), 3. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated Library.
AIDS who died in 1984, belies its historical context (Library, 3). Will first meets Charles Nantwich, the novel’s second main character, while cottaging in the public lavatories of Kensington Gardens: after seeing Charles suffer a heart attack, Will administers CPR to the elderly peer, saving his life. When they randomly meet again at the swimming-pool of the Corry gym, Charles asks Will to write his memoirs for him, taking him on as a potential biographer. These diaries, from that point on in the novel interwoven with Will’s narrative, move chronologically from Charles’s first schoolboy love in the First World War, to Oxford and colonial Sudan in the 1920s, wartime London during the Blitz, and postwar incarceration for his homosexuality in 1954. Through various structural and affective doublings between the two gay *bildungsromane* of Charles and Will, Hollinghurst’s novel primes us to see lines of connection and inheritance between their two generations. Charles’ postwar arrest finds new iteration in Will’s best friend James and his present-day troubles with the police. Will’s beating at the hands of a gang of neo-Nazi youth, sexually and racially motivated, echoes the death of Taha, Charles’ Sudanese servant whom he brings to London after his stint in colonial administration. Charles and Will share an infatuation with black men, a protectionist or paternalist impulse mixed with colonial and postcolonial exoticism. The image of the swimming-pool also haunts the entire text, emerging as a constant site between the two men and suggesting one long history from their shared dark laps in the Corry gym to the ancient Roman baths hidden in the basement of Charles’ London home, from the locker rooms of Will’s schooldays to Charles’ description of incarceration as being underwater.

These strong, recurring resonances between Will and Charles present a challenge to understand how the novel thinks about history, whether in terms of repetition, haunting
return, progress, or even repair. Hollinghurst underscores this by another common
denominator between Charles and Will—namely, their violence-based epiphanies
through which they learn, to quote Jameson, “History is what hurts, it is what refuses
desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis.”141 As two
upper-class white peers, both Charles and Will often encounter the limits of their
sympathy and understanding when it comes to black, working-class, colonial, or post-
colonial subjects. When history returns to them, it is often to show its limits to their
individuality insofar as they are implicated in a larger collective. Though Charles insists
that he is beyond the brute, racist civilized mission of the “hard-hatted, heavy-handed
empire-builder,” and though Will’s cruises like a demi-god through the dense sexual
networks of London, both learn a new sense of personal, even universal precarity through
these events, in which they or their intimates become subject to discriminatory violence
along the lines of race or sexuality. This reveals not only the blindnesses that adhere to
these characters, but also the irony of their seeking an unfettered sexual freedom whose
mobility and efficacy are predicated on personal privilege.

Notably, Hollinghurst’s novel culminates with this form of epiphany, this time
revealing the complex structures of personal connection, intergenerational trauma, and
potential repair between the two men. Over the course of the novel, what eventually
comes into view is the encrypted realization that Will’s grandfather, Lord Denis
Beckwith, played a major role in keeping homosexuality criminalized, in what Will later
describes as the “gay pogrom” of the postwar period, and furthermore, that their family

141 Fredric Jameson, “On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act,” The
Jameson Reader, eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Malden: Blackwell Publishers
owes their wealth and peerage to his unseemly political work. Through Charles’ prison diaries, the final documents given to Will at the end of the novel, Will not only realizes the ugly truth about his family’s past, but also comes to understand how much is riding on his writing of Charles’ biography, which Will now imagines as a campaign: “If Charles had been orchestrating his campaign, as I sometimes believed he had, then he had brought it brilliantly and comprehensively to a head. The prison was the key. The one unspeakable thing that no one had been able to tell me threw light on everything else, and only left obscure the degrees of calculation and coincidence in Charles’s offering me his biography to write—a task he must have known I could never, in the end, accept” (Library, 263). Indeed, the reparative fantasy that adheres to this “unspeakable thing” is that by writing the biography, Will would somehow not only mend the injury his grandfather had done to Charles, but also that, as a gay man, his textual labor would have the added poignancy of sexual solidarity. His refusal to take on this intergenerational burden of biographical representation can be seen as abjuring both responsibility and the possibility of repair on an individual and collective level—though as I’ll discuss later, it’s possible that this refusal is not mere or empty negation.

If Charles had orchestrated a brilliant campaign, so too, of course, does Hollinghurst through his careful emplotment of the novel and his creation of empty space between his two main characters. The specificity of the novel’s primary epiphany throws its particular historical situations into relief, raising the question of why the immediate postwar period carries such weight and is so shrouded in mystery. Despite The Swimming-Pool Library’s sweep over the whole twentieth century, there is a curious temporal fold or blind spot between the two lives, what Will calls “the gruesome
incongruity” that leads to the force of his final epiphany. As Will’s friend James puts it:

“Isn’t there a kind of blind spot…for that period just before one was born? One knows about the Second World War, one knows about Suez, I suppose, but what people were actually getting up to in those years … There’s an empty, motiveless space until one appears on the scene” (Library, 279). This chapter will thus explore what exactly disappears in this temporal fold or hinge point between the two characters, and how, if at all, this connects to the emplotment of the novel. It approaches the empty space of the postwar as key to Will’s epiphanic refusal to write Charles’ biography, and as indexing other forms of spatial politics in the novel.

II. Spatial Histories: Queering Wartime and Postwar Reconstruction

Compared to the other historical stopping-points in Charles’ diary, the novel’s engagement with the Second World War is given relatively short summary. However, the way Will frames and narrates the events is unique to Charles’ life writings, underscoring the popular historiography of the Second World War as a sexualized, intimate state of emergency, shot through with illicit sex and romance under the cover and chaos of the Blitz. From Elizabeth Bowen’s The Heat of the Day and Greene’s The End of the Affair to contemporary novels such as Sebastian Faulks’ Charlotte Gray and Sarah Waters’ The Night Watch, the wartime literary imagination often centers on a “fellow-feeling” that, as Will suggests, rubs uncomfortably against the Home Front’s declared ethos of “selflessness and doing without” (227). Yet Will’s framing remarks also suggest a critical ambivalence about this wartime fantasy, what he calls “the other side of my apprehension about war” (Library, 224). Rather than celebrate war’s queering effects, Will indexes a
misgiving about the freedom enabled by this state of emergency. In doing so, he anticipates the degree of sexual conservatism that accompanied the course of postwar reconstruction, which gave a new meaning to the idea of social security.

With Britain’s geopolitical turn inward and domestic transition to a welfare state, and through its sheer need to reconstruct home spaces after the war, the measurement of postwar success was often registered through the family home as a conceptual site for experimentation and repair: both as repairing agent and as the thing to be repaired. This was in marked difference from the postwar of the First World War: as Peter Kalliney notes in *Cities of Affluence and Anger*, “[I]n contrast to the engineers of London’s imperial quarter, who designed ostentatious public monuments, the welfare state focused on the family home as an important site of cultural rehabilitation after the war.”142 This domestic modernization has become an abiding cultural legacy created in the wake of the Second World War, taken up especially by the postwar British novel as a genre formally and historically invested in the creation of the individual and the family home as sites for negotiating private and public life.

With the state exerting a new control over domestic class politics, it perhaps comes as no surprise that this period had severe ramifications for Britain’s gay population. As Richard Hornsey notes, the dark side of the reconstructive imagination was its desire to “offer the public a comforting framework for imagining a metropolis protected from the possibility of conflict or trauma,” which took the “insidious form of

142 Peter Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2007), 122. For other accounts of this national turn inward around this period (and its registration by literature), see Alison Light’s focus on domesticity in the interwar period in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2013), Esty’s *A Shrinking Island*, and MacKay’s *Modernism and World War II*. 
social management” of city spaces in which “malignant social practices would, quite literally, be unable to take place.”143 Through controlling social behavior through city planning and domestic design, the immediate postwar decades “witnessed a complex set of cultural contestations around the dynamics of metropolitan male same-sex desire, as certain practices became confirmed in their criminality, new forms of queer subjectivity took shape, and alternative modes of resistance emerged.”144 The assumptions upon which the biopolitics (that is, bio-planning) of reconstruction are founded contribute to what Leo Bersani calls the “redemptive reinvention of sex”: here, the wish for sex to be properly socialized or organized as productive of citizenship.145 Britain’s postwar reconstruction and its structuring ethos did not make much room for queer people, and if it did at all, it divided the good queers from the bad along liberal lines of social citizenship—i.e., those who fit securely into the plan and those who didn’t.

Given the location of its main epiphany and its structuring of the twentieth-century around this hinge point of the immediate postwar period, The Swimming-Pool Library provides an important case-study for examining these reconstructive structures of feeling. One of the few critics who studies the novel’s specific postwar legacy is Alan Sinfield, who suggests that the novel “asserts subcultural history and responsibility, not


144 Ibid., 3.

only against Thatcherite selfishness, but against the consensus that failed to acknowledge gay men.”

To Sinfield, the novel’s main function is to uncover the sexual conservatism and discrimination that belied the seemingly liberal postwar consensus, which it mainly achieves through Will discovering his grandfather’s role in the postwar “gay pogrom.”

While the novel is significantly invested in exposing the discriminatory ethos of the postwar period, I’d suggest that this ethos is not overtly registered through the political structures of the postwar consensus and the welfare state. Compared to the eventfulness of two world wars, British imperialism, and Falkland War, which are directly marked as distinct historical periods, the postwar period makes itself known through obliquely rendered spatial effects. As the absent center or empty place of the novel, the 1940s and 1950s provide an archive of degraded spaces including the Blitzed ruins of wartime London, such as the houses bought up by Lord Beckwith and Charles, and the church Charles transforms into a Boys Club in 1955; the postwar housing towers, where Will is assaulted by the young neo-Nazis as he searches for Arthur; and most directly, the prison where Charles is incarcerated under the Labouchère Amendment. All three of these institutional spaces index aspects of Britain’s changing postwar landscape as it transitioned from a warfare to a welfare state, and embarked on ambitious projects of architectural and social reconstruction.

This period of social reconstruction can be felt as a conceptual, encrypted hinge point or epistemic gap in Hollinghurst’s novel The Stranger’s Child, whose five sections leap from 1913, 1926, 1967, 1979-80, to 2008, skipping over the Second World War and

the immediate postwar period completely. Like *The Swimming-Pool Library*, *The Stranger’s Child* measures the events of this absent temporal episteme architecturally, noting that the family estate was made into a military hospital during the war, and then sold soon after to become a boys’ prep school. What differentiates *The Swimming-Pool Library*, however, is that it does not fixate on the family estate as the main site of inhabitation and institutionalization. Instead, the characters circulate amongst social spaces that begin to outline a form of intimacy that, while still codified by institutional or public routines, is experienced as less coercive or stifling to its characters than that of the established home space as imagined by reconstruction. Though Will’s *belle époque* occasioning the novel technically begins after he left his post at the Cubitt *Dictionary of Architecture* (“a grandiose project afflicted by delay and bad feeling”), *The Swimming-Pool Library* can be read as recording its own dictionary of gay social architecture, introducing the reader to the sociological constellation of queer sites such as clubs, cinemas, schools, the tube and gyms that make up Will’s world; historical locations of the colonial home and postwar prison; and a literary archive including Benjamin Britten’s opera *Billy Budd*, and the figures of E.M. Forster and Ronald Firbank. Through exploring the way characters engage with these spaces, Hollinghurst poses the key question of the

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147 See also Hollinghurst’s *The Spell* (1998), whose architect protagonist Robin Woodfield is dedicated to renovating country estates into flats.

148 Here, it might also be useful to juxtapose these two Hollinghurst novels with two by Sarah Waters—comparing *The Swimming-Pool Library* to *The Night Watch* (2006) and *The Stranger’s Child* to *The Little Stranger* (2009). Unlike Hollinghurst’s span of the twentieth-century and enfolding of the war/postwar period within them, Waters’ novels are situated squarely in this period, with *The Night Watch* moving backwards in time from 1947 to 1944 to 1941 (and also featuring a prison space). *The Little Stranger* provides an even more direct comparison to *The Stranger’s Child*, as both focus on a haunted family house.
novel: whether one can experience intimacy without its institutionalization or enclosure. Additionally, the novel’s attention to the structuring energies of space asks us to compare the way sexuality is produced both by repressive state apparatuses of law (prison) or norms (marriage, home spaces), as well as by structures of gay identity formation such as social sites or the intellectual operations working to canonize literary history. In what follows, I address this question from two angles: first, in terms of the bad institutionalization of domestic home spaces and the sense of claustrophobia they produce, and second, in terms of the fantastic metaphor of the swimming-pool library.

III. Homespaces and the Bad Institutionalization of Domesticity

Hollinghurst’s representations of the family home reveal the ruins of reconstruction: a postwar gone terribly wrong, with its dreams of domestic stability shattered by multiple forms of bad domesticity. One example of this degradation lies in the way the stately homes of the Home Front were transformed, and indeed, cheapened, after the war. As we learn, what haunts the nobility of the Beckwith family is not only the homophobic tyranny of the grandfather, whose anti-gay pogrom led to him being given a peerage out of sheer political embarrassment, but also the shallow roots of the family estate: “It was not until years later that I came to understand how recent and synthetic this nobility was—the house itself bought up cheap after the war, half ruined by use as an officers’ training school, and then as a military hospital” (Library, 4). Even as a retrospective moment, this projection of “years later” marks a strange moment for this first-person narrative, calling our attention to the magnitude of this reveal. This degradation of a home by institutional use is, of course, a major form of dystopia for the
postwar British novel, a tradition beginning with Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* and finding purchase in works such as Muriel Spark’s *Hothouse by the East River*, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, and Hollinghurst’s own *The Stranger’s Child*, which chronicles the transformation of the family home into a school for boys. That the Beckwiths buy their home “up cheap” after the war, and that Charles’ house is represented as a claustrophobic space, is yet another twist to this melancholia for “the lost houses” of Britain, revealing how the spoils of private ownership—not just collective use—may be what ultimately completes the ruin of the home.

The novel’s other form of bad domesticity turns away from the demise of the Big House to consider the rise of tower blocks, the other dystopian horizon of postwar reconstruction. It is brought into focus during Will’s trip to visit his lover Arthur, who lives in a housing tower near the Victoria and Albert Docks (or as Will muses, “The Victoria and Albert Docks”). Here, Will is attacked by a gang of skinheads who, after a protracted back-and-forth, label Will a “poof” and “nigger-fucker” and beat him severely. Though the sheer nature of this attack can be read as a traumatic return of Nazi violence and the Second World War, the way Will recounts the attack underscores another form of violence, one baked into the mass institutionalization of domesticity. After a detailed description of the prefab units, one comparable to wartime and postwar forms of home sociology in Mass Observation and Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy*, Will concludes: “The buildings, prefabricated units slotted and pinned together, showed a systematic disregard for comfort and relief, for anything the eye or heart might fix on as homely or decent. […] I found myself sweating with gratitude that I did not live under such a tyranny, dispossessed in my own home by the insistent beat of rock or reggae” (*Library*, 169-70).
Though this domestic and racist claustrophobia is a familiar feeling to Will, one he recently and keenly experienced during his and Arthur’s self-imposed house arrest, this episode in the docks establishes a key distinction about Will’s own predilections. Though he may feel most at home in locker-rooms, swimming-pools, cinemas, and bathrooms—public institutions of education and leisure—not all publicly-designed spaces are created equal, or afford equal opportunity to commune with (and cruise for) strangers. While the destruction and dispossessions of the war did occasion postwar projects such as Charles’ reconstruction of the Boys’ Club, its buildings did not always represent such flourishing or even security. Instead, as this scene suggests, the novel sets up the postwar period as a time where things took a turn for the worse.

While this episode is not given the status as the novel’s final illumination, it certainly has a transformative, even epiphanic effect for our protagonist. Of course, physically disfigured from the attack, Will’s self-defining narcissism suffers a major blow. Yet beyond this physical trauma, a different world opens up to Will in its aftermath, one that challenges another sense of self: his fantasy of “absolute security” amongst strangers in the metropolis. In a passage reminiscent of Clarissa Dalloway’s postwar London, Will observes:

It was a bright, blowy tea-time. Already people were coming home, the traffic was building up at the lights. The pavements were normal, the passers-by had preoccupied, harmless expressions. Yet to me it was a glaring world, treacherous with lurking alarm. A universal violence had been disclosed to me, and I saw it everywhere—in the sudden scatter across the pavement of some quite small boys, in the brief mocking notice of me taken by a couple of telephone engineers in a parked van, in the dark glasses and cigarette-browned fingers of a man—German? Dutch?—who stopped us to ask directions. I understood for the first time the vulnerability of the old, unfortified by good luck or inexperience.

*(Library, 176-77)*
Here, the potential security of strangers is transformed into a profoundly treacherous relation. For the first time, Will takes on a paranoid position, interpreting the movements and even mere bodies of others as contributing to a structure of universal violence: a position he at first describes as a personal revelation, discovering the tainted or spoiled nature of a previously anodyne, if not joyful world. And yet as the passage continues, this new self-positioning opens up to consider other subjects, both the precarious lives of the old, the ambiguous screams of children in either play or fear, and perhaps most notably, the nameless “anyone” who might fail to recognize the difference: “If there were real screams, I found myself wondering, would it be possible to tell the difference, would anyone detect the timbre of tragedy? Or could an atrocity take place whose sonority was indistinguishable from the make-believe of youngsters, their boredom and scares?” (Library, 177). Indeed, what begins as a personal revelation of the good world and the bad becomes a much more complex meditation on the vulnerability of particular groups, and how, exactly, one might be able (or more to the point, unable) to recognize injury and harm as distinct from normal life.

IV. Swimming-Pool Libraries and Fantasies of Reconstruction

Despite the many biographical resonances between Charles and Will, what is most striking about their relationship is their propensity to fantasize or dream about dwelling-spaces, typically in suspended, lyrical meditations. (This a kind of connection that can only be effected in the space of literature.) Both characters are drawn particularly to the architecture of degraded homespaces and broken enclosures, sharing predilections for shadows, slatted windows, whitewashed walls, and unfurnished or temporary rooms.
Each returns to the enchantment of the uninhabitable as where at heart each wants to be, attracted to impossible forms of dwelling that are in direct and obvious conflict with established, institutionalized forms of domesticity such as marriage and private home ownership, but also with the London’s institutions that contour and make recognizable a type of urban gay male subjectivity. I read Charles’s and Will’s extended spatial meditations as a fictional answer to the set of overlapping and often contradictory questions raised by the habits and habitats of the novel’s contemporary gay subjects. On the one hand, both Charles and Will seek out sites that are structured in such a way as to allow queer sociality and sexual practices; both are drawn to the Corry’s gym, the public toilets of Kensington Gardens, and cinemas or private pornographic productions. On the other hand, both also share a dislike of established community or collective identity, sharing spatial fantasies often devoid of people and structured by emptiness. Indeed, their desire seems attached to the space itself as a site for sexual encounter, almost more than to its subjects. However, their meditations are not entirely antisocial: they do not quite belong to a politics of queer antirelationality along the lines of Leo Bersani or Lee Edelman (they are neither the grave nor anti-communitarian, and they are decidedly not anti-utopian.) And yet, as their imaginary spaces are shot through with imminent danger and the possibility of collapse and destruction, they also cannot serve as blueprints for a reparative redemption of sex in any positive utopian fashion. With these many conditions, how do we read the space of the swimming-pool libraries?

Here I find it useful to turn to José Esteban Muñoz’s distinction between “abstract” and “concrete” utopia, which he draws from Ernst Bloch’s *The Principle of*...

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Hope in order to theorize a queer utopianism whose sociality is neither anti-relational nor strictly communitarian. To both Bloch and Muñoz, an abstract utopia is “untethered from any historical consciousness,” whereas a concrete one is “relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential,” though they can also be “daydreamlike” if their dream-life exists in “realm of educated hope.” Likewise, the swimming-pool library structures that float throughout the novel are not merely fueled by a universal, banal optimism, but emerge from specific historical situations—particularly in dialogue with the ethos of reconstruction and top-down fantasies of how to contain and manage people in the spaces of their home or the city. And while they can be read as the “no-places” of utopia—unachievable, fantastic, uninhabitable, at least in the present day—they also are constructed of specific structures and modes of inhabitation that signify in important ways for their characters. If, as Muñoz articulates, “the aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity,” I read The Swimming-Pool Library’s aesthetic of place and space as gesturing towards a queer dream-life of reconstruction, developing alongside but also critically outside of reconstruction’s specific postwar history.

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150 José Esteban Muñoz, Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 2-3. Interesting, too, to note that Ernst Bloch’s work emerges from the wake of the Second World War.

151 Ibid., 3.

152 We could also read the difference between “abstract” and “concrete” utopias as the difference between state planning of reconstruction and its lived reality (often literally in concrete, whether the squat postwar housing towers or Charles’ prison cell), though that conceptualizes utopia rather differently.

153 Ibid., 1.
Along with the frail objects, degraded structures, and swimming-pool metaphors that make up Charles’s and Will’s spatial fantasies, the novel’s queer aesthetic manifests itself in an overt and labored negotiation with space, which Hollinghurst performs by rewriting and redescribing spaces in such a way that—in an almost Barthesian mythological sense—we see their significations warp and morph. We see this operation first in the doubled description of the original swimming-pool library. The first approach to the nature of this space consists mainly of straightforward representation, including details such as how to get to the pool and what the buildings looked like, and a catalogue of the boys’ actions from their dormitory escape, sex, jump in the pool, and return to their beds. The second pass at representation, however, is startlingly different, introduced as a recurring dream (or possibly an involuntary memory) prompted by Phil’s observation that the box holding Will’s Swimming-Pool Librarian paraphernalia smells “rich,” “like a country house.” This moment suddenly cuts to one of the more luminous passages in the novel: “I dream, once or month or so, of that changing-room, its slatted benches. In our retrogressive slang it was known as the Swimming-Pool Library and then simply as the Library, a notion fitting to the lives we led” (*Library*, 140). This retrospective mode continues:

Sometimes I think that shadowy, doorless little shelter—which is all it was really, an empty, empty place—is where at heart I want to be. Beyond it was a wire fence and then a sloping, moonlit field of grass—‘the Wilderness’—that whispered and sighed in the night breeze. Nipping into that library of uncatalogued pleasure was to step into the dark and halt. Then held breath was released, a cigarette glowed, its smoke was smelled, the substantial blackness moved, glimmered and touched. Friendly hands felt for the flies. There was never, or rarely, any kissing—no cloying, adult impurity in the lubrious innocence of what we did. (*Library*, 141)
This representation of the pool invites a confidence and intimacy with the reader while at the same time maintaining a critical distance from complete identification or empathy. This intimacy is signaled by the first sentence and its strange temporal beginning of “Sometimes I think,” suggesting a condition in the present tense that brings the reader closer to Will’s present moment; that the sentence ends by locating his heart adds to the strange tenderness, even naiveté of the moment. The qualification that the swimming-pool locker room was a really an empty place adds another textual layer of encryption, whether it is a secret being divulged or a warning being offered. This aside is thus less transparent than it may seem: on the one hand, everything about it is elegiac and nostalgic, being tender, exposed moment from a narrator not used to speaking about his past, much less his heart. We feel privileged to a deep secret, a disclosure, a coming out of sorts. On the other hand, the aside also could be read as a reflective worldliness, being a withdrawal of investment from this place as pure shelter, perhaps even warning the reader against interpreting these words as pure longing. The doubled nature of this passage is also reflected in its mode of narration. Though it begins from the standpoint of the narrative “I,” it quickly moves to a subjectless space beyond the shelter, and then to a strange formulation of action and description. By whom was this breath released, smoke smelled? Who sees the cigarette glowing, the blackness glimmering and touching; who feels for the flies?

The structural elements of fantasy reflect the shape of Will’s desire, particularly his intimacy with strangers and his “irrational sense of absolute security that came from the conspiracy of sex with men I had never seen before and might never see again” (Library, 132). In its tour of gay social spaces, and its fascination with, but ultimately
aversion to domesticated intimacy, *The Swimming-Pool Library* invites us to imagine an architecture of sexuality away from enclosure, property, and the stasis of home, and towards distance, strangers, and the mobility (and iterability) of practices. Thus his description of the original swimming-pool library presents no simple refusal of heteronormative familial spaces; it also offers a vision of how to live most securely in detachment and distance, in intimacy without domicile. We might read this as the inverse of postwar reconstruction and its obsession with organized, knowable, secure circuits of everyday life: as Will notes, these “daring instincts were by no means infallible: their exhilaration was sharpened by the courted risk of rejection, misunderstanding, abuse” (*Library*, 132). And yet despite being an “empty, empty place,” the swimming-pool library still provides a form of shelter, perhaps even an “absolute security”: indeed, if home is where the heart is (or wants to be), then we might also read this structure as Will’s ultimate and ideal homespace.

This form of spatial imaginary can also be seen in Charles’ experience of his house in colonial Sudan. In his diaries from these days, he pays the most attention to his homespace as encapsulating his fantasies of his everyday life:

> There is something which charms me utterly about this house. It is whitewashed & square & has four rooms, each of the same size. It is a house reduced to its very elements, with empty holes for windows and doors, so that one looks from one room into the next—and through that to the outside, the surrounding shacks, the clustered peaks of the huts or the bald, enigmatic rocks. The house is a kind of frame for living in or discipline for thought—so that its few furnishings, the book-case, a rather hideous rug, the photograph of the king, seem unnecessary embarrassments. (*Library*, 206)

Compared to his lavish present-day London home—which Will characterizes as having an “air of secrecy and exclusion, to the invalidish world of Edwardian ghost stories,” and
“the eccentric rectitude of a colonial staying on, unflaggingly keeping up appearances”—young Charles’ appreciation of this domestic austerity is striking (70). He seems to desire the house as an abstraction, one that does away with property, propriety, or entrenched, lingering historical association, which reflects his own professed unease with the trappings and formalities of colonial governmentality. Indeed, in its abstraction, the house seems less of a habitable environment and more of a blueprint or design for living: the observation that it is a “frame for living in” echoes Le Corbusier’s famous dictum that “the house is a machine for living,” complete with its ethos of discipline or efficiency. It is a form of the reconstructive imagination taken to its extreme, erasing the materiality of the house into a Platonic ideal, reducing the inhabitants to an abstract “one” whose gaze establishes the boundaries of rooms and the border of interior and exterior. Yet this hygienic, open, unpopulated space also has qualities of shelter, containment, and domestic relationships, which enable Charles to imagine a form (or at least fantasy) of intimacy with his servant, Taha. Switching to a description of the home as a “retur(n) to this little box of shadows, to the fringed globe of the shamadan, the little folding captain’s chair, with a sense of enchantment,” the enchantment of the homespace is intensified by finding Taha “waiting, never snoozing or yawning, but squatting in perfect, illiterate silence. His beauty is enhanced by his watchfulness, which is never impertinent or burdensome; it is an almost abstract form of attention, a condition of life to him” (Library, 206). After these observations and idealizations of Taha’s passivity and servitude, Charles moves tentatively to imagine Taha as his spouse, feeling “as I imagine long-married couples do, a complete freedom from self-consciousness” (Library, 206). In effect, Charles does to Taha what he previously did to the home: abstracting, reducing,
and dehistoricizing (whitewashing?) him into a pure form of relationality. Though the spell is broken by Charles “remember(ing) that he knows nothing of this, as I know nothing of him,“ which returns a critical opacity to their relationship, it is nevertheless crucially delimited by their roles as colonizer and colonized, master and servant: “I look across at him & smile, & after a second he smiles back, begins to rise, but I gesture to him to stay put. There is a momentary uncertainty, but as he settles again it disperses & is forgotten” (Library, 206).

The homespace transforms one more time when Taha’s life is endangered by a scorpion sting, an event catalyzing a series of fevered caretaking actions in which the house takes on surprising agency:

Then almost at once the dawn came up through the shutters, the heat, that seemed only to have faded for a moment, built up alarmingly & for once the beautiful simplicity of the house revealed itself as a menacing bareness, a kind of trap in which to escape from one room was only to be imprisoned in the next. I felt my responsibility weigh on me, at the same time as it buoyed me up—an asphyxiating feeling. More strictly it was like a cramp when swimming—a sudden challenge in a friendly element, threatening where before it had only sustained. (Library, 209-210)

This structure of revelation—of a shelter turned trap—is repeated time and again throughout The Swimming-Pool Library as its major epiphanic mode. (The metaphors of swimming further flag the symbolic importance of this moment.) These sudden transformations echo the paranoid structures of policing gay sexuality that we see in both Charles’s and James’s arrests, executed by officers in plainclothes who pretend to be gay (indeed, inhabit the role) in order to catch their victims in the criminal act. Yet as we see here, these also catalyze a peculiar, ambivalent form of responsibility, weaving together domestic space, political obligation, and queer kinship, which Charles elaborates in his
diary: “[W]hen I went back through the doorless aperture into the room where Taha was, asleep, unaware, & yet tormented, like some saint in ecstasy or martyrdom, I felt all my vague, ideal emotions about Africa & my wandering, autocratic life here take substance before my bleary eyes. […] At once I saw he was my responsibility made flesh: he was all the offspring I will never have, all my futurity” (Library, 209-10). Child, lover, saint, servant: Taha becomes a placeholder for all these things as the beloved, and is ultimately brought back to London with Charles to carry on as his servant. For Charles, then, this domestic spatial reverie creates (or rather, allows) him to feel forms of responsibility that have real effects, turning him into a parent and benefactor. This also is the outcome of his imprisonment, which spurs him to establish the Boys’ Club and a boxing tournament in his name (the “Nantwich Cup”); to promise his fellow prisoner Bill “something to do” upon his release, a job “where his feeling for men and physical exercise can be fulfilled, rather than baulked and denied in some clerkly work”; and finally, to give Will gainful employment as his biographer—though as we know, this last relationship has a rather different set of strings attached.

The second notable set of Charles’ spatial meditations is occasioned by his imprisonment, marked again with the metaporics of swimming: he describes as a fall into water, “[T]hat very fast, dazed and escorted plunge from the dock after the sentence had been given, down and down the stone stairs from the courtroom to the cells. I had the illusion—so active is the faculty of metaphor at moments of crisis—of being flung, chained, into water: of a need to hold my breath. In a sense I kept on holding it for half a year” (Library, 249). Added to the archives of swimming-pool libraries, then, is the space of the prison, a subterranean world that was “fuller than it ever had been with our people,
as a direct result of the current brutal purges” (*Library*, 253), a “nonce-world” that
“closed about me, offered me its pitiful comforts, and began to reveal its depths—now
murky, now surprisingly coralline and clear” (*Library*, 254), and “a structure of
submerged bonds and loyalties” (*Library*, 255). At the heart of these diaries is Charles’
recurring dream of his arrest, which, like his meditations on the colonial house, he
describes and reiterates in great spatial detail. But whereas the desert diaries begin with a
description of the house and then become increasingly more literary and symbolic, the
revelation here is inverted, beginning with fantasy and moving to the reality of his arrest.
The sequence begins with Charles walking to the cottage, which transforms in the dream-
logic to a number of different locations; meeting a man, who has “elements of many
people in him” and a compounded, ideal penis “startling me like some work of art”; and
then taking a “two-step backwards into what is no longer simply the cottage but a light-
filled space whose walls alter or roll away like ingenious stage machinery in a
transformation scene. We make love in the drying-room at Winchester, or in a white-tiled
institutional bathroom, or the white house at Talodi, bare of my scraps of furniture and
revealed in all its harmonious vacancy: simple places whose very emptiness prompts
desire” (*Library*, 251). This is a gorgeous palimpsest of places, people, and parts, a
beautiful writing of the no-place (and yet every-place!) of queer utopia. Yet it is also
shadowed by a menacing sense of destruction and an ultimate dead end, as Charles notes
in his one injection of the reality principle: “[I]n reality the places that I sought had in
some cases long been closed or demolished. Down Street was shut up before the war; and
the station at the British Museum, although I recall no lavatory there, was another
imaginary rendezvous, that now is an abandoned Stygian siding; so that my dream
dissolved one nostalgia in another, and showed how all closures, all endings, give warning of closures, greater yet, to come” (*Library*, 250).

This closure appears in the second iteration of this dream, which begins, heartbreakingly: “In another version, of course, it is not like this” (*Library*, 251). Only slowly revealing itself as the story of his arrest, the second version reiterates the structural sequence of the previous fantastic dream, though its elements are fatally singular and its end devastatingly closed. Once Charles realizes he’s been had, he writes: “There is a thumping silence, and the light of the one lamp across the wet tiled floor seems conscious that it will illuminate this and many other atrocities, just as it will go on shining through days and months of sudden speechless lusts, and all the intervening hours of silent emptiness” (*Library*, 252). What was before a desirable emptiness has turned degraded; the very structure of the dream-cottage becomes sentient of its new complicity in atrocity. Combined with the news of Taha’s death, Charles falls into a depressive state and turns inward, “[C]urling up in the warm leaf-mould of earlier and earlier times, drawing some wan, nostalgic sustenance from those dead days. My life seemed to go into reverse, and for a month, two months, I was a thing of shadows” (*Library*, 259). This retreat into sheltering memory spaces does not last, however: as he prepares to leave prison, he begins to cathect to the world outside, preparing himself to “do something for others like myself, and for those more defenseless still. I would have to abandon this mortal introspection and instead steel myself. I would even have to hate a little” (*Library*, 260). Repeating his avowal of responsibility, though this time to his kind and not to the singular Taha, Charles’ prison writings and post-prison politics raise a challenge for Will as his potential biographer. After reading these diaries, will Will write the biography for
Charles, similarly inspired to “do something” for his fellow man, or will he abandon its work of retrospection?

V. Epiphany Revisited, Epiphany Refused

When Will learns that Charles’s victimization by a “whole sort of gay pogrom” was orchestrated largely by his grandfather, who was then Director of Public Persecutions, it sets off a series of cascading crises that only find cessation with the final lines of the novel. Will reads the diaries (the “digest of disasters”); goes to find solace with his lover, Phil, only to find him in bed with the much older Bill; has a truly comic-disastrous encounter with Gabriel, an Argentinian with a penchant for sex-shop accoutrements; and fails to retrieve the photos that would incriminate Colin and save James. What I want to focus on is the nature of the realization, and how it is so different in kind than Will’s previous meditations on the nature of violence. It is here where Will learns his life is not independent of history: instead of generalizing the hurts of history to the “universal violence” lurking in every shop-goer, he comes to terms with his blindness to his own past. Whether this realization has any ramifications for our protagonist is the central challenge posed by the novel. Critics are torn: some think he learns nothing from Charles’ object lesson, whereas others see it as a form of epiphany.

Notably, Will’s reaction to these prison diaries is to fall into a “queer empty panic”:

I was so confused by this digest of disasters, I felt so stupid and so ashamed that I walked around the flat talking out loud, getting up and sitting down, scratching my crew-cut head as if I had lice. It was impossible so quickly to formulate a plan, but I felt the important thing was to go to Charles, to say something or other to him. It took me ages to get a cab, and as at last it locked and braked its way
through the West End closing-time crowds, I found all my ideas of what I might do rattling away, leaving me in a queer empty panic. (Library, 260)

This queer empty panic may seem worlds away from the empty placeholder of the swimming-pool library. On the one hand, it evokes “gay panic,” a legal defense that legitimates paranoid, homophobic violence, making it acceptable for individuals to use force against a person who is perceived to be making (homo)sexual advances towards them. Although here Will has been called out and identified through Charles’ sexual/textual request, Will is experiencing the opposite of this legal paranoia—instead of reacting in violence against Charles, he seeks to connect and perhaps make amends; instead of projecting force outwards, he turns it inwards through feelings of stupidity and shame. Yet the insertion of the word “empty” destabilizes its meaning, as does the word “queer.” While this does remind us of Will’s description of the swimming-pool library and the original architecture of his sexuality, here, queer as strangeness surfaces more strongly than previous references, emphasized by the fact that Will is hardly ever at a loss of what to do (or for that matter, unable to catch a cab)—his lack of easy mobility underscores the shock and confusion of his realization. On the other hand, we could also read this phrase as an apt way to describe the strangeness of Will’s newly-discovered relationship to Charles Nantwich—one both kindred and non-kindred, once-removed and yet still terribly insinuating, implying some form of debt and apology still owed, but not by the original source. This queer empty panic is a structure of historical feeling that arises from this form of skew relation, one that is uninhabitable more in the sense of Charles’ postwar prison cell (an entrapment) than the desirable, empty shelter of Will’s swimming-pool library.
But whereas Charles emerges from his imprisonment with a renewed sense of active commitment to other gay men, Will ultimately refuses to write Charles’ memoirs for him. Indeed, as he finally says to Charles, the only writing that could come from this would be a “book about why I couldn’t write the book”—perhaps the very book we now hold in our hands (Library, 329). J. Murphy offers one very powerful interpretation of Will’s refusal to write Nantwich’s biography, which along with the novel’s elision of AIDS, he reads as “ethical responses to the catastrophe,” a refusal to turn both into “objects of knowledge transparently available to narrative framing.”

Rather than conceive history as catastrophe and historiography as a form of mourning—the dominant imperative of criticism ranging from deconstruction to trauma theory to Jameson’s “history is what hurts”—Hollinghurst’s novel employs irony, rather than memory, as a way to move beyond a calamitous history. As Murphy writes: “Irony seems especially necessary now not only as a way to counter the excessive reverence in literary criticism for historical calamities—a reverence that sometimes seems to put the calamity above its victims and survivors—but also as a way, in fact, to honour the dead. It is precisely because Will Beckwith and Alan Hollinghurst refuse to respect history that they do it a service.”

Thus perhaps the lesson we should take away from this refusal is that a focus


155 Murphy classifies the novel’s irony as both a literary style and a form of recovery project, contrasting a comradely Forsterian morality, predicated on responsibility, visibility, and open community, with a Firbankian style favoring irony, strategies of concealment, and camp effeminacy (“Past Irony, 70-1).

156 Ibid., 73.
on pain or catastrophe leads to a narrow, if not reductive conceptualization of history and group identity: an impulse certainly shared by the novel’s protagonist.

This focus on irony, however, does not completely account for the dynamics of Will’s refusal. To start, it’s only implied that Will is the author of the book: how he came to this decision is obscured from us, as is the future and conditions in which he purportedly writes it. If it is his work, then isn’t the novel another form of testimony to historical calamity—even doubly so, as it also includes Will’s personal crisis? History hurts twice in *The Swimming-Pool Library*: first as tragedy, and second not as farce but as collateral tragedy. Instead, I read Will’s refusal as different type of ethical response to the catastrophe: one that sees the labor of writing the biography as too stifling a commitment or intimacy, akin to Will’s aversion to domesticity or monogamy. Though writing the account might be potentially reparative for Charles, it is quite another to write on behalf of another person, especially under such conditions of responsibility, atonement, and contrition. For Will, serving as Charles’ Swimming-Pool Librarian does not signify repair. Instead, it symbolizes yet another form of empty place, a hollow promise of fulfillment through historical reconstruction. Furthermore, it is impossible to read the novel’s final lines as a complete commitment to an ironic distancing. Returning to the Corry, Will muses:

> There were several old boys, one or two perhaps even of Charles’s age, and doubtless all with their own story, strange and yet oddly comparable, to tell. And going into the showers I saw a suntanned young lad in pale blue trunks that I rather liked the look of. (*Library*, 288)

The combination of these last two sentences is essential. On the one hand, we could read the last line as ending on an ultimately ironic and distancing move, one that eschews
responsibility and a community based on injury and celebrates individual desires and actions. On the other hand, the first line does signal a key change in Will: just as he newly understood the precarity of the elderly, young black men, and gay men, so too can he now see a deep, shared history of the “old boys.” Connected by the additive conjunction “and” (rather than “but” or “yet”), these sentences show that Will can have it both ways—a double-consciousness he has earned over the course of the novel.

That said, the ordering of these last two sentences also contains a warning to those who might privilege this burgeoning textuality over Will’s now-familiar sexuality. After all, as a quasi-*bildungsroman* that documents Will’s gay, and to a lesser degree, racial consciousness-raising (as taught to him by Charles and his personal encounters with racist and homophobic violence), it might be tempting to read too much into Will’s newfound appreciation of the old boys’ stories as the ultimate outcome, even payoff, of the novel. Yet by turning our attention to the suntanned young man, Hollinghurst ensures that gay desire gets the last word—or at the very least, the last diegetic word.

VI. Epochs of Catastrophe (and Institutionalization)

What makes *The Swimming-Pool* such an important case study for the dissertation is how it uses the “postness” of the postwar period—both its historical violence against gay men and cultural history spatialized language of social repair—to animate its own contemporary periodization of a world both before and after (or rather, during) the AIDS crisis. While this epochal parallel-processing is nothing new for literature of the Second World War, which as I’ve discussed, often situates its postwar condition in relation to that of the First World War, Hollinghurst paves the way for other types of historical
comparison. His novel asks the reader to consider the violence of war in relation to homophobic, racist, and colonial violences: and relatedly, their associated forms of redress and repair. While the earlier discussion has studied violence in terms of the histories it generates, in this conclusion, I will also consider the way that Hollinghurst raises academic institutionalization as a related form of both historicization and repair, comparing the end of *The Swimming-Pool Library* to his most recent novel, *The Stranger’s Child*. Both novels use gay biography as the medium of this work, and, as I’ll show, we can read *The Stranger’s Child* as a counterpoint, even extended afterlife of *The Swimming-Pool Library*.

Thus even though the final lines of *The Swimming-Pool Library* end with the present, instantaneous pulse of sexual desire, its balancing of past and present reminds us of our own eminently contextual double-consciousness with respect to the novel: that is, our anticipation of the rise of the AIDS crisis, which signifies both the endpoint of Will’s halcyon summer and the novel’s narrative arc. That the novel begins with a dedication to Nicholas Clark, a friend of Hollinghurst’s from Oxford and one of the first victims of AIDS who died in 1984, supports a reading of the *Swimming-Pool Library* as a world suspended in the moment just before the AIDS crisis, the calamity flickering around the edges of its diegesis. (Indeed, first British documentary about AIDS, “The Killer in the Village,” aired in 1983, the present year of Hollinghurst’s novel.) Like Hollinghurst’s later work, *The Line of Beauty*—also beginning in 1983, though the spectre of AIDS materializes by the end of the novel—Hollinghurst’s *The Swimming-Pool Library* can’t be read without the twin feelings of nostalgia for a world before AIDS, and of impending catastrophe for the world after.
To end on such a note, I find, raises the question of how we as readers will inherit Will’s story, a formal repetition of Will’s encounter with Charles. Do we read the *Swimming-Pool Library* as an elegy for a world before AIDS, or as a celebration? Does keeping AIDS at the margins actually counter what Murphy sees as an “excessive reverence” for historical calamities and the tendency to value the catastrophe and its trauma above victims and survivors? Or does it leave us in a queer empty panic of our own, not knowing whether the novel’s characters will be victims or survivors?

Hollinghurst leaves us with these questions in order to encourage our own comparative historical consciousness, encrypting AIDS as the epoch we must contend with from the vantage of our present moment, just as the postwar period is encrypted in Charles’ diaries. And as a piece of imaginative literature, *The Swimming-Pool Library* shifts its narrative algorithm to ask us not only what responsibility we have to a past we never experienced, but also, crucially, what responsibility we might owe to the future.

To this, we might turn both to Hollinghurst’s biography and larger *oeuvre* to find concrete models for what it looks like for a writer to take on this responsibility. Though Hollinghurst has recently expressed a desire for critics to stop worrying over his established reputation as the quintessential gay British writer—or rather, to stop worrying over his own potential unease about this moniker, as it is “no longer relevant” today—he seems unable to stop writing literature that deals with what it means to be one.\(^{157}\) This takes on three forms, two of which we have already encountered. First, Hollinghurst’s work is animated by literary allusion and reverence for the gay literary and cultural canon, such as Will’s interest in Ronald Firbank and Benjamin Britten’s opera *Billy

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Budd, as well as The Line of Beauty’s Nick Guest, who attempts to finish a postgraduate thesis on Henry James, and The Stranger’s Child’s Cecil Valance, a fictionalized WWI poet. Second and relatedly, he is interested in the work of gay biographical writing, directly thematized in The Swimming-Pool Library and most recently, The Stranger’s Child, which characterizes the 1980s as experiencing a burgeoning market for gay and lesbian biography. Third, and finally, Hollinghurst’s work shows an interest in the academic institutionalization of queer studies, particularly in The Stranger’s Child, which ends in 2008 with a queer theory conference.

Taken together, Hollinghurst’s oeuvre is characterized by a self-reflexivity that makes up much of his novels’ power, pathos, and potential for social critique. This is in keeping with Hollinghurst’s intellectual trajectory, which saw him earning a BA and MLitt in English from Oxford and the Newdigate Prize for poetry in 1974; lecturing at Oxford and University College London; and serving as the deputy editor of The Times Literary Supplement from 1985 to 1990, during which time he wrote his first novel, The Swimming-Pool Library (1988). His masters’ thesis, entitled “The Creative Uses of Homosexuality in the Novels of E.M. Forster, Ronald Firbank and L.P. Hartley,” can still be pulled from the shelves and read in Duke Humfrey’s Library, Oxford, giving the reader not only the thrill of encountering handwritten edits, footnotes, and accent marks, but also a profound sense of familiarity, since his literary oeuvre has continued to inhabit these critical and theoretical commitments (and in the case of The Swimming-Pool Library, actually re-animating Firbank through documentary footage).

Here, we might want to recall the ending of The Swimming-Pool Library, whose counterpoint between history and sexuality is expanded, perhaps to a fault, in
Hollinghurst’s *The Stranger’s Child*. *The Stranger’s Child* spirals around the few brief days that Cecil Valance, a charming, poetic rogue, spends with the Sawle family in 1913, during which he composes a poem in their daughter’s autograph book that, in time, comes to seal his literary reputation. The secret, of course, is that while the poem is written for the daughter, Daphne, it is actually written about the son, George (“And in their shadows lovers too / Might kiss and tell their secrets through.”) Dying a war-hero’s death in 1918, Cecil leaves the poem and its attendant shadows to take on lives of their own, which the novel charts through the winding, tortuous inheritance of his work and life across various generations, and through different guises (memories and family secrets; biography-writing and gay studies). Like *The Swimming-Pool Library*, *The Stranger’s Child* is characterized by both the breadth and metahistorical nature of its timeline. Divided into five sections, the novel drops us squarely and unapologetically into the Edwardians’ last hurrah of 1913, the interwar year 1926, gay history’s watershed 1967 (and the decriminalization of homosexuality in England, here more a structure of feeling than explicitly foregrounded), the 1980s market for gay and lesbian biography, and finally 2008, characterized by the academic canonization of Queer Theory. If this is gay history, it is also the history of gay studies, which Hollinghurst twins neatly with the more recognizable family saga. Yet this conceit also makes *The Stranger’s Child* a potentially unsatisfactory novel, as it depends upon the readers’ interest in academia itself (an unstable, if not difficult premise). Indeed, the challenge for the novel is how to both move past but also recapture the very live, beating heart ensconced in its first eighty pages – the history which it spends the rest of its pages recovering, but also recovering from.
At times, this feels like the worst kind of dilution. As the novel progresses, Hollinghurst moves us from youthful woodland frolicking to the biographer’s grubbing for scraps, from the laughing secrets of Cambridge men to the shifty-eyed competition of academics. Prewar parties become conferences, interviews, and funerals, and Hollinghurst’s sharp social criticism transmutes into the less glamorous, but equally desperate terrain of biography research. Perhaps Will was right to refuse the labor of writing Charles’ life, thinks the reader of *The Swimming-Pool Library*; for when it comes, the biographer’s reward in *The Stranger’s Child* lies somewhere between delusion and grandeur (Paul’s funny feeling of “a welcome from the literary family, of curtains held back, doors opening into half-seen rooms full of oddities and treasures that seemed virtually normal to the people who lived in them”).\(^{158}\) This hard-earned welcome may not seem like much of a payoff for the intrepid reader of *The Stranger’s Child*, who has already been given full access to these hallowed halls in the novel’s earliest section. Our reward – if we can call it that – lies somewhere else, in our difficult witnessing of Hollinghurst’s relentless narrative, with all the hauntings, misreadings, and disavowals that only time can tell.

Like *The Swimming-Pool Library*, *The Stranger’s Child* is a study of gay history’s secrets and lies, desperate desires, dusty closets, and nested narratives. And yet while Hollinghurst’s latest novel also teaches us how to feel the inevitable passage of time and its ellipses, it is at a slower, more accretive pace than the shattering epiphany of *The Swimming-Pool Library*. The lesson, when it comes, is a difficult one to swallow: history is made not only by those who show up, but also by the grudges and slow

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calcification of those who were there before, and the obsessive, ungainly intrusions of those who were not. Put differently (and to use the final lines of *The Swimming-Pool Library* as a kind of shorthand), by the end of *The Stranger’s Child*, all we can see are the old boys with their odd and comparable stories – the suntanned young men of the world have all but disappeared.
CHAPTER FOUR: OASIS SOCIETIES: CARING FOR RUINS IN *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*

The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn’t be.
(Ondaatje, *The English Patient*)

This chapter argues that the greatest appeal of Michael Ondaatje’s popular novel *The English Patient* (1992) lies not in the seduction of its love story, nor in the eroticized majesty of the Libyan desert, but rather in how it models a working global community built around practices of domestic, mutual care. Set in the immediate aftermath of Europe’s Second World War, Ondaatje’s novel recapitulates Britain’s transition from warfare to welfare, assembling an international cast of characters wounded by war to recuperate in a crumbling Italian villa. Not only does the narrative move deftly between each character’s backstory (from sapper training in England to a Canadian childhood, an illicit affair in colonial Cairo to wartime espionage), but it also conjures a wide range of historical, philosophical, and artistic references in recounting the present-day reality of the postwar villa. In doing so, *The English Patient* conjures a very different vision of welfare than Britain’s reality of postwar reconstruction: rather than recount the degraded spaces of administrated life (cold high rises, decaying housing estates) or, conversely, welfare’s Thatcherite dismantlement, Ondaatje gives us an idealized portrait of a welfarist space, characterized not only by the romance of ruins but also the intimacies arising from this communal, quasi-domestic life, which cross boundaries of nation, race, and bodily integrity. It isn’t until the characters hear the news of Hiroshima that this spell is broken: an event that recasts their allegiances along geopolitical and racialized lines.
Despite the general worldedness of the novel, *The English Patient* maintains clear ties to its Englishness on multiple levels. While we eventually learn that Patient is not an Englishman, but rather the Hungarian Count Ladislaus de Almásy, his eponymous status as the “English Patient” begs the question of what, exactly, is the allegorical and geopolitical wound to England, and relatedly, what type of care and reparation is owed from the British Commonwealth and colonies (i.e., Canadian and Indian characters in the novel). This question is thematized throughout the novel, particularly through the character Kirpal Singh, a Sikh sapper who learned his trade in England. Detailed in the section “Westbury, England, 1940,” Ondaatje gives Kip a backstory that sees him “beginning to love the English,” apprenticing to a jovial sapper Lord Suffolk whom Kip would eventually deem both teacher, family, and friend, and whose vision Kip would eventually take on after his death.  

Thus the news of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is imbued with no uncertain irony: not only is it the bomb that no one can defuse, but it also re-stabilizes the “English” of *The English Patient*: as the Sikh sapper Kirpal Singh notes, “American, French, I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you’re an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You all learned it from the English” (*Patient*, 286).

While the novel eventually remembers the divisive lines of its postcolonial history, I want to focus on the space of the Italian villa as a space that attempts a global welfare without the state. Despite the fact that this space anchors and gives structure to the itinerant, fragmentary narrative (as much as, say, the Patient’s memories and

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commonplace book), little attention has been paid to the specific workings of this house other than as a convenient setting for a social experiment. Yet Ondaatje imagines a particular form of domestic sanctuary, one meant to catalyze and create a reparative space—indeed, asylum—for these wartime refugees. While the earlier novels in this dissertation ultimately dismiss the idea that wartime devastation can create socially productive spaces of inhabitation, Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* re-enchants this possibility, seeking renewed potential in the ruins of war and their degraded spaces. In what follows, I study two approaches to space taken by *The English Patient*: first, its representation of environment and its reparative potential, both in terms of the villa’s domesticity and the desert’s empty space; and second, the limited manner in which Ondaatje’s narrative style approximates a welfare space, which despite its intricate character-system, is unable to extend its imaginative reparative practices to a wider social collective.

### 1. The Italian Villa and Domesticity

In its privileged treatment of the Italian villa, *The English Patient* treats as a potential good what other postwar novels hold out as a devastating possibility: namely, that the old, aristocratic Big House, after having served its wartime purpose as a military center, hospital, or haven for war orphans, would no longer be privately owned but rather become a space of group inhabitation such as a hotel or boarding-school. Novels such as Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*, Muriel Spark’s *The Hothouse By the East River*, and Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Stranger’s Child* all novels figure the institutionalization of “the lost houses” of Britain as the postwar’s inevitable conclusion and dystopian horizon:
an organized living ultimately worse than the ruins of the Blitz. While *The English Patient* picks up on this fear, turning the Italian villa into a place of temporary room and board, it also asks readers to consider the possibility that this might be more than a desperate or doomed halfway house, and to let go of the idea that life would be better if the villa could be restored to its original function. Instead, we glimpse new forms of domesticity and living-together in what Barthes would call this “novelistic simulation of everyday space,” one whose imperfections not only match its impaired and disabled inhabitants, but also helps them cope with their losses. In this manner, the villa works in an opposite fashion to the housing imagined by the wartime Ministry of Reconstruction and postwar planning schemes: instead of fitting the people to perfect houses built for them (indeed, intended to *manage* them), the people fit themselves to the ruins of houses, their making do within them a way to understand how to live within their own wartime injuries.

We see this first through the caretaking actions of Hana, who rebuilds the garden to the best of her ability, uses books to create makeshift stairs where they were blown away as well as, through reading them, to escape her situation (“as the only door out of her cell” (7)); as the weather changes, she moves her bed from room to room, depending on the temperature or the light. And yet she also makes her own destructions; for instance, removing all mirrors, and knows that “all this she could burn down if she wished” (*Patient*, 14). In fact, the novel is very specific about the idiosyncracies of the villa for Hana and her Patient, its ruins allowing her both haven and the freedom to act on her own desire:

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From outside, the place seemed devastated. An outdoor staircase disappeared in midair, its railing hanging off. Their life was foraging and tentative safety. They used only essential candlelight at night because of the brigands who annihilated everything they came across. They were protected by the simple fact that the villa seemed a ruin. But she felt safe here, half adult and half child. Coming out of what had happened to her during the war, she drew her own few rules to herself. She would not be ordered again or carry out duties for the greater good. She would care only for the burned patient. (Patient, 14).161

In some sense, this relationship to this space goes against not only postwar logics of reconstruction (preferring to entrench oneself in ruins, even seeing safety in them), but also, more broadly, a national welfare ideology. Hana swears herself against any state-mandated care “for the greater good,” admitting that her behavior is not one of progress but of regression, or the safety of childhood. The passage thus suggests a personalized regime of care that goes against the tenets of the Beveridge Report, whose third “guiding principle” is that “social security must be achieved by co-operation between the State and the individual,” with the State “offer[ing] security for service and contribution.”162

Though Hana is offering her service, it is stubbornly only for the burned patient, a

161 We might compare this most closely to Muriel Spark’s opening to Girls of Slender Means, which also describes the ruins of war. Though both novels ultimately critique the conclusion that emergency times/spaces lead to more civilized behavior, Spark satirizes this from the beginning (i.e., it is a foregone conclusion, obvious to the reader), writing the technology of epiphany through her character Nicholas Farrington, whereas Ondaatje’s technology of epiphany, though mostly through the character Kip, is supposed to be felt on a more collective scale on both the character level (cf Hana’s confusion, “Kip, it’s me. What did we have to do with it?”) and, I’d argue, our own as we are asked to invest in the possibility of this radical home (Ondaatje, Patient, 288).

From a different angle, Ondaatje’s novel feels it has to teach a divided world (and is perhaps more generous in its treatment of nostalgia), whereas Spark is more immediately vicious about postwar British nationalism. Also note that both novels take place between V-E (or in The English Patient, Allied victory in Italy) and V-J day, ending with one of their characters’ cathartic move away from Europe: perhaps this period of major instability is the literary-political condition for writing, evaluating, and in the end, critiquing Europe’s merit as a future worth investing in.

boundless task that stretches her beyond what seems appropriate (i.e., a principle of the welfare state that one makes “appropriate contributions” to a collective based on identity.) After action ends in Italy and she makes her decision to stay on, the other nurses at the Villa demand that she continue her service for the greater good, which would require abandoning a patient seemingly beyond saving: “The war is not over everywhere, she was told. The war is over. This war is over. The war here. She was told it would be like desertion. This is not desertion. I will stay here” (*Patient*, 41). Hana’s response belies an ambivalence over how she sees her future work, both in substance and style. In terms of the former, she refuses to see her work as “desertion,” unwilling to label it as different in kind than her previous nursing or even as separate from the war effort. And yet, her “staying here” acknowledges the persistence of injury and the uncertain boundaries of wartime, a conceptualization of war that goes beyond official demands.

The narrative stylistics of this passage further underscore this ambivalence. To the nurses, whose speech is rendered in normal indirect speech (“she was told”), Hana responds in free *direct* speech, indicating an individual, decisional force against the demands of the larger war machine. And yet in the flatness of the passage, with its lack of indicative punctuation and repetition, it is difficult to separate her voice from that of the nurses.

I read this passage as performing the central question posed by the novel: firstly, how to distinguish between the labor of warfare and the labor of welfare (which contain both the potential for violence and repair) based on different factors, including duration, kind, and object; and relatedly, whether individuals can come up with their own form of reparative involvement with the war separate from the nexus of warfare and welfare. Ondaatje recapitulates this division of the private and the public in *Anil’s Ghost* (2000),
set during a late 1980s Sri Lankan Civil War, in which he explores the various professional labors attached to a human rights investigation (forensic analysis, facial reconstruction, emergency medical care), transforming them into occasions for mourning, addressing, and repairing wartime violence. However, the conclusions of these wartime novels ultimately reveal wartime care as unable to escape the gravity of the war and its real-world conditions: whether through Hiroshima’s division of the world into brown and white, or the protagonist Anil’s flight from Sri Lanka, which transforms her into the figurative “American or the Englishman who gets on a plane and leaves at the end of the movie,” leaving her colleague Sarath to incur the cost. In both cases, it is the real (History, the state) that breaks the spell of the fiction, or that provides the sobering limits to the beautiful, intimate spaces of care written in each.

On the one hand, we might read Ondaatje’s treatment of the villa in The English Patient as an overly utopian one, suspiciously generative of positive community. This is the essence of Marianna Torgovnick’s critique, which reads the villa as a space that “convey[s] war’s destructive effect but also the removal of boundaries and lability that can characterize what we might call warspace”: spaces that “foster different and more hopeful reactions—reactions that take account of destruction but experiment with new

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163 Ondaatje, Anil’s Ghost (New York: Vintage, 2001), 285-6. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated Ghost.

164 Ondaatje does not lament this incursion (compared, say, to McEwan’s Atonement, that suggests that the world might still be an okay place if only Briony hadn’t committed her crime of accusation, an act for which she spends the rest of the novel in abject, metafictional atonement, or the “not now, not yet” end of Forster’s Passage to India, which holds out hope for a changed world in a time to come); instead, Ondaatje’s juxtapositional form shows the necessity to work within these systems even if there no clear path to repairing the damage.
and creative ways of belonging ‘through impropriety and unbelonging.’”\textsuperscript{165} Though Torgovnick finds this concept compelling, she notes that its eminently fictional status also risks an unseemly optimism or naiveté, as actual warspace “also typically contains death, decay, danger, deprivation, and exploitation—and should end with reconstruction.”\textsuperscript{166} While this division provides clear way of categorizing literary representations of war, my project has shown not only that postwar fiction routinely collapses this distinction between the labile creativity and damage produced by destruction, but more saliently, that fiction also questions reconstruction as the natural end to wartime decay and exploitation. What’s more, discourses of reconstruction also drew heavily on fictional registers of creativity, transformation, and fantasy: an aspect critiqued by the novels in my dissertation just as much as the overly positive valences of Torgovnick’s “warspace.”

The difficulty posed by \textit{The English Patient}, however, is that it invests too earnestly in the power of postwar domesticity, however askew it may be to its traditional form. Despite all its contextualization of world history and art, the main drama of the narrative centers on four characters and their individual relationships, and is unable to extend its reparative practices to the scale of the collective. This is why the news of Hiroshima is such an abrupt event, and why it feels clumsily handled: by only attending

\textsuperscript{165} Marianna Torgovnick, \textit{The War Complex. World War II in Our Time} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Kindle Location 2452, emphasis mine. This phrase, which Torgovnick credits to an unpublished paper by Alex Ruch, also finds purchase in Deleuze’s term “any-space-whatever” (Deleuze, quoted in Torgovnick, Kindle Location 2447).

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Ibid}. Torgovnick, incredibly dismissive of \textit{The English Patient}, likes the novels of W.G. Sebald much better insofar as he deals with this “actual” warspace (Kindle Location 2441).
to the particularity of individual connection, Ondaatje has not given his characters the
means to think themselves into group affiliation—at least based on qualifications other
than their shared living arrangement, such as race, gender, religion, or nation.

This investment in the reparative potential of domestic space is unique within
Ondaatje’s oeuvre, and speaks to the cultural association of the Home Front to the
Second World War. This is especially evident when compared to In the Skin of a Lion
(1987), the literary prehistory of The English Patient.\textsuperscript{167} In a dense literary cross-
pollination, The English Patient not only continues the character histories of Caravaggio
and Hana, but also intimately transforms the earlier novel’s immigrant labor into postwar
labors of repair (i.e., a character’s dynamiting for a logging company is inverted into
Kip’s defusing bombs; prisoners painting a penitentiary ceiling are transformed into
medieval war experts appreciating the beauty of the Sistine Chapel). Yet what makes In
the Skin of a Lion a particularly useful foil to The English Patient is how The English
Patient inverts its predecessor’s preoccupation with space, and thus its accompanying
politics. While In the Skin of a Lion addresses how immigrant labor built the major public
landmarks of the city of Toronto, such as the Prince Edward or Bloor Street Viaduct, the
St. Clair Reservoir, and the R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, The English Patient
focuses on how wartime labor transforms into private labor in service of a small
community. And while each novel culminates in a bombing that punctures the idealism of
these built spaces (an attempted revolutionary destruction of a water treatment plant; the
news of the bombing of Hiroshima), In the Skin of a Lion’s expressly political focus on

\textsuperscript{167} Though the comparison to his memoir, Running in the Family, might be apt here —
perhaps closer than his other novels to The English Patient in its treatment of
domesticity.
class and ethnic inequality becomes both atomized and universalized in *The English Patient*, which substitutes individuals for group politics, and the stronger, more locatable historicity of *In the Skin of a Lion* for the spell of world history.

II. The Colonial Desert, or, a “World Without Maps”

Yet there is another type of space that is as equally important to *The English Patient*’s postwar politics as the Italian villa’s domesticity: the space of the Libyan desert. While the novels of the first two chapters study Britain’s total war in a localized manner, taking London’s Ground Zero as their main setting, the later novels in the dissertation take a wider temporal and geographical aperture, exploring how a set of prewar colonial archive of feelings and structures might resurface in the postwar period. In the later postwar novels of Hollinghurst and Ondaatje, the spaces of postwar institutions (prison, school, hospital, home) is juxtaposed with the spaces of the prewar colonial desert, which is projected as a site of personal freedom, fantastic desire, and strange new relationships between its characters. As we’ve seen, *The Swimming-Pool Library* uses this juxtaposition to heighten the contrast between individual and institutionalized identity, whether through Charles Nantwich’s romance with his servant Taha and his later postwar imprisonment, or the playful anonymity of Will Beckwith’s youthful “swimming-pool library” and his later aversion to stifling domesticity and increasingly legible gay identity. In *The English Patient*, however, Ondaatje uses this juxtaposition to underscore the similarity of the prewar Libyan desert and the postwar Italian villa, the “oasis society” of

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168 This move away from the city underscores its centrality in the earlier chapters, as space shared by Bowen, Orwell, Spark, and even Hollinghurst.
“desert Europeans” strongly echoed by the Villa San Girolamo as occupied by the four main characters. In drawing this connection, *The English Patient*’s particular nexus of warfare and welfare brings together prewar colonial space and postwar British reconstruction, or colonialism and welfare, a combination about which there has been strikingly little inquiry.\(^{169}\) It prompts us to read the space of the villa alongside the other major space of the novel, the Libyan Desert: and to ask what fantasies of circulation and community are encoded in each.

As the previous novels’ focus on London and the destruction of urban space suggest, one key comparison we might make between colonial and welfare systems of power would be their organization and planning of everyday life: that is, their striation of space, and in the case of Egypt (yet another setting of *The English Patient*), the compartmentalizing projects of militarization, urban planning, model villages, and education so central to British colonial rule. Timothy Mitchell describes these methods of surveillance and control as “creat[ing] the effect of structure”: “Like the careful layout of an exhibition, this structure appeared as a framework within which activities could be organised, controlled, and observed; and it also appeared as a plan or programme, supplementing the activity with its meaning.”\(^{170}\) This, he suggests, is the “peculiar metaphysic of modernity, where the world seems resolved into the two-dimensional form

\(^{169}\) This combination offers yet another approach to theorizing Britain’s domestic turn, what we might understand as a postwar/postcolonial synthesis of Jed Esty’s *A Shrinking Island* and Marina MacKay’s *Modernism and World War II*. For a good historical account of this nexus, see Jordanna Bailkin’s *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

of individual versus apparatus, practice versus institution, social life and its structure—or material reality and its meaning.” Though Mitchell assigns this form of modernity to colonizing structures of power, it also pertains to the modernity of postwar reconstruction, with its shared interest in exhibitions (“Britain Can Make It!” and the 1951 Festival of Britain) and estrangement of material reality and its blueprinted meaning through state planning of everyday life.

However, these physical infrastructures are largely absent in *The English Patient*. While a key part of Almásy’s romantic plot line is set in South Cairo, 1930-1938, there is relatively little treatment of Cairo’s citiescape compared to the desert expeditions of the Royal Geographical Society. This absence of the urban thus requires a rethinking of the imaginative space of reconstruction that, until now, has been entrenched in the city rather than the country. The novel’s imaginary asks us to consider the emptiness of the desert, or what Deleuze and Guattari would call unstriated or smooth space, as a postwar and anti-colonial fantasy. While the desert may at first seem the very opposite of the (re)constructed—the uncontainable vs. containment, the sublime vs. the everyday—Ondaatje asks us to read the “world without maps” so desired by Almásy in comparison to the strange domesticity of the villa, or what we might call a “house without planning.” Both are fantasy spaces of degraded boundaries, newfound intimacies, and a general sense of worldedness that is broken by either the beginning of the war (i.e., the 1930s geographical explorations turned into warfare reconnaissance) or the end of it (i.e., the international villa community returned to their nationalisms after Hiroshima).

Ibid., xii.
Of course, while the main cultural legacy of *The English Patient* is the desert romance of Almásy/Katharine—helped in no small part by the 1996 film adaptation—the Italian villa also plays a huge role in this fantasy of uncolonized space, being a miniature global community without borders. Both spaces are held together by a common denominator: a fantasy of abolishing striation or boundaries along racial and national lines, those compartmentalizations so key to the colonial world and its methods of creating and maintaining structures of violence. Nevertheless, *The English Patient* requires this colonial history in order to heighten the reparative stakes of the Italian villa.

### III. *The English Patient’s* Narrative Welfare System

While the potential repair imagined by *The English Patient* is attached to its specific spatial imagination, it is also situated in the politics of Ondaatje’s narrative style. Ondaatje himself has described his novel as “about very tentative healing among a group of people. I think it is that most of all.” Much of the literary criticism on the novel also grapples with this idea, not only to understand the tentative nature of this group healing, but on a more meta-level, what it means to have the novel be about healing at all. Most critics agree that while the novel makes a case for the reparative value of language and

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172 See Fanon: “A world compartmentalized, Manichaean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge. A world cock-sure of itself, crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip. That is the colonial world” (Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 15.)

imaginative fiction, such an aesthetic bid is undermined by the fact that the novel also seeks to expose the restricted efficacy of fiction to do so.\textsuperscript{174} Put differently, though there appears to be consensus that \textit{The English Patient} seeks to redress historical trauma, whether through the talking cure or interpersonal relationships (Visvis), sympathy (Marais), practices of demilitarized or non-cryptographic print (Brittan), or a “postcolonial impatience” with imperial fictions (Jacobs), each critic ultimately locates a critical impasse to these forms of reparation, created by the novel’s \textit{metafictional naïveté}.\textsuperscript{175} Whether through the particular appeasement of literature for the characters (Visvis), the masterful, yet politically inconclusive nature of Ondaatje’s bricolage (Jacobs), or simply the dual function of language as both a medium of violence and as a way to address violence (Marais, Brittan), there’s something about Ondaatje’s style that undoes any politically complex work the novel might have achieved.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{174} This echoes Linda Hutcheon’s argument about the paradoxes of historiographic metafiction. One could also make a sociological reading of critical unease around Ondaatje’s \textit{English Patient}, insofar as several critics find its bid for literary prestige difficult to take seriously given its immense popularity as both a novel (winning the Booker Prize) and a film (winning, among others, Best Picture at the Academy Awards, Best Drama at the Golden Globes, and Best Film at the BAFTA Awards.)


\textsuperscript{176} Alice Brittan compellingly locates this textual paradox as one of cryptography. Though Ondaatje’s characters seek to demobilize print or make it “civilian” (though handwriting and empathy with non-mobilized art forms—contra its status as a militarized
My approach to Ondaatje’s reparative politics of style studies the distinct way he employs narrative position and voice, and asks what it enables or disables for his characters’ social world. For *The English Patient* works through an intricate scheme of focalization, using a complex negotiation of point of view, voice, quoted speech and medium to create a narrative system in which all voices seem to be equally accessible. In doing so, it reflects a problem inherent to the welfare state: namely, the tension between its democratic or universalizing impulses and the specific, entrenched inequalities of class, race, and gender.

One particularly evident trait of Ondaatje’s narrative prose is the way it effortlessly moves between its four main characters. While the sections are mainly focalized through a singular person (the first five sections being Hana’s “The Villa,” Caravaggio’s “In Near Ruins,” Kip’s “Sometime a Fire,” Almásy’s “South Cairo,” and even Katharine’s “Katharine”), they also make small, fluid transitions within themselves between different characters. This can happen by shifting focus between the many fragments that make up the section, using the natural break of the paragraph space to effect this change (*Patient*, 208-209). It can also happen inside these fragments, beginning with one character and then transitioning to another, a subtle yet still recognizable shift signaled by phrases such as “he, for his part” (*Patient*, 72-73), gestures
of reported speech or thought such as “she knew” (Patient, 209) or witnessing such as “she has watched” (Patient, 74). And then there are the less obvious shifts of point of view, small and alternating frequently enough that it is unclear as to who is thinking, such as this passage from the very beginning of the novel:

At night he is never tired enough to sleep. She reads to him from whatever book she is able to find in the library downstairs. The candle flickers over the page and over the young nurse’s talking face, barely revealing at this hour the trees and vista that decorate the walls. He listens to her, swallowing her words like water.

If it is cold she moves carefully into the bed and lies beside him. (Patient, 5)

While the overall effect of this narrative trick may be read as a radical erasure of boundaries between characters, Ondaatje’s circulating focalization does not exactly level the playing field for his four characters. Given its title of The English Patient, it is perhaps unsurprising that despite its alternating focalizations between all four characters, the body of the novel still encodes the mystery of Almásy’s identity as its predominant narrative arc. Both his spectacular injuries and gift of storytelling lay claim to his individuality, signaled overtly in the opening section’s description of the Patient as “dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into during those months before he died” (Patient, 4).

Ondaatje’s narrative style also underscores the Patient’s privileged position, giving him a distinct brand of narrative focalization: that is, a unique claim on first-person narrative through the modes of oral storytelling and his writerly voice. The first is introduced in the opening section through the Patient’s first instance of unreported speech (“I fell burning into the desert,” notably a statement about his bodily trauma), which then
extends into a two paragraph story about his recuperation by the Bedouin. Unmarked by quotations, interruptions by other characters, or any other signals of reported speech—narrative devices used in every other section to signpost who is talking—the Patient’s speech becomes a metanarrative within the narrative diegesis. Losing track of the present, his plunging style drags Hana and the reader into his well of memory.

The second mode unique to the Patient, also introduced in the opening section, is his common book’s writerly voice in his copy of Herodotus’s *The Histories*. While the Patient’s voice does not always take the first person in his entries—at times treating them like a diary, at others like a historian’s or geographer’s catalogue—it still is able to make a bid for authorial power that Ondaatje refuses the other characters. Though Hana also starts writing in random books in the villa’s library, perhaps inspired by the Patient’s Herodotus, her entries are more simply-worded and shallowly focused on her present moment. Compared to his, hers read more like a young woman’s diaries, either through descriptions of the other men in the villa (“There is a man named Caravaggio, a friend of my father’s. I have always loved him” (Patient, 61), and, “He is small, not much taller than I am...Remember “I’ll rewire him in the morning.” Ooh la la!” (Patient, 209)) or serving to document other’s stories (“He says the gun—the Zam-Zammah cannon—is still there outside the museum in Lahore” (Patient, 118)). And whereas the Patient saves his Herodotus, bringing it “with him through the fire” like a treasure, Hana returns the copies of her books to their random spot on the library shelf, perhaps never to be seen again.

While Ondaatje’s textual encoding privileges the Patient’s status in the novel, the question still remains as to whether this is done in a sympathetic, ironic, or critical manner. One answer is given by the characters themselves, who are well aware of their
extreme, even perverse attachment to this dying man and all he represents. Kip is taken by the English Patient’s stories and memories as a master narrative, a colonial position that he later disavows: “Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. […] Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had the histories and printing presses?” (*Patient*, 283). Caravaggio also encourages Hana to divest from her caretaking labor, which has transformed far beyond nursing his physical burned body to the consuming acts of reading aloud and bearing witness to his tales. Caravaggio disdains her labor as a form of necrophilia, saying: “You’ve tied yourself to a corpse for some reason,” and, “A twenty-year-old who throws herself out of the world to love a ghost!” (*Patient*, 45). As Hana’s and Kip’s relationship to the Patient bears out, Almásy—whether his physical body or symbolic position—demands two types of care through his claims to an eminently textual history. His assigned status as the “English” Patient also testifies to the geopolitical condition of this care, perhaps a latent critique of Britain’s welfare state, which demanded strange acts of fealty and allegiance from its citizens.

### IV. Metafiction and the Space of Literature

Yet there is a voice in the *English Patient* that belongs neither to the Patient nor to any of the other characters: that of the omniscient narrator, which is neither the effect of totality effected by the alternating focalizations nor that of the Patient’s storytelling or geographical studies—though it is at times stylistically close to the latter, as it is highly descriptive and rich with visual, historical, and architectural detail. Though there is no
structural pattern to these lapses of descriptive omniscience—they occur throughout the novel and in tandem with different characters, and at are placed at different moments within each section—the thematic work they do is similar insofar as they are uniformly interested in the nuances of wartime space. In particular, this voice points to the war’s warping of particular locales (the library in the Villa, Italian fortress towns, the Libyan desert, Naples), giving the reader insight as to their alternating status of militarization and demilitarization in relation to the Second World War. Though these insights could be interpellated by the novel’s characters, especially Almásy and his polymath, knowledge-dispensing tendencies, that they are presented instead by an (extra)narrative voice suggests they may have a special function in the novel. Indeed, through studying this series of narrative events, another account of the exigencies of wartime rises to the surface, one that cannot solely be accounted for by Ondaatje’s overwhelming network of metafictionality.

My analysis of the narrator’s spatial voice is in part inspired by Alice Brittan’s approach to Ondaatje’s metafictionality, insofar as she moves away from reading it as an interminable paradox (à la Hutcheon’s “historiographic metafiction” and the slipperiness of signification, trauma, etc.) to contextualizing it in relation to its contemporary practices of cryptology and the militarization of writing technologies. If, as she notes, “the coding systems of the Second World War changed the meaning of books as readable texts” with its “rules of wartime reading and writing turn(ing) poems and novels into political and military tools,” so too, I suggest, did the war change the meaning of lived spaces such as private homes, with the rules of the Home Front turning these places into
its own form of political and military tools.\textsuperscript{177} This history of the book approach leads Brittan to locate and analyze the various ways characters seek to “demobilize” reading or writing to “arrest the violent dislocations of war” (i.e., Kip’s admiration for statues and Hana’s acts of handwriting). What, then, might we gain from a focus on wartime space and postwar reconstruction? Is it even possible to separate the space of literature from its referents?

Notably, the novel does not begin with the introduction of an omniscient narrator or a birds-eye description of the main location, such as Elizabeth Bowen’s \textit{The Heat of the Day} or Muriel Spark’s \textit{The Girls of Slender Means}. Though its first section explores the structure of Hana and the Patient’s living quarters, it initially does so through Hana’s movements through them: “she stands up in the garden,” “she turns and moves uphill towards the house,” “she crosses the loggia,” “in the kitchen she doesn’t pause,” and so forth. Just as we are given little clues as to the identity of the two inhabitants of the home (named here pronominally as “he” and “she,” or through generic assignments such as “the young nurse” and “the burned man”), the villa reveals itself only as much as the woman circulates through it, and like Hana and Almásy, is not given its proper name (“Villa San Girolamo”) until the next section.

Yet as the opening section continues, a different voice takes over, introducing an anonymous narrator invested in minutely describing the space:

\begin{quote}
Between the kitchen and the destroyed chapel a door led into an oval-shaped library. The space inside seemed safe except for a large hole at portrait level in the far wall, caused by mortar-shell attack on the villa two months earlier. The rest of the room had adapted itself to this wound, accepting the habits of weather, evening stars, the sound of birds. There was a sofa, a piano covered in a grey
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{177} Brittan, “War and the Book,” 202, 206.
sheet, the head of a stuffed bear and the high walls of books. The shelves nearest the torn wall bowed with the rain, which had doubled the weight of the books. Lightning came into the room too, again and again, falling across the covered piano and carpet. *(Patient, 11)*

This voice calls us to attend to the damage incurred by the library from past, present, and the future. Though the wounding of the room has a specific, recent origin, this passage draws a portrait of space beyond the wounding. Much like Kip’s work of defusing wartime bombs—a labor that extends far beyond the bombs’ original implantation, potentially indefinitely—the room reflects the long half-life of injury, and the postwar work required to make space habitable once more. In particular, this passage asks us to determine whether this “space inside seemed safe,” a subjective judgment without a locatable subject; if there is a subject, it seems to be the room itself, which adapts to and accepts its wartime wound. This strange assignment of agency implicitly asks the reader to be similarly adaptable and accepting, though what this would translate to for the villa’s occupants is as yet unclear. Though Ondaatje ultimately writes Hana into this room, showing us how she adapts her habits to this broken habitat, he first gives us space to imagine ourselves into this setting and even to view the setting as having a mind of its own, adding an extranarrative layer to the novel’s rich networks of diegesis and metafiction.

Of course, given Ondaatje’s predilection for metafiction, it is no random choice that this illuminated space is a library (and almost a swimming-pool one, given the damp). By the end of the passage, what emerges as the most pressing damage from the room’s wound is the sogginess of the books, whose description of being doubled in weight signifies two opposing meanings: that of the books’ physical damage (the rain
rendering them unreadable or beyond repair) and that of their increased importance (indeed, their increased *weightiness*). The room thus stages a multifaceted debate about the role of art and repair in the postwar period. On the one hand, it suggests that books and their archive might give us a model for reparation, as the library adapts to and accepts its wounds of war. On the other, it also suggests that books are the ultimate casualty of the war, being at once unable to be repaired as well as unnecessary to postwar life (“The German army had mined many of the houses they retreated from, so most rooms not needed, like this one, had been sealed for safety, the doors hammered into their frames”) (*Patient*, 11). Yet it is precisely here, at the sealing off of this seemingly unnecessary archival space, that Ondaatje uses Hana as our avatar to enter into this forbidden space: we watch her carefully slide into the room, cognizant of its dangers; pull *The Last of the Mohicans* from the shelf; and retreat to the Patient’s room, pulling apart the water-damaged pages to read aloud to him. Thus showing the books to still be usable, Ondaatje pushes away the specter of irreparability and illegibility, and ends this passage squarely in the realm of celebratory metafiction: “She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from a sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams” (*Patient*, 12).

Indeed, when Ondaatje’s prose takes on this omniscient narrative voice, it routinely follows this pattern whereby a spatial meditation yields to an overly aesthetic one. Take, for instance, this description of the Italian war front:

*The last mediaeval war was fought in Italy in 1943 and 1944. Fortress towns on great promontories which had been battled over since the eighth century had the armies of new kings flung carelessly against them. Around the outcrops of rocks*
were the traffic of stretchers, butchered vineyards, where, if you dug deep beneath the tank ruts, you found blood-axe and spear. [...] Medieval scholars were pulled out of Oxford colleges and flown into Umbria. Their average age was sixty. They were billeted with the troops, and in meetings with strategic command they kept forgetting the invention of the airplane. They spoke of towns in terms of the art in them. (Patient, 69)

This passage is typical of Ondaatje’s style, bringing deep history to bear on the present moment in an act of narrative enchantment. It is a dubiously lyrical moment, one that works by sublimating violence into the discourses of history and art. While the narrator takes pains to delineate the effects of war on these fortress towns, he also underscores the peculiar archival, archaeological status of these spaces. Tapping into the resources of magical realism, we are to understand the strange recurrence of medieval technology as mysteriously hidden by the towns themselves: soldiers acquire crossbows, field marshals consider pouring hot oil from the battlements, and the only order to be found in the rain and cold come from “the great maps of art that showed judgement, piety and sacrifice” (Patient, 70). The result is a re-enchantment not only of place, but also of the role of art: a move dripping with metafictional sentiment, that ultimately occludes the particular realities of wartime violence in order to invest them with aesthetic value.

V. Ondaatje’s Repair

Having discussed Ondaatje’s narrative style, I’d like to end this chapter by returning to the novel’s final scenes, asking what, if anything, is the reparative payoff of his type of metafiction, particularly in relation to the narrative diegesis. To this, The English Patient falls in step with the other novels in this dissertation, which, after their narrative climax, use a series of nested endings that record various responses to the
harmful event. As we’ve seen, the climax is often figured as a breakage of social bonds that betray the novel’s narrative welfare-system: thus Louie’s class disappointment with Stella in Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*; Selina’s theft of the communal Schiaparelli dress (and Nicholas’s horror) in Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means*; and Will’s turn away from gay solidarity as he refuses to write Charles’s biography in *The Swimming-Pool Library*. We can read Kip’s racial awakening as a similar moment, precipitated by the horrific disenchantment of Hiroshima, which breaks apart the community of the Italian Villa and fragments its miniature global community.

For each novel in the dissertation, after this wounding of the social fabric (woven by the novel’s plot in an eminently *literary* welfare system), the characters are faced with the dilemma of redressing these seemingly irreparable moments. This results in moments of heightened contradiction, and often disappointment, in the novels’ protracted *denouements*. Bowen’s Louie relaxes her class aspirations and becomes pregnant with an illegitimate child, only rescued from the stigma attached to being an unwed mother by the convenient news of her husband’s death. Spark sets up a scene of potential mourning, returning Nicholas and Joanna’s father to the ruins of the May of Teck Club, but ultimately refuses her reader significance or consolation. And while Hollinghurst’s Will seems to reach an ideal synthesis of the novel’s competing terms, able to recognize the importance gay history while also chasing his own sexual desire, this conclusion is thrown into disarray if we consider the novel’s social context: set in the halcyon summer before the AIDS crisis. Taken together, these novels all end with the *work of unfinished mourning*, whether foreclosed, refused, or anticipatory. Perhaps this serves as a reminder that, by returning to the transitional energies and promised social utopias of midcentury
Britain, we also need to remember what we have lost: the time to properly mourn the dead.

In this light, what distinguishes Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* from the other novels in the dissertation is its re-enchantment of the work of literature and the repair that it can afford. This takes two forms: first, Hana’s revealed connection of the Patient to her father’s death, and second, the final imaginative gesture that, in one fell swoop, re-connects the estranged Hana and Kip. In both situations, the time and space of repair is out of joint, through revelations that take place belatedly and across national boundaries.

As we learn in the penultimate section of the novel, “August,” Hana’s care for the Patient is her way of tending to the ghost of her father, who died in a dove-cot in France, and her guilt about not being there at the moment of his death. Though a letter Hana writes to her mother, Clara, back in Canada, Ondaatje reveals this to be Hana’s hidden trauma:

> How did Patrick end up in a dove-cot, Clara? His unit had left him, burned and wounded. So burned the buttons of his shirt were part of his skin, part of his dear chest. [...] He was a burned man and I was a nurse and I could have nursed him. Do you understand the sadness of geography? I could have saved him or at least been with him till the end. I know a lot about burning. (Patient, 295-6)

In this epistle, we are also given a crude picture of the dove-cot, a child-like drawing of a dome encircled by a horizontal halo one-third of the way down, which as Hana notes, is called “the rat ledge—to stop rats running up the brick, so the doves would be safe. Safe as a dove-cot. A sacred place. Like a church in many ways. A comforting place. Patrick died in a comforting place” (Patient, 293). Yet as the excerpt above shows, Hana also

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178 Ondaatje’s crude visual depiction of the dove-cot looks like the hat/snake eating an elephant in Saint-Éxupery’s *Le Petit Prince*, another book about the romance of the
feels that this place on its own cannot be comforting or safe enough for a dying man: that it’s the labor, or rather the misplaced professional care, that matters more. The letter’s jumble of tenses underscores the sense that her care was out-of-joint, especially the sentence: “I know a lot about burning” (Patient, 296). Of course, as the reader knows, she only came to know a lot about burning through her experience with the English Patient, undermining the conditional mood (the very condition!) of her wished-for-reparation.

Ondaatje’s interlaces the text of Hana’s letter with Kip’s own emotional journey after hearing the news of Hiroshima, as he rides a motorcycle helter-skelter away from the Villa, “against the direction of the invasion, as if rewinding the spool of war, the route no longer tense with military”: a form of imagined repair and relief for the young sapper who otherwise would stop, carefully, to clean up the signs of war (Patient, 290). In doing so, Ondaatje underscores that both characters feel that they should have invested their work in other places, a form of belatedness or frustration that they express through their “tiredness” with Europe.179 It also weaves the two characters together, giving them a desert and aviation, the peculiarity of professionalism, the tenderness of strangers, and the anguish of not being where one should be. Indeed, the crisis of Le Petit Prince is all about care and the nightmare of anonymity (i.e., all the roses looking the same) – its answer being that work and the labor of care creates propertied intimacy (“…puisque c’est elle qu’ici j’ai arrosée. Puisque c’est elle qu’ici mise sous globe. Puisque c’est elle que j’ai abritée par le paravent. […] Puisque c’est ma rose.”) And, of course, the Little Prince ultimately dies to go back home to his rose, rather than stay in the desert.

179 Hana’s letter also reacts to the news from Japan, though in a tone of resignation: “The year is 194- What? For a second I forget. But I know the month and the day. One day after we heard the bombs were dropped in Japan, so it feels like the end of the world. From now on I believe the personal will forever be at war with the public. If we can rationalize this we can rationalize anything” (292). There’s more to be said, here, about the characters’ differing reactions to Hiroshima, whether the Patient’s self-destructive desire for Kip to shoot him “Do it, Kip. I don’t want to hear any more” (285); Caravaggio’s knowledge that “the young soldier is right. They would never have dropped
textual intimacy that both recalls and differently re-iterates their sexual relationship – especially at their moment of greatest distance, even estrangement.

The novel’s final section gives us the fullest realization of Hana’s and Kip’s interpersonal connection. Set in some unspecified future (“these years later”), we find Kip has returned to India and “is a doctor, has two children and a laughing wife” (Patient, 299). We are clearly meant to read this as Kip’s attempt at post-Hiroshima reparation, effected through geographical and racial re-alignment: instead of working for the Allies, he is a doctor for his people, “permanently busy in this city” (Patient, 299); instead of loving the white Canadian Hana, he has a kitchen table where “all of their hands are brown” (Patient, 301). Though it is unclear what historical India this is (most likely post-Partition, which raises questions for Kip’s Sikh identity), there is a sense of levity that was missing from the Italian Villa San Girolamo: as Ondaatje takes pains to note, Kip’s wife has a “wild humor” that she has taught him and his family: indeed, Kip “loves to see his son’s wit in this house, how it surprises him constantly, going beyond even his and his wife’s knowledge and humor”—an indication of a hopeful reproductive futurity, one that has been improved through Kip’s kinship choices (Patient, 301).

And yet, even in this picture of family harmony, Kip finds himself returning to memories of Hana, triggered by various everyday events such as treating a burn patient or walking up a stone stairway. But this is no mere recollection. Instead, Ondaatje grants his character a magical ability to see Hana, described as “a limited gift that he has somehow been given, as if a camera’s film reveals her, but only her, in silence,” and “as if these such a bomb on a white nation,” which nevertheless does not identify with the American “they” that dropped the bomb (286); and finally, the text of Hana’s letter, which does invoke a general “we” that rationalized this form of wartime violence.
moments of revelation are a continuation of the letters she wrote to him for a year, getting no reply, until she stopped sending them, turned away by his silence” (*Patient*, 300). This gift is a clear re-instantiation of the narrative epiphany, one that connects two characters across great distances, except here, and especially in the novel’s final lines, it reads as almost too magical:

> And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal’s left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles. (*Patient*, 301-2)

There’s much to be skeptical of here in terms of both content and style: the logic of the butterfly effect; the breath-taking catch; the wrinkle of the eyes; the weirdness of a happy ending. But what I want to underscore here is the moment’s narrative construction.

Rather than a psychological act of imagined sympathy through a window, Ondaatje’s form of epiphanic connection depends on a narratorial *deus ex machina* to effect this impossible reconciliation, taking the matter into his own hands. With these final words, Ondaatje re-animates literature’s suspect ability to restore plenitude to broken histories through the building of interpersonal relationships – even despite the novel’s larger structure of disenchantment and awareness of geopolitical and racial identity politics (i.e., using the Villa as a space of potential global welfare, only to be broken by the news of Hiroshima). Thus unlike Hollinghurst, who knows that the metaphorical space of the “swimming-pool library” is ultimately uninhabitable, *The English Patient* keeps investing in these exceptional (and exceptionally literary) spaces of fantasy: again, one of the cultural legacies or promises that defines the wartime imagination of a reconstructed postwar world.
Here, it might be instructive to compare this ending to that of Ondaatje’s other war novel *Anil’s Ghost*, which, as I discussed earlier, is similarly invested in the work of wartime repair that happens *adjacently* to official human rights work. One of the literary-critical controversies surrounding *Anil’s Ghost* lies in its use of the literary as a way to make sense of violence: that Ondaatje aestheticizes violence in an irresponsible way, more interested in how to write a beautiful, moving novel about the war than in offering any substantive or ethical critique of its violence. But what I find equally urgent is a different iteration of this question—namely, the way the novel turns to aesthetic practices as having the potential to repair injury and redeem war-damaged lives and deaths. Whether through the sculpting of a human face from a skull, or dressing the wounds of the dead as if it could bring them back to life, *Anil’s Ghost* constantly returns to the aestheticization of human rights, moments where routine labor transforms into something beyond the resolution imagined by the law—in a way corollary to the global, welfare-without-the-state community as configured in *The English Patient*.

Like *The English Patient*, *Anil’s Ghost* closes with a critical commentary on what it means to make whole what was broken, depicting the reconstruction of a broken Buddha statue by the peripheral character Ananda. The reconstruction proceeds painstakingly slowly, with workers piecing together all the fragments of the original Buddha (work that, as Ondaatje pointedly describes, later came to be seen as “complex and innovative” (*Ghost*, 301)). When it came time to finish the face, Ananda decides to retain traces of its brokenness, leaving it “quilted” and “knit together from damaged stone.” […] “They had planned to homogenize the stone, blend the face into a unit, but when he saw it this way Ananda decided to leave it as it was. He worked instead on the
composure and the qualities of the face” (*Ghost*, 302). The resulting statue “was no longer a god, (and) no longer had its graceful line but only the pure sad glance Ananda had found” (*Ghost*, 307).

However, this parable of imperfect repair is actually less interesting than Ananda’s work on the newer replacement statue. Unlike the scarred reconstruction, this statue becomes a god through the final eye ceremony that closes the novel. Yet even this artistic birth contains echoes of past violence, as suggested in the novel’s final lines. Viewing the world from the heights of the statue’s head, Ananda has a vision of the world that renders its vicissitudes impersonal, even inhuman:

Ananda briefly saw this angle of the world. There was a seduction for him here. The eyes he had cut and focussed with his father’s chisel showed him this. The birds dove towards gaps within the trees! They flew through the shelves of heat currents. The tiniest of hearts in them beating exhausted and fast, the way Sirissa had died in the story he invented for her in the vacuum of her disappearance. A small brave heart. In the heights she loved and in the dark she feared.

He felt the boy’s concerned hand on his. This sweet touch from the world. (*Ghost*, 307)

While this last line could be read as a naïve, humanist gesture that obviates the violence and damage of civil war, I think this passage calls more attention to the interruptive power of Ananda’s wife Sirissa’s death, which, in the penultimate line, occurs *before* the restorative touch of the human. While this figuration of impossible repair takes a *literary* form (i.e., an invented story to counteract the vacuum of her loss), it is one of the few moments that is not attached to the work of human rights, a powerful reminder that, in this coda to *Anil's Ghost*, the work of mourning and reparation occurs as an infinite work until called back by a touch (a hand reaching out) from this world.
Coda: World Lite’s Litmus Test

This discussion of Ondaatje’s aestheticization of violence leads to one final approach to the aesthetic and political stakes of his novels: the polemical article “World Lite,” written by the editors of n+1 for its August 2013 issue on “The Intellectual Situation.” In this piece, the authors descry the current state of “World Literature” as market-determined, consisting mostly of award ceremonies, festivals, and university appointments, and instead write in favor of an international, potentially revolutionary form of literature—though what this looks like is unclear. Of the many responses and parries that followed, Poorva Rajaram’s and Michael Griffith’s for Tehelka emerged as the strongest, most incisive critique of the original piece, in which they suggest that the editors of n+1 are putting the age-old burden of political representation on writers outside of the US and UK: “Why are these anaerobic literary litmus tests (Marxist or otherwise) mysteriously over-applied to Third World writers? And why refuse aesthetic considerations to these writers?” In response to Rajaram and Griffith, the editors of n+1 noted that the opposite was true: “In fact, our preference, in “first world” fiction, is often for the political. Our preference in non-first-world fiction—if we’re to judge by the writers we’ve published—tends to be the opposite.”

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181 Editors of n+1, “‘The Rest is Indeed Horseshit,’ Pt.6,” n+1, August 23, 2013, accessed February 1, 2014, https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/horseshit/the-rest-is-indeed-horseshit-pt-6/
Though this non-response is perhaps more symptomatic than any of the article’s original implications, inverting rather than addressing the question at hand (using the logical equivalent to “some of my best friends are”), what emerges as the most peculiar question from these exchanges is the persistent turn to Michael Ondaatje as the litmus test for a good or bad world novelist. This began in the original piece “World Lite,” when the n+1 editors critiqued how the themes of trauma and exile, relied on by modernist and postcolonial authors, have in World Literature been “pried from their original political context, devices of blindness more than insight.” With this, they turn to Ondaatje as their example author in the dual sense of being both the exceptional and most fitting example: “Michael Ondaatje, a Sri Lankan–born Canadian of Dutch ancestry and hero to many world litterateurs, has been exemplary in the worst way, with his sinuous capacity to suggest a political mind without betraying a real one.” Rajaram and Griffith responded to this provocation by noting: “Michael Ondaatje crafts beautiful prose, not political pamphlets. Is Ondaatje (or any of the other writers the editors attack) required to do something that other writers are not?” The final word went to n + 1, who, while noting their agreement with Rajaram and Griffith on the subject of uneven political pressure, they cheekily yet staunchly refuse to cede aesthetic ground:

But we will take a stand on the subject of Michael Ondaatje, the author of sentences like ‘I would watch the flicker under his eyelid, the tremble within that covering skin that signaled his tiredness, as if he were being tugged in mid-river by a rope to some other place’ (Divisadero). This, in our opinion, is no crafter of

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183 Ibid.
184 Rajaram and Griffith, “Why World Literature.”
‘beautiful prose.’ If we can’t agree that Ondaatje is a terrible writer, we may, in fact, have to go our separate ways.\textsuperscript{185}

At once irreverent and deadly serious, this gesture is a dissembling, dissatisfying olive branch, leaving followers of this debate with an uneasy truce. But what it foregrounds and leaves open yet again is the question of Ondaatje’s style and its relation, if any, to the political. Is he, as the editors of n+1 would have it, seriously lacking a “real” political mind, his novels offering only a \textit{suggestion} of one? Or, as Rajaram and Griffith of \textit{Tehelka} suggest, do Ondaatje’s novels make an implicit argument for the old argument of “art for art’s sake,” asking to be aesthetically rather than politically considered?

This chapter suggests that, at least in light of \textit{The English Patient}, these questions gain traction when thought alongside Ondaatje’s investment in the reparative potential of space, which in his mind, can only be accessed through literary structures of fantasy and metaphor. What feels like bad style to the editors of n+1 is instead a residue of historical failure, whose stakes are repeated again and again by the novels in this dissertation, which return to the scene of 1945 in order to showcase the failures of postwar repair. But compared to Bowen, Spark, and Hollinghurst, Ondaatje makes a more earnest return to 1945, aiming to reactivate a historical threshold in which the world was full of social possibility, and to give us a glimmer of international relations based not on war making, but rather on caretaking. While it is doomed to failure – a failure precipitated by the atomic bombings, which reassign the characters into a postcolonial West/East divide –

\textsuperscript{185} Editors of \textit{n+1}, “The Rest.” Apparently this vitriol towards Ondaatje continued in a talk the authors gave at the Slought Foundation on “World Lite,” testifying to its lasting, if not irksome, power.
the novel nevertheless asks us to believe less in the divisive nature of this violence, and more in the connective potential of communal living.\textsuperscript{186}

\textsuperscript{186} It is also worth noting that the divisive event of Hiroshima transforms \textit{The English Patient} from a clearly \textit{global} novel (one that thinks about, even aspires to, a sense of \textit{world history}) into a clearly postcolonial one.
CHAPTER 5: “LOOK IN THE GUTTER”: INFRASTRUCTURAL INTERIORITY IN
NEVER LET ME GO

And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast
the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not
remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go.
This is what I saw. It wasn’t really you, what you were doing, I
know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I’ve never
forgotten.” (Kazuo Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go)

Was there, then, any place in the sublunary world where a child
might be enfolded in unbroken loveliness? (Douglas Mao, Fateful
Beauty)

The previous two chapters signalled a shift away from the English scene,
introducing other timelines, geographies, and histories of violence (colonial,
homophobic) into the mythology of the People’s War and People’s Peace. What resulted
were newly historical fictions whose longer view of the twentieth-century hinged upon
the fulcrum of the Second World War. We might consider these twentieth-century
fictions as a distinct microgenre within the postwar British and Anglophone novel,
including works such as Penelope Lively’s Moon Tiger (1987), Zadie Smith’s White
Teeth (2000) Ian McEwan’s Atonement (2001), and most recently, Kate Atkinson’s Life
After Life (2014) and companion A God in Ruins (2015). As with Hollinghurst and
Ondaatje, these authors write the events of the Second World War as a temporal epicentre
between the past and present, and as a period whose encrypted trauma comes to inform
emplotment and in particular, narrative epiphany.

By choosing to end the dissertation with Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go
(2005), this final chapter continues its trajectory into contemporary Anglophone fiction,
while at the same time returning squarely to the scene of postwar England. It also
completes an inversion that happens across the dissertation as it traverses the 20th-century: that is, it is motivated less by the fear of what happens when the private becomes public (i.e., institutionalized by the welfare state), and more by what happens when the public becomes private (i.e., privatized or corporatized by the business model). In other words, while earlier chapters showed Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* and Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means* grappling with the promises and failures of the welfare state, later chapters reflect the death of the liberal postwar state and rise of the neoliberal state. As ushered in by the policies of Thatcher and Reagan, neoliberalism seeks to limit the scope and activity of governing, instead promoting self-governing through individualism and entrepreneurialism.

While, as I’ve shown, Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Swimming-Pool Library* and Hilary Mantel’s *An Experiment in Love* situate themselves right at the cusp of this shifting governmentality (and especially Hollinghurst’s later 2004 novel, *The Line of Beauty*), Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* offers the fullest engagement with the spectre of neoliberalism. Set in late-1990s England, Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* presents a world that remedies previously incurable diseases through the aid of a government cloning program, which harvests organs from human clones. While this scheme doesn’t share the same status of public utility as water or gas, it nevertheless supplies goods that, over time, have become less like commodities and more like necessities. As the reader eventually learns, the program is a vast enterprise, large enough to assure the British population that “their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease.”

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187 Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (New York: Knopf), 263. All references to this text
development echoes those raised by developments in national infrastructure, whereby a previous luxury becomes more widely available (even, perhaps, an entitlement) through technological advancement.188

Yet Ishiguro’s novel isn’t a mere critique of welfare state institutions, and the harms contained in these supposedly care-driven institutions. Instead, he adds another layer of institutionalization, recounting the rise and fall of Hailsham, a specialized, privately funded institution within the larger cloning program that raises clones within a beautiful, boarding-school. While Hailsham still feeds its charges back into the larger system, its beautiful, boarding-school-like environment provides a respite from the program’s bleak governmental homes – which, though never depicted, are implied to be in horrific conditions. Thus even though Hailsham is a privatized entity, its provenance runs counter to the rationalizing logic of neoliberalism: rather than optimize profit from its all-too-human resources with the bare-bones infrastructures of the cloning program, it seeks to supplement this system with humanizing superstructures.189

With these dystopian valences, *Never Let Me Go* is defamiliarizing for readers of Ishiguro’s oeuvre, moving away from the locatable historical settings that characterize

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188 The debates that shaped the course of Ishiguro’s donations program closely echo those raised by developments in infrastructure, whereby a previous luxury becomes more widely available (even, perhaps, an entitlement) through technological advancement. See, for instance, Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 18.

189 See Jane Elliott’s “Suffering Agency” in the 2013 *Social Text* special issue on “Genres of Neoliberalism,” in which she reads Ishiguro’s Kathy H. as an exemplary figure of the neoliberal person: characterized by the “way in which choices made for oneself and according to one’s own interests can still feel both imposed and appalling” (“Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood in North America and Britain,” *Social Text* 31.2 (2013): 84, accessed November 14, 2013, DOI 10.1215/01642472-2081139.)
novels such as *A Pale View of Hills, The Remains of the Day, and When We Were Orphans*. However, *Never Let Me Go* still maintains Ishiguro’s trademark protagonist: a highly self-conscious character nostalgically, if ambivalently, orbiting around a lost past. Narrated by Kathy H., a clone about to begin “donating” her organs, this lost past takes the form of Hailsham. As a Hailsham alumna, Kathy is special, individuated; and yet, as her simple, even flat narrative style suggests, her subjectivity is radically delimited by her status as a clone.

Given these parameters, *Never Let Me Go* provides an important test case not just for Ishiguro’s oeuvre, but also for the novelistic tradition as a whole, whose ideological core Nancy Armstrong has described as “the presupposition that novels think like individuals about the difficulties of fulfilling oneself as an individual under specific cultural historical conditions.”\(^{190}\) Although Armstrong expresses doubt that novels can modify their ideological core, she also proposes that if the novel is to evolve, it must begin imagining a “genuine alternative to the individual, one that does not inspire phobia and yet is grounded in the world we now inhabit.”\(^{191}\) This is a useful way to approach the project of *Never Let Me Go*, a careful hybrid of realism and science-fiction underscored by its protagonist’s narrative perspective. As many have suggested, the novel forces us to contend with the disappearance of the individual and the emergence of the social aggregate, as well as the difficult, often alien emotions that arise from its dark biopolitical premise. Lisa Fluet, for instance, reads the novel as an experiment in class-consciousness, asking “what it might feel like to lose one’s individual sense of ‘me’ in an impersonal,


collective ‘we’... with a bureaucratic, even actuarial eye to the exterior limits of human endeavor in the aggregate, rather than to the bottomless depths of strong, individual human feelings about those limits.”¹⁹² Bruce Robbins approaches this through the problem of statistics, “[i]f only so as not to join the millions in thinking of myself as an improbably individual exception to the statistical rule.”¹⁹³ And while Rebecca Walkowitz suggests we consider the novel’s networks of “unoriginal objects” (such as Kathy’s lost cassette, the titular song, and even Kathy herself), her analysis still hinges on the fate of the individual, reading the novel’s modes of comparison as helping us “recognize the large networks of approximation and comparison in which individuality functions.”¹⁹⁴

This chapter introduces a spatial element to these considerations of the social aggregate by focusing on the novel’s infrastructuralism, which I define as its marked attention to the relationship between the clones and their material environment. As the clones pass through the program, we are given a substantial amount of information about the schools and the Cottages they inhabit as young wards of the state; the bedsits, car parks, and highways they use as carers for their fellow clones after organ donations; the recovery centers that house them as donors; and finally, the hospitals that harvest their organs until they die (or “complete,” to use the program’s euphemistic language). Indeed, the drama of Never Let Me Go comes precisely from this confluence of bildung and

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environment: Kathy’s narrative is occasioned not only by her transition from carer to donor, but also by the closure of Hailsham and other privately funded enterprises within the cloning program. The closure of these privately funded “privileged estates” signals an imminently bleak future, one stripped of all acculturating facilities and left with only the barest forms of infrastructure.

Although critics agree that conceptualizing the difference between the individual and the aggregate is one of the main problems presented by *Never Let Me Go*, they have overlooked the novel’s analogous concern with the difference between exceptional and nondescript places. What distinguishes Hailsham from the rest of the ”vast government homes” that make up the majority of the cloning program? What, if anything, makes up its distinct infrastructuralism, especially if it feeds its subjects back into the system? While the program’s euphemistic language of “carers,” “donors,” and “completion” play a role in masking the cold reality of the clones’ lives, Hailsham’s emphasis on a kind, beautiful environment plays an even stronger role in their repression. Read in this way, *Never Let Me Go* emerges as a deliberation over the meaning-making potential of state infrastructures, and whether their promises of cultural value actually sustain those whose lives are thoroughly instrumentalized.

In approaching *Never Let Me Go* as Kathy’s struggle to retain her self-as-Hailsham over her self-as-infrastructure, this chapter participates in the recent interest in using state infrastructure as an optics for literature, especially public utilities and welfare state institutions.¹⁹⁵ These studies acknowledge the Janus-faced tendency to see state

planning as promising utopias of large-scale care, but resulting in dystopias of totalitarian control. One way to adjust this phobic filter is to render the state’s workings more visible, whether by contextualizing their historical development or by locating them in aspects of literary form such as metaphor, character, or genre. In this regard, Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* presents an exceptional case study of literature and the state, as its narrator is herself an infrastructural element—what we might understand as sentient infrastructure, a second aspect of the novel’s infrastructuralism. Through Kathy, the novel challenges us to expand our definition of infrastructure, presenting a situation where humans have become utilities (indeed, part of England’s National Health Service). One might say we already have an adequate theoretical scaffolding to understand this subjectivity, whether through Agamben’s concept of bare life and *homo sacer*, or the speciation of human beings conceptualized by a Foucauldian notion of biopower. However, neither can sufficiently account for Kathy H.’s perspective as a clone, and the way that she directly mediates her crisis of self through the crisis of the institution. The innovative nature of *Never Let Me Go* can be attributed precisely to the tension between Kathy’s individual consciousness and infrastructuralized body, a dilemma that both relies upon and challenges Ishiguro’s signature style.


Key among these are Sophia Beal’s *Brazil Under Construction: Fiction and Public Works* (New York: Palgrave, 2013) and Rubenstein’s *Public Works*, which analyze the modernizing effects of public utilities; and Szalay’s *New Deal Modernism*, Robbins’ *Upward Mobility*, and Sean McCann’s *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), which identify key aesthetic characteristics of literature and the welfare state.
Ishiguro gives us a glimpse of this tension in the opening lines to the novel, which begin to carefully unfold the contours of the cloning program:

My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That’ll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn’t necessarily because they think I’m fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who’ve been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I’m not trying to boast. (Never, 3)

While this passage introduces the euphemistic mechanisms of the donations program, as well as the dark, dystopian sense of an “I” versus a “them,” what I want to draw attention to is Kathy’s turn to her own figurative language—“a complete waste of space”—which she employs to describe a particularly unskilled carer. Her turn of phrase reveals the relationship between bodies, environment, utility, and waste that is central to the cloning program, and to clones’ interactions with their environment. Though this description may seem merely idiomatric, or perhaps officially euphemistic, it is significantly neither. Instead, and even more chillingly, this language comes from Kathy herself, giving the reader a glimpse into her infrastructural consciousness.

I. Hailsham’s Paradoxical Infrastructure

As a privately funded estate within the cloning program, Hailsham’s great trick is to refuse its infrastructural status: it shelters its clones from the outside world for as long as they remain under its care. This is due in part to the guardians’ epistemological wariness when teaching their students about their place in the order of things, cannily only letting their students know only so much at a time. But this deception is also built
into Hailsham itself, with its provisions of education, its caretakers, and its beautiful surroundings designed to placate the clones’ otherwise bleak fate. The estate itself is large and immaculately groomed, with several rooms, halls, tranquil ponds, rhubarb patches, and sports pavilions that look like “those sweet little cottages people always had in picture books when we were young” (*Never*, 6). Its boarding-school atmosphere adds an additional level of intrigue to the students’ lives, including its intimacies of dormitory living and attachments to favorite guardians. Hailsham’s traditions further emphasize students’ individual merit, such as the emphasis on artistic creation and the encouragement of collection chests, which students use to house their private belongings.

By encouraging their creative development, Hailsham gives their students a sizable superstructure of meaning-making values, practices, and places, either to forestall or repress their knowledge of their infrastructural purpose. As Miss Emily puts it to Kathy, “Whatever else, we at least saw to it that all of you in our care, you grew up in wonderful surroundings. And we saw to it too, after you left us, you were kept away from the worst of those horrors. We were able to do that much for you at least” (*Never*, 261). This revelation of environment is crucial: it dramatizes a long-standing belief in an environment’s ameliorative effects on personal development, or as Douglas Mao puts it, the belief that exposure to beauty could “bring human beings to some kind of reconciliation with a world that otherwise seems alien, indifferent, fragmented, or oppressive.”

It certainly appears that Kathy has absorbed this lesson: her narrative is

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197 Indeed, *Never Let Me Go* creepily inhabits the novelistic infrastructure of British school fiction, rendering education not as soul-producing, but rather organ-producing.

predominantly spatial, consummately in touch with her surroundings.\textsuperscript{199}

That said, what is particularly grim about Hailsham’s environmental experiment is that it does not ask for a revolutionary turnover of the program, but rather seeks to make it more comfortable, and thus more acceptable, to its cloned subjects. The cultural attachments it offers to the clones are merely palliative, delivered in advance of the wounds administered by the state. Though privately funded, it nevertheless aids in maintaining and training its students to become healthy, willing organ donors, feeding them back into the larger system. While describing Hailsham, Kathy’s narrative obliquely registers this chilling reality, giving us small reminders of its role as a clone factory. We learn, for instance, that the clones are sterile, and that they have been in Hailsham since their “Infants” stage. And while they are given lessons in literature, music, and geography, they are also subject to “Culture Briefings,” role-playing sessions to help prepare them for the outside world, or at least the minimum level of social encounter they’ll need as carers. Though Kathy doesn’t dwell in this paranoid space, she often uses these referents as a means of establishing common ground between her and her audience, such as this reference to her medical exams: “I don’t know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical almost every week—usually up in Room 18 at the very top of the house—with stern Nurse Trisha, or Crow Face, as we

\textsuperscript{199} As Mao suggests, this relationship between the environment and its influence over personal development reached its apogee in the decades after the Second World War, as “revulsion at Nazi eugenic policies helped make inquiry into hereditary and even physiological influences on human development broadly unpalatable, which meant that in serious research (and in popular understandings growing out of the new science) environment had the field largely to itself” (Mao, 15). \textit{Never Let Me Go} provides a fascinating turn to this relationship, not only using this environmental hypothesis to alleviate (or provide consolation for) normalized practices of state violence against cloned subjects, but also by attributing Hailsham’s closure to eugenic practices in creating superhuman clones.
called her” (*Never*, 13). Through these asides, Kathy hails us as fellow clones (perhaps even her donors), though the interpellation is never firmly established.

However, Hailsham cannot completely sustain its ideological illusions. Even though it tries to do away with the reality of its infrastructural purpose, the clones still have to come to terms with their status as infrastructure, creating a series of psychic dilemmas regarding their utilitarian personhood and foreclosed futurity. For some, like Tommy, this manifests itself in forms of rebellion and moments of uncontrollable rage. But for the majority of the Hailsham students, this entails inventing compensatory mechanisms to deal with these issues, engaging in their own forms of play, jokes, and fantasies to make sense of their infrastructural status. The novel can be read as a series of these meaning-making experiments, one after another, until the end of their lives.

The dilemmas begin in their childhood years, as the young clones develop an uneasy relationship to their physical bodies as both their own and someone else’s. They register this ambivalence through imaginative play and figurative language, beginning with their concept of “unzipping.” It starts as a cruel joke on Tommy, the students pretend that a wound on his elbow was at risk of unzipping like a bag, with “skin flopping about next to him ‘like one of those long gloves in *My Fair Lady*’” (*Never*, 86). However, the idea of unzipping persists long after the joke ends, finding new life as a way to conceptualize donations: “The idea was that when the time came, you’d be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you’d hand it over” (*Never*, 88). Another example occurs during an English lesson with Miss Lucy,

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200 An apt comparison might be made here to the epiphany in Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*, in which Stevens finally breaks down over the idea of “giving his best” to Lord Darlington (255).
when the students discuss POW camps in the Second World War. As Kathy recalls, “One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence” (Never, 78). To Miss Lucy’s horror (and ours), the students laugh and begin to impersonate “someone reaching out and getting electrocuted. For a moment things got riotous, with everyone shouting and mimicking touching electric fences” (Never, 78). Part coping mechanism, part registration of the horror of their bounded, controlled lives, the clones’ play is a metaphorization that reflects, but also doesn’t quite fit, the reality they face. Ishiguro is interested in these moments of self-negation as an exit from, even rebellion against, the clones’ thoroughly instrumentalized lives. While there is no escape from being-infrastructure, the clones are still able to effect a spectacle of violence, one that cuts through the subdued, euphemized nature of the cloning program.201

While these fantasies center on the materiality of the body, at the Cottages they evolve into more complex questions about personhood and professionalism. For instance, here we see Ruth excitedly searching for her “possible,” clonespeak for the person from whom each clone was modeled. As Kathy explains, the main idea behind the possibles was that if you caught a glimpse of your model, “you’d glimpse your future . . . you’d get some insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you’d see something of what

201 The clones also favor the scene in The Great Escape when “the American jumps over the barbed wire on his bike,” demanding that it be played again and again (“Rewind! Rewind!”) (99). This is the clearest, most potentially redemptive representation of freedom in the novel, a dramatic vision of escape with one’s self intact. Of course, in the film, the American (the dashing Steve McQueen) is caught just seconds later, his body cruelly entangled in a second line of fencing. This captivity is closer to the world of Never Let Me Go, whose subjects continually vacillate between the body ensnared by the barbed-wire and, as I suggest, the wire itself.
your life held in store” (*Never*, 140). Yet as Ruth’s search demonstrates, the importance of the possible becomes less about interior personhood and more about professional environment, her interest first piqued by the suggestion that her possible worked in an office in a distant seaside town. However, the fantasy doesn’t take hold until Ruth sees an advertisement of a sparkling open office. Captivated by the ad’s vision of professionalism (“Now *that* would be a *proper* place to work”), she uses the picture as the basis of her dream future, going into “all the details—the plans, the gleaming equipment, the chairs with their swivels and castors” (*Never*, 144). Here, we have a glimpse into Ruth’s own Hailsham-forged consciousness, one drawn to beautiful managerial environments as the pinnacle of her personal development. However, when the clones take a field trip to search for Ruth’s possible, the fantasy unravels, leading to Ruth’s bitter, abject catharsis: “We all know it. We’re modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just as long as they aren’t psychos” (*Never*, 166). The end of her tirade is even more striking, evacuating any sense of personhood: “If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that’s where you’ll find where we all come from” (*Never*, 166). In other words, look to the infrastructure. Not only has Ruth’s vision of professionalism crumbled, but also her sense of a viable personhood. Now, she’s able to see herself as what she’s been all along: an object circulating in the networks of society’s refuse.

### II. Poetics of Infrastructuralism 1: Searching for Hailsham

Yet there is a reason why Kathy is the narrator of *Never Let Me Go*, rather than
the bitterly disillusioned Ruth, the rage-filled Tommy, or even the righteous guardian Miss Lucy. For what worries Kathy the most is not the injustice or loathsome nature of her death, but rather the closure of her beloved alma mater and her increasing distance from her childhood life:

“But what’ll happen to all the students?” Roger obviously thought I’d meant the ones still there, the little ones dependent on their guardians, and he put on a troubled face and began speculating how they’d have to be transferred to other houses around the country, even though some of these would be a far cry from Hailsham. But of course, that wasn’t what I’d meant. I’d meant us, all the students who’d grown up with me and were now spread across the country, carers and donors, all separated now but still somehow linked by the place we’d come from. (Never, 211)

To Kathy, the loss of Hailsham isn’t just institutional: she isn’t concerned about the physical relocation of the younger students, but rather the symbolic effects for the alumni. Indicating its lingering influence as a place, Kathy points to what Gaston Bachelard calls a “poetics of the house” that has laid claim to her and her fellow students, one founded on Hailsham’s environmental ideology. If, as Bachelard suggests, writers “prove to us that the houses that were lost forever continue to live on in us; that they insist in us in order to live again, as though they expected us to give them a supplement of living,” Kathy’s narrative follows partially in suit, reanimating Hailsham just on the

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202 What’s worse, Hailsham is not merely closing, but rather transforming: its house and grounds are being sold to a hotel chain, creating a new form of institutionalized domesticity uncannily related to Hailsham’s original function. This grim course of reconstruction is a ubiquitous specter in the postwar British novel, beginning with Evelyn Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited, which finds the estate turned into military barracks. Regarding Ishiguro, see John J. Su’s “Refiguring National Character.”

eve of its disappearance. Yet where Bachelard finds the practice of nostalgia ultimately reparative (“How much better we should live in the old house today!”), Kathy’s reflections are more conflicted. While she does not fully jettison Hailsham’s poetics of space in her post-Hailsham life, neither does she wholeheartedly reproduce it. Instead, she finds herself drawn to an archive of degraded spaces, such as fields and open roads, marshlands and ruins. In doing so, she builds her own poetics of infrastructure, which testify to, but also bear a fraught relationship with, Hailsham’s institutional legacy.

In contrast to Ruth’s looking down toilets and gutters, Kathy’s poetics of infrastructure reflects a more mobile search, catalyzed by her travels through the English countryside. This leitmotif will be familiar to readers of Ishiguro, whose fixation on transportation is unmistakable: from the trams and trains in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *A Pale View of Hills*, to Stevens’s country motoring in *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro’s novels are both minutely located and vastly networked. Stevens provides the closest analogue to Kathy, as their sheer mobility across the English countryside sits at odds with the situated accounts of Darlington Hall and Hailsham. Their driving also provides a useful frame structure for the novels, catalyzing flashbacks to their respective pasts. But where *The Remains of the Day* gives us a tour of a mythical “Great” Britain (“as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feel no need to shout it”), *Never Let Me Go* travels England’s darker, uglier backroads, following the more banal, nondescript infrastructure that shapes its landscape. And while Stevens’

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204 Ibid., 56.

205 Ibid.

travels represent a rare moment of leisure for him, Kathy’s driving is sponsored by the donations program, and characterized by a dreary work fatigue comes from their long hours on the road, commuting from donor to donor. The car thus underscores the clones’ thoroughly instrumentalized beings, as they use them in accord with the government’s plan rather than as a means of escape.

For Kathy, driving allows an active way to continue searching for Hailsham:

Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I’ll think: “Maybe that’s it! I’ve found it! This actually is Hailsham!” Then I see it’s impossible and I go on driving, my thoughts drifting on elsewhere. In particular, there are those pavilions. . . . If I drive past one I keep looking over to it for as long as possible, and one day I’ll crash the car like that, but I keep doing it. (Never, 6)

The violence of the final line is apparent. This is no carefree cruise down memory lane; instead, its escapism suggests a deep ambivalence about what it means to search for Hailsham. Though the last sentence merely gestures to a potential car crash, Kathy’s disregard for her own safety is nevertheless disturbing, especially in contrast to her careful professionalism. This spectre of vehicular death raises two potential types of closure: either Kathy will metaphorically crash into reality (i.e., Ishiguro’s trademark epiphany), or die before required to become a donor. In some sense, this episode recalls the earlier joke about the POW camp, and the disruptive potentiality of the students’ suicidal urges. Yet as before, while Ishiguro inserts the question of resistance into the novel, he does so only in a shadowy, underdeveloped form. Never Let Me Go is not interested in outward acts of rebellion, heroic attempts at escape, or even abject acknowledgements of one’s fate, but rather in the limited ways clones fantasize
themselves out of being infrastructure, limitations that come from their status as infrastructure. And even if Kathy does deliberately crash her car, she may end up fulfilling her infrastructural role after all. Indeed, the spectre of the car crash reflects our own quotidian brush with organ donation, namely, the decision whether or not to identify as an “organ donor” on a driver’s license. In this way, Ishiguro cannily reminds us that there is little room for resistance in the world of *Never Let Me Go*, underscoring the distance between choosing and not-choosing how we become infrastructural.

Though Kathy never manages to find Hailsham itself, there’s something about the empty, gray quality of England’s landscape and roadways that is peculiarly conducive to remembering it. In her reminiscences, Kathy uniformly begins by describing the long, expansive nature of her commutes, whether “past fields on a long afternoon, or maybe drinking my coffee in front of a huge window in a motorway service station” (*Never*, 45) or “past rows of furrowed fields, the sky big and grey and never changing mile after mile” (*Never*, 115), which then instigates a memory of Hailsham. Like Proust’s madeleine, these memories seem involuntary. Yet they aren’t spurred on by a particular object or sensory pleasure. Instead, they come from the absence of direct stimulation, growing from a space where “thoughts have nowhere special to go” (*Never*, 55). It may seem counterintuitive that these bleak, empty infrastructures remind Kathy of Hailsham, especially in relationship to its beautiful, cultivated environment. And yet the unremarkable, utilitarian nature of these roads and service stations are closer to the true nature of being a clone—more than any well-meaning attempt to reform the lived experience of the donations program. These roads and motorway service stations provide a direct reflection of Hailsham, revealing its true nature as a transient, unlivable
infrastructure no different from any other vast government home. In this sense, Kathy’s driving meditations can be read as akin to Tommy’s excessive rage, or Ruth’s bitter insistence that they are modeled from trash: they are her way of expressing resistance to, or at least awareness of, her thoroughly infrastructural being.

While this specter of potential violence haunts every clone, Kathy’s nostalgia grants her an incisive double-vision that allows her to see both the beauty of past places and the bleakness of present ones. While her traveling provides the most immediate catalyst for entering this nostalgic mode, it is also activated by representations of past places, such as an old photograph of the Kingsfield, Tommy’s recovery center. Taken in the late fifties or early sixties, it shows Kingsfield when it was still a “holiday camp for ordinary families,” before it had been converted into a center for ailing clones. The photograph shows a cheerful, sunny place, centering on a swimming pool with “all these happy people—children, parents—splashing about having a great time” (Never, 219). The only evidence left of this past structure is the metal frame supporting the pool’s high-dive, a remainder that exemplifies the current center’s shoddy, unkempt nature. Looking at the photograph, Kathy muses: “It was only when I saw the photo it occurred to me what the frame was and why it was there, and today, each time I see it, I can’t help picturing a swimmer taking a dive off the top only to crash into the cement” (Never, 219).

From the diver’s point of view, this violence is self-inflicted, much like the joke over the electrical fence, and Kathy’s intimation of her car accident. Yet here, Kathy’s projected imaginings double the point, symbolizing not only the clones’ entrapment, but also the slow leaching of care from the cloning program, as institutions like Hailsham give way to bleak governmental facilities.
The most poignant of this infrastructural poetics surfaces when Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy travel out to the beached boat in the middle of a marshland. That it has become a legend amongst the donors suggests a closer look at its features, to see what mythical revelation it holds. The trip is not easy, especially for ailing donors like Ruth, but after a while, the clones happen upon an eerie, bleached landscape of water and woods:

The pale sky looked vast and you could see it reflected every so often in the patches of water breaking up the land. Not so long ago, the woods must have extended further, because you could see here and there ghostly dead trunks poking out of the soil, most of them broken off only a few feet up. And beyond the dead trunks, maybe sixty yards away, was the boat, sitting beached in the marshes under the weak sun. (*Never*, 224)

The boat, too, is just as bleached and decayed, with cracking paint, crumbling frames, and fading sky-blue color. What the clones see in all this degradation and disrepair, interestingly, is Hailsham, or at least a version of it. As Tommy offers: “I always see Hailsham being like this now. No logic to it. In fact, this is pretty close to the picture in my head. Except there’s no boat, of course. It wouldn’t be so bad, if it’s like this now” (*Never*, 225). And while Ruth at first refuses to see the likeness between the two structures, she then connects the scene to a dream she had, one where she was back at Hailsham, “looking out the window and everything outside was flooded. Just like a giant lake. And I could see rubbish floating by under my window, empty drinks, cartons, everything. But there wasn’t any sense of panic or anything like that. It was nice and tranquil, just like it is here. I knew I wasn’t in any danger, that it was only like that because it had closed down” (*Never*, 225).

Thus for Tommy and Ruth, the boat becomes a means to assure themselves about Hailsham’s closure, whether Tommy’s conclusion that “it wouldn’t be that bad, if it’s
like this now,” or Ruth’s dream-logic of Hailsham’s tranquillity. Likewise, Jane Elliott reads this episode as reinforcing what she calls the clones’ “suffering agency,” or a desire for self-preservation that leads them to embrace Hailsham’s ideological confines as a shelter rather than a prison (Never, 95). To Elliott, this desolate landscape provides a “vision of what lays outside the novel’s focus on ideological control,” a “chilling brush with reality” that leads the clones to turn away from the scene and back to their programmed lives (Never, 96). However, I read this scene not as a reinforcement of the divide between ideological sanctuary and dystopian wasteland, but rather, a collapsing of it. Finding Hailsham here entails accepting its status as a ruined experiment, an abandoned structure, or in Ruth’s dream, a giant lake of trash. For Ruth and Tommy, who are donors at the time, the boat offers a compensatory aesthetic vision of their own ruinous status, a compellingly peaceful end for an object created, used, and eventually discarded. For Kathy, however, this moment is less revelatory: still a carer at the time, her self-realization waits until the end of the novel, located in her own mythic landscape of rubbish, emptiness, and infrastructural remains.

III. Revising the Historical Epiphany in *Never Let Me Go*

Like its protagonist, *Never Let Me Go*’s parting epiphany is distinct within Ishiguro’s oeuvre, in part because the conditions of Ishiguro’s typical narrative epiphany are simply not available to Kathy’s subjectivity. The form of this epiphany follows roughly the same narrative pattern, beginning with a protagonist reflecting on the remains of his or her day in a manner that suggests a concealing of, or a willful blindness towards, certain traumatic episodes. In recounting their past, the characters often express a pride
about their status and social position, especially with regards to their consummate professionalism; however, this self-satisfaction becomes untenable as the protagonists come to terms with their complicity in a violent order of things, through a crisis that reveals what they needed to ignore, forget, or injure in order to continue their work.\textsuperscript{207}

Thus Etsuko of \textit{A Pale View of Hills} (1982) reveals her guilt around her daughter’s suicide in the difficult landscape of postwar Nagasaki; retired artist Ono of \textit{An Artist of the Floating World} (1986) looks back on his contributions to Japanese wartime propaganda; the butler Stevens of \textit{The Remains of the Day} reflects on what it meant to give his personal and professional best to an employer with Nazi sympathies; and detective Christopher of \textit{When We Were Orphans} (2000) learns his inheritance came from his mother’s service to a Chinese warlord.\textsuperscript{208}

As these examples suggest, Ishiguro’s narrative epiphanies are often historically and politically oriented around war, usually the Second World War. As Ishiguro expressed in an 1989 interview with Graham Swift: “I tend to be attracted to pre-war and post-war settings because I’m interested in this business of values and ideals being tested, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideals weren’t quite what they

\textsuperscript{207} See Walkowitz’s chapter on Ishiguro’s “treason” in \textit{Cosmopolitan Style} for another take on these consistencies to his oeuvre (\textit{Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation}. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{208} The exception to this remarkably consistent oeuvre is \textit{The Unconsoled} (1995), which is a more dream-like, surreal meditation on memory loss (and piano performances!) that is not immediately locatable in any specific historical moment. It was largely lambasted by literary critics, who were flummoxed as much by its departure from the typical Ishiguro novel as its length and experimental style. However, Ishiguro’s recent short story collection \textit{Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall} (2009) also obliquely follows this pattern, with each protagonist reflecting on the twilight of their days.
thought they were before the test came.” While Ishiguro’s other first-person narrators play out their ethical dilemmas against the backdrop of historical events and wartime referents, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are not allowed such access: their engagement with the outside world is as radically delimited as their short life spans and their ability to understand the system in which they live is as carefully monitored as their health. Thus the real challenge posed by the novel is how, if at all, a clone might experience a postwar epiphany in relation to her historical or social context, especially as these contexts are not foregrounded as such.

One way to begin addressing this is to turn to the failure of the historical epiphany in *Never Let Me Go*, and to see what, if anything, emerges in its stead. The novel’s attempted historical revelation occurs during Kathy and Tommy’s visit to the home of her former Hailsham guardians, Madame and Miss Emily. At this point in the novel, Kathy is acting as carer for Tommy. The two make the pilgrimage to the house together, hoping that on the basis of their love, Tommy might be granted a deferral from his donations. Of course, this idea is shown to be just another Hailsham fiction, with Madame and Miss Emily confirming the extent of the cloning program’s cruelty. It’s a strange interlude, often passed over in critical treatment. Perhaps this is due to the peculiar interface between the guardians and the clones, meeting their makers in a contrived, almost deus ex machina-like setup. It is also unnecessarily didactic: the reader’s common sense needs

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no further confirmation that cloning is bad, and this episode merely belabors the point. However, the failure of this denouement is worth a second look, especially in light of Ishiguro’s other novelistic epiphanies.

What makes this episode particularly peculiar is the extent of its historical backstory, given in a long explanation that had hitherto been absent in the novel. As a product of the immediate postwar period, the program began when scientific developments in cloning led to the eradication of previously incurable diseases. In the 1950s and 1960s, Hailsham and other estates were created to counter the general way the program was being run; these establishments reached the height of their influence in the late 1970s, when Hailsham’s creators organized exhibitions of clone art to gather support for their movement. However, by the 1980s and on through the 1990s (roughly contemporary with Thatcherism in real, historical England), public support for Hailsham was lost through the Morningdale scandal, an experiment in genetic engineering aiming to create superhumans rather than clones. By the novel’s present day, Hailsham and the other planned environments are gone. For readers of *Never Let Me Go*, this historical account is immediately recognizable as the story of the British welfare state. In this light, the novel offers a damning forecast. Shattering the view of welfare as putatively caring, it envisages an exceptionally violent system, one that even trains the dead to bury their dead.

Yet this contextualization comes across as strangely unsatisfying, not only due to the episode thus confirms Robbins’s characterization of Ishiguro’s work as seeming to be “committed to making only the most banal and uncontroversional ethical statements,” like “cruelty is bad” (Robbins, “Cruelty is Bad,” 301). James Wood’s reading also finds the novel “weakened by a didactic ending, in which the spirit of Wells or Huxley bests the spirit of Borges” (“The Human Difference,” *The New Republic*, May 16, 2005, 38, accessed June 5, 2011, https://newrepublic.com/article/68200/the-human-difference).
its ungainly didacticism, but more importantly due to its illegibility for the clones. After
years of strategically being “told and not told” about their place in the world, this
historical explanation is foreign, even unrecognizable (Never, 81). Here we might turn to
Lauren Berlant’s concept of the juxtapolitical as a productive way to think about history
in Never Let Me Go. As a near or nearly political register, the juxtapolitical “flourish[es]
in proximity to the political because the political is deemed an elsewhere managed by
elites who are interested in reproducing the conditions of their objective superiority, not
in the well-being of ordinary people or life-worlds.”211 Often emerging in marginalized
collectivities, the juxtapolitical allows subjects relief from the political through
“adaptation, adjustment, improvisation, and developing wiles for surviving, thriving, and
transcending the world as it presents itself.”212 This is an apt way to describe Hailsham’s
habitus: with power so obviously managed elsewhere, it creates its own intimate public
that must, to make life livable, find ways to relieve its students of their thoroughly
utilitarian subjecthood. We might likewise call Hailsham’s project juxtahistorical,
fighting back the bad history of the donations program. Thus when Miss Emily
admonishes, “From your perspective today, Kathy, your bemusement is perfectly
reasonable. But you must try and see it historically” (Never, 262), we know there’s no
way for the clones to do so: unlike Ishiguro’s other novels, history is not what hurts them.

Seen infrastructurally, however, a drama emerges between public utilities and
their privatization, one that even the clones can register. Faced with a reality of “vast
government ‘homes’” (which, Miss Emily assures, are so unspeakably awful that “you’d

211 Lauren Berlant, The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in

212 Ibid., 2.
not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places”), the former guardians of Hailsham retreat to a domestic interior, sequestered away from the world (Never, 265). Though this is the first private domestic setting we see in the novel, it does not come as a relief: instead, the clones find the house to be dark and dank, with narrow hallways, a sealed-off fireplace, odorous Victorian furniture, and an atmosphere as though “a servant of some sort had got the place ready for the night-time, then left” (Never, 249). As these women prided themselves on Hailsham’s orderly, well-designed, and disciplined environment, their home’s disrepair comes as a surprise. However, as Miss Emily notes, this decrepit domesticity is intimately tied to Hailsham’s closure and the loss of their life’s work:

And as for Marie-Claude and me, here we are, we’ve retreated to this house, and upstairs we have a mountain of your work. That’s what we have to remind us of what we did. And a mountain of debt too, though that’s not nearly so welcome. And the memories, I suppose, of all of you. And the knowledge that we’ve given you better lives than you would have had otherwise. (Never, 265)

Misses Havisham of Hailsham, perhaps: having failed to save their young charges from the misery of growing up, they retired from the outside world, with only their cobwebbed memories and relics to keep them company. The similarities between this scene in Never Let Me Go and Pip’s visits to Miss Havisham in Great Expectations are marked, though unlike Miss Havisham, Miss Emily affirms what she has done instead of begging

213 Though some critics compare Never Let Me Go to Shelley’s Frankenstein (see especially Gabriele Griffen, Keith McDonald, and Tiffany Tsao), it is also fruitful to read it as a return to and reworking of the Victorian novel, whether in relation to Dickens’s concern over orphans and marginal progenitor figures (for example Great Expectations’ Abel Magwitch as Pip’s benefactor, which Ishiguro rewrites in When We Were Orphans), the doubling of “Kathy” as a protagonist name (as in Wuthering Heights, which also foregrounds her experience of wild, open spaces), or even Kathy’s research project on Victorian novels. This is more evidence of Ishiguro’s canny, parasitical inhabitation of the British novelistic tradition.
for forgiveness. The women have transformed their previous caretaking duties not only into both the stewardship of the Hailsham Gallery—an unruly, unmanageable mountain of clone artwork and debt—and the labors of housekeeping and interior decorating.

From this passage, however, it’s unclear whether Miss Emily feels guilty or not: she and Madame could just as easily be unwilling hosts to the Gallery’s archive of clone art as willing ones, especially as the mountain of their work is followed, associatively, by the mountain of unwelcome debt. Though Miss Emily’s implies that they are happy to house her former students’ artwork (in comparison to her debt, “not nearly so welcome”), her next statement implies an uncertainty as to whether she wants to remember the clones themselves (“and the memories, I suppose, of all of you.”) The concepts of work, debt, and memories as reminders of what she and Madame did all threaten to slide into a bad infinity, turning a proud accomplishment with lingering financial obligations into an uncertain trauma with lingering responsibility and guilt. Thus conflicted, her narrative can only find closure by restating the consolatory fiction—now “the knowledge”—that Hailsham had given the clones better lives than they would have otherwise had. This rhetorical transaction shifts the burden of blame and responsibility away from her and Madame and onto Kathy and Tommy, now in the peculiar position of needing to thank Miss Emily for not making them live the lives of typical clones.

The speech also belies the perverse, infinite nature of their caretaking duties, as they’ve made their own home the archive of Hailsham’s hopes and dreams. Though perhaps a humanizing gesture that tries to close the gap between the human and the inhuman, their labor is ultimately doomed to fail, not only because they no longer have the clones under their care, but more importantly, because they cannot empathize with the
clones, or connect the clones’ artwork and memories with a legible, desirable personhood: instead, their interactions with the clones are marked by revulsion, fear, or pity. Earlier in the novel, Kathy had remarked upon Madame’s disgust for the students, a theory she and her friends test during their childhood days, and which causes a mild existential crisis for Kathy. This current encounter shows that Miss Emily, too, had suffered a similar dread, as she reminisces “There were times I’d look down at you all from my study window and I’d feel such revulsion…” She stopped, then something in her eyes flashed again. “But I was determined not to let such feelings stop me doing what was right. I fought those feelings and I won” (*Never*, 269). This is yet another rewriting of the modernist window-scene, which uses the threshold of the window and its division between private and public to dramatize exceptional, humanizing acts of sympathy.

Previous chapters have explored the postwar rewriting of the window-scene, studying Elizabeth Bowen’s class reversals in *The Heat of the Day* (i.e. Louie, the lower-class subject, who stands on the street and attempts to look inside to Stella’s upper-class domicile) and Muriel Spark’s upending of a modernist architecture by using the window to destroy the myth of collective sympathy (i.e. Selena’s slithering through the skylight bars to steal the communal Schiaparelli dress, a vision of evil witnessed by Nicholas Farrington). Here, Ishiguro provides one more turn to the window, showing a welfarist guardian who looks out the window on her wards.

During Hailsham’s tenure, winning for Miss Emily meant not giving into one’s personal, ugly feelings; after its closure, winning is similarly ambivalent insofar as she retreats into an infinite labor of bad domesticity. She transforms her previous management of the school and her students’ interior design into a management of
housework and interior decoration, her revulsion for the clones redirected into a petty annoyance at various service workers who come to help with the home (“Oh dear, is that the men come for the cabinet?” “It’s that awful man from the decoration company again” (*Never*, 259)). Ultimately, it’s these men who close their conversation with Tommy and Kathy, marking the end of their appeal and any hope they may have had for a deferral:

> “This time it must be the men,” Miss Emily said. “I shall have to get ready. But you can stay a little longer. The men have to bring the thing down two flights of stairs. Marie-Claude will see they don’t damage it.”
> Tommy and I couldn’t quite believe that was the end of it. (*Never*, 265)

On the one hand, this interruption adds a bit of realism: this is not just some cinematic revelation about the history of Hailsham, nor even the devastating realization that there are no referrals, but also an ordinary day in the lives of the two women, a day punctuated by housework and movers, a plot not serving Kathy’s and Tommy’s tightly-knit drama. On the other hand, these interruptions are no random choice: having to do with interior design, with the men figured as shadowy intrusions into domestic life, this second layer of narrative action reminds the reader that their house can never be a retreat from the world they designed or the crueler world that conditioned it.

> Though the two women’s domestic arrangement could be read as a generous gesture to rehouse the institutions of Hailsham, their labor is also clearly ambivalent, somewhere between a gift and an obligation, hospitality and hostility, guilt and self-righteous reconstruction. If the house does function as a substitute for Hailsham, it becomes not a memorial to the clones, but rather an obsolete archive of their work that substitutes furniture for clones, objects for objects, in an infinite labor of attempted
repair. It also re-animates a novelistic trope of the obsolete, antiquated Big House after 1945, which either falls into disrepair; becomes re-purposed into schools, hotels, hospitals or other forms of collective living (as in the fate of Brideshead in Evelyn Waugh’s elegy for the country house, or Alan Hollinghurst’s The Stranger’s Child and Ian McEwan’s Atonement); or is turned into a semi-public museum by the National Trust, the British conservation organization which, after the Second World War, began to look after historic country homes in addition to its original interest in open spaces like parks and forests (representing a sea-change in the way conservation was conceptualized in Britain). In Never Let Me Go, the protracted afterlife of Hailsham represents one of the two possible ends of the Hailsham experiment: either total instrumentalization or total privatization—both bleak futures of the state’s cloning program.

IV. Poetics of Infrastructuralism 2: Somewhere; Wherever

Despite the postwar provenance of the cloning program, Kathy’s self-awareness cannot be registered historically; despite the welfarist ideology of Hailsham, her epiphany cannot be politically oriented as such. What then, might it look like? This chapter has explored the clones’ verbal play, metaphors, and fantasies that they use as compensatory mechanisms, but there is one particularly powerful spatial fantasy that recurs throughout the novel and returns as the means for Kathy’s final epiphany: Norfolk. Unlike the playful unzipping, the search for a possible, or the archive of degraded spaces addressed in the previous sections, this fantasy provides an alternative space of shelter that cannot be taken away or otherwise disillusioned. The clones learn of this county during a geography lesson with Miss Emily, who describes Norfolk’s location as a peaceful area,
but also “something of a lost corner” (*Never*, 65). After this, the clones begin to associate the lost corner of Norfolk with Hailsham’s lost and found, also called the “Lost Corner,” and soon start imagining Norfolk as a place “where all the lost property found in the country ended up” (*Never*, 66). As Ruth reflects later on, it was important to them that “when we lost something precious, and we’d looked and looked and still couldn’t find it, then we didn’t have to be completely heartbroken. We still had that last bit of comfort, thinking one day, when we were grown up, and we were free to travel around the country, we could always go and find it again in Norfolk” (*Never*, 66). And indeed, in the novel’s one moment of true magic, Kathy finds another copy of her lost, beloved Judy Bridgewater tape in a Norfolk Woolsworth’s, lending improbable credence to this particular myth.

Unlike the tape, however, Kathy’s loss of Hailsham presents a more difficult challenge. By the end of the novel, Kathy’s solution is to internalize it wholesale, in the ultimate form of spatial fantasy: “Once I’m able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I’ll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that’ll be something no one can take away” (*Never*, 286-7). As her language suggests, Kathy thinks of this internalization as a small act of defiance against the larger cloning system, a way to preserve the kind old world of her youth. At the same time, however, her solution follows the novel’s arc of disenchantment, and its slow divestment of meaning from state infrastructure. For though this internalization preserves Hailsham’s fiction of shelter, Kathy’s language also exposes Hailsham’s great lie, pitting its mythology against the reality of the external world. In this moment, then, Kathy has finally embraced the paranoid logic Hailsham leaves in its wake: a myth that good, caring state spaces can
mitigate the harm wreaked by bad, harmful ones.

While this solution brings us up to date with Kathy’s narrative present, it is crucially not the last word of *Never Let Me Go*. After affirming Hailsham as something no one can take away, Kathy recounts one last return to Norfolk, producing a coda that interrupts the dichotomy of good and bad. As she reveals, “The only indulgent thing I did, just once, was a couple of weeks after I heard Tommy had completed, when I drove up to Norfolk, even though I had no real need to” (*Never*, 287). After driving through “field after flat, featureless field, with virtually no change,” she finds herself in the now familiarly abject setting of an empty field surrounded by barbed wire, where “all along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled” (*Never*, 287). Unlike Ruth’s boat epiphany, however, Kathy doesn’t fixate on the rubbish as a terminus to her thoughts. Instead, she starts to imagine what she describes as “just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I’d lost him,” an exceptional registration of Tommy’s loss that is then followed by this exceptional meditation:

> I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shoreline of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy, and he’d wave, maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn’t let it—and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn’t sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be. (*Never*, 288)

This scene provides the last moment of enchantment in the novel, one final attempt at humanization and meaning-making contra the destructive infrastructures of the state.

Turning away from her search for Hailsham, Kathy orients us towards a different space—
registered through the figurative and the subjunctive—which culminates in the reanimation of Tommy, whose figure grows larger and more recognizable the longer she waits. Through this Norfolk-induced fantasy, Ishiguro brings us deep into Kathy’s own spatial imaginary, one that draws on Hailsham’s emphasis on the consolations of environment, but also troubles it, turning to a setting defined by liminality, waste, and uncultivated space. Here, the reader enters the realm of somewhere, conceptualized as a nearly real place with all of its detrital quiddity: a lost-and-found, a field full of rubbish, and a horizon full of potentiality.

After imagining this world and summoning the lost figure of the dead, Kathy stops herself, able to name the moment for what it is: a fantasy. And Ishiguro could have ended the novel there, or even after “I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car,” which would repeat the way he usually ends his novels: with the shattered protagonist re-committing to living out their lives under conditions that are now abhorrent to her, trying to make it more bearable, even pleasurable. Instead, Never Let Me Go relieves Kathy from such an unliveable responsibility, its final scene emerging as a unique departure from Ishiguro’s other novels. Unlike Stevens’s recommitment to bantering in The Remains of the Day, or Christopher’s reinvestment in London in When We Were Orphans, Kathy does not convince herself of the necessity of returning to the professionalism or places of her present life, even in an ironic way. For after Kathy turns back to the car, Ishiguro adds this final, enigmatic dependent clause: “to wherever it was I was supposed to be.” With these words, he signals that while Kathy will return to her fate as a clone, it’s merely a return, not a recommitment. As she turns back to the car, she leaves the fantastical “somewhere” of Norfolk for all the “wherevers” of the cloning
Yet while this moment is a disenchantment of the spaces of the cloning system, it doesn’t completely hollow out the significance of enchantment for Kathy herself. Indeed, we can read the novel itself as the ultimate enactment of Kathy’s Norfolk fantasy, as it archives all the washed-up experiences of the clones’ lost lives. Perhaps, as Kathy suggests, the only way we can create meaning in such a totalizing system is through a registration of its loss. Read this way, *Never Let Me Go* mirrors this Norfolk fantasy: documenting the various ways the clones attempt to rehabilitate themselves, the novel archives all their washed-up losses and attempts at becoming-people, and becoming-places, rather than becoming-utility.

**Conclusion**

With this final text, we find yet another turn to what does literature does as it returns to the pivotal moment of 1945 and its postwar promises, and its mixture of critiquing and salvaging the idea that welfare provisions can create real institutions of care. In the case of *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro seems to offer a damning forecast. The novel shatters the view of welfare as repair, revealing an exceptionally violent system, one that even trains the dead to bury their dead. But amazingly, even within this world, Ishiguro does not simply repudiate the notion of a state that cares, as in other dystopias, such as Orwell’s *1984*, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, or J.G. Ballard’s *High-Rise*. Instead, Ishiguro uses his clone protagonist to explore the great and reparative promises made by welfare services, and the hold they have even on a character as thoroughly
instrumentalized and subject to state violence as the character of Kathy H. Ishiguro is able to negotiate this seemingly impossible task by re-activating the promises of post-45, and specifically, the spatial hypothesis that the built environment will create a better life for all its inhabitants. By extending this postwar fantasy to its extreme, *Never Let Me Go* offers a cold picture of the welfare state’s endgame, in which the individual becomes indistinguishable from – indeed, makes up – the infrastructure of the welfare state.
CONCLUSION: ON REPAIR

In considering the ways postwar British and Anglophone fiction keeps reactivating the transition between warfare and welfare, “States of Repair” offers a new approach to contemporary debates over periodizing the twentieth century. It also gives a new vantage point on the literary value, even canonical vitality, of the Second World War. Yet as I reach the end of this project, I must make a confession of, or at least indication of, a thought that has troubled me from the very beginning. Which is this: I had some reservations about using the Second World War as the centerpiece of my dissertation, in part because I did not wish to pay fealty to (not to mention build my first project around, and thus define my scholarship based on) its hold on our cultural imagination. I thought – and to some degree, rightly so – that it was the provenance of war buffs, keen on proving arcane knowledge about weaponry or battle timelines; or on the other hand, that it belonged to the veterans and survivors, keen on recalling what it was really like for them or their loved ones during the war. I thought, in other words, that there was something either hawkish or mawkish about an obsession with WWII, and that writing about it would make me a hack. (And perhaps, in the end, it has.)

What I’ve found instead is that over the course of writing this dissertation, my fears have been transmuted into an even more difficult, conceptually more seductive shape. For if the authors of my dissertation are held in both critical and popular regard, it is because their treatment of war indexes a reparative imagination, whose plans and promises have yet to be fulfilled. Their recursive re-instatement of 1945 models several forms of attachment to a permanent transition away from war, a process that is not just
unfinished but also, perhaps, unfinishable. These valences of the “postwar” – a term which we are no closer to achieving in 2015 than we were in 1945 – continue to haunt the stories we tell, and to shape the novels that define our national pasts and our global present.

This reparative logic is endemic to this midcentury moment, shared not only by Britain’s welfare state but also by the waves made by Kleinian psychoanalysis and the (continued) demand for postwar, post-conflict financial reparations. Perhaps risking overstatement, I believe there’s many more stories to tell about the transition I’ve been following from war-making to caretaking, stories which have been important to my scholarly development and which have informed the way I read literature. While my methodology of locating literary repair does not have a fixed discursive lens, there are resonances between different fields’ definitions of repair that have influenced my approach, which I will begin to sketch the outlines of here.

Several literary scholars have taken note of the jurisprudential innovations that emerged after 1945, including postwar criminal trials, civil rights and human rights, and of course, financial reparations. This has come to saturate the interdisciplinary field of law and literature, in which scholars often take law’s attempts at adjudicating violence as critical referent points, from the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials (Ravit Reichman, Shoshana Felman), South African literature and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (Mark Sanders), and the flourishing field of human rights and world literature (Elizabeth Anker, Joseph Slaughter). Like others, I take this as another way to periodize the
twentieth century and the logic of repair that gained traction in the wake of WWII—a turn that Ravit Reichman has suggestively called “legal modernism.”

Underlying these studies is always a question of the comparative value of literature and law. If, as Shoshana Felman puts it, the postwar world turned to law as a “marked symbolic exit from the injuries of a traumatic history: as liberation from violence itself,” scholars are tasked with asking whether this holds for literature as well. After all, the discourse of law and literature has always been interested in the reparative potential of literature—an interest that only intensifies when studying the wake of historical violence. Thus it has often been the case that, in relation to the official, eventful, decision-making discourse of law, literature emerges as more just than law insofar as it refuses closure and keeps the vicissitudes of wounding, trauma, and mourning radically open. This premise turns on the common gesture of valorizing literature as exceptional in its ambiguity, complexity, and ability to entertain contradiction and aporia in a way that law cannot, which runs the risk not only of a flat-footed approach to jurisprudence but also a blindness to literature’s own decisiveness.

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It’s also the case that state repair is configured very differently in this dissertation, as it centers on welfare state apparatuses of care rather than expressly legal ones. I thus perhaps share more affinity with scholars grappling with how to read for the state in literature, which as Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen write, want to “challenge the seeming necessity of the opposition between monolithic state and individual artist,” or the paranoid logic that can only descry or affirm the work of the state. While, as I’ve shown, this paranoid approach is also rife in law and literature scholarship, I do want to underscore that literary repair is very different than legal reparations, which suggest a closed action consisting of material, often financial reparation accompanied by an expression of legalized affect (apology, regret, guilt: emotions that help to authenticate and carry the force of law). Repair, on the other hand, indicates a process not necessarily under a legal aegis, an open-ended action whose duration is uncertain, and whose materials are not contained by financial and legally affective means. My differentiation between these two terms echoes Anne Cheng’s conceptualization of grief and grievance, with grievance being the “social and legal articulation of grief...incapable of addressing those aspects of grief that speak in a different language.” For Cheng, mourning and melancholia reiterate and underscore the relationship of grievance and grief, especially regarding their duration and possible acceptance of substitution for the lost object.

To some degree, I read literary repair as having a melancholic relationship to the midcentury moment and its various failures of social repair. Indeed, the interminable nature of the postwar as played out through literature may be considered a melancholic

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216 Hart and Hansen, “Contemporary Literature and the State,” 493.

history, a condition that only comes into being after the shadow of 1945 has fallen on it. Yet the terms repair and reparation might also help to newly constellate these relationships along different lines, or at least show that, as Jonathan Flatley suggests, not all melancholias are depressing. Instead, these novels return to 1945 to animate (or in Flatley’s term, *map*) various political problems for their reader, and to destabilize the ideas of society or welfare we have inherited up to that moment of reading. I embrace Flatley’s more capacious definition of modernism as the “wide range of practices that attempt in one way or another to respond to the gap between the social realities of modernization and the promises of the project of modernity. We find such practices not only in the literature and arts, but in law or international relations (the League of Nations), economics (Keynes), language (Esperanto), technology (electrification, cinema), and so forth.”²¹⁸ In this way, all the texts in my dissertation are interested in a modernist ethos, though with no small amount of ambivalence: whether finding fault with the premises of welfarist modernity, or by showing how post-45 social realities fail to live up to their projected futures.

Psychoanalysis, the second reparative discourse, has also provided literary scholars with a rich source of ways to think about literature and war. If keystone psychoanalytic texts for WWI were Sigmund Freud’s “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), which puzzles over why we repeat things that are displeasurable to us, particularly with regards to the condition of

“traumatic neurosis,” the keystones for WWII might be Melanie Klein’s “Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States (1940) and “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” (1946), which developed the concept of the depressive and paranoid-schizoid positions, as well as reparation. In Klein’s account, reparation occurs after the infant entertains destructive fantasies against a loved object/person, for “when in the baby’s mind the conflicts between love and hate arise, and the fears of losing the loved one become active, a very important step is made in development. These feelings of guilt and distress now enter as a new element into the emotion of love.”

This is characteristic of the depressive position, a self-sustaining mode where the baby seeks to preserve the loved one by “build(ing) up phantasies that he is putting the bits together again and repairing her.” Klein’s pioneering work on child psychology led to a form of war itself: the protracted battles of the “Controversial Discussions” (1942-1944) between adherents of the classical form of psychoanalysis (the “Freudians,” led by Anna Freud), Klein and her followers (the “Kleinians”), and the more moderate (“Middle Group”). During these years, the fate of the British Psychoanalytic Society (and psychoanalysis itself) hung in the balance, and ended with an uneasy postwar détente.

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219 This wounding would become characteristic of the First World War: as Sigmund Freud writes, “The terrible war which has just ended gave rise to a great number of illnesses of this kind, but it at least put an end to the temptation to attribute the cause of the disorder to organic lesions of the nervous system brought about by mechanical force” (Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 10).


221 Ibid., 61.
My point is not to take a position on these debates. Nor is it to offer a strong Kleinian reading of Britain’s Second World War, though it is tempting: whether diagnosing its transition from warfare to welfare as a move from the paranoid/schizoid position to the depressive position, or the turn inwards to the Home Front and postwar domestic policy as reflecting an endogenous rather than external anxiety. (Klein herself was wont to make such moves, scaling up from the individual to society in an almost Hegelian way in *Love, Hate and Reparation*.) Yet what I do want to point out is the historical and geographical context of the Discussions, as they took place in Britain during the Second World War: a time where discussions of reparations and postwar reconstruction saturated the cultural and political climate.222 As Jacqueline Rose suggests in *Why War*, “The emphasis on negativity, the ambivalence about reparation (reparation as ambivalent), takes its reference from, even as it casts light on, the conflict going all around,” quoting psychoanalyst Ella Sharpe: “The ‘status quo’ is a frequent phrase heard today. The full phrase is ‘the status quo ante.’ How many people still hope that the end of the war may mean a restoration of the pre-war conditions for which they are most homesick, although progressive minds on every hand warn us that restoration of old

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conditions could only lead to renewed disaster.”  

To which Rose responds: “What clearer statement of the political provenance of theory? What clearer indication that, for this analyst at least, if psychoanalysis concentrates on the good and the restorative, it heads straight into a theoretical and political blind?”

I find Rose’s response here a prescient one, one that anticipates our current literary-critical climate. With this, she signals to the other use of “repair” currently in circulation: reparative reading, as articulated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in affiliation with the teachings of Melanie Klein, and in response to what Paul Ricoeur has called the “hermeneutics of suspicion.” This has in turn encouraged an efflorescence of critical responses, such as “Distant Reading,” “Surface Reading” and an interest in denotative writing, object-oriented ontology, actor network theory, and perhaps most directly in response to Sedgwick, work on “Weak Theory.”

While I have tried to move away from a paranoid reading practice in this dissertation, interested in a more minutely textural and historically-inflected approach to measuring postwar welfare’s aspirations (i.e., through a focus on domestic structures), I still suspect welfare has something to teach us about the hermeneutics of suspicion, especially in light of this specific midcentury moment. For the transition from warfare to welfare is the paranoid move par excellence, leading to theoretical and political blinds: it could neither fully restore old conditions nor fully achieve new ones; it was a reparation born from war. Here, Sarah Cole’s formulation of enchanted and disenchanted violence might prove a useful conceptual tool for describing this particular transitional state,

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insofar as the “New Jerusalem” of the welfare state was forged in the crucible of wartime violence. The British state at the end of the Second World War could not stomach being taken, once again, as a “sign and precipitator of total degeneration and waste” as it was construed in the literature of the First World War; it thus committed itself to being an agent of forced sublimity, of capitalizing on violence’s transformative power for the welfare of its citizens. Instead, the welfare state set itself up as both a reward for citizens’ wartime efforts and their enabling of state violence, as well as — and perhaps contradictorily — an assurance that they would never feel precarious again, a deft substitution of postwar material security for the traumatizing experiences of war.

Of course, this proposed substitution is in many ways preposterous. To see the welfare state as a reparation of (or penance for?) the war machine underscores its non-symmetry: for starters, one cannot evoke the promise of care or assurance of security “from the cradle to the grave” without invoking the vast losses of the Second World War. Yet this lack of symmetry and indeed, fictionality of reparation is a condition endemic to repair, which works squarely in the realm of the “as if.” In this way, repair itself is a literary concept, whether in literature, law, or psychoanalysis. It is not an instance or finite event of reparation, but rather a labor to be borne, one that demands perhaps infinite work, and which proves a durable characteristic, even central problematic for the literature of this long postwar.

Introduction: States of Repair


**Chapter 1: A Room of One’s Own? Revising Modernist Connection in The Heat of the Day**

Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900*. 


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Chapter 2: “Nowhere’s Safe”: Ruinous Reconstruction in *The Girls of Slender Means*


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Chapter 3: “An Empty, Empty Place”: Unpropertied Intimacy in The Swimming-Pool Library


Chapter 4: Oasis Societies: Caring for Ruins in The English Patient


Esty, Jed. A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England. Princeton:


Visvis, Vicki. “Traumatic Representation: The Power and Limitations of Storytelling as


Chapter 5: “Look in the Gutter”: Infrastructural Interiority in *Never Let Me Go*


Tsao, Tiffany. “The Tyranny of Purpose: Religion and Biotechnology in Ishiguro’s *Never
Conclusion: On Repair


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